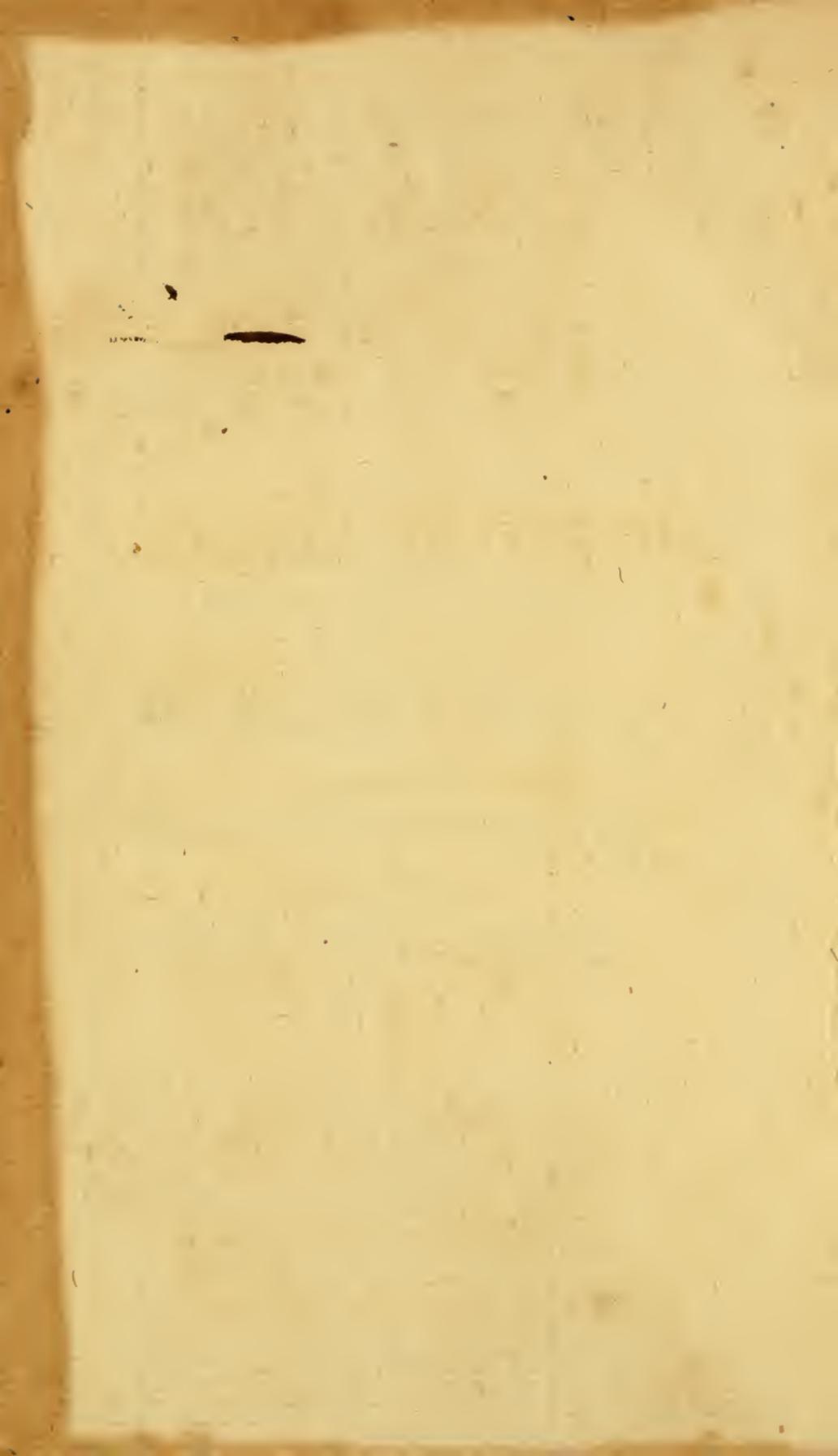


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S E R M O N S

*Sam<sup>r</sup>: Miller*

ON SEVERAL

12/

Important Subjects.

By the Late Reverend

Mr. FREDERICK CARMICHAEL,

One of the Ministers of *Edinburgh*.

E D I N B U R G H,

Printed by R. FLEMING. M.DCC.LIII.

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ON FILE

Important Subjects

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# P R E F A C E.

*T*HE following sermons are the genuine remains of one whose distinguished worth and ability justly intitled him to a high degree of the public regard. He was ordained a minister of the church of Scotland in 1737; and for four years remained in the charge of Monimail; whence he was translated to Inveresk. When he first entered on that large and populous charge, he had no little opposition and prejudice to encounter. But his merit was no sooner known, than it surmounted every prejudice; and in a short time, his warmest opposers became his most zealous friends. From his first appearance in a public station, his character continuing uniformly to rise in the just esteem of the world, he had not been long settled in Inveresk, till he received an invitation to the chair of divinity professor in the

## P R E F A C E.

*Marischal college of Aberdeen; which he declined to accept; and in 1747, was called to be one of the ministers of Edinburgh. In all the congregations of which he had the charge, no man could be more regarded and beloved than he was by persons of all ranks. His behaviour was in every respect suited to the dignity of the sacred character; sullied by no meanness, and no vice. He was of a generous open spirit; a warm friend; endowed with a clear understanding, a sound head, and an upright heart. A noble indignation at whatever was base or dishonourable, and a firm and bold adherence to justice and honesty, distinguished his character. As these many qualities, joined with thorough good sense, commanded the highest esteem; so his open candour, and social humane disposition attach'd many personal friends to him, and gained the affection of all who knew him. In his preaching he was remarkably animated, and persuasive. That spirit and fire which distinguished his manner, commanded the profound attention of every audience: he spoke with*  
all

## P R E F A C E.

*all the energy of one who deeply felt what he inculcated on others. He applied himself to study the constitution of the church of which he was a member; and in its judicatories his sentiments were highly regarded. He had that weight with all the different contending parties which the greatest abilities can only acquire, when they are supported by entire and approved integrity. Thus qualified for being extensively useful, and acting an eminent and conspicuous part in that sphere which belonged to him, a short illness put a period to his life in the forty third year of his age. So untimely a death, in the midst of those hopes which were justly formed of him, was matter not only of private affliction to his friends, but of public sorrow.*

*HIS sermons which are now printed appear under considerable disadvantages. They were not intended for the press. Tho' often solicited, he could not be prevailed on to consent to the publication of any of them. His papers were found in disorder; and they want*  
all

P R E F A C E.

*all the advantage of the Author's finishing hand: yet still, the reader will find in them such an excellent strain of rational devotion, sound thought and clear reasoning, as gives ground to expect, that they will contribute to serve the interest of true piety and religion: and 'tis hoped, it will be no disadvantage to their reception with the world, that they are published for the benefit of the family of Mr.*  
FREDERICK CARMICHAEL.

THE

THE  
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# S E R M O N I.

Of the O B S T A C L E S to Progress  
in R E L I G I O N.

H E B. xii. 1.

*Let us lay aside every weight —*

W H E N we reflect on the great variety of motives and incitements, that are set before us, to persuade us to constancy and zeal in the service of God, it must be matter of surprize to observe how little influence they have upon ourselves or others. Every principle of action is wrought upon, every passion in our breasts is applied to; every thing, in short, that has power to move the heart of man, is adduced to persuade us to a chearful obedience: and yet how little

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progress do we make in holiness and goodness! how lukewarm, or rather how cold are we in our religious endeavours! how inconstant and variable in our obedience! and how far short do we come, in our practice, of the rules and precepts of that holy religion which we profess! A conduct so inconsistent with reason as this must certainly proceed from our entertaining some false principles and mistaken notions of things, the unhappy influence of which tends to defeat all the motives of the gospel; or from our indulging ourselves in a careless indolence, and not duly striving against that wrong bias and corruption of nature, which of itself indeed is a mighty hindrance to our *growing in grace*, and *perfecting holiness in the fear of God*. It must therefore be a matter of great concern and moment to all of us, to know what are those false principles, those mischievous impediments, which so much obstruct our growth and progress in religion; that being warned  
and

and armed against them, we may hence-  
 forth be *constant and immovable, and a-*  
*bounding in the work of the Lord.* To  
 give you a brief representation of them,  
 is, what, by the assistance of God, I pro-  
 pose from the words now read, *Let us lay*  
*aside every weight.*

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THE Apostle is here speaking of the  
 Christian life, under the notion of a  
 race; alluding to the public sports of that  
 kind, which were performed with so  
 much solemnity and pomp by the antient  
*Greeks and Romans*, in honour of their  
 gods. The saints already glorified, a  
 noble catalogue of whom he gives us in  
 the preceeding chapter, the apostle con-  
 siders as the witnesses of this race, who,  
 by their example, instruct us how we are  
 to behave in it; and by their success af-  
 ford us the encouraging hope, that if we  
 follow their steps, we shall assuredly ob-  
 tain the same crown. From this he ex-  
 horts us to *lay aside every weight, and the*

SERM. *sin that doth more easily beset us, and to run with patience the race that is set before us:*  
 I.  where, by every weight, we are evidently to understand every thing that will stop or retard us in running the race; every thing, in short, that may be a hinderance to us in making that progress in the religious life, and advancing towards that perfection of holiness which the laws of Christ require.

WHAT I have in view then from these words is, both to point out the principal impediments of our steadfastness and growth in religion, and to hint, as I go along, the proper means of our striving against them with advantage and success. The subject is large and extensive, and I am abundantly sensible, how much I must need the pardon of the judicious hearer, for the defectiveness of what I can offer upon it, within the bounds of this discourse.

THE *first* particular I shall mention, as being a very considerable hinderance and impediment to us in the service of God, is our entertaining loose notions of religion.

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THERE are many who imagine that zeal in the service of God is an excess of righteousness; and that moderation, which is in other cases so highly commendable, cannot in this deserve blame. They are resolved to have their religion fit easy upon them, and can see no necessity of their still *growing in grace*, and striving after perfection in holiness. They hope to save their souls from hell, and are contented to forfeit any higher degrees of bliss, that may be the reward of a more troublesome and laborious religion. Hence, among many professing Christians, fervency and warmth in devotion, humility, poverty of spirit, self-denial, and mortification are so far from being visible in their practice, that they seem almost to have lost the very notion of them.

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BUT let the men who are capable of such thoughts take care lest they be widely mistaken in their notions of religion. The nature of things is not to be altered by their fancies, and God will not be mocked. If we would deal sincerely with ourselves, (as in this case particularly it highly concerns us to do) we must form our thoughts of religion, not from our own corrupt inclinations, not from the opinions, manners, and fashions of a degenerate world, but from the scriptures of truth, and the declarations of God himself. For this purpose, let us consider the great end of religion, as therein held forth to us; which is to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, to raise us above the world and the flesh, to make us delight in pleasures spiritual and refined; and from thence we may judge how far our conceptions of religion suit with these purposes, and come up to these great ends. Let us consult the word of God, and there we will find such repeated exhortations

to

to diligence and earnestness, to a constant watchfulness, to fear and trembling, to patience and steadfastness, as are directly opposite to that easy and lazy religion, beyond which too too many never aspire: Let us consider the lives of the disciples and apostles of Christ, and the first professors of our holy faith, whose example we are commanded to study and imitate; and there we will see what virtues and graces, what labours and strivings are necessary to obtain that *incorruptible crown* which they are possessed of. With what earnestness did these true servants of the blessed Jesus *press forwards towards the mark?* With what courage, nay joy, did they *take up their cross,* and follow him? How frequent and fervent was their devotion? how noble and generous their charity? What grace, what humility shone forth in all their conversation? The true spirit of Christianity discovered itself in all they said and did, and the virtues of their lives as eminently distinguish'd them from the

rest

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SERM. rest of the world, as their faith and belief.  
 I. Then did Christians truly overcome the  
 world, and live above the body. Then  
 did they indeed *by the spirit wait for the  
 hope of righteousness by faith*, and the cross  
 of Christ was more delightful to them,  
 than all the ease and honour, the pride  
 and pleasure of a sinful life. And can we,  
 my friends, compare our lives with theirs,  
 and sit down contented with such poor  
 and low attainments? Can we put them in  
 the balance against ourselves, and will  
 not the inequality put us out of counten-  
 ance? Do we indeed profess the same re-  
 ligion with them? are we under the same  
 obligations? do we expect and look for  
 the same reward? and yet are our lives  
 so widely different from theirs? Well may  
 we blush at our being left so far behind,  
 and scarcely have the confidence to call  
 our selves by the same name, or to look  
 for the same inheritance with them.

WE, alas! have endeavoured to enlarge  
 the

the way to heaven, and widen *the gate that leadeth unto life*. We please ourselves with more easy schemes of religion, with such as are accommodated to our own humours and fancies, and to the modes and fashions of a backsliding age, rather than to the precepts and example of Christ and his apostles. But whatever vain notions we may form, our religion is still the same, as in those early ages of Christianity; and the conditions of the divine love and favour have undergone no change since then. Then were Christians called to a continual warfare, to a constant vigilance and wrestling with numerous surrounding foes; and the crown of victory was promised to him alone, who *endured to the end, and fought the good fight of faith*. Our situation is not more secure than theirs; our struggle must be as great; nor must we expect to attain to the reward on easier terms than they. But then,

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Secondly,

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I.  


*Secondly*, As there are some who are thus deceived with loose notions of religion, and who flatter themselves that there is no necessity for so much diligence and zeal in the service of God; so there are others, who look upon this perfection of holiness required in the gospel, as what is absolutely impossible for human nature. This is another great weight and hinderance, and a despair of ever succeeding in our duty discourages us from labouring after it.

MANY forming their judgment of things upon the weakness and corruption of human nature, and the defects and infirmities which, no doubt, are to be found in the best of men, conceive of that perfection required of Christians as a chimerical imaginary thing, which it never was in the power of man to come up to. They will acknowledge indeed, that, considering how very ready men are to come short of their duty, it is but fit and reasonable

sonable, that the rule prescribed to them should be exact and strict, and that they should be strongly pressed to a full conformity to it; but at the same time, they are persuaded, that this is an attainment vastly too high for mortal man to aim at. Many there are, who engage in the Christian life with great zeal and vigour; they are mighty sanguine in their resolutions, and without having counted the cost, and reckoned upon the difficulties before them, they promise themselves that all will be fair and easy: but no sooner they encounter temptations and trials, and begin to feel their own weakness, and the power of the enemy, than, behold! they stand surprized and amazed; their spirits droop, their courage fails them; after a short struggle they give up the cause as lost: and now they persuade themselves, that the way is unpassable, which before they believed to be so smooth and plain, and either make a hasty retreat, or, at least, never attempt to make any further progress.

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BUT

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I.  


BUT let us examine the matter to the bottom, and perhaps we shall find, that it is an inward aversion to the life and exercise of virtue, rather than any real belief of unsurmountable difficulties in religion, that has given rise to such apprehensions as these. Let us diligently search, if this be not an artful excuse, a plausible pretence for our coldness or lukewarmness in the practice of Christianity, that the holiness it requires is altogether impracticable. But if we have really imposed on ourselves by such a false notion as this, let us reflect,

*Ist*, THAT the chief difficulties in religion commonly occur at our first entrance upon it; and yet these must be conquered, if we would not perish for ever. The nearer we approach to that perfection in holiness which is required of us, religion becomes still the more easy, delightful and pleasant. If with bravery and resolution we go on, we shall find  
the

the *yoke of Christ* still more *easy*, and his *burden* more *light*; and we shall soon attain to the joyful experience, that *the ways of wisdom are pleasantness*, and *that all her paths are peace*. If we go forth weeping, bearing the precious seed, we shall return rejoicing, bearing our sheaves with us. Thus you know it is in common life; a condition, which at first appears extremely burdensome, will in some time become more tolerable, and at length perhaps so agreeable, that it is not without regret we can think of a change. But how much more must this be the case in religion, which is the only source of real and lasting pleasure, and carries our happiness here to as great a height, as the imperfect state we are now placed in can well admit. It is not with religion, as it is with the pleasures of sin: the more we taste of these, the more we must needs despise them. But religion, the more acquaintance we have with it, the more we find in it of real and substantial worth; it more than

answers

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answers all our expectations, and outdoes our highest hopes. Let us not then sit down dispirited on account of any difficulties we may meet with in the beginning of our journey; but let us *forget the things that are behind, and reach forth to the things that are before.* Let us *quit ourselves like men, and be strong;* for consider in the

2d place, that it is *God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure* \*. We may look on the religion of Christ as a religion fitter for angels than men, and on the exalted holiness which it requires as altogether above our power in our present weak and corrupted state: but our ability to give obedience to the precepts of the gospel, is not to be measured by our own strength, but by the power of the Spirit of God, and the all-sufficiency of the divine grace, which is promised, secured, and offered to us. Our warfare indeed is dangerous, our duty is diffi-

\* Philip. ii. 13.



cult, and our wisdom and courage are but small; but we are not called to go out into this warfare at our own charges, depending on our own fortitude and conduct alone; we have superior aid and assistance provided for us, through which we shall be *more than conquerors*. Let us not then harbour in our breasts, those timorous and dispiriting apprehensions, which spring from an evil root. But when the dangers and difficulties of the Christian life are ready to dismay us, let us reflect, that *through Christ strengthening us we shall be able to do all things* \*. And let us often call to mind, when we are tempted to turn our back on religion, that heaven is a cheap purchase, how dear soever it may cost us: that we are not our own masters; that there is a God above us, who has assigned us our post and station, and to whom we are accountable for our behaviour in it; that, in short, whether we will or will not, we must either sub-

\* Philip. iv. 13.

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mit to the self-denial and mortification of religion, or expose ourselves to the endless plagues and punishments of sin. Let us then no longer object and dispute, but with *faith and patience be followers of those who inherit the promises*. They went through honour and dishonour, prosperity and adversity, good report and bad report, till they arrived at the blessed rest reserved for the people of God. The same glorious prize is still proposed to us, the same assistances are offered to us, our difficulties are no greater than theirs. Let us not then, through a dastardly fear or through mistaken notions of things, forfeit our share in that bliss, which they are now possessed of.

3dly, ANOTHER great hinderance and impediment to our making progress in religion, and *running our race with patience*, is a mixture of infidelity; the weakness or the want of faith in the declarations and promises of God.

THIS



THIS was evidently the case of the *Israelites* in the wilderness; their doubting of the promises of God was the source of all their backslidings; and hence flowed their frequent revolts to idolatry, which kindled the divine wrath against them. It is to be feared, that this is the case of too many Christians, and that their unfruitfulness and lukewarmness in religion may frequently be traced back to the same origin and spring, namely, a tincture of unbelief. Are not the prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous, apt sometimes to weaken our belief of Providence? Are we not thereby tempted to say, as it is in *Job*, *What advantage shall it be to us, and what profit shall we have, if we are cleansed from our Sins?*\* May we not often find a secret doubt lurking in our breasts, whether religion be the true blessedness of life; and whether there be that delight and pleasure in the practice of righteousness, which the scripture af-

\* *Job xxxv. 3.*

SERM. firms that there is? Whatever we profess  
 I. to believe of an inheritance above, of a  
 treasure in heaven, does not the conduct of  
 too many plainly show, that they look on  
 it as the wiser course to secure at any rate  
 their portion and their treasure here? Direct  
 and open infidelity has not, I hope, as  
 yet spread its contagion widely; but have  
 not the objections of adversaries against our  
 holy faith, and the most important articles  
 thereof, been often received by men with  
 a secret satisfaction, which, even to them-  
 selves, they durst not avow? Have they not  
 sometimes been employ'd to bear down  
 the risings of conscience, and to sooth men  
 in a careless, or even in a dissolute life?  
 Have not such thoughts as these, that the  
 way to happiness may be more broad and  
 smooth than it is represented in the Gospel;  
 that God will receive us into heaven upon  
 softer and milder terms; that he will not  
 execute judgment with that rigour which  
 he has threaten'd; that tho' he is a severe  
 law-



lawgiver, yet he will not be such a terrible judge ; have not, I say, such thoughts as these sometimes found a welcome reception in the minds, even of professing Christians ? and have they not had an unhappy influence on their life and conduct ? When the *word preached doth not profit*, so as to make us *zealous*, and *to abound in good works*, it is because it is not mingled with a due measure of *faith*, in those that hear it.\* Did we, my brethren, truly believe the revelation of God ; were his promises and threatnings evident and present to us by faith, tho' distant in themselves ; it is impossible but they must affect and move us in a different manner, render us more earnestly watchful to avoid those paths that lead to destruction, kindle in us more vehement desires, and produce in us stronger endeavours after that holiness, without which *no man shall see the Lord*, or taste of the celestial bliss. We see how the prospect of gain captivates the covetous,

\* Heb. iv. 2

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the expectation of pleasure inflames the voluptuous, the sight of vanity and grandeur elates the proud, and the hope of glory fires the ambitious; and should not the charms of holiness and goodness have the same, nay rather a greater power over the true Christian? should not the prospect of the heavenly crown animate and inspire his soul? should not the hope of the eternal fruition of God have such a commanding influence on him, as to make him regulate the whole of his life and conversation with a view to this glorious end? The promises of God are surely *great* and *precious*, and if they work not mightily on our minds, it is not thro' the want of excellence in them, but want of faith in us. Let us then, with the Patriarchs of old, tho' we have not yet *received the promises*, yet *seeing them afar off, be persuaded of, and embrace them*. Let us *have respect unto the recompence of reward*, being fully persuaded that *what God hath promised, he is also able to perform*. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith with-*

out

out wavering; and as many deceivers have enter'd into the world, and scoffers in these our last days, who walk after their own lusts, and say, where is the promise of his coming? take heed to yourselves, that ye be not ensnared by following them; take heed lest ye also be led away by the error of the wicked so as to fall from your own steadfastness. They speak to thrust you out of the way, which the Lord your God hath commanded you to walk in; take heed lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Let it be our constant prayer, that God would help our unbelief, and increase our faith, and that our faith may be in us a living principle of every virtue and grace, and may powerfully incite us to adorn the doctrine of God and our Saviour in all things. But to proceed;

4thly, ANOTHER great hinderance to our successfully running our race and making due progress in religion, is, our still retaining in our breasts too great a love for earthly

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I.



earthly enjoyments and possessions, and our being too much under the influence of some wordly desire or passion. *Love not the world, saith the apostle, neither the things that are in the world, for if any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him.\**

This is the destructive passion, which, tho' in various degrees, yet universally prevails with the children of men. In some it reigns with a power so uncontrouled, that it renders them entirely blind to their true and most valuable interest, and makes them go on thoughtless and secure in a bold contempt of God and of all the threatnings of his word. In how many others has it the unhappy influence to stifle the cries of conscience, nay, to destroy the most promising beginnings of holiness and goodness? Such are they whom our Lord speaks of in the parable of the sower, *some fell among thorns, says he, and the thorns grew up and choked it. They that are sown among thorns, says he, in the explica-*

\* 1 John ii. 15.

tion of the parable, *are such as bear the* SERM.  
*word, and the cares of this world and the de-* I.  
*ceitfulness of riches choke the word and it be-*  
*cometh unfruitful.* \* This appears to have  
 been the case of *Herod*. We are told that  
 he received *John* the baptist as a *holy and a*  
*just man, and observed him, and heard him*  
*gladly, and did many things upon it.* † But  
 he was drawn back by the charms of his  
*Herodias*, and thus all the impressions of  
 the holy Prophet's teaching were soon de-  
 faced. This also was the case of the young  
 man in the gospel, who came to Christ  
 with the question, *What shall I do to inherit*  
*eternal life?* ‡ When first he addressess  
 himself to our blessed Lord, who would  
 not have thought but he was in the right  
 way to heaven? His life, as to the great  
 commandments of the law, had been inno-  
 cent and blameless; he comes with a  
 seemingly earnest desire of being further  
 instructed in the way to happiness; he  
 attracts the love of the Saviour of mankind:

\* Math. xiii. 24. † Mark vi. 20. ‡ Luke xviii. 18.

but

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I.  
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but yet we see, that a secret love to the things of the world blasted all those fair appearances. Now the case is just the same with every one, who is but *almost a Christian*. He is under the power and dominion of some sensual worldly lust. This is that which to him spoils the relish of the hidden manna, and obscures the beauty of the heavenly *Canaan* in his eyes. Whence is it that we see men so generally careless and indifferent in the pursuit of their spiritual concerns, but from their being too fond of the body and its pleasures? Whence is it that they seek not the heavenly bliss with that application and earnestness which its worth and excellence deserves, but from their being too much engaged with this world and its enjoyments, and so too willing and ready to take up their rest on this side of *Jordan*? But, my friends, they only who triumph over the world are crowned; and they who *sow to the world and the flesh, shall of the world and of the flesh reap corruption*.

BESIDES

BESIDES this vitious and exceffive love of the world, there is another kind, which it may perhaps be allowed is neither in the matter nor degree of it fo criminal, as to be quite incompatible with fincerity in religion, nor fubverfive of our hope of heaven; yet it may be fufficiently ftrong to abate our vigour, and to hinder our progrefs and growth in religion: And it is this meafure of wordly care and affection, which, in the opinion of many learned divines, the apoftle has particularly in view in the paffage we are now difcourfing from. He confiders, fay they, the Chriftian who fets out on the religious courfe, while he ftill retains his love to the world, as one who would engage in a race with a loofe heavy garment, which muft needs fo moleft and entangle him, as to leffen his fpeed; which may probably occafion his ftumbling and falling; and which is at the beft but an ufelefs weight, and therefore ought to be thrown afide. A Chriftian may have too much concern for the  
 pomp

SERM.

I.



SERM.

I.



pomp and shew of life; too great a desire to grow rich, to *join house to house, and land to land*, and to *load himself with thick clay*. He may have too brisk, too exquisite a relish even of the lawful pleasures of the world. He may have too great an exaltation of mind upon his successes in it, and too great dejection of spirit upon his losses and disappointments. He may, in short, encumber and embroil himself too much with the things of the world; tho' not so far as to occasion the sickness and death, yet enough to abate the spiritual vigour and health of his soul, and to retard his progress in the ways of holiness. Now, the more we find ourselves in danger of this, let us endeavour the more to have *our conversation in heaven*. Let us meditate frequently and seriously on the infinite rewards promised to the servant who is faithful and diligent; on the pleasure that attends the practice of goodness here, and the eternal happiness that awaits it hereafter. Had the young man, whom

whom we just now mentioned, made a SERM.  
 just estimate of the riches of eternity, I.  
 would he have *gone away sorrowful*, when   
 he was advised to exchange the treasures  
 of earth for those of heaven? Did we often  
 reflect how soon the fashion, the pomp,  
 and grandeur of this world passeth away;  
 how much better our heavenly country is,  
 than this house of our earthly pilgrimage,  
 we could neither rejoice nor weep for the  
 things of the world with too great e-  
 motion of spirit. Did we so often and so  
 devoutly think of that time, when *Christ*  
*who is our life shall appear, and when we*  
*also shall appear with him in glory*, as to make  
 us love and long for that joyful day, we  
 could not well be in danger of over-  
 rating, and consequently acquiring too  
 high a taste for the riches, honours, or  
 pleasures of the world. We would have  
 no application of mind, but to abound  
 in good works; no ambition, but for  
 that happiness which is eternal. In the  
 pursuit of these ends we would lay out the  
 strength

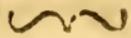
SERM. strength and vigour of our minds ; for  
 I. these we would chearfully give up our  
 present pleasures, and retrench our present  
 profits, and be content to be mean, labori-  
 ous and obscure in the world : for if the  
*world* be once *crucified in us*, we shall the  
 more easily bear being *crucified to it*.

5thly, ANOTHER weight which encum-  
 bers and retards us in running our christian  
 race, is slothfulness ; a vitious indolence  
 and want of resolution. These were the  
 great sources of that instability and ficklen-  
 ess of mind that appeared in the *Israelites*,  
 after they were brought from *Egypt* into  
 the wilderness. They no doubt desired to  
 be possessed of *Canaan* the land of promise ;  
 but they could not think of purchasing it  
 at the expence of so many hardships, such  
 tedious marches and dangerous encounters  
 as they saw before them, so that every  
 now and then they preferr'd the inglorious  
 slavery of *Egypt* to their freedom in the  
 land flowing with milk and honey on  
 such

such difficult terms. And thus, I am a-  
 afraid, it is with many Christians. They aspire  
 after heaven, and gladly would they have  
 their lot in the *Canaan* that is above, could  
 they but purchase it at an easier rate. They  
 profess to be the disciples of Christ, and  
 would share in the merit of his death  
 and sufferings; but they will not *take up*  
*his cross and follow him*: nor can they  
 think of venturing upon that laborious  
 course of watching and diligence, of me-  
 ditation and prayer, which he has enjoined  
 his disciples. The wages, which Christ  
 offers to his servants, they are extremely  
 pleased with, and therefore they will list  
 themselves in his service; while at the same  
 time the work he requires, thro' their own  
 sloth and laziness, appears so intolerably  
 severe, that they can by no means brook  
 it. In short, they wish to arrive at the  
 end without being put to the trouble of  
 using those means which God has prescribed  
 in order to it. And this slothfulness of  
 theirs is constantly joined with cowardice  
 and

SERM.

I.



SERM. and a daftardly meanness of fpirit, that moves  
 I. them to decline every difficulty, and dif-  
 ables them from making a bold refiftance  
 to temptations. They fhun as much as they  
 can every encounter with their fpiritual e-  
 nemies; they will rather fubmit to their  
 power, than hazard an engagement; and  
 yet while they are thus behaving, they  
 fondly hope they fhall at length obtain  
 the reward of victory. But, alas! as foon  
 might *Ifrael* have gained her liberty with-  
 out leaving the houfe of bondage, or have  
 arrived at the pleafant land, without tra-  
 vel, hardfhip, and blood, as the Chriftian  
 may obtain the inheritance of the faints  
 in light, without the continual ex-  
 ercife of patience and fortitude. As foon  
 may we expect to fubdue our enemies  
 without arms or difcipline, as to mafter  
 our corruptions, to conquer temptations,  
 without diligence, meditation and prayer.  
 Can our natural life fubfift without the  
 fupplies of food, which repair the daily  
 decays thereof? no more can our fpiritual  
 life

life be maintained without a constant care of its sustenance and welfare. The means which God hath appointed for the attainment and increase of holiness, are doubtless very proper and well adapted to the end; and we have the highest encouragement to expect that they shall be attended with a divine power and energy; but can their happy influence be felt by such as neglect and despise them? The grace of God is no doubt sufficient to strengthen and establish us in the ways of holiness; but then it must, with frequency and earnestness, be asked of God, and carefully cherished and improved, when it is obtained. The word of God has force and efficacy to enlighten the mind and purify the heart, but it must be received not as the word of man, but, as it is indeed, the word of God. We must *hide it in our hearts and meditate thereon day and night*. If we are so sunk in laziness and sloth, that we either will not use the means appointed by God, or only apply ourselves to them

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them with a lifeless formality, whilst we habitually indulge ourselves in a vain and trifling conversation, what wonder is it, if our life is unsteady and unfruitful; if our faith is weak, and our affections groveling; if, in short, our religion is destitute of true pleasure, and our latter end of comfort and confidence in God? It is naturally to be expected, that the soul of the sluggard will be like his vineyard, as described by the wise man in the book of *Proverbs* xxiv. 30. *I went by the field of the slothful and the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and lo! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.* How criminal, how guilty must this slothfulness in the service of God render us in his sight! Is this like the revenge which the sincere penitent has vowed to take upon his lusts? Is this like the hatred which he has sworn against that evil and *abominable thing* that God hateth? Is this like the war which he has proclaimed

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ed against all the enemies of God and goodness? Is this to redeem the time, and to make amends for our past neglect in the work of God, by our future zeal and diligence in keeping his commandments? Is this the *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*, which becomes the children of God, and the disciples of the holy Jesus? Is this behaving like those faithful servants who would be found *watching with their loins girded, and their lamps burning, when their Master cometh?* Is this improving in a right manner the talents our Lord hath intrusted us with? or can we thus expect to be received with that blessed welcome, *Enter ye into the joy of your Lord?* Is it not rather a *wrapping up the talent in a napkin, burying it in the earth*, and keeping it uselefs and unemployed? Is this, my brethren, like the conduct of true soldiers of Jesus Christ, who ought to *take unto them the whole armour of God, that they may resist the fiery darts of the devil, that they may withstand in the evil day, and having*

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*done all may stand*; who by their character are bound to watch, that the enemy may not gain the smallest advantage over them, and never to turn their backs till they have gained the victory, and that crown which the Captain of their salvation hath promised to *them that overcome*? Is such slothfulness in the service of God a fit requital for his infinite goodness and mercy? Is it thus that we promote the honour of our blessed Redeemer, who *loved us to the death*, and who died that he *might redeem us to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*? Can we entertain suitable thoughts of his amazing love, who show so much coldness and indifference for that salvation, which the Son of God hath purchased by so much shame and sorrow, so much travail and blood? Let us not then, my brethren, be *slothful*, but *fervent in spirit serving the Lord*. Let us *quit ourselves like men*, and be strong, be zealous towards God, ready to every good work, and diligent, that we may be found of God *without spot, and blameless*

*blameless. Let us not be weary in well-doing, knowing that in due season we shall reap if we faint not. Let us give all diligence to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity; that these things being in us, and abounding, we may be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, but may have an entrance administered to us abundantly into his everlasting kingdom.*

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THE last particular I shall mention as an hindrance of our growth and progress in religion, and which indeed is a-kin to that just now treated of, is, our not duly watching against the weakness of our nature, the infirmity of the flesh. *The spirit is willing, said our blessed Saviour, but the flesh is weak* \*. The warfare between the flesh and the spirit, must in some measure remain while we are on this side of

\* Matth: xxvi. 41.

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I.



the grave, and therefore we ought to be always on our guard, with our arms ready, and in a posture of defence. The young soldier of Christ, who has but lately entered into this warfare, will find the assaults of this enemy so frequent and sharp, so violent and shocking, that he will see no time for careless slumber and thoughtless ease; nay, the old and experienced soldier must not be too secure; tho' he has often triumphed over the enemy, and repelled his fiercest attacks, yet he may rally again his broken forces, assault him unawares, and give him a shameful defeat. As an awful warning in this matter, we have in scripture set before us the scandalous backslidings of the best and the greatest of men; and these, like so many claps of thunder, should awaken and terrify us, who, in respect of them, are but weak and infirm. Now, in order to our successful watching against the weakness and infirmity of nature, let us in the

1<sup>st</sup> PLACE carefully observe, where it is SERM.  
 that our greatest weakness lyes; on which I.  
 side the enemy has attacked us with the   
 greatest success; and let us be sure to watch  
 there with a particular circumspection and  
 diligence. We have all our constitutional  
 failings; there are some sins, as the apostle  
 speaks, that *do more easily beset us* than o-  
 thers; and these are different in different  
 men, according to the various propensions  
 of their natures. Some are more inclined  
 to vanity and pride, others to anger and  
 wrath; some to laziness and indolence,  
 others to wantonness and the pleasures of  
 sense. But whatever the predominant  
 weakness is, it is our duty to watch against  
 it with a peculiar care, and to use all the  
 means which reason or religion furnish us  
 with, for correcting or restraining it.

2<sup>dly</sup>, LET us endeavour to be constant-  
 ly in the exercise of *godly fear*, and this  
 will prove an excellent remedy against the  
 frailty and fickleness of our natures. And

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in order to this, let us be frequently employed in meditating on God, and the perfections of his nature; his infinite knowledge and omnipresence, by which he sees the inmost recesses of our souls, and is acquainted with all our ways: his unspotted holiness and purity which *cannot behold iniquity*, and makes him *angry with the sinner every day*: his inflexible justice, in executing the threatened destruction on all that forsake him. Let us often revolve in our minds the awfulness, the impartiality of the judgment to come, when all the actions of our lives shall be published before angels and men, and a solemn sentence shall be pronounced upon us accordingly. Let us seriously consider the numerous temptations that daily assault us; the power and cunning of our enemies, who ly in wait to surprize us, and will be sure to take the advantage of our weakness. Serious and frequent meditation upon such subjects, will prove an excellent means of promoting in us this  
good

good disposition of mind, and of teaching us not to be *high-minded, but to fear*; and *blessed is he that feareth always.*

SERM.

I.



3dly, THE great remedy against the bad consequences of the weakness and corruption of our natures is, our living in a constant dependance on God for the assistance of his grace, and the strength of his Holy Spirit, which he has promised, to supply our wants and *help our infirmities, to strengthen us with all might in the inner man, and to work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.* Every temptation will be too strong for us, if left to ourselves, and we will be ready to yield on the first assault of the enemy; but if we fight under the banner of the great *Captain of our salvation*, we shall be sure of victory, and *shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

THUS I have laid before you some of  
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the chief hindrances to our running the Christian race, and making progress in religion ; and as I have endeavoured, under the several heads, to make such practical reflections, or hint at such directions as I thought proper and natural, there is now the less need of any formal application of the subject. Only allow me, in a few words, to exhort you to the duty required in the text, the *laying aside every weight, and running with patience the race which is set before us*. This I might do, by representing the manifold obligations we are under to it, and the blessed fruits and advantages that will attend it. If we have any regard to the great end of our beings, which is, by holiness and goodness to promote the glory of him that made us ; if we have any dutifulness or gratitude to that God on whom we depend for all that we are, or have, or hope for ; if we have any love to our blessed Redeemer who died for us while *we were sinners and enemies*, that he might bring us to God ;

if



if we have any regard to the sanctity of the Christian character, and the repeated voluntary engagements we have brought ourselves under to support that character; if we would secure to ourselves true comfort and happiness whilst we live in the world; if we would *die the death of the righteous*, and have *our latter end like his*; if we would provide against the unknown terrors of a dying hour, and render it the passage to endless bliss — All these considerations loudly call upon us to be *constant and immovable*, and to *abound in the work of the Lord*; to pursue that *path of the just*, which, *like the shining light*, *shineth more and more to the perfect day*. Of all the motives to constancy and growth in religion, that of the crown of glory, provided for good men in the kingdom of Christ above, is the most powerful and prevalent, and therefore ought to be continually in our minds. How cheerfully must he run the race that is set before him, who has the noble prize of immortality

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tality constantly in his eye? Who will refuse to *endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*, who believes that He is now the spectator, and will soon be the judge and the rewarder of all his sufferings? And if the prospect of heaven will make the Christian rejoice, even in suffering, how much more in doing good? If it enables him to conquer in the day of trial and affliction, how much more to abound in good works in the days of prosperity and peace? How cheerfully will a man give of his substance to the poor and indigent, who by faith sees Christ himself standing by, placing it to his own account, to be repaid a thousandfold in the day of the Lord? How much will it contribute to allay all the disorders of ruffled passion, when faith presents, and as it were opens to his view those mansions above, which the meek shall inherit for ever, where there is nothing but uninterrupted peace and everlasting love? How earnestly, in fine, must he endeavour to be made perfect

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fect in holiness, who has continually in view that happiness, which consists in the perfection of purity, and can only be attained to, by studying to be *holy as God is holy, and perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect?*

SERM.

I.



LET us then, my brethren, be daily contemplating that blessed state; let us by faith render it present to us, and bring it home to our hearts; and thence we shall derive strength and virtue to resist temptations, and to overcome the world and the flesh; to *lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset us; and to run with patience the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus the Author and the Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right-hand of the throne of God: unto whom, &c.*

## S E R M O N II.

Of ANXIETY and SOLLICITUDE.

PHILIP. iv. 6.

*Be careful for nothing—*SERM.  
II.

**M**AN, saith *Job*, is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards. Such is our situation in the present life, that we are exposed to many calamities which no prudence can foresee, and no industry nor power can guard us against. The frailty of our bodies, the injuries of the world, and the changeableness and vicissitude of all earthly things, are fruitful sources of a variety of sorrows. But whilst many of the troubles of human life are unavoidable, there are also many which we create to ourselves, by superfluous anxiety and sollicitude of mind. We vex ourselves in vain, and are ingenious in increasing our own misery. Our minds are quick at perceiving,

ceiving misfortunes at a distance, and are always ready to bode the worst. We form the most frightful images of the future evil; and, not content to wait till it overtake us, we anticipate the grief, and greedily torment ourselves before the time. By the same unhappy art, we magnify every present trouble; our busy imagination representing it in the most dismal light, and painting out our case as wretched and forlorn. Thus our souls are overwhelmed within us; a peevish fretfulness gnaws us, or a fullen gloom hangs upon the mind, which makes our lives a burthen to us, and sometimes drives us into black despair. To guard us against these mischiefs, and to enable us with constancy and fortitude to bear the adversities of our present state, is the design of the apostle's exhortation in the text, *Be careful for nothing*. In speaking from which, I shall, in the

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II.



1<sup>st</sup> PLACE, state the necessary limitations  
of

SERM. of this general precept, and show what  
 II. degrees of carefulness religion and right  
 reason allow ; by which, at the same time,  
 it will appear, what the carefulness is  
 which is here forbid.

*2dly*, I SHALL endeavour to evince the  
 reasonableness of the precept, by showing  
 the folly and sinfulness of that care and  
 anxiety which we are here cautioned a-  
 gainst.

THIS carefulness then may be consider-  
 ed in these two different views ; as having  
 for its object either some future mischief,  
 which we apprehend ourselves in danger  
 of, or some present evil and affliction  
 which we suffer ; in each of these it ad-  
 mits of very just limitations.

IF we consider it in the first of these  
 views, as respecting any future misfortune  
 which we dread, it must not be under-  
 stood so as to exclude that caution, pru-  
 dence

dence and diligence which every wise man ought to exercise, in order to prevent and avoid it. Have we reason to fear an injurious attack on our person, reputation or estate; it becomes every man of sense, and is highly consistent with religion and virtue, to use the utmost caution to frustrate the vile design. Are we in hazard of falling into any dangerous disease; who but a thoughtless foolish man will not use every probable mean of preventing the calamity? *A prudent man, saith Solomon, foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.* But that which here principally claims our attention, is that care which respects our circumstances in the world, as to riches or poverty. This is what above all other things employs the minds of men, and distracts their thoughts; and in this their cares are most ready to exceed the bounds appointed by reason and religion. That a competent portion of the good things of this world is a valuable blessing, and what

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we may lawfully search after, will not, I suppose, be disputed ; as it tends to make our lives here agreeable and easy, and enables us, in many respects, to promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures. By the present constitution of things, men, at least the far greater part of them, cannot attain to this, but by labour and industry of one kind or other. Accordingly the word of God, that perfect rule of life, earnestly recommends to us diligence in our lawful employments, and severely condemns the contrary conduct. *He that provideth not for himself (saith the apostle) and for those of his own household, is worse than an infidel. Be not slothful in business. In all labour there is profit. The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness.* And we see with what severity the apostle rebukes such as *learn to be idle, working not at all, but are tatlers and busy bodies, wandering about from house to house, speaking the things which are not convenient.* We are required then to apply with diligence and industry

industry to our several employments. As this labour and industry cannot be exercised, without our having some thought and care for our success in it, such carefulness as is necessary to animate our diligence, must of consequence be considered as permitted, and cannot be the subject of the prohibition in the text.

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II.



NOR are we to imagine, that this carefulness is only allowable, when it has for its object what may be necessary to raise us above the miseries of poverty and indigence, and to procure for us a bare subsistence in the world ; tho' some may tell us, that when we exceed these bounds, our care must be vitious, in regard that it is a deviation from the simplicity of nature. God has now established a diversity of conditions among men, such as, it is probable, would never have taken place, had we continued in our original state. From this diversity of conditions, there must necessarily flow a different manner of life ;

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and, whatever some people may talk of deviating from the simplicity of nature, it is extravagant to tell us, that after such an establishment, there should still in this respect be an equality between the high and the low, the rich and the poor. A man, therefore, may lawfully employ his care and industry in the pursuit of such a proportion of the riches of the world, as will enable him to make a decent figure in that rank and station in which he finds himself placed by God, and to live in such a manner, as other people of his rank do in the time and place of the world where his lot is cast. And thus, what in an entire consistency with reason and religion may be the object of the cares and desires of one man, in another of lower degree would be unreasonable and vicious.

LET us, in the next place, consider this carefulness, as it respects present trouble and affliction; and here too we shall find, that it is capable of many obvious limitations.

tions. By the constitution of our beings, we are susceptible of pleasure and pain.

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II.



There are certain outward objects which, affecting our organs of sense, naturally produce in us joy and comfort; and there are others which are as necessarily painful and afflicting. Certain thoughts and reflections are pleasing and delightful to the mind, while others fill us with uneasiness and trouble. Thus our Creator, for infinitely wise reasons, has appointed it to be. Such a constitution is necessary to our happiness in the present life; necessary to incite us to a due care for the preservation of our beings, and to make us fly from whatever is hurtful and destructive to them. As soon then may we change the laws of our nature, as hinder our rejoicing in the perception of pleasure, or prevent our feeling the smart of pain. Pleasure and pain will never be indifferent to us; nor will the Stoic, with all his subtilty or eloquence, ever be able to persuade us, that there is nothing really good

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in the one, or evil in the other. In this there is more of pride and grimace than of truth and reason. We are not then to imagine, that the apostle is here prescribing an absolute insensibility under affliction; this were to require what is impossible, to command us to divest ourselves of the feelings of human nature, and to contradict the constitution of our being. Besides, are there not many things befalling us in this life, to be grieved and afflicted for which, is by no means unbecoming the wisest of men, or even the best of Christians? Not to mention religious sorrow, or our grieving for our offences against God, as what no one will be so extravagant as to think the apostle could have here in his view; there is the death of those to whom we have been united by the bond of natural affection, or the sacred ties of friendship. If our love to them was virtuous, and founded on worthy and noble principles, our sorrowing for their death can have nothing vitious

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or blame-worthy in it; unless it be carried to that excessive height, to which if any of the human passions arise, they are at the same time destructive to ourselves, and sinful in the sight of God. A cold indifference under a calamity, such as this, was never esteemed a perfection or virtue, but with justice is looked upon as too certain a sign of a disposition harsh and inhumane. Our holy religion is far from discouraging or forbidding this virtuous sorrow; on the contrary, it cherishes those tender passions which soften our natures, and dispose us to the duties of compassion and love; and in the life of its blessed Author, it gives us a shining example of friendship and love, and a bright pattern, how we ought to mourn over the death of a friend. Even the holy Jesus, in whom was neither imperfection nor sin, *groaned in his spirit, and was troubled* for the death of *Lazarus*. He thought it not below him to weep over the grave of him whom he had loved.

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THUS much of the measures of carefulness, which reason and religion declare to be lawful, and which cannot therefore be the subject of this prohibition: but we suffer this carefulness to exceed those due bounds, when instead of rational foresight and prudence, in the case of threatening misfortune, it becomes a painful anxious sollicitude; when instead of that moderate grieving under the feeling of present evil or misery, which is essential to our natures, it swells into a furious turbulent passion, or settles into a pining consuming sorrow. In either of these cases it is the carefulness we are here warned against. And that leads me to the

*2d* THING I proposed, which was, to prove the reasonableness of this precept, by showing the folly and sinfulness of that carefulness which it forbids. This I shall endeavour to do, by considering it, *1st*, as it respects ourselves, and is of immediate bad influence on our minds; and *2dly*, as  
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it respects Almighty God, the Creator and Governor of the world. If we consider it in the first of these views, we will find it to be an uneasy hurtful passion, which is destructive of the peace and order, the happiness and perfection of our souls. If we examine it in the other view, we will see that it is founded on wrong notions of the Deity, and flows from dishonourable thoughts of the wisdom and goodness of the divine administration.

SERM.

II.



THE soul is an active principle, whose powers and faculties cannot be preserved in their strength and vigour, unless they are employed and exerted about proper objects. The passions and affections are the springs of the life and action of the soul; by them it is excited to exert its powers and faculties, and without them they would lye inactive and torpid. But, in order that the passions may produce this good effect on the mind, and prompt us to that action which is necessary to its  
per-

SERM. perfection, it is required, that they be well regulated, and kept within due bounds : for, if they be allowed to rise to a monstrous unnatural height, if instead of gently moving, they violently hurry and drive on our minds, then they pervert our faculties, and bring forth nothing but disorder and confusion. And of all the passions, there is none which produces more mischievous effects of this kind than immoderate carefulness and anxiety. Upon due consideration we will find, that it distracts the mind, and unfits it for every study and pursuit that is worthy and excellent; that it incapacitates us to use those means that may be in our power for obtaining relief from our distresses; and that if carried to any excessive height, it commonly vitiates our tempers, impairs our faculties, and brings the most dreadful desolation on the soul. Briefly to show how this passion works these bad effects, is what I propose under this head.

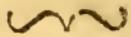
Iſt THEN, it diſtracts our minds, and SERM.  
 unfits us for every ſtudy and purſuit that II.  
 is worthy and excellent. In order to the  
 ſucceſſful purſuit of any ſtudy and buſineſs,  
 it is neceſſary that we enjoy freedom of  
 thought, calmneſs and ſedateness of mind,  
 and that we be under no biaſs and propen-  
 ſion to any thing which is foreign to it.  
 Now, 'tis certain, that trouble and miſery,  
 either apprehended or felt, will have con-  
 ſiderable force to attract and fix the mind  
 even when under the beſt regulation ; but,  
 when, in theſe circumſtances, we give way  
 to exceſſive carefulneſs, our minds are ſo  
 riveted to the object of our diſtreſs, that it  
 is not in our power to draw them to the  
 conſideration of any thing elſe, how im-  
 portant ſoever. Would we improve our-  
 ſelves in ſuch valuable knowledge as will  
 enrich and adorn our minds, and render us  
 uſeful and beneficial to mankind? While  
 this uneaſy paſſion rages in our breſts, vain  
 and fruitleſs are all our endeavours for  
 that end. It hangs as a weight upon the  
 ſoul,

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II.



soul, and retards its flight every moment; it breaks in and disturbs our meditations; insensibly carries off the mind and withdraws the attention, so that our hastened thoughts die before they have arrived at perfection and maturity. Would we apply our minds to the study of religion, and to the attainment of divine knowledge? To this it is not only necessary, that we have all that composure which is required to the pursuit of other studies, but that our minds be in some measure raised above the things of the world, before we can acquire a due taste and relish for those heavenly truths, and become fit for the contemplation of things spiritual and divine. Again; would we employ ourselves in the duties of devotion and worship? While our minds are groveling here on earth, while with anxious wishes we are breathing after its ignoble pleasures, or indulging immoderate sorrow for its losses and misfortunes; can we have that elevation of soul, that ardency of love, that purity of affection



affection which is required in exercises so divine and heavenly? No; our anxious cares will bear down the mind, disjoint our thoughts, cool every holy desire, and render our devotion lifeless, broken and deformed. Further; would we lay ourselves out to be beneficial to our fellow creatures, and employ our time and pains in designs for the good of mankind? This selfish passion will extinguish the generous flame in our breasts, contract our spirits, center all our thoughts upon ourselves, and blast every good and charitable design. While our minds are contracted in melancholy grief for our own misfortunes, can they be enlarged in pity for the miseries of our brethren? While our thoughts and our cares are so much and so anxiously employed about our *own things*, can we also *mind the things of others*? Would we, in short, apply ourselves to the great business of the present life, the preparation of ourselves by virtue and goodness here for the state of perfect happiness and virtue above?

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While we indulge such an anxiety for the present life, how ready will we be to forget that we are designed for another? While the little trifling enjoyments of time enhance our thoughts, or while the want of them disturbs our peace, and robs our souls of rest, can we have our *conversation in heaven*, or our *affections set on the things which are above*? No; we must be more thoroughly weaned from the joys and pleasures of this world, e're the joys which *are at the right hand of God*, and the *pleasures which are in his presence for evermore*, can make a due impresson on our minds. Thus an immoderate carefulness indisposes us for every study and pursuit which is worthy and excellent. The passion might perhaps be allowed to be excuseable, could we say, from experience, that it is subservient to the purposes of warding off approaching mischief, or freeing ourselves from present trouble. But so far is it from answering either of those ends, or indeed any valuable end whatsoever, that

that it never fails, in proportion to the degrees of excess to which we permit it to rise, to render us incapable of using skilfully and successfully the means of defence or relief, that may be within our power, and adds a double weight to every trouble; which was the

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2<sup>d</sup> THING I propos'd to illustrate under this head. As a moderate degree of care is of excellent use to inspire us with diligence and industry, so, if we carry it to that vitious excess that is here forbidden, from a wholesome medicine it becomes a deadly poison, and, instead of animating a man with spirit and activity, it spreads a chilling damp upon the soul; it enervates all his powers, and as other passions push on the man to action, this renders him incapable of it. How will ambition, for instance, awaken every power within us, to undertake, endure, and accomplish the greatest toils and labours, and rush from danger to danger to grasp at the wish'd  
for

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for honour? How will watchful malice set the mind at work to contrive a thousand schemes, for effectuating its base, its dark designs? Even that ignoble passion, avarice, will give our souls no rest, will raise us early, and keep us late from sleep, and transform a lifeless sluggard into a man of business and activity. But care, sickly care alone, languishes and droops, sighs and mourns, but cannot rise to help itself. Are we in danger of poverty and want? By industry we might, perhaps, save ourselves from the threatening evil: for *the hand of the diligent maketh rich*. But oppressive and overwhelming care, unfitting us for business, brings on with greater quickness the evil which we feared. We become like *the sluggard, whose soul, saith Solomon, desireth, and hath nothing, who hideth his hand in his Bosom, and it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth; whose poverty shall come upon him as one that travelleth, and his want as an armed man*. Do we think ourselves in danger of any sickness, which may break

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our constitution, or hazard our lives; or do we actually labour under any trouble of which we dread the event; as calmness and fortitude of mind is the greatest preservative of health, and the greatest support under sickness, so our indulging melancholy fears sometimes brings on the most terrible distempers, and frequently makes even slighter indispositions prove fatal in the issue. *Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it to stoop, but a sound heart is the life of the flesh. A merry heart doth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.* Of all the passions then, this immoderate and oppressive carefulness is the most inconsistent with common sense and wisdom. The other passions, how irrational and vitious soever in themselves, push us on with vigour and activity to obtain their desired satisfaction; this on the other hand fights against itself; and the more we indulge it, the more it renders us incapable to labour for its satisfaction; the deeper it plunges us in the misery which

gave

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II.



give rise to it. In the mean time the passion itself, and all its mischievous consequences, rise in proportion to a greater and more fatal height ; which brings me to the

3<sup>d</sup> THING I propos'd under this head ; which was to show, that this passion, when indulg'd to excess, vitiates our tempers, impairs our faculties, and frequently brings on most dreadful desolation on the soul. The man must have lived but very little in the world who has not observed the bad effects that care and sollicitude produce, in this way, on the minds of men. How often may we see them work the most surprizing and melancholy change upon the best tempers and dispositions ; rob the joyful and the gay of their mirth and humour ; turn their laughter into heaviness of heart ; and from being the delight of their friends, make them a burden to themselves, and to all about them ? How oft may we see the men of the greatest calmness

ness and serenity of mind, lose thereby their engaging sweetness, contract a lasting frown on their brows, and become sour and fretful; and the most friendly and benevolent tempers thereby turn harsh and morose, sullen and untractable? Nay, have we not seen a course of anxiety and carefulness extend its dreadful influence to the nobler faculties of the soul, and impair the reasoning and intellectual powers? Has not this gloomy passion sometimes crazed the strongest judgment, and spread a dark cloud over the finest genius and the brightest parts? Of this, if our own experience fail us, history affords us very mournful examples.---Here is a man who, in a high and honourable station of life, has gained the applause of the world for his wisdom, conduct, and all those abilities that can fit one for the discharge of the highest trust. He meets with an unexpected, and, perhaps, undeserved disgrace. This his proud heart can by no means brook. He retires to a hated obscurity

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with melancholy, care and discontent deep rooted in his mind. These passions prey upon his soul, and soon produce a surprising change. His reason is shattered. He is reduced to a mere changeling, and there remain not the least traces of the great man he sometime was.---To conclude this head ; have not care and anxiety sunk many to the grave itself, and made them end their days in the bitterness of their souls ? Nay, have they not in some unhappy creatures conquered the love of life, the strongest principle of our natures, and driven them, in cruel despair, to stain their hands in their own blood, and to fly for shelter to a hideous death ? If then we consider this carefulness in the immediate bad effects it has on our own minds ; as it indisposes us for every study and pursuit which is worthy and excellent, as it renders us incapable of using the probable means of obtaining relief from our miseries ; and if we consider it in those still more dreadful consequences it sometimes has on the minds  
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of men, we will see the folly and finfulness of indulging such a passion in a very clear light. But this will appear yet more fully, if we go on to consider it in the

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2<sup>d</sup> VIEW which I proposed, as it respects Almighty God; where we shall find it to be founded on wrong notions of the Deity, and dishonourable thoughts of the wisdom and goodness of the divine administration. The first, the primary duty we owe to God, is to entertain true and just notions of him; to think of him as we ought, to conceive him to be, as he really is, infinite in every perfection. Our entertaining wrong notions of the Deity, our representing him in our minds as clothed with any imperfection or weakness, as it is highly criminal in itself, so it is the source of innumerable evils to the children of men. Now, of all the divine perfections, as goodness is the most glorious and amiable, and the great foundation of any rational intercourse man can have with

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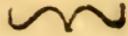


his Maker ; so it especially concerns us to have right notions of this perfection ; to have our minds impressed with a lively sense of it, and to be established in the firm persuasion, that the divine government, in all its parts, is ever directed by the most perfect and invariable goodness. Having once attained to such just and worthy views of the supreme Being, we will naturally see it to be our duty to trust in him, to cast all our cares upon him, to submit with resignation and pleasure to his holy will in all things. As He is the Creator and Governor of heaven and earth, who has an absolute dominion over us, and all his creatures, we are, no doubt, bound to receive with a humble acquiescence whatsoever comes from him. *Has not the potter power over the clay? and shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What doest thou?* But if we add to this the consideration of the infinite goodness of God; that the happiness of his creatures is what he pursues in all his works, in all his dispensations ;

penfations ; that this he defigns, even in the chaftifements and punishments with which he vifits the children of men; then there is an infinite force added to the obligation, and a double guilt and wickedness to the contrary conduct. Had we no difcovery made to us of the divine goodness, our fubmiffion to the will of the Deity would be rather neceffary than virtuous, and our repining at the divine government would be chargeable rather with madnefs than with vice and impiety. But, fince we know *that the Lord is good, and doth good*, our acquiefcence in his will is built on the moft noble and rational foundation; and our murmurs and complaints, and the rifings of our heart againft the conduct of his providence, are no lefs impious than they are irrational. From thefe more general thoughts, we may be able to judge, whether this carefulnefs, of which we are difcourfing, is confiftent with that honour and reverence we owe to the fupreme Being. Had we right notions

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II.



notions of God; were we thoroughly convinced, that we are under the protection and conduct of a Being of infinite kindness and love; could we indulge our minds in painting out scenes of future misery, as wantonly prepared by Providence to overcloud and darken our future days? Could we allow these phantoms, formed by our vain imaginations, to sour every comfort of life, and deprive our souls of rest? Did we think honourably of him who is Judge over all, would we give loose reins to our gloomy passions? would we indulge desponding thoughts to an excessive height, or allow an overwhelming sorrow to make havock of our souls? No. By such a behaviour we in effect deny that the *Lord is good, and that his tender mercies are over all his works*. We distrust his fatherly care and tenderness; we doubt whether he will order every thing for the best to his creatures; we arraign and impeach his management of things. Every well disposed mind will, no doubt, be frightened at such thoughts

as

as these, and be ready to deny the charge. SERM.  
II.  
 But whence then do these anxious cares gnaw thy heart, and disturb thy peace? Why these pale looks, these down-cast eyes, these sleepless nights and joyless days? Were we convinced of the divine goodness; did we make *God our refuge and our strength*; with the Psalmist, we should not be afraid though the earth were removed, and the mountains were cast into the midst of the sea. With souls calm and undisturbed, we would join with the prophet, *Although the fig-tree should not blossom, and the labour of the olive should fail, and there should be no fruit on the vine, although the fields should yield no meat, and the flocks should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herds in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.\**

AGAIN, let us examine what passes in our minds, when we are indulging this passion under any present trouble, and we will find ourselves secretly censuring the

\* Habak. iii. 17, 8.

SERM. management of heaven, and blaming the  
 II. Judge of all the earth for harshness and  
 partiality. May we not often, in the midst  
 of our fretting and repining, catch our-  
 selves employed in such meditations as  
 these? Here is a wretched miser to whom  
 God hath given riches and wealth, yet he  
 hath not the heart to eat thereof; who is  
 so much afraid that his estate should be  
 useful to others, that he is willing that it  
 should be absolutely useless to himself;  
 while I, who would use such a blessing  
 for the good of mankind, who would *make*  
*the heart of the widow and the fatherless to*  
*sing for joy*, am oppressed with poverty,  
 and straitened even for the necessaries of  
 life. This worthless creature again is ex-  
 alted to greatness and honour, fares sum-  
 ptuously every day, receives the fawning  
 addresses of a croud of dependents; while  
 I, who deserve, and would become these  
 things so much better, am left to languish  
 out a miserable life in inglorious obscurity.  
 There is another who is little better than

a burthen to the earth, and yet is blessed with a constitution strenuous and robust, while I am left to struggle with a crazy body, and the powers of my mind are born down with a load of diseases and pain.---

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And what is the necessary conclusion from such fine reflections as these? Durst we avow it, it is no less than this; how blind are the ways, how unaccountable and capricious is the management of heaven! Thus do vain short-sighted mortals, oppressed with anxious melancholy cares, and at the same time puffed up with pride and self-conceit, dare to censure the divine conduct, and *charge God foolishly*. But, had we worthy notions of God; did we think honourably of his government; did we conceive of him as *delighting to exercise loving-kindness on the earth*, as pleased with the happiness of his creatures, as pursuing this great design through the whole of his administration, through all these seemingly dark and gloomy mazes of providence; this would spread a sweet calm and serenity

SERM. nity over our souls, and make us bear the  
 II. adversities of our present lot with a noble  
 resignation and courage. Through the  
 darkest cloud of sorrow and trouble we  
 should see some beams of light and joy.  
 We should be able to trace the divine mercy  
 through every part of our affliction, and  
 should firmly believe, that by these, to us  
 the most unlikely means, God is carrying  
 on our real and highest good. Convinced,  
 that God knows what is good for us, better  
 than we know ourselves, that he loves us  
 better than we love ourselves, and careth  
 for us more than we care for ourselves,  
 we should say with good old *Eli*, *It is the  
 Lord, let him do whatsoever seemeth unto  
 him good.* \*

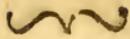
LITTLE more, I hope, needs be said  
 to show the sinfulness of this passion, as it  
 respects God, the infinitely wise governor  
 and disposer of all things. Let us only  
 consider, how our giving way to such an  
 anxious fretful temper would be taken by

\* 1 Sam. iii. 18.

any to whom we were subject on earth. How displeasing, how affronting would it be to any master, if his servant (notwithstanding of the greatest kindness shown to him) should on every occasion appear dissatisfied with his condition, should grudge and repine at every little hardship and inconvenience, and, instead of serving him with cheerfulness, should show by his whole behaviour, that he looked upon him as a master unjust and severe? How disrespectful and provoking would it be to any earthly prince, if his subjects (notwithstanding of his utmost endeavours to promote their happiness) were perpetually showing their doubts and jealousies of bad designs against them; if they should discover themselves uneasy under his government, and, above all, if they murmured against, and reviled his administration as arbitrary and tyrannical? But with much greater reason must such a conduct be provoking to God, our heavenly master and almighty sovereign. The best of men have their

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II.



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II.



their failings, their peevish humours, their fits of passion, which may provoke their servants to repining and discontent. The best, the wisest of princes may commit errors in government, which may disgust their people, and alienate their affections. Like other men they are sometimes led astray by their private passions. They may trust too much to undeserving favourites, and be imposed on, and led by designing men to steps the most unjust and dishonourable. But He who *reigneth over all is mighty in wisdom and excellent in council. Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants, and respecteth not any that are wise in heart. Just and true are all his ways, and his judgements are mercy and truth. Fury is not in him, nor doth he afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. But, as a father chasteneth his son, so the Lord our God chasteneth us, that he may do us good in the latter end.* Now, how provoking would it be to the most affectionate tender hearted father, if on every little chastisement his son should spurn at  
the



the rod, and afterwards appear before him not with a modest blush and an ingenuous shame for the offence he had given, but with a sullen angry discontent in his looks. *We have had fathers of our flesh*, saith the apostle, *which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits? For they chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.* †

THUS I have endeavoured to show the folly and sinfulness of that excessive carefulness which is here forbidden by the apostle, and I must not further encroach on your patience by making any reflections from the subject. Let us be persuaded never to harbour in our breasts a passion, which, as it carries its own punishment along with it in the bad effects it has on our minds, so it is highly criminal in the sight of God; a passion which has in it as little of wisdom as it has of innocence, and is the more danger-

† Heb. xii. 9, 10.

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ous, because it deceives us with a false appearance of both. We are the children of the most loving father, we serve the kindest of masters, and are under the government and protection of a God of infinite mercy and everlasting love. Let us trust in his goodness for evermore, and *commit our ways to him*; and he will be a *strength to us in our distress, a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat*. Let us in every circumstance of life endeavour to maintain such a cheerful composure of mind, such a fortitude and magnanimity as becomes the dignity of our rational nature; as is necessary to its perfection and happiness; and will be the best evidence, that we think honourably of him in *whose hand our life and our breath are, and whose are all our ways*. Let us remember, and put in practice the direction of the apostle to make our *requests known unto God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*; and let us implore the assistance of the divine grace to enable us to *possess our souls in patience, and to teach*



us in whatever state we are therewith to be content. I shall conclude this discourse with the excellent passage of our Saviour's sermon on the mount; *Matth. vi. Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor for the body wherewithal ye shall be clothed. Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the fields how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed. For your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom*  
of

SERM. *of God and his righteousness, and all these*  
II. *things shall be added unto you. Take, there-*  
 *fore, no thought for the morrow; for the*  
*morrow shall take thought for the things of*  
*itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil there-*  
*of.*

## S E R M O N III.

RELIGION the best Support under  
the TROUBLES of LIFE.

PSALM XCIV. 19.

*In the multitude of my thoughts within me,  
thy comforts delight my soul.*

N O mistake concerning religion has SERM.  
III.  
been attended with more hurtful ~  
and unhappy consequences, than the opi-  
nion that it prescribes a joyless and me-  
lancholy course of life; engaging in which,  
we must bid farewell to every pleasure and  
comfort. This false and groundless opi-  
nion we are too ready to take up in our  
early years, when our taste for pleasure  
and enjoyment is keenest; and frequent-  
ly it has a lasting influence to render re-  
ligion an object of our aversion through  
the rest of life. Religion we generally  
F admit

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admit to be of some importance as to the world to come; but we look upon it as a restraint upon our liberty, and an interruption to our pleasures in the present life: and it is no easy matter to persuade men, that their happiness here depends on their following its instructions and precepts. Nothing however is more certain, not only from the most express declarations of God, but from the nature and reason of the thing itself, than that religion is the true blessedness of life; that the *ways of wisdom are the only ways of pleasantness, and that her paths alone are the paths of peace.* It is religion that gives a sweet relish to every comfort of life; that qualifies us for enjoying external pleasures with true satisfaction and peace of mind, and thereby carries our imperfect happiness here to its greatest possible height. As it thus increases the real value of all other good things, so it is the only real and effectual support under the manifold evils  
and

and afflictions of life. Whether pleasure or pain, happiness or misery, has upon the whole the ascendant in the life of man, is what I will not presume to determine; but surely, whoever considers to what a variety of sorrows we are liable, and how many afflictions every man, in the ordinary course of things, may reasonably lay his account with, must admit that religion is valuable in the highest degree, if it has this effect to make the troubles of life fit easy upon us, and to enable us to bear them with patience and with chearfulness.

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To show you that religion really has this blessed influence, is the subject I am naturally led to from the words of the text; where the psalmist, who, in the course of his life, had met with a variety of troubles and afflictions, declares his own experience. *In the multitude of my thoughts within me, says he, thy comforts delight my soul.* Amidst all my fears and

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III.



cares, my pains and sorrows, thou makest peace and gladness to reign within: I find in thy service a perpetual source of delight and joy.

WHAT I propose then, is to represent, how the practice of religion and holiness supports a good man, and affords him comfort and delight under all the evils and calamities of life; which I hope will be abundantly plain from the consideration of the following particulars.

I. RELIGION moderates our love of the world, restrains our affections from the eager pursuit of its enjoyments, and thereby enables us to bear with greater patience its evils and afflictions, and prevents immoderate sorrow and dejection under them.

II. THE practice of true religion affords such immediate delight and pleasure, as in a great measure supplies the want of  
any

any outward enjoyment, and allays the pain of any worldly distress.

SERM.  
III.



III. RELIGION, as it teaches that all things are ordered by the most perfect wisdom and goodness, so it particularly assures every good man, that all things shall work together for his real interest.

IV. RELIGION gives us the blessed prospect of a happy end to all our sorrows, and of rest from all our labours in the life which is to come.

V. RELIGION intitles us to the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, by which we are enabled to apply all these things to our comfort, and to *rejoice in the Lord always*.

I SHALL endeavour, as briefly as I can, to illustrate these several considerations, and conclude with some practical reflections on the whole.

I. THE

SERM.

III.



I. THE first thing I mentioned was, that religion moderates our love of the world, and restrains our affections from the eager pursuit of its enjoyments, thereby enabling us with greater patience to bear its afflictions, and preventing immoderate sorrow and dejection under them.

MAY not we here begin, with lamenting the wretched folly of that great part of mankind, who seek their happiness and chuse their portion here, preferring the transient enjoyments of time to those that are durable and eternal. Did this their choice exempt them from the evils, and raise them above the vicissitudes to which our mortal state is liable; were it indeed the case, as *David* once thought it was, that they were *not plagued like other men, nor chastened as others be*; then were this their conduct more excusable: but alas! not only are they exposed in common with others to those troubles which belong to the lot of mankind, but moreover, the warm indul-

indulgence of their several passions, and the fond pursuit of earthly pleasures, will always be found to multiply their griefs, and, by a train of necessary consequences, to become bitterness in the latter end. It is a truth certain and undoubted, that the enjoyments which these men pursue, in which they seek for happiness, are variable and fugitive, short and uncertain. Their most promising hopes may soon be blasted; their riches may *take to themselves wings, and fly away*; or sickness may render their enjoyments tasteless and insipid, and im-bitter their lives in the midst of the greatest affluence. Now, if all things here below are so changeable and fleeting, how wretched must they be, who set their whole hearts upon them, and have no higher views than the attainment of the honours, pleasures and riches of life? To men, whose supreme delight is placed in such precarious enjoyments, the loss of them must prove the most dreadful stroke. The calamities of life must fall upon them  
with

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III.



with double weight, and they have nothing left to support them from sinking under them. Thus it is, and thus it must always be with such men, when visited with the losses and disappointments, the evils and troubles of the world.

BUT how different is the case with him whose mind is informed and ruled by the dictates of religion; which corrects our mistaken notions, reclaims our wandering affections, and fixes them on objects which alone are worthy of our nature. Religion teaches us to consider this life as a short passage to our lasting and unchangeable state; to look on this world, as only the *house of our pilgrimage*, from which we are to pass on towards heaven, the mansion of eternal rest. Religion calls upon us to remember, that *our life is but a vapour*; that *the fashion of this world passeth away*; and accordingly, that we are not to set up our rest here. Religion teaches us, that when we begin to live, we should learn to die,

and

to look beyond this vain world to a state of more lasting and glorious existence. How certain is it that the man whose prospects and views of things are thus enlarged, who has his eye fixed on a *better country, even an heavenly*, as his passions of course will not be so much engaged with the things of the world, so he will bear the evils and afflictions of it with greater evenness and composure of mind than others? He knows that there is no proportion between this and the future state of things; and therefore, neither the troubles nor enjoyments of life, will appear to him of such importance as to disturb his peace or to turn him aside from the steady pursuit of his true happiness. But besides, religion not only moderates our affection to the things of the world as short and fleeting, and bearing no proportion to the immortality of our souls; but by a further consideration it corrects our attachment to the world, as not only a foolish and mean, but an extremely dangerous passion.

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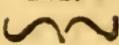


passion. *Love not the world*, says the apostle, *neither the things that are in the world; for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* We are taught, that the indulging such a passion *wars against the soul*; that *to be carnally minded is death*, and excludes us from the kingdom of heaven; that we must be freed *from the corruptions that are in the world through lust*, if we would be *partakers of the divine nature*; that we must not entangle ourselves with worldly cares, if we would behave ourselves as *good soldiers of Jesus Christ*, and *fight the good fight of faith*: in short, religion enjoins us, *to have our conversation in heaven*; and, as already *fellow citizens with the saints*, to be learning betimes to take delight in the same exercises, and to relish the same pleasures with them, if ever we expect to be received into their blessed society above. And now, how can he whose mind is ruled by such principles as these, and whose affections are purified by such a discipline, be subject to those furious passions, which the

the

the distresses of life so often raise in the minds of others? Whence flow those oppressive cares, that sorrow and melancholy, that overwhelm the minds of men, but from a fond admiration of the things of the world, from an immoderate attachment to the pleasures of life, from mens being lovers of worldly riches more than lovers of God? Those disturbing passions surely cannot find place in his heart, whose *treasure is in heaven*; whose *affections are set on things above*; and who looks on every worldly thing as contemptible and low, when compared with the favour of God, and that reward which he has laid up for his faithful servants. Thus much then for the first particular.

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III.



II. THE next thing I mentioned was, that the practice of religion affords such immediate delight and pleasure, as in great measure supplies the want of any outward enjoyment, and allays the pain of wordly distress. Religion does not require,

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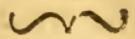


quire, nor do we pretend that it produces an absolute insensibility under the troubles of life. We plead not that health and sickness, wealth and indigence, honour and disgrace will be things indifferent to a good man. They who have carried the matter to this romantic height seem to have been ignorant of the essential principles and constitution of human nature, with which a desire of pleasure and an aversion to pain are so interwoven, that by no means they can be rooted out nor changed. But granting that these natural appetites and feelings are insurmountable, and that no man, by any influence of religion, can be altogether freed from an afflicting sense of the evils of life; yet here is an undoubted advantage of piety, and a privilege peculiar to good men, that they have a certain stock of pleasure and enjoyment, independent of the body, and of all the vicissitudes of time; which neither sickness nor poverty, nor all the envy and malice of vitious men can rob them of. To these pleasures

pleasures they have access, when every external enjoyment is gone. They find in them the most delightful entertainment to their minds ; such as makes them forget their sorrows and wants, nay, such as makes them even to rejoice in the midst of the heaviest afflictions. That refined delight which attends the exercises of religion, that blessed peace and serenity of mind which is the natural and constant effect of the practice of goodness, support and revive the servants of God, when all things around them are most black and threatenng.

SERM.

III.



How miserable must he be who is a stranger to religion and to its comforts, who knows no other blessing than what the outward enjoyments of life can afford him ! He seeks but one spring of happiness, and that a scanty one too, and when this is dried up, as soon it may, he falls into a condition the most disconsolate and forlorn. Let us suppose him reduced to want and indigence,

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gence, or afflicted with pain and sickness; what entertainments has he? what relief can he fly to? what course has he left him? None, but to lye brooding over his sorrows, and to torture himself with thoughts of those evils, which he can neither remove nor endure. Should he turn his eyes inward, there will open to him a black scene of folly and of guilt, and he will be glad to think of any thing rather than himself. Should he lift his eyes to God, who before was scarce in all his thoughts; what relief or pleasure can he have in the contemplation of that power which he has defied, that justice which he has provoked, that goodness which he has abused and trampled on! Well may we apply to wicked men when under affliction, what we find *Moses* threatening the *Israelites* with as the certain consequences of their rebellion; *Thou shalt have no ease* says he, *neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; for the Lord shall give thee a trembling heart and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind; and thy life shall hang*  
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doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. In the morning thou shalt say, would God it were evening; and in the evening thou shalt say, would God it were morning; for the fear of thy heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. † There is no peace, saith the prophet, unto the wicked, for they are like unto the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt. Let us now, on the other hand, suppose a pious man beset with the evils of life, and in a situation, to all appearance, the most miserable and destitute; yet he enjoys a blefsful calm and tranquillity within, which affords him a delight superior to all the noisy and empty pleasures of the world. Hence it is that Solomon tells us, that the good man is satisfied of himself; and that the work of righteousness is said to be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. He has a variety of worthy employments and noble exercises to which he may betake

† Deut. xxviii. 65, 66, 67.

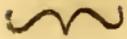
himself,

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himself, and which not only divert the mind from the present feeling of trouble, but in themselves afford him a high measure of satisfaction and joy. He will take delight in approaching to God, and the *meditation of him shall be sweet unto his soul.* When compared with this and the pleasures that flow from it, all the little artifices, the trifling amusements which the men of the world can have recourse to, in order to lull asleep their griefs, are but miserable comforters. The contemplation of Him who is the perfection of beauty, the fountain of excellence, must in itself be a delightful exercise to the truly pious. Nor will his understanding only be employed in contemplating the loveliest object, his affections also will be running out towards God; he will feel his heart warmed with love and gratitude, and inspired with trust and confidence in him; his meditations will be accompanied with the purest and most exalted devotion; and it is this devout intercourse with God which

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is the great refreshment and support of good men under all the evils and troubles of life. It is thus, that *in the multitude of thoughts within them, his comforts delight their soul.* For, is it not a sensible consolation to us, when in distress and perplexity, to have a sure and faithful friend, into whose bosom we may pour our cares and sorrows, who may comfort, direct and advise us, and by his tender friendly sympathy may ease us of half our burden? How happy then must a pious man be, who in all his distresses may have his recourse to God; the most faithful, affectionate, all-sufficient friend; ever ready to hear and willing to help us; who *despises not, nor abhors the affliction of the afflicted;* who invites us to *pour out our hearts before him,* and has promised to be a *strength to us in our distress, a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat.* Thus then I hope it appears, that religion affords the servant of God such spiritual joys and pleasures, as will in great measure supply the

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want of other enjoyments, and lessen the weight of any sorrow. Is he reduced to want and indigence? he has a good conscience, which is *a perpetual feast*; and he can join with the Psalmist, *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than when their corn and their wine abounded.* Is he harrassed by the envy and malice of those about him? he enjoys peace with his Creator, and friendship with himself. Is he forsaken by friend and brother? one friend still remains who *changeth not*: he finds in his experience, that the Lord *forsaketh not his saints*, and *that none that trust in him shall be desolate.*---Is his body weakly and languishing? his soul may notwithstanding be vigorous and free, may raise itself above this world, converse with its eternal Creator, and taste of pleasures, which those the body ministers, when in all its health and soundness, can never equal.

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III. THE next thing mentioned, in order to show that religion is our great support under the afflictions of life, was this, that as religion teaches us, that all things are ordered by the most perfect wisdom and goodness, so it particularly assures every good man, that all things *shall work together for his good*. Without the knowledge and belief of an infinitely perfect Being, the Creator and Governor of the world, we would necessarily have the most melancholy views of human nature and human life. Let us represent to ourselves a poor helpless animal brought into being, ignorant of his origin, and of the end for which he is formed; surrounded on all hands with darkness; subject to a thousand anxieties and troubles, pains and distresses, which he can neither prevent nor cure; feeling violent inclinations which can never be satisfied; endowed with so much reason, as to make his misery the more complete by the exquisite perception of it; and after a few years of this wretch-

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ed existence, returning to the dust, and dying like the beasts that perish. This, my friends, is the best notion we can form of ourselves, if we exclude from our thoughts the Supreme Being, *whose we are*, and on whom we depend. But when we consider ourselves as the creatures and subjects of the great and good God; all whose ways, tho' by us unsearchable, we know to be in righteousness and truth; who has the most tender concern for the welfare of his creatures, and pursues this as his great end thro' the whole of his divine administration; when we believe that nothing can befall us here, but what is ordered by the most consummate wisdom and the most boundless goodness, nothing but what, if rightly improven, will turn out to our real interest and advantage: this instantly brightens the scene; this affords a most comfortable prospect of things, and may justly support our minds under the various evils which we are here exposed to. When all things around us  
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are dark and gloomy, how rejoicing is the thought, that there is one who sits at the helm of the world to govern and direct every event, to bring light out of darkness, and order out of seeming confusion! When we see nothing before us but the dismal prospect of approaching misery, and our minds are ready to sink under sad apprehensions and forebodings; what consolation must it yield us, to know that our concerns are all in the best and safest hands, and are under the care and management of him, who is *mighty in wisdom*, and whose *tender mercies are over all his works!* When our minds are perplexed and confounded with the strange and seemingly inconsistent appearances in the present state of things, how comfortable must the reflexion be, that tho' we, short-sighted creatures, cannot comprehend it, yet the whole makes up one regular system, worthy of the great and righteous Ruler of all! Well therefore may we join with the Psalmist, *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice,*

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*rejoice, and let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darknes are round about him, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.\**

BUT a general assurance of the wisdom and goodness of the divine administration is not all the comfort which good men have under the troubles of life. Besides this, they have the most express declarations and promises of God, that *all things shall work together for their good* in particular; and that whatever may befall others, yet *surely it shall be well with them that fear the Lord*. He has promised that *he will prevent them with the blessings of his goodness, and with his favour encompass them about as with a shield*. *How great is thy goodness, O Lord, which thou hast laid up for those that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for those that trust in thee, before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man, thou shalt keep them in a pavilion from the*

\* Psal. xcviij. 1, 2.

*strife of tongues. The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord, he is their strength in time of trouble; he shall deliver them in six troubles, and in seven there shall no evil touch them: in famine he shall redeem them from death, and in war from the power of the sword. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.* Now, tho' these and the like promises of God's peculiar favour to good men are not so to be understood, as if they were to be entirely exempted from those troubles to which the rest of mankind are liable; or as if these afflictions were not to have their natural effects on them as well as others: yet this much they must surely import, that good men, when under the evils of life, are in a situation widely different from that of wicked men, when under the same evils; and that the righteous have grounds of strong consolation which others know nothing of. They know that all the afflictions  
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they are visited with here, are designed for the most wise and gracious ends. They behold them as the kind chastisements of an affectionate father, which are by him dispensed, in order to correct their failings, to quicken them in their duty, to exercise their graces, and to strengthen their faith and trust in God. They look on them as excellent medicines applied to cure the maladies of their souls, to check the wandering of their affections, to raise them above this world, and make them aspire after pleasures more exalted and sublime. It is in this light that we always find the afflictions of the people of God represented in scripture: *when the righteous are holden in the cords of affliction, saith Eliku, then God sheweth them their work and their transgression, that they have exceeded; he openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.\** We have a long and excellent reasoning on this subject in the epistle to the Hebrews xii. 7. where the apostle hav-

\* Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10,

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ing shown God's wise and gracious designs in visiting his people with afflictions, very properly subjoins this exhortation, *Therefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees.* And indeed, my brethren, must not the man who beholds all the evils and calamities of life in such a light as this, bear them in quite another manner, and with much more composure and fortitude, than it is possible for the men of the world to do? Well may he *count it all joy when he falls into divers temptations, as knowing that the trying of his faith worketh patience, that he may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.* Thus find we the saints in scripture expressing their trust and confidence in God under trouble, in language the most strong and sublime. *The Lord, says the Psalmist, is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? In God have I put my trust, I will not fear what man can do unto me. God is our refuge and our strength,* says he elsewhere,

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where, *and therefore I will not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be cast into the midſt of the ſea.* But the conſolation, which truſt in God and in the divine promiſes affords to good men, is better felt, than it can be poſſibly expreſt in words; it is their cordial under all diſeaſes, their light under all darkneſs, their antidote againſt all the plagues of the world: *The peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding, keeping their hearts and minds through Jeſus Chriſt.* By means of this, their ſpirits are not only born up in the miſt of all the waves and billows of affliction, but they are made to look beyond the tempeſt to a ſafe and quiet ſhore; they triumph in the aſſured proſpect of deliverance, and are enabled to *rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

IV. WHICH leads me to the fourth head of diſcourſe, that religion gives us the bleſſed proſpect of a happy end of all our ſorrows, and a reſt from all our labours in  
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the life which is to come. Sometimes, no doubt, the cloud is so dark over good men, the storm beats upon them so furiously, and they are so beset behind and before, that were it not for this delightful prospect, other considerations would avail but little to bear up their minds under the pressure of affliction. Hence the inspired apostle, when speaking of the trials and persecutions of the first Christians, uses that expression, *If in this life only we had hope, we were of all men most miserable.* And indeed, what less than the glorious hope of eternal bliss could have supported men, who were constantly exposed to the derision, hatred and cruelty of mankind; who were enduring stripes and chains, weariness and hunger, cold and nakedness, who were continually in perils and dangers, and who could expect to end this life of sorrows only by a violent and shameful death? Accordingly we find that our Lord and his apostles usually adduce this consideration of an everlasting reward, as the  
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only motive of sufficient force in such a dismal case. *Blessed are they*, says our Saviour, *who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when all men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil falsely against you for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.\* Be ye patient, saith the apostle, and stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. †* Now tho', by the goodness of God to us, we are not generally exposed to such dreadful sufferings, as our brethren were exposed to in the first days of the gospel; yet, no doubt, it is sometimes the lot even of the best of men, to be placed in such disastrous circumstances, in such extremity of pain and anguish, that nothing but the prospect of heaven could keep them from the greatest dejection of mind. But this glorious hope entirely changes the face of things; it makes all their present *afflictions*, how heavy soever they may be, to seem *light*; and

\* Matth. v. 10, 11, 12. † James v. 8.

how



how long soever they may last, to appear as enduring *but for a moment*, in comparison of that *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. Death, tho' naturally dreadful to mankind, they will welcome as the happy period of all their griefs, the cure of all their diseases, the victory over all their enemies; and will look forward with pleasure thro' the dark and gloomy vale, into that happy land where they shall *rest from all their labours, and their works shall follow them*; where God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; where the righteous shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; where former things shall be done away, and all things shall become new. Looking upon this state of succeeding existence in no other light, than as a complete deliverance from all the troubles of the present life, it must needs afford the highest consolation to good men;

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men; and as they approach nearer to it, they may *lift up their heads with joy*, as knowing that *the day of their redemption* is at hand. But must it not have still a more powerful influence to support and gladden their souls, when they consider, that then they shall not only be for ever redeemed from all their sorrows, but shall receive an unspeakable reward of glory and endless bliss? *Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath laid up for those that love him.* Who can now comprehend the happiness that must flow from perfect knowledge, joined with perfect goodness; from the society of angels, and of the *spirits of just men made perfect*; from our enjoyment of God himself, and our union with the fountain of all goodness! If in this life good men have been loaded with reproach and disgrace, there shall they be made *kings and priests unto God*, and be crowned with *glory, honour and immortality*; if here they have been born down  
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with poverty and want, there is reserved for them an inheritance *eternal and incorruptible*; a *treasure which moth or rust do not corrupt*, and where no *thieves break through and steal*. If here they have been made to pass through the furnace of affliction, and through pain and sickness; if they have had wearisome days and nights appointed for them; there shall they *obtain joy and gladness*, they shall flourish in immortal youth, and be clothed with strength and vigour incapable of decay; when *this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory*. Inspired with this blessed hope, how well may they *rejoice in the midst of tribulation*, and with what courage may they bear the hardships and difficulties of the way, which they know will soon lead them to everlasting rest and joy! What labour and toil will not men endure; what danger will they not cheerfully encounter, when animated with the expectation of acquiring

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ing some fading worldly good? Ought not then the prospect of the celestial bliss to have a much stronger influence to support our minds under the evils and calamities of life; since, with so much certainty, we can conclude with the apostle, that *the sufferings of the present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall afterwards be revealed.*

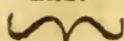
V. THE last thing I mentioned, to show you how religion is the source of comfort under afflictions, was this; that it intitles us to the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, which enables us to apply, in a due manner, the grounds of comfort which religion affords, and to *rejoice in the Lord always.* The necessity of our being directed by a superior principle in the ways of truth and goodness, reason itself may deduce from the present weakness of our natures, and the unhappy bias which so early appears in us to the crooked paths of error and vice. The ancient philosopher

pher, is acknowledged to have deeply studied human nature, who laid it down as a maxim, that no man could arrive at eminent virtue without the inspiration of God. Agreeably to this, the divine revelation every where ascribes the beginning, the progress and perfection of the religious life to the benign influences of the spirit of God, and assures us that it is God who *worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure*. As this blessed aid is necessary for us at all times, so in a particular manner in the day of distress and trouble; then the divine grace must be *sufficient for us*, or our own weakness will soon betray us. The afflictions we are here exposed to, the sacred writers very properly represent as trials and temptations; it being extremely difficult to behave in a right manner under them, and not to be led into sin and folly, to impatience and fretfulness, to murmuring and repining against God. Most seasonably, therefore, in such circumstances, is a divine aid provided for us, by the promise

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of the spirit of God to them that sincerely ask it. He assures us that *they who are the sons of God shall be led by the spirit of God*; and to point out to us the happy effects of his influence and conduct, when we are under distress and trouble, he has promised the spirit under the particular character of the *Comforter that should abide with us for ever*. It is by this spirit, *the Comforter*, that good men are armed with patience, contentment and fortitude under all their troubles; and are made to *rejoice in tribulation, the power of Christ resting on them*. By him they are made to delight in the exercises of religion, and to taste therein a *joy and peace that is unspeakable*, quieting all the griefs and sorrows of their hearts. By him they are *rooted and grounded in faith and love*, and made to know what is *the hope of God's calling*, and what *the riches of the glory of his inheritance*. *Joy and peace*, are the fruits of the spirit; and it is *through the power of the Holy Ghost*, we are said to *abound in hope, and to be filled with joy and*  
*peace*

peace in believing. - These happy effects of the holy spirit, the first professors of our religion fully experienced in all their sufferings for the cause of Christ; and as their *sufferings abounded*, their *consolations also abounded by Christ*, so that they even rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for his sake. The same spirit, with all his gracious influences, is still promised, and will certainly be bestowed on every sincere Christian. Many I hope there are who can bear witness to the goodness and faithfulness of God in this respect; who under the greatest afflictions have found themselves upheld and comforted by an invisible power, and when destitute of earthly comforts have found that the *consolations of the Lord are neither few nor small*.

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THUS having endeavoured to explain and illustrate the several particulars by which I proposed to show, that religion and goodness is the great source of

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comfort under the afflictions of life, I should now conclude with some practical reflections on the whole. Here allow me only to observe, that the design and the natural improvement of this discourse is to incite us to the serious study and practice of holiness and piety. Many and various are the motives set before us, to persuade us to this; and what we have been insisting on, is none of the least considerable. Where is the man, who can reasonably promise himself to pass through this valley of tears, without tasting of its sorrows? Neither the highest pitch of greatness, nor the lowest obscurity, can exempt us from this common fate of all the children of men. Would we then, my brethren, be prepared to bear, with cheerfulness and fortitude, those calamities which we cannot avoid? Would we arm ourselves against the arrows of affliction which are every where flying around us, and aim'd at our peace? let us take to ourselves the buckler of religion and virtue;

tue ; let us seriously apply ourselves to the exercise of holiness, and this we shall find to be the best defence. Could we once take delight in communion with God ; were the *meditation of him sweet unto our souls* ; this would lay asleep our sorrows and fears ; this would calm the storm in our breasts, and raise us above the world and all its anxious cares. Were we approving ourselves as faithful servants unto God, then might we challenge, and, with humble confidence, rest upon these *great and precious promises* he has given to good men. Were we *abounding in the work of the Lord, stedfast and immoveable* in his service, then we might derive the most powerful consolation from knowing that our *labour should not be in vain in the Lord*. What an indifference about all things here below ; what patience and contentment under all our burthens ; what an heroick courage under all dangers ; what joy, what triumph would be the natural, the blessed effect of our looking forward to that day, when all

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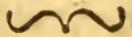
SERM. III.  our sorrows shall have an end; when we shall be placed beyond the reach of poverty, distress and pain, and be possessed of that *fulness of joy* which is *at the right hand of God*, and these *rivers of pleasure* which are in *his presence for evermore*? Such would be the blessed effects of the practice of religion: and is not this sufficient to make us love it, and pursue it, that when the calamities of life overtake us, the Lord may then *be our strength and our defence*, and *in the multitude of our thoughts within us*, *his comforts may delight our souls*?

HAVE we not here, my friends, a loud call to all the sons and daughters of affliction, to seek relief where it is only to be found; to all the *weary* and *the heavy laden*, to come unto God, that they may find rest unto their souls? Nay, to those who have not as yet tasted of the evils of the world; who are yet in the joyful spring of life, ought not this strongly to recommend the good ways  
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of the Lord? — You may flatter yourselves with hopes of uninterrupted happiness, and form to yourselves imaginary schemes, where one pleasure shall still be succeeding another. You are unwilling, I know, that any thing gloomy or sorrowful should enter into your views of life: but, alas! these are vain deceitful dreams. As your enjoyments, at the best will be faint and languid, fleeting and transitory, so your joy will be chequered with sorrow, and your pleasure mingled with grief. You know not, you cannot know, how much pain and sickness, how much distress and want, how much affliction and misery may be yet before you in life. The less you look for such things, they will be the heavier when they come: if you are not guarded and armed against them, they will oppress you with double violence, and you will be ready to sink under their weight. Now 'tis religion alone, and the devoting yourselves to the service of God, that can support you under the trials of the world, and conduct

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duct you thro' human life with safety and peace. They alone *shall be established in perfect peace whose minds are stayed on God.* Are you entering upon a life so exposed to distresses and plagues, and will you not carry alongst with you this antidote, this cordial? a life, where one sorrow shall succeed another, and will you neglect this best source of tranquillity and comfort? *Get wisdom therefore, and with all your getting, get understanding: for happy is the man that findeth wisdom; the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof, than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand, are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.\**

\* Prov. iii. 13, 14, 15, 16.

## S E R M O N IV.

The Christian Religion the greatest  
Blessing to MANKIND.

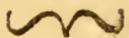
COLOSSIANS i. 12, 13.

*Giving thanks unto the Father, — who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

**I**T is very observable, that we have the justest sense of the true value of those blessings, of which we have sometime felt the want, and were thereby made sensible how necessary they are to our happiness. These things, on the other hand, of which we have had a long uninterrupted enjoyment, how great and valuable soever in themselves, make but a very faint impression on us. We become, in a manner, insensible of their worth; and are neither  
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careful to improve them in a right manner, nor duly thankful to God for bestowing them. There is nothing in which this wrong judgment, this weakness of our nature, appears more evidently, than in our manner of thinking concerning the Christian religion. It is an inestimable treasure which we have all our life enjoyed. We never knew what it was to want it: and thence it comes to pass, that few of us have a deservedly high estimation of its great excellency. Most people think of it with a cold indifference; and some have not scrupled to declare before the world, that they look upon the religion of Jesus as a superfluous institution, of little or no real use to mankind. But had we ever known, or did we duly reflect on the horrid barbarity and ignorance, on the wretched gloomy superstition, from which we are delivered by this light from above, and had we thus been taught to know its infinite value, no cold, no lessening thoughts of it could find room

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in our breasts. With eager joy would we embrace the heavenly gift, and with thankful souls adore the divine goodness manifested in bestowing it.

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WITH a design to offer to your consideration some thoughts on this subject, I have chosen these words of the apostle *Paul*, as the foundation of this discourse. Not to spend time in showing their connexion with what goes before, it is abundantly plain, that the words, *Giving thanks unto the Father*, in the beginning of the 12th verse, equally relate to what is contained in the 13th verse, as to what is immediately subjoined to them; which not being so much to our present purpose, we may pass over, and read the text thus; *Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

By the power of darkness, I understand  
heathenish

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heathenish ignorance and superstition, which is frequently in scripture expressed under this figure, as the gospel is represented by the opposite figure of light. Thus, says the apostle, speaking to the *Gentiles*, *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now ye are light.* The *Gentiles* are said to have *sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death*; and God is said to have *called them from darkness into his marvellous light*: and this *marvellous light* is the same thing that in the text is expressed by the *kingdom of the Son of God*; which here, and in many other places of the New Testament, denotes the Christian church, or the evangelical dispensation, of which Jesus Christ is the author, and in which he must be acknowledged as *King* and *Lawgiver*, by all who sincerely receive it.

THE proposition that naturally arises from the words thus explained, is this; That God's delivering the *Gentiles* from heathenish darkness, and calling them to  
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the knowledge of the gospel of Christ, is an instance of his goodness, which ought always to be acknowledged with the highest expressions of gratitude and praise.

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IN ordinary cases, we judge of the measure of gratitude due on account of any favour from such circumstances as these; from our deserving or not deserving it at the hands of our benefactor; from our great need of it, and our misery without it; and lastly, from the importance of the favour itself, and the happiness which we enjoy by means of it. If therefore it can be shown, that the *Gentiles* were entirely undeserving of this valuable gift; that without it they were in a state of very deplorable misery; and that the possession of it is the greatest happiness; it will hence be evident, that the goodness of God, in bestowing this gift on them, requires their highest gratitude. In this method I propose to consider the subject.

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MANKIND are endowed with rational powers, by the due exercise of which they may attain to a considerable knowledge of God and religion. Altho' men may be plac'd in such circumstances, that this knowledge, even when carried to the greatest height they can bring it to, may still be insufficient for the great ends of religion; yet undoubtedly a diligent search after it, and a suitable improvement of what they have attained, however defective, is the best way of recommending them to the favour of God, for what farther knowledge he sees necessary for creatures in their circumstances. The neglect of this knowledge, on the other hand, and the misimprovement of their natural powers, render them altogether unworthy of any such favour. Now, that this last was the case of the heathen nations, is most certain. They had sunk into such an ignorance of the nature of God, and had adopted such an impious, absurd and ridiculous scheme of religion, as it was impossible for them

to have fallen into, had they exercised and improved their reason as became rational creatures. Our understandings are no doubt very much darkened, and the powers of our mind weakened in this imperfect state; yet not so much, but that *from the things that are made, we may know the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead*; so that those ridiculous tribes of mock deities received by the heathens, must have been the offspring of the most criminal negligence and shameful stupidity.

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SOME, I know, are of opinion, that mankind were in no period of the world left to the glimmerings of their own reason, in the investigation of religious knowledge, but were aided by the traditionary remains of the most ancient revelations which God made of himself to mankind, and which he intended should be handed down from father to son. Now, if we take the matter in this view, the guilt of the *Gentiles* will

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will still appear in as strong a light. For to what a sinful neglect of God, to what a scandalous indifference about the great truths of religion, must we ascribe it, that they suffered this knowledge of God, conveyed to them by revelation, to be so soon corrupted, nay, utterly effaced; first clouded with fable, and at length quite buried in darkness and superstition? Granting that God did not leave mankind to find out the most necessary truths, by that slow and uncertain way of their own reason; yet surely these noble faculties were designed to be of great use in religion; to judge what was consistent with infinite perfection, and worthy of God; to guard them from ascribing to the Deity any thing low or mean, vitious or imperfect. How criminal then was it in men, so far to extinguish this candle of the Lord, as to make to themselves gods, whose characters would sute infernal spirits, or the vilest men, better than the objects of religious worship and adoration? We can scarce read the  
 stories

stories of the heathen deities, and persuade ourselves, that mankind were ever so infatuated, as to receive for important articles of faith, what we smile at as poetic fables: but such certainly was the case, with the multitude at least, even in those nations which looked down on the rest of the world as barbarous and ignorant: so wise and discerning a creature is man, with all his boasted powers and extensive faculties, when left to be his own guide in religion! The great apostle of the gentiles gives us a very just and elegant description of their state in the first chapter of his epistle to the *Romans*; *they are without excuse, says he, because that when they knew God, (or might have known God) they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man, to birds, to fourfooted beasts and creeping things: they*

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*changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore.*

Now, as these things make it evident, that the gentiles had not improved the light that God had given them, so as to deserve any farther declaration of his will, or had so abused a first revelation, as by no means to deserve a second; so they may serve in part to show the miserable condition into which they had brought themselves; which was the second thing I proposed to illustrate.

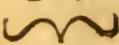
THE misery of the heathen world may be considered in these two different views; *first*, As flowing from that false religion they had adopted:

AND, *secondly*, From their ignorance of many necessary principles of true religion.

As we are dependent beings, our happiness or our misery must be very much influenced

fluenced by our notions of that Being, on whom we believe ourselves to depend. Our conceiving him to be infinite in every perfection, particularly in wisdom, righteousness and goodness, makes our contemplation of him noble and exalted, and the thoughts of our dependence on him pleasant and delightful. From such thoughts of the Deity flows true religion, which is the source of the most refined pleasure; which elevates the soul, and raises our natures to their greatest dignity and perfection. On the other hand, our entertaining evil and dishonourable notions of the Deity, particularly our conceiving of him as grievous and hurtful to mankind; as a Being of fierce passions and of cruel revenge, whose government is arbitrary and tyrannical; such thoughts, I say, must fill us with slavish fear and dread, must embitter all our comforts, and make our lives a melancholy scene of horror or despair. By such thoughts as these is begot that monster superstition, which harrasses

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mens minds with chimerical terrors, fours their tempers, and gives birth to a thousand passions of the worst and most unnatural kind.

Now, that the gentiles had these wrong conceptions of the Deity, will appear evidently from the accounts which they themselves give of their gods, as guilty of the most dreadful instances of cruelty; from their deifying and paying religious honour and worship to things in themselves the most destrutive to mankind; to famine and pestilence, to fevers, and the most dreadful diseases; nay, to evil spirits and the powers of hell; from those cruel bloody rites used in their worship; those dreadful howlings, whippings, maiming their bodies; and above all from their execrable practice of shedding human blood in sacrifice to their gods. For had they not conceived the beings, whom they worshipped, as sanguinary and delighting in their misery, they could never have imagined,

gined, that such rites as these would be acceptable to them. Now what peace, what satisfaction men could enjoy, who believed themselves to be under the arbitrary power of such deities as these, and conceived themselves obliged to use such detestable methods of appeasing them, may very easily be determined.

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BUT further, from this there sprung another branch of misery; their slavish dread of their imaginary gods bred in them a mean subjection, and implicit obedience to their crafty priests. If they would not draw down the vengeance of heaven on their heads, they must with reverence submit to that sacred order, who were too wise for themselves not to improve this folly of the people to their own advantage. The greatest absurdities, the most palpable falsehoods and contradictions, if they served their interested designs, were imposed on the people as divine revelations, which they were not permitted to examine

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examine nor call in question. Not content with the power of appointing rites and ceremonies, which they multiplied to such a number, that their worship became a laborious penance ; but thirsting also after riches and dominion, they extended their subtile craft much farther. Under an artful pretence of knowing, by certain signs, future events, and the will of heaven, they established to themselves a boundless power over the deluded people, who thought themselves bound on every occasion to consult them ; and thus every thing, from the most important transactions in the state, to the meanest occurrences in private life, was subject to their controul. Now, what base servitude were they under, and how much must they have suffered from it, all whose actions were thus over-ruled, whose greatest designs could thus be broken ; whom the word of an ignorant soothsayer, or of an intriguing priest could inspire with hope, or sink into despair ; whom the entrails of sacri-

sacrifices, the flight of birds, or things yet more trifling than these, could fill with joy, or make pale with fear. What a powerful thing is superstition! The ancient *Romans*, that wise and valiant people, so justly fam'd for their love of public liberty, were conquered by its force, and submitted to this inglorious slavery; even with them was this priestcraft carried to the highest perfection. What then shall we think of the state of those nations, whose barbarity and ignorance has occasioned our having no such particular accounts of them? They sure, as they lay more open to trick and fraud, and were a more easy prey to every silly imposture, must have been in circumstances still more wretched, and must have been held in stronger chains by *the power of darkness*.

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BUT the misery of the heathens will appear in a much stronger light, if we consider their ignorance of the necessary principles of true religion. I do not propose

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pose to enter into a detail of the truths, of which the heathens were either wholly ignorant, or of which they had but a dark and imperfect knowledge. I shall only make the two following observations:

*1<sup>st</sup>*, OUR happiness is strictly connected with our paying that honour to God, the Creator and Sovereign of the world, and yielding that obedience to his laws which becomes us as rational creatures, in that station in which we are placed. This connection is founded both on the positive appointment of God, and on the nature of man ; according to which our happiness is in various ways connected with the practice of true religion and virtue. Assuming this for a principle, it clearly follows, that the knowledge of the Supreme Being whom we are bound to honour, and of that obedience which is due to his laws, must be infinitely valuable ; and that in proportion as men, through sloth or negligence, have sunk into an ignorance  
of

of his nature, and of what he requires of them, or have adopted wrong notions of these things, in the same proportion must they be deprived of the necessary means of happiness. Now 'tis evident beyond question, that the gentiles were in a great measure ignorant of the nature and perfections of the Deity; that the knowledge of the true God was almost entirely lost, in their invention of numberless deities of the vilest character; that the knowledge of the true worship of God was lost in the irrational, ridiculous, impious service paid to their idols; that a vain pageantry of absurd rites had usurp'd the place of true piety, devotion, goodness and virtue; that the sense of moral good and evil planted in our natures was thereby much weakened, if not in some instances quite extinguished; and lastly, that the knowledge of a future state of rewards and punishments, these great incitements to religion and virtue, was very dark and imperfect. Now, how far men in these circumstances were capable

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SERM. IV.  able of paying that rational service to God, which he requires of his intelligent creatures, any one may easily judge. This however is certain, that as far as they were incapable of doing it, so far were they under an incapacity of attaining to the true happiness of a rational nature.

To this whole account of the heathen world, and particularly to what has been just now said, it may perhaps be objected, that there were some amongst them, who saw through the imposture of the established religion; who had high and worthy notions of the Supreme Being; of his perfections and his will; and such views of a future state, as were tolerably clear and rational. No doubt there were such; and their attainments, considering the disadvantages they laboured under, were very surprizing: but it may be observed, once for all, that granting the discoveries of these philosophers had been more complete than they appear to have been in reality,

ality, yet as they were very few in number, appearing but seldom and in few places of the world; as it was impossible for them to propagate their doctrine in any extensive degree among the people, who abhorr'd them as atheists and despisers of their gods; they make so small, so inconsiderable an exception from the general misery and ignorance in which the gentiles were involved, as not in this place to merit any particular consideration.

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BUT *secondly*, as all mankind have, in innumerable instances, transgressed the laws of God, they must be sensible, that they are thereby exposed to his wrath and to just punishment. Tho' we should suppose them not to have a full view of their danger in this respect, yet we cannot but suppose, that conscience must on many occasions have suggested very alarming apprehensions and fears, sufficient to be the causes of great uneasiness and disturbance. In this case there are certain duties to be performed,

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performed, in order to their obtaining the pardon of their sins, and being reconciled to God; the distinct knowledge of which duties is of the greatest importance to the peace and comfort of their minds in this world, and without which 'tis impossible to have the smallest rational assurance of happiness hereafter. Now though we should admit, (what can never be yielded) that these duties may be known by the light of nature; yet if we consider the ignorance and corruption the heathens had fallen into, we will see no probability that they could ever have attain'd to a distinct knowledge, far less to a tolerable discharge or performance of them. Let us suppose, that God requires nothing else of a sinner but true repentance and amendment of life; and that man by the due exercise of his natural powers, without any extraordinary assistance, may perform this duty in a right manner. But when could a heathen, who had no just notions either of the infinite purity or goodness of God; who

who had never thought of any way of appeasing the deity, but by shedding blood at his altars, by maiming his own body, or by some such other useless rites and observances ; who was a mere stranger to every thing spiritual in religion ; when, I say, could a man in these circumstances perform a duty so extensive and spiritual ? Never sure, till his notions of God were corrected, till his superstition and idolatry were banished out of his mind ; till he had got quite new thoughts of the divine love, and of the whole of religion : and how soon the gentiles might have done all these great things, whilst they were left to themselves, will not be easily determined : there is great reason to believe they would never have done them at all. We see that the few great spirits amongst them who employ'd themselves in the search after truth, after a life spent in the most laborious study, with difficulty came to see some small light through that dark cloud of ignorance, prejudice and superstition, that had

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had so long blinded their minds: and can we imagine, that the ignorant bigotted croud, could ever have found out, of themselves, what cost the greatest philosophers so much laborious study and close application? Or were they to leave off their trades, and turn disciples to the philosophers, whom they look'd on as profane and impious? Or were their priests to turn honest, and take side with the philosophers, and confess that their religion was all a cheat? Till such impossible things as these had happen'd, it is not to be conceived how they could have delivered themselves from that wretched superstition with which they had been so long deluded.

FROM what has been just now said, it will appear, that to show the misery of the heathen world we need not enter into a discussion of the question, whether the gentiles were left by God under an absolute incapacity of attaining to his favour,  
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and consequently in a state of damnation. For supposing God had not left them under any such absolute incapacity, yet if they had sunk into such a brutish ignorance of the first principles of religion, that there was not the least probability of their being able to extricate themselves; if the teaching and instructions of the few more enlighten'd minds that appeared amongst them, were so far from producing any general reformation, that they often proved dangerous to the teachers themselves; if their political constitutions and their idolatrous religion, were so woven together, that none could propose the least amendment of their religion without being accounted an enemy to the state; if these things were so, surely their case must have been very deplorable; and not the less so that they had fallen into it by the neglect of light, and the abuse of powers supposed to have been sufficient for directing them in every part of religion. This circumstance may make their guilt the greater, but  
cannot

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SERM. cannot possibly make their misery the less,  
 IV. and so does not necessarily enter into the  
 present question.

IT is very obvious, that this account of the heathen world, differs extremely from the views given by some late authors of the state of mankind without a divine revelation ; where they are represented as deducing with the greatest ease from the nature of things whatsoever is necessary to be known in religion ; and from this is drawn as a consequence, the uselessness and impertinence of any supernatural revelation.

NOT to mention how imperfect their schemes are at best, and how much they are obliged to the Christian doctrine in framing them ; I shall only submit to any man's judgment, whether it be most rational to judge of the state of mankind, when they were without a revelation, from refined speculations of what some persons think it might have been ; or  
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from the concurring testimony of the histories of all ages, declaring what it actually was, and what at this day it is: and then, whether it be most rational to judge of the usefulness and necessity of a revelation to the gentile world, from the consideration of the state they were actually in without it; or from a chimerical supposed possible case, which never took place under heaven. The gentlemen may dress up what fine schemes they please, but all to no purpose. The matter of fact is plain and undeniable; the gentiles were under the power of darkness, ignorance and superstition, which rendered them wretched in the last degree. From this state there was scarce the least possibility of their delivering themselves. It was therefore a design worthy of God, and becoming his infinite wisdom, goodness and mercy, to interpose in order to rescue his creatures from this distress; by a divine light to dispel those clouds which no human power could dissipate; by the

SERM. *day-spring from on high* to shine into the  
 IV. hearts of those *who sat in darkness and in*  
 *the shadow of death.* Which leads me to  
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THIRD thing, from which I propos-  
 ed to show the goodness of God in this  
 dispensation ; and that is the great happi-  
 nefs the gentiles enjoy by the light of the  
 gospel, and by their being *translated into*  
*the kingdom of the Son of God.* That it is  
 necessary for the happiness of mankind in  
 this present state, that they should be led  
 by some superior hand in religion, seems  
 to have been the constant opinion even of  
 the heathen world. Hence flow'd their  
 ready submission to every pretence of in-  
 spiration, how absurd soever and destitute  
 of proper evidence; hence their regard  
 to their oracles and Sybils ; and hence it  
 came, that the devisers of each particular  
 scheme of religion pretended an intercourse  
 with heaven, and that from thence they  
 derived their institutions and laws. As for  
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the philosophers, on the other hand, who despised these mock revelations, and endeavoured to form a religion for themselves, how distracted and bewilder'd do we often find them in their inquiries? Their reason wandered in an endless maze, and found no place of rest. How often, when perplexed with doubts and insuperable difficulties, do they wish and pray for a divine instructor? They never thought their reason was so strong as to render an assistance from heaven useless and superfluous. No; that was left to the discovery of these latter ages! They, like *Elymas*, were sensible that a mist or darkness had fallen upon them, and *went about seeking one to lead them by the hand*. Now this divine light, this heavenly guide, so much wanted by mankind, so much desired by the wiser part of them, is what we enjoy in the revelation of Jesus Christ. We are no more left to grope in the dark, to depend on our own uncertain conjectures, or to be deceived by the inventions of de-

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SERM. signing men, but have a sure and a plain  
 IV. rule to lead us in *the way of peace.*



BUT if we consider the excellency and wonderful perfection of the Christian revelation, we shall have still higher thoughts of our happiness. So much wisdom and goodness appears in every part of it; it is so well adapted to the weakness and necessities of our present state; it has so obvious a design, so direct, so plain a tendency to promote our happiness and welfare, that tho' it were not stamp'd with the authority of God, it has innate worth and beauty sufficient to recommend it to our esteem and veneration. 'Tis but a very imperfect view of its excellency that can now be given. In the Christian revelation every thing necessary for us to know or to do, is laid before us in the clearest manner. We have not only a complete system of natural religion, but the *hidden wisdom of God*, the *mysteries kept secret since the world began* are

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are here revealed. Here we are instructed in the nature and perfections of the only true and living God. Here he is represented to us not only as a being of boundless power and majesty, of perfect purity and holiness; but of infinite goodness and mercy; the Friend and Lover of mankind. Here every serious humble mind may without learning or extraordinary parts soon discover more of God, than the greatest philosophers could attain to, by the laborious search of many years. Here all may *know the Lord from the greatest to the least: for the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, hath revealed him.* Here we are taught how this world arose from nothing at the command of God; we see our own origin and the nature of our beings; our bodies formed of the dust of the earth; our souls immortal made after the image of God; the happiness, the glory of man in his first estate; his sad apostasy which spoil'd him of all his honour, and cast him down into misery and

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woe. ----- Myſteries that baffled the reaſon and enquiry of antient ſages ; their ignorance of which made all their ſchemes deficient and imperfect.

AGAIN, here we have the ſurpriſing method God has appointed for the recovery of man from this wretched ſtate. 'Tis the great deſign of revelation to teach us this important truth, that *through the name of Jeſus Chriſt, whoſoever believeth on him ſhall receive remiſſion of ſins and eternal life.* Now as the heathens could never arrive at the leaſt knowledge of ſalvation through Chriſt ; ſo all they had to depend on in this matter, (in which, if in any, it was of the higheſt importance to attain to full certainty) was at the beſt but faint probability and doubtful conjecture.

FURTHER, here we have a complete and diſtinct body of precepts, to regulate our duty to God, our neighbour, and ourſelves. Our duty to God ; where nothing  
is

is required of us, but what is rational, delightful, and perfective of our natures: our duty to our fellow creatures; which is not confined within the bounds of strict justice, but extended to a hearty love, friendship and beneficence to all men: our duty to ourselves; which requires nothing but what is necessary to the health of our bodies and the soundness of our minds. Our religion is not burden'd with useless rites and ceremonies; it is altogether a *reasonable service*; and the few duties that are not so manifestly deducible from the nature of things, have so plain a tendency to promote purity of mind and a religious disposition, that they are entirely worthy of God, and excellently fitted to the present imperfection of our natures. If we consider the Author of our religion in the light of a mere philosopher, he is infinitely the greatest moralist that ever appeared on earth. His doctrine is so pure, amiable and perfect, and is delivered with such a majestic simplicity, that it far

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excels the most elaborate composures of the most applauded ancients. Nor is it in this alone that he excels them; for as *he spoke as never man spoke*, so he lived as never man lived: his doctrine is but the picture of his life, which was a bright example, a living pattern of all goodness and virtue; by contemplating which we may be better form'd to the spirit of true goodness, than by the study of all the wisest human precepts.

FURTHER, to incite our obedience to this perfect rule of righteousness, we have the strongest motives and arguments laid before us: arguments drawn from love, reverence, and gratitude to God; from the reasonableness of the duties themselves; and especially from the future happiness that is connected with our obedience, and the terrible destruction that abides the disobedient. *Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel*; the way of life and the way of death are set before us. The  
 beauty

beauty of virtue, and that it is its own reward ; the ugliness, the deformity of vice, and that it is its own punishment ; these topics, so much insisted on by the philosophers, afford speculations, which, no doubt, well deserve the attention of mankind, and on many occasions may be useful, especially to more refined and ingenious minds : but we may be allowed to say, that these speculations alone never had, nor will they ever have sufficient force to conquer our strong bent and inclination to vice, and the innumerable temptations to it with which we are daily surrounded.

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BUT, *lastly*, the Christian revelation not only gives us the completest system of precepts, and enforces them by the strongest motives ; but likeways points out a superior assistance, by the help of which we may be enabled to give obedience to them. Without this, of how little effect was all the teaching of the philosophers, and  
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their eloquent harangues in praise of goodness! The most cogent reasoning, the sublimest eloquence are too often found ineffectual for inspiring us with such a love of virtue, as shall conquer the passions, and subdue the natural corruptions of our hearts. A more powerful method of persuasion is requisite for such an end, even his inspiration who is the *God of the spirits of all flesh*; who *form'd the soul of man within him*; and who by a thousand secret ways can convey the truth to our hearts in its full energy and power; can illuminate what is dark, purify what is corrupted, and rectify what is perverse within us.

THIS is an imperfect view of some of the chief excellencies of the Christian religion, and of the happiness we enjoy by being *translated into the kingdom of the Son of God*. If it is a blessing to be delivered from darkness, ignorance and superstition, and to be enlightened with the most divine

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vine and useful knowledge; if it is a blessing to know what God is, and what we are ourselves; if it is a blessing to a rational creature to be taught the just rule of rational conduct, to a sinful creature to be taught how to make his peace with God; if it is a blessing to have our views and our pursuits rightly directed to the greatest possible happiness here, and to a crown of immortal glory hereafter---- then, with highest gratitude, we have reason to *give thanks to the Father*, who hath bestowed upon us the light of the Gospel.

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THE Gospel, I say, when clearly and fully revealed, and when dispensed in its purity and simplicity, is the source of such blessings: for I am aware of what may be objected to this account of our happiness under the Gospel, in opposition to our misery under pagan darkness. These things, it may be said, do very well in speculation; but has the Gospel actually produced these

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these blessed effects? has it rescued mankind from superstition and ignorance? does not a great part of the Christian world labour under these diseases in an equal degree almost with the heathen world? where then is the mighty advantage of the Christian revelation? I wish we could answer the objection, by denying the fact on which it is founded; but alas! 'tis too evident and certain to be altogether refused. The following considerations will, however, in some measure take off the force of the objection.

*First,* No such thing as perfection is to be expected in this world, under any religion whatsoever. The wickedness and craft of some men, joined with the weakness and folly of others, will always be able, in some measure, to prevent the good effects of the most perfect institution mankind can possibly enjoy.

*Secondly,*

*Secondly*, As it is certain, that, by the Christian religion, we are better guarded against those mischievous consequences of the degeneracy of mankind, than if we had no such guide in religion; so it must be owned, that however corrupt some Christians may be, yet wherever the Christian religion has been established, it has produced a change to the better.

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*Thirdly*, It is certain, that this change has been greater or less, in proportion as the gospel has been more or less clearly and fully published and established; free from superstitious mixtures and doctrines of human invention; and that wherever the gospel has prevailed in its native purity, it has always gained a glorious victory over the powers of darkness.

*Lastly*, As all I have been endeavouring to prove is, that we ought to be thankful to God for the light of the gospel; the objection may be answered, by observing, that

SERM. that altho', by reason of the wickedness  
 IV. and folly of men, this valuable gift has  
 been in too many instances mis-improven,  
 yet this does not at all derogate from the  
 value of the gift itself; nor ought it to  
 make those less thankful for it, who, if  
 they be not entirely blind, must see its in-  
 finite worth, and be sensible of its blessed  
 tendency: and this leads me to conclude  
 with this one reflexion.

IF the knowledge of the Gospel is so  
 great a privilege and blessing, how thank-  
 ful ought we to be to our gracious God,  
 who has visited us with this salvation,  
 and made the *Sun of righteousness* to  
 shine on this distant corner of the earth.  
 I formerly observed, that the miserable  
 state of darkness into which the gentile  
 nations had sunk, made the goodness of  
 God very remarkable in bestowing this  
 blessing upon them. If we apply this  
 consideration to ourselves in particular,  
 none can have better reason to adore the  
 goodness

goodness of God than we. No nation perhaps in the world was overwhelmed with more melancholy darkness, with greater ignorance and superstition, than this island which we inhabit, before God visited us with his *marvellous light*. Our forefathers, if we may credit the accounts given of them, were wild and savage to a proverb; the principles of natural religion and morality were almost extinguished amongst them; their religion was a mad superstition. The Gospel has dispelled this darkness, reformed this barbarity, and in a great measure civilized one of the wildest nations under heaven.

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CAN it therefore be thought upon, without an equal surprize and detestation, that there should be any among us, who are ready impiously to throw back this valuable gift of God on his face; who despise and reject it as useless and superfluous, on the impudent pretence, that their natural  
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knowledge of religion was fully sufficient for their instruction and happiness? Had these men lived in this island two thousand years ago, or were they living just now in any of those countries that have never yet been visited by the gospel, 'tis more than probable their schemes of natural religion would not have been altogether so complete; and whatever refined sentiments in religion they may now pretend to, 'tis very likely they had been as deeply engaged in the superstition of their country, as any of their neighbours.-----

Let us then, my brethren, ever be thankful to our merciful Father, that we who were *alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in us*, have now received the knowledge of the truth; that we no more *walk in darkness, but have the light of life*. And let us express our gratitude, by preserving a due regard and esteem for this divine revelation, and especially by *bringing forth fruits meet for the gospel*. This is the great, the only sure  
evidence

evidence of our having received the Go-  
 spel in sincerity. *By this shall all men know,*  
 saith our Lord, *that ye are my disciples, if*  
*ye keep my commandments. Let us not there-*  
*fore henceforth walk as the other gentiles walk,*  
*in the vanity of their minds; but walk wor-*  
*thy of the Lord, to all pleasing, being fruitful*  
*in every good work, and increasing in the*  
*knowledge of God.*

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## S E R M O N V.

The Reasonableness and the Advantages of EARLY PIETY.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*

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THE main design of the royal preacher, in this excellent book, is to give an answer to that important question, Wherein consists the chief good and highest felicity of man? a question, which employed the thought and study of the philosophers of old; in answering which, they divided into such a multitude of opinions, and so contradictory to one another, as affords us a convincing proof, how fallible, how uncertain a guide unassisted

assisted reason is to lead us in the way to happiness. But our divine philosopher, who had wisdom and understanding given him from above, and enjoyed that light which the wisest of the heathen sages wished and prayed for, leaves us not thus to grope in the dark, and to wander in a maze of different opinions, exposed to such danger of catching at shadows instead of the substance. In the first part of his discourse, he inquires into those enjoyments which the bulk of mankind pursue as their chief good; the pleasures of sense, of riches, of honour and power. In his examination of which likeways, he has a signal advantage over the ancient moralists. They, in the obscure retirement of their schools, declaim against pleasures they had never tasted. *Solomon*, a glorious and a powerful monarch, possessed at the same time of the noblest genius and the greatest treasures, having, in the bloom of his years, made the fullest experiment, determines, that as these enjoyments are not only vain,

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fleeting and uncertain, but the source of vexation and sorrow to the children of men, the chief good and highest felicity of man cannot lye in the possession of any, or all of these: but, on the other hand, as religion and virtue alone can yield us that true satisfaction and pleasure which reaches to the soul, outlives this transitory life, and extends through the whole of our existence, he justly draws the conclusion, that to *fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man*; his chief good; that which alone deserves his care and diligence. As the establishing of this truth seems to be the principal design which the inspired writer has in view through the whole of this work; so we find, that his reasonings for proving it are frequently interrupted by beautiful digressions, and exhortations suitable to the several heads of discourse. Of this last kind are the words of the text, which seem to be occasioned by what we find in the 7th and 8th verses of the preceeding chapter.



chapter. The wise man there concludes his proof of the insufficiency of the things of the world to make us truly happy, by observing the vast disproportion there is between the present life, and that which is to come. *Truly light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun. But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Rejoice O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment: therefore remove anger from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity: which naturally introduces the exhortation in the text, Remember now thy Creator, &c.*

By the remembrance of God may be understood, the particular duty of ever retaining in our minds such becoming thoughts

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thoughts of the Supreme Being, and his glorious perfections; and such a lively sense of the obligations we are under to him, as will have an habitual influence on the whole of our conversation. But I chuse rather to understand it in a more general sense, as such phrases are often used in scripture, to signify the whole of religion and virtue; *Remember now thy Creator.* This particular character of the Deity, includes in it a variety of arguments for the duty here required. ----- *Remember* him to whom thou owest thy life, thy breath, and all things; who spoke thee into being by the word of his power; who has preserved thee by his goodness and mercy; who has the best, the most undoubted right to thy service; to whose glory thou art bound, by the strictest ties of gratitude, to dedicate thy life, thy health, thy understanding, thine estate, and every blessing he has bestowed upon thee. Him we are exhorted to remember *now in the days of our youth*; to remember him in the first, the

the best part of our lives; while we are in our strength and vigour; when the powers both of body and mind are most active and lively; *before the evil days come, &c.* before we are overtaken with distress, or sickness, or those calamities of old age so pathetically described in the verses following the text.

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WHAT I propose in discoursing from the words at present, is,

I. BRIEFLY to represent to you the reasonableness of the duty here enjoined, and the obligations we are under to the performance of it. And then,

II. To show some of the blessings and advantages that attend it.

I. IT is our duty then to *remember God our Creator in the days of our youth*; to dedicate our early years to the service of God, and to the practice of religion and virtue; for,

1st, GOD.

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1st, GOD has a right to the service of our whole lives; a right built on the surest, the most immovable foundation. We are his creatures, the workmanship of his hands; *in him we live, we move, and from him we have our being*; and thus we are his property, entirely at the disposal of his sovereign will, and absolutely subject to his supreme dominion. He is the *preserver of men*; whose upholding arm being withdrawn, we would instantly return to the dust; who gives us *meat to eat, and raiment to put on*; from whom we have all the blessings that make our lives agreeable and easy. And while he thus upholds and maintains our existence, has he not an undoubted right to our obedience? while he bestows so many blessings upon us, has he not, as our Supreme Benefactor, a title to the service of our whole lives, and of all our faculties? Again, he is the merciful Redeemer of mankind, and thus has laid us under new obligations to serve and obey him. We had lost and *destroyed ourselves*:

*selves*: he in mercy fought after us and sav- SERM.  
 ed us. We had sold ourselves unto slavery: V.  
 he ransomed us, and with a price of in-  
 finite value purchased our liberty and free-  
 dom. We were under the sentence of  
 death, and the sword of divine justice was  
 hanging over our guilty heads: he gave his  
 eternal Son, *the brightness of his glory*, to suf-  
 fer for our sins, and to taste of death for  
 the children of men. Should we not there-  
 fore *glorify God in our bodies and spirits which*  
*are his?* and are we not bound, who live  
 by him, henceforth *not to live unto ourselves,*  
*but unto him that died for us and rose again?*  
 Has God a right to our service, on so many  
 and so weighty accounts, and shall we be  
 so unjust, as to deny him what is his own;  
 or think the service of our lives too great  
 in return for so many blessings and fa-  
 vours?---Do we at any time live independ-  
 ent of God? Are we at any time preserv-  
 ed by our own wisdom and power? Was  
 this the case we might have some pretence  
 to spend our own time, after our own  
 pleasure;

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pleasure: but as his powerful and bountiful hand is the support of our beings, and the source of our mercies through the whole of our existence, if he thereby acquires a right to any part, he acquires for the same reason a right to the whole. What is our time and the prolonging of our days? is it not the gift of God? Why *died we not from the womb*, or have not long e're now gone down again unto silence? is it not God, who hath *held our souls in life, preserved us in our going out, and our coming in*, and graciously lengthened out our time and the number of our years? And are we not bound then to redeem those years for his service, and to employ them to the honour of the giver?

2dly, As God has a right to our whole lives, so he has a peculiar right to the service of our youth. Youth is the prime of our lives, the flower of our days. Then the body enjoys its beauty and strength; the mind its activity and vigour; the fancy

its

its sprightliness and life. This therefore is the best of our time ; what is dearest to ourselves ; yielding us the highest satisfaction and joy ; and upon these very accounts God has a peculiar right and title to it. Were the first born of man and of beast, and the first fruits of the field to be offered unto God ? and has he not a right as undeniable to the first fruits of our lives, the first born of our days, the first exercise of our reason, and the prime of our affections ? Now it is that the generous passions have all their ardour and warmth ; and has not God, whose unbounded goodness, whose amiable excellence alone is worthy of our love ; has not he, I say, a special right to it then, when it enjoys its strength and vigour, and burns with the strongest flame ? Shall we prostitute the noble warmth of our affections on the ignoble pleasures of sense and the fading beauties here below ; and reserve their languid breathings in old age or sickness for him who is the perfection

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tion of beauty, the fountain of excellence? Now it is that we have the nearest, the liveliest views of the divine goodness. Our life and being are gifts but newly conferred. Our preservation during a helpless infancy and a feeble childhood is now fresh upon our minds, and calls upon us to remember him who supported us, when we hung upon our mothers breasts. Our life is now in its verdure and flower. Now for the most part we are free from those calamities and mischiefs that embitter our more advanced years. Without diseases or pains, free from oppressing cares and anxious solicitude, we pass our days in pleasure, mirth and ease; and while thus we taste of the goodness of our God, has he not the highest right to the grateful return of our love? And can there be any thing more perfidious and base, than to squander away in the service of sin that period of life in which God, by so many blessings, would engage us to himself? Afterwards, perhaps, long possession will make

us ready to look upon our lives as our own, and tempt us to forget the God that made us. But now, when looking but a little back, we see the time in which we began to be, or first were conscious of our being; ought we not with gratitude and love to reflect on him, who is the author of our being, and has preserved us from the womb? Afterwards the troubles of life may render us less sensible of the divine goodness, and eclipse its beams; but ought we not to dedicate those days of joy and gladness to his honour, whose sun then shines unclouded on our heads, and whose love showers down so many comforts around us? What then can be more manifest, more undeniable, than that during this period the Divine Being has a peculiar right to our service?---But then,

3dly, As God has a right to our whole lives, and a peculiar title to our youth; so the work he has given us to do in this world, and the service he requires of us,  
are

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are things for which the whole of our life is no more than sufficient. What is our life? *it is even as a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Man that is born of a woman is of few days; his years are as a handbreadth, and swifter than a post.* And of this narrow fleeting space, how little deserves the name of life, or can be employed for its important ends? How many are the days of thoughtless infancy and childhood; and may not the successive returns of sleep and waking be said to divide our more advanced years unto life and non-existence? Is then this small compass of life more than sufficient for acquiring the knowledge of God; for contemplating his perfections and his works; for planting in our souls every grace and virtue; for forming our natures corrupt, and degenerate, into a resemblance with God; in short for preparing ourselves, by a course of holiness and virtue, for the state of perfection and happiness above? These are exer-  
cises

cises we have naturally no great fondness for; and time, industry and perseverance are necessary to surmount the difficulties which occur in them. True indeed it is, our holy religion leaves us not to encounter these difficulties alone, but points out a superior aid, which can *perfect strength in our weakness*, and make us *more than conquerors*: yet after all, the Christian life is a race, where, as the slipperiness of the path requires the greatest attention lest we fall, and the allurements we are surrounded with require vigour and resolution lest we be tempted to turn aside; so the length of the course, and the shortness of our day, require, that we should set out betimes lest the night of everlasting darkness overtake us. Have we then so dangerous a warfare to accomplish; enemies so powerful to encounter; so difficult a conquest to obtain; and ought we not to be early in the field? to occupy the places of strength, the advantageous posts, before they are possessed by

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V.



by the enemy; and by giving him battle before he has rallied all his force, to endeavour to secure the more complete and easy victory? Having thus briefly represented the reasonableness of this duty, from these several considerations,

I PROCEED to the *second* thing proposed from the words; which was, To show the blessings and happy consequences of *remembering our Creator in the days of our youth*; or the advantages of early piety.

*1st*, THIS will render the religious life natural and pleasant to us. It is an ordinary observation, that custom makes every thing easy, and becomes as it were a second nature. The things which at first seem extremely difficult, and next to impossible, after some practice we come to perform with the greatest facility: so likewise a manner of life, which at first seemed slavish and burdensome, will by degrees appear

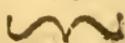
appear more tolerable, and at length perhaps become so agreeable, that it is with regret and uneasiness we think of a change. But how much more will this be the case in the practice of religion, which is the only source of real pleasure, yielding a satisfaction which the delights of the world can never equal? It is not with religion, as it is with the pleasures of sin, which the more we taste of, the more we must necessarily despise; though our unreasonable passions continue to push us on to seek for pleasure where we have already found that all is vanity. Religion requires only to be known in order to be loved; and the more we know and are acquainted with it, we will love it the more. It is owing to our minds being vitiated by the false pleasures of sin, that we are insensible of the pleasures of religion, or ever look upon it as comfortless or irksome. But if by an early application to it, we prevented our taste from being corrupted, and our affections from being per-

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verted, we would run in the ways of righteousness with pleasure : every day would discover to us new enjoyments in religion, new beauties in virtue, and it would be *as our meat and drink to do the will of God our heavenly father.*

2dly, ANOTHER advantage of early piety is, that thereby we shall escape all the dangers of youth. How many, how fatal are the mischiefs to which our youth is exposed, if it be not restrained and governed by religion and virtue ? Our passions are then at the highest ; our taste for pleasure keenest ; our judgment is but weak, and our foresight small. In that period of life we have not a sufficient measure of experience, to enable us to discover the bad consequences of the pursuits in which we engage ; or if we discover them, yet such is the violence of our appetites, and our furious rashness, that we are too apt to despise the danger, and frequently plunge ourselves into the most irretrievable distress.

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We need only on this head consult our own SERM.  
 experience and observation, in whatever V.  
 station of life we have been placed, and   
 we shall find too many and too mournful  
 instances of the disasters of vicious youth.  
 It is indeed the higher sphere of life which  
 affords examples of this kind the most  
 remarkable and melancholy.----The poor  
 thoughtless youth sets out into the world  
 just possessed of an opulent fortune, the  
 spring of his present joy and his after ruin.  
 He resolves to give himself full swing in  
 all the extravagancies of life. He looks  
 on his estate as given him for this very  
 purpose; and, however it may be with  
 meaner mortals, pleasure he imagines to be  
 his only business. Accordingly he embarks  
 in the laudable design: foppery in dress,  
 and a gaudy equipage, the usual first fruits  
 of youthful folly, run him of course into  
 a vast expence. The more hurtful pas-  
 sions come in to increase the charge; by  
 which, if he is not sunk into poverty and  
 indigence, yet what a train of dangers has

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he to encounter? One vice exposes to the vilest diseases; another to the commission of the most dreadful crimes: all combine to ruin his character, to shatter his judgment, to break his constitution, and to bring on the craziness of old age, even in the bloom of his years. So that after a short course of this fatal extravagance, he is left to languish out the wretched remainder of his time in pain and deep remorse. Nay, how oft may we see the unhappy youth cut short in the midst of his mad career? A raging fever, the fruit of an irregular life, puts an end to his days: or his blood being inflamed by intemperance, he is led into quarrels which end in murder or death: these, these, are the consequences of a licentious youth. But, would we secure ourselves against those horrid mischiefs, and safely pass those rocks and quick-sands, we must arm ourselves betimes with the love of God and virtue. A youth may fondly flatter himself that his good sense and judgment will  
guard

guard him sufficiently from follies such as these, no less inconsistent with reason than opposite to religion. But alas! *the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?* Little is he, who flatters himself thus, acquainted with the power of temptation, and the contagious influence of bad examples; how they insinuate themselves into our minds, baffle the strongest resolutions, and banish every sober thought. Who would vainly trust to his own wisdom and conduct, in a way so full of snares and dangers? It is religion alone, the fear and the love of God, and that gracious protection which he vouchsafes to his children, that can arm us sufficiently against those powerful enemies, and guard and preserve us from the dangers of youth. And not only so, but further in the

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3<sup>d</sup> PLACE, it will also furnish us with consolation under all the calamities of life, and with support under death itself.

Strangely

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Strangely ignorant and foolish must he be, who fondly hopes to pass thro' this valley of tears without vexation and trouble. *Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards;* and no state, nor period of life affords us any exemption from this common fate of all the children of men. We are exposed to innumerable diseases that may render our lives a scene of misery and woe; all our enjoyments are extremely precarious; by a thousand various ways we may be deprived of them; our riches may take wings unto themselves and fly away; death may snatch from us those friends whom we loved as our own soul, and leave us sorrowful and alone, to mourn over their loss with whom we would have wished to die. How often do such misfortunes blast the fairest prospects we had formed in our youth? how often do they throw a black cloud over all our remaining days, and utterly oppress and overwhelm the minds of those who are unsupported by any higher principles or hopes? Is it not wise then to prepare

our-

ourselves for approaching affliction and trouble, and to provide the best defence we can against it? But where is this preparation and defence to be found, unless in an early application to piety and virtue; by which we may secure to ourselves divine friendship in the midst of all the various and unforeseen events of human life? SERM.  
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*Happy is the man whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made the heaven and the earth. The Lord is his light and his salvation, whom shall he fear? The Lord is the strength of his life, of whom shall he be afraid? The Lord is his strong habitation, whereunto he shall resort; his rock, and his dwelling-place thro' all generations.* If in the bloom of life we have dedicated ourselves to God; if in the midst of its gayest and brightest scenes we have remembered and honoured our Creator; then in its darkest hours we may look up to him with confidence and hope, and rest in his protection, as our ancient friend. When all other sources of comfort are dried up, this will  
open

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open to us a perennial spring in religion, which shall ever continue to flow. *To the upright there shall arise light in darkness. The peace of God shall keep their minds. A joy shall be theirs, which a stranger intermeddletb not with,*

BUT the blessed influence of religion appears most conspicuously at the hour of death. The empire of death extends over all the ages and conditions of men; and the growing vigour, the blooming beauty of youth, are not beyond the reach of his all-conquering arm. Now, is there any thing but religion that can bear up our souls, when attacked by this dreadful foe? Then riches and honours, the world and its deceitful pleasures shall retire, and leave their deluded votaries trembling and naked, wretched and forlorn. But happy, thrice happy, at that critical period, is he, who from his early youth has made religion his choice; who can review with pleasure the past scenes of a virtuous life; who

who with humble confidence can commit his soul to that God whom he has long served and loved. He can look on death without dismay ; and, seeing through its dark vale the dawning of immortal bliss, can welcome its approaches with calmness and serenity of mind.

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THUS early religion has a blessed influence to support us under all the calamities of life, and at the hour of death itself ; and to this may we not add, that it will also exalt us to a greater degree of glory in heaven ? The most sublime notion that either reason or revelation afford us of the celestial state, is, that it will consist in the perfection of virtue, in our being made like to God. In order to our arriving at this, the seeds of virtue must be sown here ; the tender plant must be carefully nourished ; but the sooner it is sown, the longer it is nourished, may not we justly expect, that it shall rise to a greater height, and being transplanted more tall and flourish-  
ing

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ing to the regions above, shall there be honoured with a place proportioned to its growth and stature.

THUS have I endeavoured briefly to enforce the duty of remembering our Creator in the days of our youth, and have represented the chief advantages of our doing so; a subject, which tho' it more immediately respects those of a certain age, yet none of more advanced years have reason to think themselves entirely unconcerned in it. If they have spent their youth in folly; if now the hurry of worldly cares distracts and fills their minds; if they have trifled or dreamed away too many of their years; with what redoubled force must the exhortation reach them, *now to remember their Creator, before the evil days yet come, and the years draw nigh, in which they shall say, they have no pleasure in them.* But I hope, I shall be allowed to conclude this discourse, in an address to those whom the text has particularly in view.

IF you consult your own breasts, my brethren, you will find, that the desire of pleasure is the ruling passion. We call you not to deny this darling appetite: no, it is the wise constitution of God, essential to your natures, and necessary to their perfection. But would you have this passion fully satisfied? or would you search for ever, and meet with nothing but pain and disappointment? By dedicating your early years to religion and virtue, you shall reap the truest, the most lasting delight and joy. Alas! how vain and chimerical are the hopes of pleasure you build on the enjoyments of the world? Are you placed in a superior station in life? How early do you begin to lay down schemes of future happiness and grandeur; your intoxicated imaginations are employed in painting out scenes of pleasure, and every revolution in life affords you a prospect more joyful and gay than another. But, if you look for pleasure in the ways of sin, you miserably deceive yourselves. There you will

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will find nothing but what is empty and vain, false and dangerous. These pleasures may be sweet to your taste, but they turn to gall and bitterness within. At a distance they may appear beautiful and comely, but you will find them, on a nearer view, full of deformity and ugliness. You may come to them full fraught with hopes of solid satisfaction, but the enjoyment is vanishing, and leaves nothing behind it but shame and remorse. Even the more innocent enjoyments of life, you behold at present through a deceitful glass. At the highest they are but faint and languid, fleeting and transitory. Your joy shall be chequered with sorrow, your pleasure mingled with grief, and the sum of all shall still be *vanity and vexation of spirit*. But would you pass your days in pleasure? Seek it in the paths of virtue, where you shall find a delight that reaches to the soul, which is lasting and uniform; which is manly and noble; which alone can support you under every circumstance of life.

Do

Do you look upon religion as joyless, sorrowful and melancholy? Were this the case, it might indeed be hard to persuade those, in whom the fire of youth yet burns, to embrace and entertain it. But this is a slander on religion; religion exhilarates the soul with the purest joy, and gives the sweetest relish to all the other comforts of life. The moment we exceed the bounds it prescribes us, the pleasure is turned unto pain, the comfort unto sorrow, the blessing unto a curse. *The ways of wisdom are the ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

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AGAIN, my brethren, do you find in your breasts a passion for praise? are you ambitious of applause and honour? This too is a laudable passion, and it finds its most proper exercise in the pursuit of religion. For religion and virtue add a lustre and grace, a superior amiableness to every accomplishment either of body or mind. What an alluring thing is a sprightly wit, when

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when joined with innocence and goodness? how charming is beauty when accompanied with virtue? The beauty of the face we admire as a natural image of the beauty of the mind; but, if we find the picture is false, and that the fair outside covers a mind stained and deformed with vice, it loses all its charms. How engaging, how endearing a thing is early piety and virtue? It renders you the beloved of God, the favourites of heaven; it secures you the esteem and honour of the best and wisest of men, and commands an inward regard and reverence even from the abandoned and the vicious. The youth who has subjected his mind to the dictates of reason; who gloriously spurns the base and unmanly allurements of vice; who has chosen the steep path of virtue, and is daily making advances in that arduous ascent to true glory, is an object more worthy of admiration and praise, than an *Alexander* or a *Cæsar*, adorned with the laurels of conquered nations.

HAVE

HAVE you then a taste for true pleasure? are you ambitious of honour, or of praise? would you set off these endowments that adorn your youth in the best and fairest light? *Seek wisdom, watching daily at her gates, waiting at the posts of her doors: for riches and honour are with her; her fruit is better than gold, yea, than much fine gold; and happy is the man that findeth her. Make the testimonies of God thy delight, and thy counsellors; thereby shalt thou cleanse thy way, taking heed thereto according to his word. When sinners entice thee, consent thou not, walk not thou in the way with them, refrain thy foot from their path; keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life; put away from thee a froward mouth and perverse lips. Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously and godly, looking for the blessed hope, and glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

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SERM. *Christ*: To whom with the Father, and  
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the blessed Spirit, be glory, dominion and  
praise for evermore. Amen.

S E R-

## S E R M O N VI.

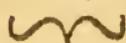
The Folly and Danger of delay-  
ing to enter upon a RELIGIOUS  
LIFE.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy  
youth, while the evil days come not, nor the  
years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I  
have no pleasure in them.*

HAVING, on a former occasion, dis-  
coursed from these words, of the  
duty of dedicating our early years to the  
service of God and religion; and having  
represented the advantages and blessings  
that attend our doing so, I now propose  
to lay before you the extreme folly and  
danger of delaying this important work;  
and especially of delaying it until *the evil  
days come, and the years draw nigh, when*

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we

SERM. *we shall say we have no pleasure in them.* In  
 VI. order to which, we may consider the following things:

I. THE great uncertainty of human life makes it impossible for us to know, if afterwards we shall have time for this important work.

II. WERE we sure of afterwards having time, yet by thus delaying we become more averse to the work, and the work itself becomes more hard and difficult.

III. SUPPOSING that this were not the case, and that this delay produced no change to the worse, in either of these respects; yet the seasons of old age or sickness, to which we delay, are in themselves improper for the management of a business so weighty and great.

IV. WERE there nothing in the days of sickness or old age that render'd them unfit

fit for commencing our application to religion; yet, by spending our strength and vigour in the service of sin, and allotting only these worst of our days to the service of God, we become unworthy of his favour, and may justly provoke him to deny us that grace which we have so often despised and rejected: after having spoken briefly to which, I shall end with some reflections on the subject.

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I. THE great uncertainty of human life makes it impossible for us to know, if afterwards we shall have time for the important work of repenting and reforming our lives. How vain and foolish is the conduct of youth! they expect to live to old age and grey hairs; and then, when they suppose their passions shall have lost their force, and their taste for the pleasures of sin shall be abated, they resolve to mind the concerns of their souls, and dedicate to religion that season which they think good for nothing else. But tho' the young

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and the gay will scarce allow a thought so gloomy to discompose their minds, and reckon it by much too soon to think that they must die; yet certain it is, that the empire of death extends over all ages and conditions of men; and neither youth, nor strength nor beauty, afford us the least security for the continuance of life. *All the glory of man is as the grass, and his goodness as the flower of the field; as the grass it withereth, and as the flower of the field it passeth away.* The young man in the prime of his years, in the vain thoughtless time of his life, when he indulges himself without controul in whatever he desires, and *withholds not his heart from any joy*, in the midst of this mad career may be suddenly stopt by death, and torn for ever from his beloved pleasures. Is there any of us so young, who has not mourned for the death of friends as young or younger than ourselves? Whom are we daily attending to the grave? are they only those, whose hoary heads made them ripe for death?

are

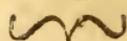
are they not for the most such who have been cut off in the first spring of life, or what they reckoned but the middle of their days? Ask any man who has arrived at sixty or seventy years, who were his friends and companions, with whom he passed the joyful years of youth? How many will he number who have gone to the dust and have seen corruption? but how few, who yet survive and are the companions of his old age? The half of mankind, born into the world, die in the years of infancy and childhood; and of those that arrive at the use of reason, scarce a fourth part come near to that period to which God has now restricted the life of man. Can any thing then be more irrational, than to deceive ourselves with those vain, those flattering hopes? or more absurd, than in a business of infinite concern to us, to depend on events so uncertain and precarious? Now, perhaps, we glory in our strength and vigour, and, rejoicing in fulness of health, we think our lives

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secure

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secure for a course of years to come; yet, alas! there may be but a step between us and death. *Man knoweth not his time, but as the fishes that are caught in the evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them\**. Does death always come on by slow and gradual steps, and give us timeous warning of his approach? on the contrary, how many sudden unexpected deaths are we daily alarmed with? How oft does it happen, according to the case in the parable, when men are blessing themselves with the smiling prospect of a happy and prosperous life, *that very night their souls are required of them*. What a frail and slender thing is the thread of our lives? how easily and soon may it be cut asunder? Of what an infinity of curious tender parts are our bodies composed, the least of which being violently broken, or otherways indisposed for action, may bring on

\* Eccles. ix. 12.

the sudden dissolution of the whole. And how do we know, when thus dallying and trifling, when thus presuming on our lives and the continuance of our days, but this may be our fate? May not death be secretly lying in wait for us, and attacking us as it were by stealth; or may not some disease within, unfelt by us, be working our destruction? May we not sink into the invisible state in a moment, and be carried into the presence of our awful Judge, without being allowed the smallest time to implore his mercy, or to prepare ourselves for so solemn an appearance? The present moment is only ours, and we are not sure of to-morrow; this day therefore ought we to do, what we would wish to have done when we come to die. But then,

II. LET us abstract from this, and suppose ourselves certain of our lives for a course of years to come; yet, by delaying the business of religion from time to time,

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our minds become more averse to it, and the work itself becomes more hard and difficult. How many are there, who from a Christian education have got such good impressions, as cannot be entirely effaced or banished from their minds, and yet labour under the power of a fatal delusion? Sensible they are of the importance of religion, and resolve to apply their minds to it with care and diligence; but now perhaps they are engaged in a hurry of business, which entirely consumes their time; or they are indulging a favourite passion which they cannot resist; but they hope soon to get the better of it, and then will they mind the great business of their lives with calmness and attention. But a conduct more foolish and absurd than this cannot easily be imagined. *This is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.\** Do the cares of this life, the pursuit of the riches, honours and pleasures of this world harass your minds now, and will these avocations

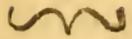
\* Prov. xiv. 12.

do you think shortly cease, and of themselves give place to pursuits of a higher and more exalted nature? No: the world has attractions fatally successful for every age of man; and as it presents its sensual joys and gaudy magnificence to thoughtless youth, so its riches and honours attract those of riper years, and have power to enslave old age itself with all its wisdom and experience. How oft may we see men even on the utmost verge of life overwhelm'd with wordly cares, panting after worldly riches, and the sooner they are to part with them seeming to embrace them with greater keenness, and to cling the faster to them? In vain then do we wait for minds more disengaged from the cares of the world, and freed from its avocations; and as vainly do we hope for the time, when those sinful passions, we now indulge in our breasts, shall lose their power, and the distaste, they now give us at religion, shall wear off and fail. Sin is the most deceitful thing in the world.

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When first we begin to taste of its false pleasures, we find an uneasy shame, an inward remorse. We abhor the thoughts of a habit of wickedness ; but of this, by one indulgence or two, we think ourselves in no great danger. But one indulgence still authorizes and pleads for another ; our virtuous shame insensibly decays ; sin becomes familiar to us ; by every repeated act it gathers strength in the mind ; till at length it erects its throne in our heart, and establishes a dominion to itself within us, which we become utterly unable to shake off. There is a progress in sin, and no man at once becomes desperately wicked.

As it is with the diseases of the body, which the more inveterate they are, prove the more incurable ; as the distemper, which if taken in time might have been easily removed, will, if allowed to go on, baffle the art of the most skilful physician, and the force of the strongest medicines ;

just

just so it is with sin, the vilest disease and poison of the soul: as soon may *the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots*, as he that is *accustomed to do evil learn to do well*. It is a common observation, that custom is a second nature; let us accustom ourselves to any thing even of the most trifling nature, it is with the greatest difficulty imaginable we can wean ourselves from it. Such is the force of custom, even where our passions are scarce at all concerned. But how much more must this be the case in the practice of sin, to which our corrupt natures have so strong a bias, to which our irregular passions drive us with so terrible a force? By a long continued course of wickedness and vice, conscience, that witness for God within us, is overwhelm'd and stifled. We have scorned its checks, and given a deaf ear to all its friendly admonitions. Wearied out with such repeated insults, it becomes silent at last, and ceases to reprove us. *This candle of the Lord is extinguish-*

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ed,

SERM. VI.  ed, and we are left in darkness to continue our fatal sleep. In short, a course of sin impairs our reason, weakens our understanding and judgment, perverts the will; nay will almost obliterate and deface that sense of moral good and evil which God has planted in our natures. And how hard, how difficult must it be to conquer such indispositions as these, to root out such inveterate habits; to awaken such a drowsy soul; to cure a disease that has had so long possession, and has spread its malign influence over the whole of our frame! Can any thing then be more foolish, than with a stupid carelessness to allow it thus to grow, and to indulge it when growing upon us, in hope that we shall afterwards more easily conquer it?

BUT let us even suppose the case to be, as those persons vainly expect, that after sometime they might find themselves more at leisure, and more inclined to engage in the service of God and religion; yet is  
this



this conduct and proceeding of theirs the most unreasonable and inconsistent thing in the world. Repentance for the offences of our past life is necessarily the first step in religion, without which we can never be intitled to the favour of God, or expect the pardon of our sins. This repentance, if it be true and genuine, must be accompanied with the deepest sorrow and contrition of soul, and the greatest self-abhorrence for our disobedience and ingratitude to God, our best friend; for the contempt which we have shown of his laws, and the dreadful danger to which we have exposed ourselves. Now, can there be any thing more absurd, than to continue in the practice of those things, which we resolve afterwards to repent of; to take pleasure in the commission of those sins, which we resolve afterwards to be heartily grieved for; to add wickedness to wickedness, when we know, that this will add sorrow to sorrow, and double our affliction? Is this acting like a rational creature? Will  
any

SERM. VI.  man in the common affairs of life engage in a design, when he knows he shall certainly repent his having ever meddled with it, and shall heartily condemn himself for it? or, when he finds the mistake, while he has yet power to draw back, will he still go on and involve himself deeper in the mischief? yet such is our conduct in matters of infinitely higher moment.

III. THE next thing we proposed to illustrate was, That supposing this delay produced no change to the worse, either in our own minds or in the work of religion, in which we propose to engage; yet the seasons of old age or sickness, to which we delay it, are in themselves exceedingly improper for the management of a business so weighty and great. Old age, should we arrive at it, has been found by experience, to be a sufficient burden to itself, tho' it be not loaded with what ought to have been the work of our more vigorous years. *Sufficient for that day is the*

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*the evil thereof. The strength of the old man,* says the Psalmist, *is labour and sorrow.* The powers both of body and mind are then decayed. We have lost that quickness of apprehension, that soundness of judgment and reason, that strength of memory, that warmth and vigour of affection, which we before enjoyed; and our bodies crazy and infirm, fertile of diseases and pains, serve only to clog and bear down the soul. In these evil unpleasant days the wise man will leave nothing to be done, but summon up, with his little remaining force of mind, all the comforts of religion and virtue, the conscious reflexion on a well spent life, and the joyful prospect of approaching bliss, that by these he may be enabled to bear with patience the sorrows he is surrounded with, and with decency to lay down this tabernacle of clay. But how miserable must he be, who then, in place of all these comforts, possesses only the follies of his youth; who has spent the day in which he ought

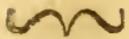
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to have wrought the work for which he was sent into the world, in idleness; and finds, that now, when the night is come on, he must begin to work; who, when he is so soon to die, finds that he has not yet begun to live! Can any man upon the smallest reflection, think it wise or rational to leave so momentous and difficult a work to so weak, so impotent an age.

BUT then further, are there not some whose folly rises to a yet greater height? So much are their minds bewitched with the pleasures of sin, that, whilst they enjoy the least remains of health, they are loth to part with them; thinking it will be full time for this, when sickness the forerunner of death overtakes them. When they are no more able to gratify their passions, they resolve to mortify them; and seriously to repent that ever they were engaged in so wicked a course, when they can do no better. Could it ever have been thought, that a being whom the  
blessed

blessed God made after his own image, and endued with the noble faculties of understanding and wisdom ; a being who, in the little trifling affairs of life, can show so much wisdom and prudence, should be so infatuated in matters of the highest concern ! Not to mention again, that death by its sudden approach may rob us of this time we destine to religion, and hurry us into the invisible world, without allowing us one moment's thought or preparation : can any man of common sense persuade himself, that this is a season proper for a work so great and difficult, when the body is racked with pains, or oppressed with sickness ; when a deadly languor hangs on all our senses, and every nerve within us starts at its approaching dissolution ; when every returning pang disjoins our thoughts ; when the tears of our surrounding friends, and the thoughts of the last, the mournful parting, overcome our souls ; when the anguish of a guilty mind, and the confounding dread of approach-

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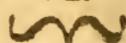
ing vengeance complete the scene of horror. Is this a season fit for a work requiring calmness of thought and sedate reflexion? Have we ever been visited with pain and sickness, and can we say, that then our minds were in a proper state for managing any business of importance? Have we not frequently seen our dying friends in such distress and agony as called forth the liveliest sorrow? and can we place ourselves in the same circumstances, and yet resolve to delay to that period, the care of our souls and the making our peace with God?

BUT let us abstract even from this; let us put the case in the most favourable view, and suppose that there were nothing in this state that render'd us unfit for so great a work; yet how can we be assured of the truth and sincerity of such a death-bed repentance? how do we know but all these tears, and this grief and sorrow may be extorted from us solely by the views

views of impending misery? May we not often have seen men in such a situation, giving all the evidences of a seemingly sincere repentance, and declaring their fixed resolution, if God will spare them, to live in another manner than they have formerly done? But no sooner are they restored to health, but all these resolutions are forgot; every good impression vanishes, and they become twofold more the children of hell than they were before. And how can any man in the same circumstances be assured that his repentance is better than this? Can he know whether it be such as would work a lasting change, a thorough reformation in his life, and consequently such as shall be accepted of God? And how wretched is the state of the departing soul, when under this uncertainty? What has he to support him in his wrestling with death, in his conflict with the king of terrors? What dreadful horror must overwhelm the soul that stands thus trembling on the confines of

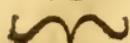
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an eternal world; who has misery in all its most ghastly shapes presented to his view; and scarcely dares to hope that his offended God will save him from it. Dreadful are the agonies of death, but more dreadful are the agonies of a mind thus distracted. The death of the best of men we reckon but a mournful spectacle; but the death of a man departing in terrors of conscience, is the most tragical sight our eyes can possibly behold.----But to proceed; were there nothing in the times of old age, or sickness, that rendered them unfit for beginning our application to religion, yet there is another consideration which shows the folly of delaying it till then in a very clear light; and this I mentioned as the

IV. HEAD of discourse, That by spending our strength and vigour in the service of sin, and allotting only these worst of our days to religion and the service of God, we become unworthy of his favour,  
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and may provoke him justly to deny us that grace which we have so often despised and rejected. That the assistance of the Spirit of God is necessary in order to our conversion from sin to holiness, is so clearly revealed to us, that tho' many have been the disputes about the manner of its operation, and the degree of its efficacy, yet few or none have been so extravagant as entirely to deny it. *The way of man is not now in himself; our sufficiency is of God, and it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* As it was by the almighty power of God that we were brought into life, so by the same power we must be *created again unto good works, and renewed in the spirit of our minds.* This assistance and gracious influence is daily offered to us in the gospel; where we are called to *ask and we shall receive, to seek and we shall find, to knock and it shall be opened unto us.\** And if we take the matter in this light, to all the folly

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\* Matth. vii. 7.

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and danger we have already seen in this conduct of delaying the work of religion, this farther is added, that it is presuming upon the goodness and mercy of God; that tho' we continue thro' the whole of our lives dishonouring his laws, and contemning his authority, yet whensoever the views of death and judgment, and the terrors of his wrath shall make us wish to be reconciled to him, he will certainly extend his mercy to us, and save us from destruction.

FALSE notions of God, wrong apprehensions of the great Governor and Judge of the world, are the source of innumerable mischiefs to the children of men. We set the divine perfections at variance amongst themselves, and according to the prevailing temper and disposition of our minds we entertain such notions of one perfection as are absolutely inconsistent with the rest. Are we under the power of dejection and melancholy? the divine holiness  
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and justice appear to us in so dreadful a light, as is inconsistent with infinite goodness and everlasting love; and our gloomy conceptions are ready to drive us into distraction and despair. Again, are we blessed with prosperity and ease, does the world smile upon us, so that we are *walking in the sight of our eyes*, and indulging ourselves in whatever our hearts desire? then we are apt to conceive of the Deity as a Being of such unbounded goodness and mercy, as is inconsistent with infinite wisdom, righteousness and truth. And how ready are such notions to soothe us in our sins, and to inspire us with a presumptuous security. God indeed is infinitely good, he *delights to exercise loving kindness on the earth, and his tender mercies are over all his works*: yet we must believe, if we would conceive aright of the Supreme Being, that there is between these amiable perfections and the other excellencies of his nature a constant and eternal harmony. And tho' we ignorant

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mortals must not dare to set bounds and limits to the divine goodness; for the *heaven is not higher than the earth, than his ways are above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts*; yet may we safely say, that all such notions of the goodness of God as encourage us in a course of action contrary to the rectitude of his nature, and the authority of his laws, must be false and dangerous. From these general thoughts, let us proceed to examine the present case.

WE know that God has a right to the service of our whole lives; that he abhors the wicked, and is *angry with the sinner every day*; that *all things are naked and open before him*, and that he sees the inmost secrets of our souls: yet we resolve with ourselves, that we will follow our sinful lusts and pleasures, as long as we can, or have the least relish for them; and when that is gone, we will betake ourselves to God, who, we hope, will kindly receive

us.

us. We cannot think of giving him the best of our days, but we hope he will be willing to accept of the worst. We grudge him an *acceptable offering*, because we hope he will receive from our hands *the blind and the lame*. We chuse *other lords to rule over us*, promising ourselves, that when we are no more able to serve our beloved masters, the most high God will welcome us when worn out and decrepit in the slavery of sin and Satan, and will exalt us to *the inheritance of the saints in light*. But is not this a mocking of God? Can such notions of goodness be consistent with infinite perfection, with unspotted purity, with unerring wisdom? If a servant should entirely neglect the work committed to him by his master, and take every opportunity, even to his face, to express contempt of him and disregard of his authority, encouraging himself in this course of disobedience, from an impudent confidence in his master's goodness; that whenever he shall judge it convenient for his

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own purposes to apply for it, his master will receive him into his favour : is it possible that this servant can esteem his master a wise man? must he not have the lowest thoughts of his understanding and judgment, and from his heart despise him? Yet thus it is that men pretend to deal with Him who is *mighty in judgment, and whose understanding is infinite.*

THERE is one passage of scripture, upon which men are ready to build their vain deluding hopes of this kind, and that is the instance of the thief on the cross : an instance which has in it so many circumstances entirely singular, that it cannot with the least shadow of reason be brought as an encouragement to that conduct which we are now arguing against. Here we have a poor creature, whose manner of life, and the clandestine wickedness in which he was engaged, had probably given him little or no opportunity of beholding the miracles, or hearing the doctrine of the Sa-  
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viour of the world. He now sees him his fellow-sufferer, hanging upon the neighbouring cross; the rulers and croud of spectators shaking their heads at him, the soldiers mocking and insulting him, and even the other malefactor forgetting his own condition, to deride and upbraid him. Him the penitent thief rebukes, *Dost thou not fear God, says he, seeing thou art under the same condemnation; and we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss.*† And having thus expressed the deep sense he had of his own crime, and of the punishment it deserved, and having acknowledged the innocence of our Lord, then, notwithstanding that every circumstance seemed to concur against it, he owns him as the Saviour of the world, who alone could deliver him from eternal wrath; *Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.* A faith so noble on a Saviour dying on the cross, joined with a sincere  
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† Luke xxiii. 40.

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repentance of his former crimes, was accepted by Christ. *Verily I say unto thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*— But will our case in the least degree be parallel to this. If having enjoyed the clearest dispensation of the Gospel; having had the way of life and the way of death fully set before us, we receive this grace of God in vain; if we harden our hearts against him, nay, *for yet the more because his grace abounds;* the most that possibly can be deduced from this instance is, that God may in certain extraordinary circumstances extend his grace and mercy to a penitent sinner, even in his last moments: this is what nobody ever denied; yet it is certain, that to presume upon it is the most foolish and dangerous thing in the world. Will any man swallow a draught of deadly poison, because it is possible he may find an antidote that will conquer its pernicious force? Will any man throw himself from the height of a precipice, in expectation of catching at some bush or

frock

shrub that may break his fall? Will any man expose himself to shipwreck, from the hope of escaping on a broken plank? Yet no wiser are they, who adventure to persist in sin, the *wages of which is death*; who run on boldly in these paths that lead to destruction, and promise themselves, that when they are come to the very brink of misery, God, whom they have all along affronted and despised, will bestow his extraordinary grace, and interpose to deliver them from that ruin they have brought upon themselves.

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I SHOULD now make some reflexions on what has been said; but your time allows me only to suggest, that the great design of all that has been now said is, to incite us to such a consideration as becomes men and reasonable creatures. The conduct we have been considering is, perhaps, what no man in calm blood ever pretended to defend or vindicate. It is no disputable point, where we need eloquence and art

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to gain the assent, and convince the mind: whosoever fairly states the case to himself, will in a moment see which side his reason must approve of. But here lyes the grand difficulty, to bring men to think of the subject, with that attention and seriousness which its weight and moment deserves. A surprising thing indeed! that we should need persuasion to make us think of what alone is worthy of our thoughts; and that we should be so much employed as to allow no time for what is the chief business of our lives. Yet certain it is, that inconsideration is the fatal snare, the ruin of the children of men. Our minds are hurried on from one foolish pursuit to another; and if at any time these occupations should chance to fail us, and we should be left at leisure with ourselves, we reckon it a gap in our lives; our minds will wander *with the fools eyes to the ends of the earth*; we will think of any thing, of every thing, rather than of that which most nearly concerns us. But can there

there be any thing more unworthy of a rational creature? can there be any thing so shameful, as to allow his reason, which was given him by God to enable him to distinguish between good and evil, to be so cheated, so abused, so baffled? Let us suppose, that after some consideration it remained a question, which were the more advantageous course, the practice of religion or of wickedness. Was this the case, as it is impossible that ever it can be, would it not be the duty of a rational creature to inquire with the utmost diligence, till he found out the truth in a question of such moment and importance? But when upon the smallest, the most superficial reflexion, we must give religion and the care of our souls the preference; can there be any thing more foolish and absurd, than to allow those things, which we must confess to be of infinitely lesser moment, to banish it wholly from our thoughts?

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WE are placed here to prepare ourselves  
for

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for another and a more lasting state. The eternal happiness or misery of our beings depend on our improvement of the short uncertain space that is allotted us here on earth. Much of this time we have already trifled away in idleness, and how much, or how little remains we can by no means know. And will we yet go on thoughtless and secure? Strange infatuation! thus to suffer ourselves to be driven blindfold into a course of action, for which we must often reproach ourselves, which every interval of reason will condemn, and which at length may land us in endless misery. Let us bethink ourselves, my brethren, whilst time for thought yet remains; *let us quit ourselves like men*; now while it is *the accepted time, and the day of salvation*, let us mind the *things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes*. Now let us *remember our Creator, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, in which we shall say we have no pleasure in them*.

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## S E R M O N VII.

Preached in the High-Church of  
*Edinburgh, January 7. 1751,*  
 before the Society for propagat-  
 ing Christian Knowledge.

Of CHRISTIAN ZEAL.

GALATIANS iv. 18.

*But it is good to be zealously affected always  
 in a good thing.*

MANY of the *Jews* who embraced  
 the religion of Christ, when it was  
 first published by the apostles, still retain-  
 ed too great a fondness for the ritual insti-  
 tutions of *Moses*. They were bred up in  
 such a profound veneration of their law,  
 that they could not be persuaded that any  
 thing could make void their obligation to

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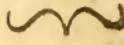


obey it. They inclined therefore to blend the two dispensations, and join the observation of the legal ceremonies to the pure and spiritual precepts of the Gospel. This weakness of the *Jewish* converts was for some time connived at, till in the height of their zeal they would have imposed circumcision, and their other rites on the gentiles who had embraced the Christian faith: then the apostles were obliged with boldness to assert that *liberty with which Christ had made them free*; to command the gentiles to maintain the native simplicity of the Gospel, and to resist those who would wreath about their necks a yoke which neither the *Jews* nor their fathers had been able to bear.

As certain false teachers of this kind had crept in amongst the *Galatians*, disturbing their peace, and corrupting the purity of the Gospel; it was the apostle's design in this epistle to warn these Christians of their danger, if they allowed them-

themselves to be seduced into such errors, and held not fast the profession of the true faith, in which they had been instructed. Among the other arts used to deceive the *Galatians*, it had been insinuated, that *Paul*, who had first preached the Gospel to them, was not truly an apostle clothed with such authority as *Peter* and others of the circumcision: in opposition to which, the inspired writer begins with a solemn vindication of his apostleship, showing, that in no spiritual gift, or extraordinary power, he was inferior to the chief of the apostles.

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FROM this he proceeds to show, by several arguments, how inconsistent these new doctrines were with the nature, design, and extent of the Gospel covenant. And that he might leave no means untried to guard them against the dangerous arts of these seducers, in the context he puts them in mind of the love and affection, the respect and veneration which they had

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before shown for himself; expostulating with them concerning the occasion of so sudden a change; that they who had lately *received him as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ*, and were ready, as the apostle strongly expresses it, to *have pluckt out their very eyes, and have given them to him*, should now be so fond of other teachers, who were his avowed opposers, and of another Gospel, so contrary to that which he had taught them, and which they had received as the greatest *blessedness*. Upon this occasion he introduces the general proposition, which I have read as the foundation of the present discourse. *It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing*. In the words we have a duty required of us, to be *zealously affected*; a limitation of this duty, that we must be *zealously affected in a good thing*; and a commendation of the duty, that it is *good* to be thus zealously affected in a good thing. In further discoursing on them, I shall, with divine assistance, proceed in the following method.

I. I SHALL

I. I SHALL explain the nature of zeal in general. SERM.  
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II. I SHALL lay before you the necessary qualifications of Christian zeal; by which we may be directed in the exercise of it, and enabled to distinguish betwixt true and false zeal.

III. I SHALL show the excellency, and the happy effects of true Christian zeal.

AND, in the last place, make improvement of the subject.

*First*, I SHALL endeavour to explain the nature of zeal in general. Ancient writers in that language from which we have borrowed the word *zeal*, use it indifferently in a good or bad sense, but seldom or never in a religious one: with them it commonly signifies warmth and fervour, an earnest desire of some temporal good; such a desire, as is attended with pain and uneasiness, when others are possessed of that good which we are deprived of. They frequently

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frequently apply it to denote emulation, and that sort of it too which is accompanied with envy, contention and strife. In the like bad sense the word is frequently used by the writers of the New Testament; and zeal is numbered by them amongst the *works of the flesh*, amongst the basest and most unworthy passions. Our translators indeed, in rendering these passages, have prudently declined to use the word *zeal*; applying other words, which more clearly convey to the *English* reader the meaning and import of the original. Thus they express it by *envy* and *envyings*, *emulation*, *indignation*, and the like, with the particular instances of which I shall not now detain you.

BUT is it not just matter of regret and sorrow, that in all the ages of the church there have been too many Christians zealous rather in this sense of the word than in the other, which it also frequently bears in scripture, and which expresses one of the brightest ornaments of the true Christian?

ftian? Sometimes it denotes an ardent de-  
 fire of promoting the glory of God, and  
 the honour of his worship, in opposition  
 to a profane indifference, and a cold un-  
 concern about these things. *The zeal of  
 thine house*, saith our Lord, applying the  
 words of the Psalmist, *hath eaten me up*.\*  
 By this the apostle expresses the sincere  
 and earnest desire he had for the salvation  
 of the souls of men. *I am zealous of you*,  
 says he to the *Corinthians*, *with a godly  
 zeal*.† In the same terms he speaks of  
 the generous charity which that church  
 had shown in relieving the necessities of  
 the saints. *I know the forwardness of your  
 mind*, says he, *and your zeal which hath  
 provoked many*.‡ *It is good*, says he again,  
*to be zealously affected always in a good thing*.

Now from these passages we may be  
 able to form some notion of that zeal  
 which is required of Christians, and  
 which is a necessary qualification in the

\* John ii. 17. † 2 Cor. xi. 2. ‡ 2 Cor. ix. 2.

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service of God. It is a vehement affection of mind, which incites us earnestly to wish and contend for the honour of God, and for the prevalency of true and undefiled religion in ourselves and others; and which moves us, on the other hand, constantly and irreconcilably to oppose whatever is contrary to these noble ends. We are not then to conceive of Christian zeal, as if it were one single affection of the soul, but as a mixture of many holy and spiritual affections. It is not properly one particular grace, but rather a gracious constitution of the whole mind. Zeal sways all the thoughts, and governs the whole will of the true Christian. Zeal gives a double measure of force and activity to that religion, which before was sincere. Zeal, in short, is to the spiritual life, what health and strength is to the natural; it renders that cheerful and vigorous, which otherways would but breath and move. So much may suffice as to the first thing proposed, the stating and explaining

plaining the just notion of zeal in general. Let us now proceed to the

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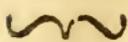


*Second* THING proposed, namely, To lay before you the necessary qualifications of this zeal, by which we may be directed in the exercise of it, and be enabled to distinguish between true and false zeal.

SUCH is the weakness and infirmity of human nature, that here we are ready to be entangled in the most dangerous mistakes and errors. It is no doubt extremely hard so to moderate our affections towards objects which are widely different in themselves, as not to err in their measure and degree. It is in a most particular manner difficult to manage our zeal in the hatred of, and opposition to that which is evil, so as that it shall at the same time be consistent with that love and kindness, that humility and prudence, that meekness and gentleness which are required of Christians; yet certain it is, that if our zeal be inconsistent with

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with these graces, we thereby rather dishonour God than promote his glory, and we do more to hurt than to benefit our souls.

THIS ought to be attended to with the greater care, that however valuable an ornament true zeal may be to the Christian, yet zeal, if misguided or misapplied, may prove the source of the most dreadful mischiefs; nay, such zeal has actually, in numberless instances, brought the greatest discredit on religion, and produced the most fatal desolation in the church of Christ. To direct us then in the management of zeal, and to guard us against such mistakes, let us attend to the following particulars.

*1st*, OUR zeal must always be according to knowledge; and if it is not so, it is highly blameable, for a very obvious reason, because it is extremely dangerous. This kind of zeal the apostle condemns in his brethren the Jews; *I bear them record,*  
says

says he, *that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.* \* Nay, he acknowledges, that before his conversion, he himself was zealous in this manner; and that this zeal led him to *persecute the church of Christ, and to think himself bound to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus.* A Christian, as the apostle tells us, ought to be ready to *give to him that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him;* and surely he is as much bound to be able to give a reason of the zeal that is in him.

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TRUE Christian zeal then must not only be free from all hypocrisy and guile, but it must be founded on knowledge, and proceed from a well informed judgment. We must love and desire that which we know and are assured to be worthy of our love and pursuit; and we must oppose that which on good grounds we know to be criminal and dangerous;

\* Rom. x. 2.

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for otherways our zeal may prove but a foolish heat or a blind fury. And from this rule, so obvious and reasonable in itself, we may safely infer, that great zeal in persons notoriously ignorant must always be liable to great suspicion. True zeal will always arise from true knowledge, will always be accompanied with it, and governed by it.

*2dly*, OUR zeal must be exercised concerning that which is good in itself, and the measures of it must be regulated with prudence, according to the real importance of the object about which it is employed. It is only *in a good thing*, as the apostle directs in the text, that *it is good to be zealously affected*. We must not only be assured in general, that our zeal is not entirely misplaced, as to the object of it; but we must be able to judge of its greater or lesser importance, as to the great ends of religion, the honour and glory of God, and the salvation of mankind; and we  
must

must temper and proportion our zeal accordingly. If this is neglected, the consequence will infallibly be, that indiscreetly laying out our warmth and heat on lesser things, we will be ready either altogether to neglect, or coldly to pursue what is of much higher concern and moment.

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OF this kind of false zeal we find our blessed Lord accusing the Scribes and Pharisees of old. *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, says he, for ye pay tithe of mint, anise and cumin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and truth: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.* † Such are

† Math. xxiii. 23---27.

SERM. VII.  the unhappy consequences of our spending our zeal on little matters: it naturally takes off our minds from what is of higher moment, and leaves us no zeal or fervency to be laid out on those things in which the interests of religion and of our immortal souls are more nearly concerned. As it is too certain a sign of folly and weakness to be earnest and eager for all things alike, so the wise, the prudent Christian will distinguish between the several objects on which he employs his zeal, and allow to each that measure of concern and warmth, which its weight and moment deserves. But then,

3dly, SUPPOSING us to be assured that the object of our zeal is right in itself, and perhaps too a matter of great concernment; yet we must take care, that it carry us not unawares into unlawful means in the prosecution of its end. That the goodness of the end will sanctify the means, that we may do evil that good may come

come of it, are scandalous principles ; and the apostle expressly asserts it to be a damnable sin, to charge such doctrines on the religion of the blessed Jesus. *Some affirm, says he, that we say, let us do evil that good may come, whose damnation is just.* † The true Christian will watch over himself, lest he fall into this snare ; and in particular will find the exercise of care and circumspection needful for this end, when he is called to exert his zeal in opposing what he believes to be dishonourable to God, and contrary to pure religion.

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LOVE to God and to the truths of God; desire to promote his glory and the happiness of mankind, are affections which ought to have the first and the chief place in our hearts. In these we can never be too fervent, for they will never carry us beyond due bounds. On the other hand, our hatred against those things which

† Rom. iii. 8.

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God hates, our indignation against what-  
ever is displeasing and dishonourable to  
him; these, no doubt, should also em-  
ploy our zeal, and are acceptable in the  
sight of God. But here we must beware  
and carefully attend, lest this kind of  
zeal exceed its due bounds, and insensibly  
degenerate into the most vicious and  
hurtful passions, into anger and ill-nature,  
wrath and malice. For such is the nature  
of the human heart, that there is great dan-  
ger, lest, under the appearance of hatred  
to sin, our zeal carry us further than mere  
detestation of the sin itself, and lead us  
unawares to the hatred of the person,  
whom we are commanded to pity and to  
pray for, and with meekness and gentle-  
ness to endeavour his recovery. And from  
this we are led to notice another very  
probable mark by which we may distin-  
guish between the zeal that becomes a  
Christian, and those other passions that  
have sometimes passed under this honour-  
able name; this I shall mention as the

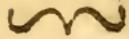
4**th** AND last thing under this head, SERM.  
 That true Christian zeal will appear VII.  
 more in the mild and gentle affections,   
 than in those that are wrathful and  
 violent. It will discover itself more in  
 the ardency of his love to God, in the  
 fervency of his devotion, in the warmth  
 of his kindness and charity towards his  
 brethren, than in the vehemence of his  
 hatred and detestation and anger, even  
 tho' these passions are not altogether mis-  
 applied as to their objects.

IT has been justly observed by an in-  
 ingenious author, that zeal should be in re-  
 ligion, what true courage is in human  
 nature. And as that is the truest courage,  
 which is not only firm and undaunted,  
 but at the same time calm and inoffensive,  
 slow to anger, and not ready to be provok-  
 ed; so that is true Christian zeal, which is  
 not only constant daring and fearless, but  
 meek and compassionate, long-suffering  
 and *easy to be entreated*, without bitterness

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or gall. Must it not be matter of wonder to every one who seriously reflects upon it, that in the profession of such a religion as the Christian, our zeal should show itself so very little in these gentler passions, and should vent itself almost always in those of an opposite nature? Yet is this so much the case, that our very notions of zeal are almost entirely preverted by it; and no sooner we hear the name, than we are ready to form the idea of something harsh and austere, unfriendly and censorious. But certain it is, that as no religion is *pure*, that is not at the same time *peaceable* and gentle, so no zeal is true, spiritual, and Christian, that is not merciful, charitable and kind.

By attending to these things we may easily distinguish true Christian zeal from the unruly heats of pride and passion, and the implacable fury of revenge. These indeed have frequently been concealed under the honourable name of zeal for God and his service; and under this cover  
have



have often brought the greatest discredit on the religion of Jesus, and caused his blessed name to be abhorred and blasphemed by *them that are without*: when men professing a zeal for God, have pretended to propagate the religion of Christ, and promote his glory in the world, not by the demonstration of the truth, not in the meek and gentle spirit of the gospel, but with the cruelty of the worst of tyrants, with the rage and fury of devils. This false and bitter zeal has made the most direful havock even in the bosom of the Christian church, and has filled nations and kingdoms with slaughter and blood. An insatiable thirst for worldly power and greatness, under the mask of holy zeal, has made the *mother of harlots* and of the *abominations of the earth* often drunk with the blood of the saints, and of the martyrs of Jesus Christ. This false zeal has given rise to rebellions, assassinations and massacres, as means to promote what is falsely called the holy catholic

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faith. This powerful delusion has made men forget the first principles of religion; has divested them of the common feelings of humanity; and made them think, that they did God good service by persecuting their fellow creatures with bonds and chains, with racks and tortures, fire and sword.-----But this principle is of a nature directly contrary to that fervency and zeal that ought to adorn the lives of Christians. It is zeal in doing good, zeal in promoting the honour of God, (which in no case can be inconsistent with, nay, which in every instance must promote the happiness of his creatures) that alone is worthy of the followers of Jesus. If our zeal be true and genuine, then, to use the words of a worthy author, divine love will fill its sails, divine wisdom and prudence will give it ballast, and it will have no heat but what is tempered with charity and love.

I PROCEED now to the *Third* thing proposed

posed, which was to show the excellency and happy effects of a spirit of true Christian zeal. This will clearly appear, when we consider, that zeal imports in it, our applying ourselves to all the duties of the Christian life with that warmth of affection, which we ordinarily show in the prosecution of any end to which we are incited by the strongest motives.

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WHEN we are engaged in the pursuit of any temporal good, the attainment of which we believe to be of high importance to our happiness; when we are fully satisfied that our pursuit is not only innocent but laudable, with what keenness and eagerness of mind do we proceed in it? how cheerfully will we undergo every hardship, encounter every difficulty? and what pleasure and satisfaction have we upon our success in it? Now the like, nay a greater fervency and earnestness will the zealous Christian discover in the service of God, and in the performance of all the duties

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duties of religion. Opposite to this character is that of indifference and lukewarmness in religion, and the one may serve to throw light upon the other.-----How easily is the lukewarm Christian diverted from his duty? He lays hold of every slight pretence to excuse him in the neglect of it, and is rather pleased than uneasy when under any plausible pretext he can decline it. If no such pretext occurs, and he is actually engaged in the service of God, what a dull formal business does he make of it? how little of that life and spirit appears, which he can show on other occasions? Whatever he does in the service of God, it is but to acquit himself of a task assigned him; and his whole behaviour shows that his heart goes not along with it.

BUT as the zealous Christian will readily embrace every opportunity of doing good, so every interruption or hindrance will be a grief to him, and he will endeavour

deavour to avoid it with care. Conscious SERM.  
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as he is, that religion is his great concern, on which his all depends; that it is a thing worthy and honourable in itself, and of the most blessed consequence, he will set about the duties of it with suitable application and intention of mind. These passions and affections which God hath planted in us as the springs of action, which incite and animate others in their lower pursuits, will in him be exerted for a nobler purpose, and will inspire him with activity and vigour, with alacrity and cheerfulness in the good ways of the Lord.

VARIOUS are the figures by which we find this zeal in goodness represented to us in holy scripture; all of them expressive of that fervency and earnestness which I have just now described. Sometimes it is described by allusions to that eager and craving appetite for the refreshment of nature, by a new supply of meat or drink, which is better felt than it can possibly

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possibly be described. *Blessed are they*, says our Lord, *that hunger and thirst after righteousness. It is my meat*, says he again of himself, *to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. As the hart*, says David, *panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?* This zeal again is represented by the activity and vigour, and earnestness of desire, which was shown by contenders in the public exercises, the mastery in which was esteemed the greatest glory. In allusion to this, we are called to *forget the things that are behind, to stretch forth to the things that are before, that we may attain to the mark and the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* As the Christian life is described in scripture as a continued warfare, so our zeal in performing all the duties of it is exprest by the watchfulness, the resolution and boldness which is required of soldiers engaged in the most dangerous

gerous enterprize, stationed in the most difficult post, surrounded with the most formidable enemies. Thus we are exhorted to be *watchful and vigilant, to stand fast in the faith, to quit ourselves like men, and be strong. To take unto us the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, may stand. For we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world; against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

FROM these things we may be able to form some notion of what it is to be zealous in good works. To go through the several parts of our duty, and to show distinctly how our zeal ought to be employed about them, is what I cannot now propose. The zealous Christian will hold nothing dear, in comparison of the favour of God, and of that holiness which will make him beautiful in the eyes of his Creator. His  
soul

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soul will *delight in the law of the Lord*, and *his desire will be unto him, and the remembrance of his name*. With what pleasure and warmth will he apply himself to the duties of devotion and worship? with what joy will his *lips shew forth his greatness*, and *sing of his mercy that endureth for ever*? with what ardour and fervency will he *pour out his heart before him*, and have his recourse unto him, as *his sun and his shield*, as his *rock*, his *fortress*, and his *deliverer*? The *tabernacles of the Lord will be amiable in his sight*: *a day in his courts will be better than a thousand elsewhere*; and it will be his constant desire, that *all the people may praise the Lord*, and *see his glory*, and *bow before him*; and that *his name may be great, from the rising to the setting sun*.

THE true Christian's zeal for God will also manifest itself in his love and kindness to his brethren of mankind, as they are the offspring of God, and bear his image. He  
will

will be zealous in *doing good unto all*, but *especially to them who are of the household of faith*, and *members of that body, whereof Jesus Christ is the head*. His zeal will shew itself in feeding the hungry, in clothing the naked, in providing for the poor and the fatherless, in comforting the dejected and sorrowful, in instructing the ignorant, in reproof with meekness and prudence those who have gone astray, and in bearing with the weaknesses and infirmities of his brethren. This love and benevolence he will not meanly confine to those of one sect or opinion. His zeal indeed will move him to wish and pray, and strive, that Christians may be joined together in the *unity of the Spirit*, and in the purity of the Gospel; and he will *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*: but if his prayers and labours have not their desired success, his zeal will display itself, not in the bitterness of wrath, but in the abounding of his charity even to those who differ from him; and these differences

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rences in opinion, that must prevail while we are in this world, will chiefly affect his zeal in this way, that they will make him long and aspire the more after that blessed state, where all debate and angry controversy shall cease, and where universal peace and love shall reign for evermore.

I COME now, in the last place, to make some improvement and application of what has been said. And here I might incite you to this zeal in goodness, by laying before you the manifold obligations we are under to it, and the blessed fruits and advantages that will attend it. To insist on these particularly, would carry me beyond the bounds to which I must, in decency, confine myself. Have we any regard to the great end of our being, which is by holiness and goodness to promote the glory of him that made us? Have we any dutifulness or gratitude to that God on whom we depend for all that

we

we are, have, or hope for? Have we any love to our blessed Redeemer, any concern for his honour, any regard for what he declares to be the great design of his whole kind and merciful undertaking in our behalf? All these things loudly call upon us to be zealous in well-doing. This, as the apostle tells us, is the great end of our election to eternal life ; for *God hath chosen us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.* For this end Christ laid down his life, *that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to himself, a peculiar people zealous of good works.* For this end he imparts to us the light of his word, the strength and assistance of his Spirit ; for *we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* This is the design of all the *great and precious promises* of the Gospel, that thereby being made *partakers of a divine nature,*

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*nature, we should perfect holiness in the fear of God.*

WHAT happy effects would this zeal in goodness have on the peace of our minds? By this alone can we know that our faith is true and unfeigned, if it be in us a lively quickening principle of every virtue and grace, and make us to abound in good works. Hereby we are assured of the truth of our love to God, if it incites us with ardour and fervency to *run in the way of his commandments*. Nay, what blessed effects would this zeal in goodness have on all around us, if we made *our light so to shine before them*, that they *seeing our good works*, were led to *glorify our Father in heaven*. *Our path* would be to them *as the shining light*; and by setting before them all the *beauty of holiness*, would attract and command their imitation. By this zeal we should awake the drowsy, quicken the slothful, strengthen the weak and feeble, and inspire the sincere and upright in heart

with



with a holy emulation. Such happy influence would the example of our zeal have upon our brethren. How much do misery and wretchedness abound in the world? Were it not for this heavenly flame which the divine grace kindles and cherishes in the righteous and the good, in some measure to counteract the sad effects of prevailing corruption and wickedness, this world would soon become a most dismal abode. It is this zeal that provides for the poor and the needy, that protects the injured and oppressed, that comforts the desolate and sorrowful, and makes the *heart of the widow and the fatherless to sing for joy*. It is this zeal which animates that best and noblest charity which respects the souls of men, and their spiritual welfare, affording the means of religion and instruction to those that *sit in darkness*; propagating the knowledge of the Gospel of salvation amongst them, who from their situation and circumstances are excluded from these valuable blessings which we enjoy.

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enjoy. And can we conceive, my brethren, any exercise of the Christian's zeal more worthy and commendable than this? Is there any good work to which we are bound by stronger ties of duty and gratitude to God, of love and thankfulness to Jesus the Saviour, of compassion and kindness to our brethren of mankind? Has God blessed us with a clear discovery of his will, and made a glorious light to shine on us who *sat in the shadow of death*? and shall we not pity those who yet lye in ignorance, and contribute all we can to their receiving the knowledge of the truth? Have we a just sense of the horrid barbarity, of the wretched gloomy superstition from which we are delivered, under which so great a part of the world yet groans? do we duly value and esteem the divine goodness towards us? and shall we never think of those who *know not the way of peace*, who are worshipping lying vanities, and bowing down before the works of their own hands? Has God so mercifully,

so

so eminently distinguished us from the rest of mankind, and shall not this oblige us to do all we can in our several stations, that his love may be declared, and his name may be worshipped in the lands where they are not yet known?

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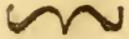
THE most zealous Christian indeed in his private capacity, farther than by his earnest prayers and supplications, can do little for the accomplishment of this great and important end. The influence of his most active and unwearied endeavours must at the best be narrow and confined. In the prosecution of this, as of every great design, the observations of *Solomon* will be found to be wise and just, that *two are better than one*, that *a threefold cord is not easily broken*, and that *in a multitude of counsellors there is safety*. In this therefore Christian wisdom and prudence has directed Christian zeal; and has led Christians to associate themselves together for the carrying on this great design; and to

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this

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this happy measure we owe any remarkable success it has had in the world. Societies have been erected for propagating Christian knowledge; by contributing to the support of which, the great and wealthy have had a noble opportunity of honouring God with their substance: and those of meaner circumstances, by offering their mite, have had the occasion of expressing their zeal for his service: societies, where the joint liberality of numbers has produced a fund, in some measure proportioned to so great a design; and their united counsels have been employed in laying it out to the best and wisest purposes. And blessed be God, that we of this country, poor and indigent as we may be, when compared with others, have not been wanting in this excellent charity; that we too have a *Society for propagating Christian knowledge*, a conspicuous, and, I hope, a lasting monument of public spirit and of Christian zeal.

THIS

THIS *Society* founded by royal authority, cherished by royal favour, maintained and supported by liberal donations of many noble and worthy persons,---happy in a wise and faithful administration, has extended her cares to the habitations of cruelty and barbarity, and has not, without success, sent the glad tidings of salvation to the dark corners of the earth. That more has not been done for them that are without, has been owing to this melancholy circumstance, that after we have for many ages enjoyed the Gospel, and for some time have been blessed with the purest dispensation of it, there have still been in our own borders such remains of heathen darkness and popish superstition, as naturally claimed the first attention and care, and have reminded the *Society* that charity must begin at home. But after the world has been favoured with so many and distinct accounts of the excellent constitution, the wise regulations, the extensive cares and unwearied labours of this

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SERM. *Society*, it were superfluous to enter into  
 VII. any particular detail.

ALLOW me only to observe, as what must afford us no mean idea of the usefulness of this design, and at the same time may give us comfortable hopes, that this zeal, in so good a work, must be attended with great and important success; allow me, I say, to observe, that besides the ministers and preachers employed in the *Highlands* and *Islands*, and maintained on this fund, and that other which is justly distinguished by the name of the *Royal Bounty*, the *Society*, at this present time, supports in these parts no less than one hundred and thirty one schools, where upwards of seven thousand poor children are instructed, who, most of them, without this charitable provision, must have grown up in the most wretched barbarity and ignorance.

BUT why need we go to such remote  
 corners

corners for instances of the *Society's* care and concern to promote this great end of their institution, when this very assembly affords us a most conspicuous and convincing proof of it. Long had the condition of the poor of this populous city been matter of grief and regret to every wise and good man; when miserable in themselves, and uneasy to all around them, they passed their uncomfortable lives in beggary, and in idleness, vice and ignorance, its almost constant attendants, and brought up their unhappy children to inherit the same misery and wretchedness. At length the noble plan was laid, which now, by the good hand of God, is so far advanced, and so well established, for feeding our hungry, for clothing our naked, for bringing them that were cast out into houses. And that this charity might not be confined to the relieving the miseries of this present life, the *Society* cheerfully embraces this opportunity of promoting Christian knowledge, and kindly lends her

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helpful

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helpful hand for the instruction of those grown up in ignorance, and for the early education of the poor children, to whom their parents were unable or unwilling to afford this blessing, or who had been cast upon the world in a helpless orphan state. What have been the happy effects of this wise and good appointment, there are not a few present who can bear witness. I shall only venture to affirm, that the proficiency of these poor children in the most valuable and useful knowledge, the knowledge of God, and of the principles of our holy religion, will be found to be fully equal to them who have their education in the polite expensive manner, which is now too much in fashion amongst us.

I MUST not, I need not surely detain this audience, after having so far encroached on their patience, with any address to you the honourable, reverend, and worthy members of this *Society*.---You know your duty, and the importance of the design in  
which

which you are engaged. You daily feel the inward pleasure that attends the zealous prosecution of it. You know to whom you must look, on whom you must depend for the happy issue of all your labours, and from whom alone you must expect your reward. May God encourage your hearts, and strengthen your hands in this great and excellent work. And may he still more dispose the minds of those to whom he has given wealth and riches, to enlarge your power of doing good. And, by his blessing on the laudable endeavours of this, and such other Christian societies, may the knowledge of the Lord at length *cover the earth, as the waters do the sea.*

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# SERMON VIII.

The Love of GOD to Mankind,  
in their Redemption through  
JESUS CHRIST.

I JOHN iv. 9.

*In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*

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**G**REAT and manifold are the advantages that attend a serious and devout contemplation of the divine benignity and goodness. By the constitution of our being we necessarily receive delight from the perception of every thing that is beautiful and excellent. In the material world we are surrounded with a variety of objects, which striking our senses yield us this pleasure. But there are beauties

of



of another and a higher nature, which immediately touch the soul, and afford us a satisfaction more exalted and sublime. Moral excellence and goodness, weak and imperfect as they are found to be in our fellow-creatures, have the most powerful charms to attract our minds. How ravishing then must be the contemplation of the spring, the source of this perfection? how delightful the study of infinite goodness and unbounded love? But the pleasure it affords is not the only motive to this divine employment; it will compose our minds, and quell every gloomy and disturbing passion; it will inspire us with hope in the midst of dangers, and arm us with patience, contentment and fortitude, under all the disasters of life. It will naturally dispose our minds to the love of God, and the other duties of religion, which elevate the soul, and raise our natures to their greatest dignity and perfection. And besides, as it is the natural tribute which as intelligent creatures we owe to

God,

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God, and which he requires in return for the blessings we enjoy; so by rendering it, we secure the possession of these blessings, and are qualified for receiving higher communications of his favour and love. Now for this most agreeable and useful exercise, we have abundant matter presented to us in all the works of God. That noble variety of creatures so wonderfully framed, and so wisely ordered, brightly displays the goodness of him who made the heaven and the earth, and every living thing. The honourable rank in which we ourselves are placed in the creation of God, the admirable fabric of our bodies, the astonishing faculties of the soul, the plentiful provision that is made for the support and joy of our lives, call for the grateful return of our adoration and praise, and should stir us up with our souls, and all that is within us, to bless that God, who is the *fountain of life*, from whom *cometh down every good and every perfect gift*.

BUT



BUT if we desire to have a scene of contemplation opened up, that is still more glorious ; to behold goodness in all its beauty, and the love of God displayed in its most powerful and alluring charms ; let us turn our thoughts upon the redemption of guilty degenerate mankind, from misery and death, to happiness and immortal life. Altho' the earth, is no doubt, *full of the goodness of the Lord*, and tho' every thing in or about us may afford us proofs of the kindness of our great Creator ; yet sin, that destructive subtle poison, has, beyond all question, spread its direful influence over all things here below ; it has in some measure deformed the face of nature, and rendered our views of the divine goodness broken and imperfect ; so that now we behold a mixed and clouded scene. Here we may see the divine goodness clearly displayed ; but there it is hid under inexplicable difficulties. Here the scene is pleasant and delightful ; there it is dark and gloomy. Here ought

to

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to be acknowledged the blessings of a merciful father; there may be seen the judgments of an incensed God. But if we turn our thoughts to the love of God in Jesus Christ, we shall find goodness pure and unmixed, bright and dazzling. Here are no clouds to interrupt our views, nothing to raise doubts and perplexing fears in our breasts, nothing to limit the sight of our souls, but the boundless greatness of the object.

AND as we have here the most illustrious display of goodness and love, so the peculiar concern we have in it, should justly make it the darling subject of our contemplation. Creating and preserving goodness is diffused over the whole universe, and the blessings which thence flow to us, we have in common with many of the works of God. Life is enjoyed by the whole animal creation; reason, understanding and wisdom we possess in a lower degree than angels and other  
intelligent

intelligent beings ; vigour and strength of body is common to us with the noblest kind of brutes ; and that rich store which the earth produces for the support of our lives, the meanest worm partakes of as well as man : but redeeming love is exercised towards the children of men only. Neither the higher nor the lower part of the creation have any concern in it ; it is a mystery of goodness which the angels *desire to look into*, and chuse for the subject of their celestial hymns: how much more ought we, who are the objects of it, and taste of its blessed fruits, to raise our souls to meditate with joy and gratitude on the marvellous theme, and give *glory to God in the highest*, for his *peace on earth, and goodwill towards men*? As praising God for his wisdom, power and goodness manifested in the works of creation and providence, was the proper employment of the antient sabbath, so the celebrating of this more glorious discovery of the divine perfections, is the particular duty of our  
Christian

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Christian sabbath, which takes its rise from the finishing of our redemption by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In order to assist us in some measure in the performance of this duty, I have chosen the words now read as the subject of this discourse.

WE find the apostle in the context enforcing the duty of mutual benevolence and affection in the strongest manner; *Beloved, let us love one another, says he, ver. 7. for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love,* the source, the perfection of love; in order to demonstrate which he adduces as the most convincing proof what we find in the text, *In this was manifested the love of God, &c.* My design being to represent briefly the greatness and excellency of the love of God in the redemption of mankind by the Lord Jesus Christ, I am in some measure directed to the following method

method, by the very words of the text, SERM.  
VIII.  
 which may supersede any introductory  
 explication of them. ~

I. IN the first place I shall endeavour to represent the greatness of this love from the different characters of God, who has manifested it; and of men who are the objects of it, and from the relations subsisting between them.

II. FROM the infinite dignity and perfection of that person, by the sending of whom this love of God was manifested; *He sent his only begotten son.*

III. FROM the meanness of that state into which he sent this excellent person, and from the sufferings he underwent in it; which may be both considered as included in these words, *He sent his only begotten son into the world.*

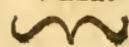
IV. FROM the noble and generous  
 design

SERM. design upon which he sent him, *that we*  
 VIII. *might live through him.*

AFTER which I shall conclude with some reflexions on the subject.

I AM in the first place then to show the greatness of this love, from the consideration of the different characters of God and man, and the relations subsisting between them.

HERE indeed, if upon any occasion, it may be truly said, that *we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness.---Behold God is great, and we know him not. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us ; it is high, we cannot attain to it ; for he dwelleth in the light, to which no man can approach. Can we by searching find him out ; can we find out the Almighty unto perfection ? To whom will ye liken him, or what likeness will ye compare unto him ? Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, who bringeth out their hosts*  
*by*



by number, and calleth them all by their names. It is the Lord by whose word the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth; who formed the light and created the darkness, whose the world is and the fulness thereof. He sitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers before him; the nations are as the drop in the bucket, and as the small dust in the balance; they are reputed as nothing before him, they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. He is the King immortal, invisible, whose throne remaineth from generation to generation.---But man, whose foundation is in the dust, who dwelleth in houses of clay, who is but of yesterday, whose breath is in his nostrils, who is crushed before the moth, wherein is he to be accounted of? What is man that the Lord should be mindful of him, or the son of man that he should set his heart upon him? Man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm, can he be profitable unto God, or can his goodness extend unto him? If his transgressions be multi-

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*plied, what doth he unto him? or if he be righteous, what doth the Lord receive from his hand? Can his government be weakened by our rebellion? Can his glory be lessened, or his happiness impaired? The Lord is infinitely happy in himself, and standeth in need of none of his creatures. Was there any beauty, any comeliness in us, wherefore he should desire us? No; he is glorious in holiness, the Lord, the Holy one, who chargeth his angels with folly; who putteth no trust in his saints; in whose sight the heavens themselves are not clean; who hath no pleasure in wickedness, and is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. But what is man that he should be clean, or he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous? Behold we are shapen in iniquity, and in sin did our mothers conceive us. All flesh had corrupted their ways upon the earth. The whole world had become guilty before God. The divine image was defaced; the glory, the honour that once crowned our natures was no more; and we had fallen from the*

the

the resemblance of angels, to a greater resemblance of the beasts of the field ; we had rebelled against our rightful sovereign ; we had cast off our best friend, and preferred the slavery of Satan to the love and favour of God. Whilst thus guilty, wretched, and vile, was there any just ground of hope that we were to receive the highest proofs of divine love ? Could it ever have been thought, that the eternal Sovereign, on whose authority we had trampled, would have interposed to preserve us from perishing in that destruction into which we had plunged ourselves, or have looked down from the habitation of his holiness, for any other end, but to render vengeance on his enemies, and to exert his power and his wrath against those who had forsaken him ? Was it not thus he dealt with those beings of a superior order, whom he spared not, but cast them down to hell, and bound them in chains of everlasting darkness ? Yet herein has God manifested his goodness which *is un-*

SERM.  
VIII.



SERM. *searchable*, and his mercies which are *past*  
 VIII. *our finding out*, in extending them to  
 man; to man tho' low and mean in him-  
 self, tho' polluted and debased by sin.

BUT then, how was it possible that this love could ever be manifested to the children of men? Was the righteous Sovereign of the world to receive his rebellious subjects into favour, without the least satisfaction? Was it consistent with his holiness and justice freely to pardon the innumerable insults offered to his laws? or with his immutable truth to reverse the sentence which doomed the transgressors thereof to destruction? Could he thus have maintained the honour of his government? could he thus have shown his creatures his love of goodness, or deterred them from the practice of sin? Surely no. How then could the purposes of divine love be ever accomplished? and whence was the satisfaction to come? Who is there in heaven or in earth that is equal to the greatness of  
 the



the work? None sure of the sons of *Adam*, encompassed with weakness, and overwhelmed with sin, could by the most direful sufferings have expiated his own guilt; and could he then by any means have *redeemed his brother*, or *given to God a ransom for him*? Nay, the whole host of heaven, even the innumerable company of *angels that excel in strength*, with their united force, were unequal for the greatness of the task. The sins of mankind were too heavy a burden for the greatest created strength to bear, and to atone for them was a work too hard for limited perfection. Whence then could our salvation come? This is a question, to determine which, he alone was able, whose wisdom and understanding is infinite as his love. *He laid help upon one who was mighty to save*. He employed in the work his eternal Son, the Son of his love, whose arm alone could bring salvation, and raise us from guilt and misery to happiness and bliss. And his employing in our behalf a per-  
son

SERM. son of such perfection and dignity is the  
VIII.



2d THING, from which appears the greatness of this instance of the divine goodness. *In this was eminently manifested the love of God towards us, because he sent his only begotten Son; his Son whom he loved, who was the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is the first and the last; the beginning and the ending; who from the beginning was with God, and is God. He is in the Father and the Father in him; and as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself also. By him were all things created, that are in heaven or that are in earth, visible or invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers, all things were created by him and for him. He upholdeth all things by the word of his power; he is the mighty God, the King of kings and the Lord of Lords. Had it been possible that any of these superior*

superior spirits that surround the throne of God could have executed the purpose of his love towards the children of men, it had been goodness well deserving our wonder and praise, if the most High had parted with any of these ministers of his, that *do his pleasure and hearken to the voice of his word*, for the sake of creatures so far inferior to them in nature, and contaminated with so much guilt. But that he should give his Son, who is *over all blessed for ever*, who is infinitely dear to him, and infinitely superior in worth to the whole creation; this is an instance of love so astonishing, that human thought and speech are too low, too faint and languid either to conceive or express it.---By this we receive full assurance, that the purpose of the divine love can never fail, since it is put into his hands, who is as perfectly qualified as we can desire, both in respect of power and inclination, to accomplish the great design. Can there be any thing too arduous and difficult for him,

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to whom *all power is committed in heaven and in earth; who is able to subdue all things to himself?* Can our interests ever suffer in his hands, *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; whose faithfulness is unto all generations, and whose loving kindness endureth for ever?* But the great excellency of this love will appear more fully, if we consider,

In the 3<sup>d</sup> place, The meanness of that state, and the dreadfulness of those sufferings into which God sent his only begotten Son. Were the children of men to be redeemed by the Son of God, by a person thus infinite in all perfection; and might not he, who spoke into being the heavens and the earth, by the same powerful word have rescued mankind from the lowest misery? Must he leave his throne of majesty and glory, and appear on earth? He, whose power is subject to no restraint, whose word can accomplish that which he pleaseth. Or might he



he not at least have appeared in some visible glory, as when he wrought salvation to his antient people, and gave them laws from mount *Sinai*? No: He who *was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal to God, must become of no reputation, must be found in fashion as a man, and be made in the likeness of sinful flesh.* Here is a mystery which will for ever employ the thought and study of the most exalted Seraphs, and be a subject of the highest admiration throughout all the ages of eternity. That he, who is God, *the king immortal and invisible,* should be born of a woman; should submit to the weakness of infancy, the infirmities of childhood, and by slow and gradual steps arrive at the strength and just proportion of manhood; that he, who was the great Governor of all things, should become subject to earthly parents; that he who commanded the world into being, should, for the satisfying of his hunger, and the sustenance of his life, depend on those  
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very creatures which his fingers had framed; that he, in whose *presence is* an eternal *fulness of joy, at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore,* should become subject to all the labours and sorrows of men.-----These are subjects of contemplation which the mind of man is neither able to fathom nor exhaust; and all we can do, is, humbly to adore what we cannot comprehend.

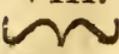
BUT was the Son of God to descend so low as to veil his glory in human flesh, and to tabernacle among men? Might he not have appeared at least with the pomp and magnificence of a mighty sovereign, with all that grandeur and majesty which attracts the reverence of men, and seems to exalt humanity somewhat above itself? No: His first appearance was attended with all the circumstances of disgrace and obscurity; from his cradle to his grave there is one melancholy scene of poverty and oppression, dishonour and pain. He

was



was brought forth in a stable, and laid in a manger. Soon are the wretched parents forced to fly, from the hands of a cruel tyrant, with their helpless infant, into lonely exile. When he grew up, he was *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*: He wandred about from place to place, and *had not where to lay his head*. By some he was reproached as a fower of sedition, by others reviled as an impostor; by some he was accused as a blasphemer, by others as a forcerer and a devil. Thro' his whole life he *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself*. But if we follow him to the last scene, and trace him thro' his sufferings and death, things yet more wonderful will open to our view. There we see him in his sorrowful retirement; his immaculate soul overwhelmed with that wrath that was due to us, and his body in agony ineffable, *sweating great drops of blood*. There we see him betrayed into the hands of his enemies by the treachery of one friend, cursed and denied by another,

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another, and basely left and deserted by all. There we see him dragged to the judgment hall, buffeted, whipt and spit upon; by the most gross injustice condemned to an ignominious death, drest up as an object of cruel derision, and his sacred head wounded with a crown of thorns. He is led out to *Calvary*, nailed to the accursed tree, the blood springing from his hands and feet, and amidst the scoffs and insults of his triumphing persecutors and enemies, he reclines his head, pours out his soul and gives up the ghost.-----Here, my brethren, may we not justly apply the words of *Moses*, to express our admiration; *Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there has been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it †.* Well might the sun hide his glorious head in darkness, when he, who appointed the ordinances

† Deut. iv. 32.

of heaven, was expiring on a cross. Well might universal horror and confusion overspread the face of nature at the death of him, at whose voice the *earth shakes* and trembles, and *the foundations of the hills are moved*. Did creatures inanimate and lifeless thus acknowledge their dying Lord, and can we, who are so nearly concerned in the matter, ever turn our thoughts to the wondrous theme, but with hearts filled with thankfulness, adoration and praise? *O the height and the depth, the breadth and the length of the love of God in Christ Jesus, which passeth knowledge!*

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THE last thing, from which I proposed to show the greatness of this love, was the generous and noble design on which God sent his only begotten Son into the world, which in the text is express in these words, *that we might live by him*; and this your time allows me but just to touch at.

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As the wretched condition, into which man had brought himself by his departure from God, is represented to us in scripture by the strongest figures and images ; so it is beautiful to observe, how by figures directly contrary to these, are expressed the blessed effects of the love of God in Jesus Christ. By our *wicked works* we were at *enmity with God, alienated from him, engaged in rebellion against our rightful Sovereign, and exposed to his wrath* : but *Jesus Christ having made peace by the blood of his cross, hath reconciled us unto God. We were sitting in darkness, and in the shadowe of death* : but *Jesus Christ hath brought us from darkness into his marvelous light. We were under the slavery of sin, and the power and dominion of Satan ; but by Jesus Christ we are called unto liberty, even the glorious liberty of the sons of God. But there is no figure more expressive than that which is used in the text. Life is the greatest of all blessings, the necessary foundation of all others, without which we*

can

can enjoy nothing. As all other blessings necessarily presuppose this, so by an ordinary figure, life is put not only for the continuation of our being, but for all those good things that raise our natures to their greatest perfection and happiness. And such a connexion is there between the ideas of life, perfection and happiness, that when a being has lost the perfection of its nature, and consequently its happiness, it is in the scripture stile said to be *dead*. Thus men, when sunk in corruption, and enslaved to filthy lusts and disorderly passions, which weaken all their powers and faculties, are said to be *dead*; and that future misery, which is the consequence of this sin and corruption, is named *death*, and *eternal death*. Now, with relation to these two kinds of death, the Son of God was sent to purchase for us a twofold life. We were *dead in trespasses and sins*; he was sent to *create us again unto good works*, to breathe into our souls a new and divine life of holiness and goodness, and to *bles*

SERM.  
VIII.  
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every

SERM.  
VIII.

*every one of us, by turning us from our iniquities. We were bound over to the second death, the death of eternal misery; he was sent to restore us to immortal life. He came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And what tongue can describe the greatness of this gift? Words fail us, nay thought itself is overpower'd, when we attempt to rise to so high a theme. Great was the blessing to be called from nothing unto being and life; greater still, to have that life and being so long continued, and enriched with so many comforts. But to have that life continued for evermore, in the midst of angels and saints, and in the immediate presence of God; freed from every annoyance and distress, surrounded with every joy, raised to the very highest perfection of our nature; this is such a blessing, as no tongue can express, and no heart be sufficiently grateful for. All that we can say upon this subject is, that eye*  
*bath*

*hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* And can we, my brethren, on the one hand, reflect on that direful anguish and endless misery, which was the just demerit of our sins; can we, on the other hand, raise our thoughts to this celestial bliss, and shall not our minds overflow with joy and gratitude for that love which God has manifested in sending his *only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him?*

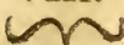
Thus have I endeavoured to show the greatness of this love, from the considerations occurring in the text. I now go on to make some practical improvement of the subject.

*1<sup>st</sup>*, DOES not this marvelous instance of goodness lay us under the strongest obligations, to live in the exercise of love, and chearful obedience to God our Bene-

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factor

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factor and Redeemer? He is possess'd of every amiable perfection, and thus has a natural title to the love of every intelligent mind. He is our Creator and Preserver, and thus has an undoubted right to our obedience. He has connect'd our happiness with our loving him, and appointed eternal misery as the portion of all that forsake him; and thus our interest, as well as our duty, is concern'd in the matter.

BUT if none of these motives, strong and weighty as they are, make a sufficient impression upon us, here sure is an argument, which, if we have the least ingenuity of spirit, must gain powerfully upon our minds. God loved us while we were yet *enemies to him by reason of wicked works*; he loved us when we deserved nothing but his wrath and indignation to be revealed from heaven against us; loved us in a manner too surprizing for us to conceive or express: and shall we not *love him,*

him, who first loved us? Well may the thought of his stupenduous goodness melt the hardest heart, and make the most abandoned sinner blush at his ingratitude? Shall the great Majesty of heaven and earth strive as it were to gain by mercy and kindness those creatures, whom in justice he might have doomed to everlasting misery? and shall we trample on his condescension, and reject with scorn his offers of love? Shall we despise the friendship of that God, who, to reconcile us to himself, parted with his eternal Son? Or shall we offend that Saviour who has loved us to the death? *Do we thus requite the Lord? O foolish people and unwise! Ought not his love to kindle in our breasts a mutual flame? to persuade us to obey him with chearful and willing minds, and constrain us henceforth not to live unto ourselves, but unto him that died for us and rose again?*

BUT further, 2dly, This instance of the divine goodness may be improv'd as an argument to persuade and engage us to

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trust and rely on God for every blessing we stand in need of, because his children and servants may hence be assured that he will order every thing for their advantage and benefit. Thus reasons the apostle, *If God spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* Shall we henceforth allow any doubt of the divine goodness to lurk in our breasts, or the least distrust of his fatherly tenderness to disturb the peace of our minds? Shall we dare to entertain dishonourable thoughts of the divine government as harsh and severe, after so astonishing an instance of his kindness, mercy and love? If the enjoyments of this life are not bestowed upon us so liberally as upon others, let us not murmur nor repine, as if we were forgotten by God; but resting, with holy confidence, on this signal proof and demonstration of the divine goodness, let us be convinced that our merciful father, by a sparing communication of these things,

is



is promoting our greatest good. Nay, tho' we are visited with distress and affliction, yet we may rejoice in our tribulations, assured that they will work for our good, if by our own mismanagement we prevent not the wholesome medicines having their designed effect. We ought to be convinced that God loves us more than we love ourselves, and cares for us more than we care for ourselves : and instead of giving way to anxious solicitude about *what we shall eat, what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be cloathed,* let us *seek first the kingdom of God,* confiding in him, that *all other things shall be added unto us.* Yea, tho' the *fig-tree should not blossom and there should be no fruit in the vine, tho' the labour of the olive should fail and the field should yield no meat, tho' the flock be cut off from the fold and there should be no herd in the stall,* yet let us still *rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.*

3dly, LET us take notice of the improvement

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provement our apostle makes of this doctrine in the context. *Beloved*, says he, *if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* We are under the strictest obligation to imitate the Deity in his moral perfections. This is a natural consequence of true love to God, and a necessary condition of God's love to and approbation of us. Of all the divine perfections, goodness is the most amiable in itself, and the most fit and proper for our imitation; and of all the instances of the divine goodness, that which he has manifested in Jesus Christ is the most shining and glorious. There we are taught of God in a special manner how we ought to love one another; and by this clearer manifestation of goodness, we are laid under stronger obligations of copying after it, in kindness and benevolence to our fellow creatures. Shall the Lord, the possessor of heaven and earth, show his love to us, on whom he was altogether independent, and shall not we love those, upon whom we daily depend



depend for their mutual good offices, without whom we could scarce preserve our very beings? Has the Lord, who is of untainted holiness and infinite mercy, manifested such goodness to us, when we were abominable and polluted in his sight, and shall we henceforth dare to think the lowest of our fellow creatures unworthy of our love, and look down with disdain on the poor and the indigent? Has God loved us, while we were enemies, and shall the little petty offences of our neighbours fire our minds with hatred and revenge? No: Let us be *followers of God as dear children, putting on bowels of mercy, compassion and loving kindness*, and above all things, *put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness*. One great design of this dispensation of love was to promote peace, friendship and benevolence among mankind, and to root out of our natures those angry hurtful passions, which blast the pleasures of society. By this dispensation Christians are joined together by the bond  
of

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VIII.



of a most sacred society and union. They are all the servants of one master, who has left it as his peculiar command, and the test of their fidelity to him, that they love one another; they are all brethren sprung from the same *incorruptible seed*, and therefore ought they to love as brethren. They are all members of the same body, whereof Jesus Christ is the head, and this body God hath so tempered together, that there should be no schism in it, but that the members should have the same care one for another; and that *whether one member suffer, all the members should suffer with it; or whether one member rejoice, all the members should rejoice with it.*

BUT *lastly*, If God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him, and thus provided for our happiness in a manner so wonderful and expensive, let us all consider how *inexcusable* we shall be, if we be  
found

found neglecters of the offered salvation. SERM.  
VIII.  
*See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? He that despised Moses's law died without mercy; but of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath troden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing? If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it. Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. And, let us exhort one another daily*

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VIII.



*daily while it is called to day, lest any of us  
be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;  
and thus receive the grace of God in vain.  
May the God of all grace who hath called us  
unto his eternal glory through Jesus Christ,  
perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle us. To  
him be glory and dominion for ever and  
ever. Amen.*

S E R.

## S E R M O N IX.

The Obligation to BROTHERLY  
LOVE, deduced from the Love  
of GOD to us.

I JOHN IV. 11.

*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to  
love one another.*

**L**OVE to our neighbour is a duty of SERM.  
IX.  
natural religion, the reasonableness  
of which can be deduced from the most  
evident principles. Its tendency to promote  
our own happiness, and the peace and  
good order of society; its agreeableness to  
our natures, and to those affections our  
Maker has endued us with, abundantly  
prove it to be both our duty and our in-  
terest. As divine revelation enforces in  
the strongest manner all the duties of na-  
tural religion, and proposes the best ar-  
guments

SERM.  
IX.



guments to incite us to the performance of them, so there is no duty that we are therein more frequently, and by a greater variety of motives exhorted to, than this of mutual love. This our Saviour makes the distinguishing mark of his disciples. This his apostles insist on in a particular manner as the *royal law*, the *bond of perfection*, the *sum of the whole law*, and the *end of the commandment*. This they establish as the best mark of sincerity in religion. *Hereby we know*, says *John*, *that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.*

AMONG the arguments to enforce this duty, there is none used more frequently, than that of God's love to mankind; which I shall endeavour to illustrate from the words of the text; where we have the apostle's conclusion from what he had advanced in the four preceding verses; *Beloved, let us love one another*, (ver. 7.) *For love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not,*



*not, knoweth not God ; for God is love, is the source and perfection of love. In proof of this, he adduces the most surprising instance of divine love. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* From the connexion of these words with what goes before, it is plain, that the love of God to us, of which the apostle here speaks, is to be understood of his love manifested in Jesus Christ ; and the apostle's argument in short is this, that by this surprising instance of the divine love, we are laid under more particular and strong obligations to love our neighbour, than the rest of mankind, who are ignorant of this amazing mercy and goodness of God.

THE apostle on this occasion uses a  
very

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very endearing appellation, extremely well adapted to the subject he is treating of; when exhorting them to love, he addresses them by a title, which declares he had the same tender affection for them all, which he desired them to have for one another. *Beloved, if God so loved us, &c.* Tho' the apostle, as was just now hinted, has here no doubt chiefly in his eye the instance of God's love in Jesus Christ; yet I hope, it will not be thought doing great violence to the words of the apostle, and none sure to his reasoning, if I extend it so far as to comprehend all the goodness and love God our merciful Father has shown to the children of men. I need scarce tell you, that by love to one another, we are to understand such an esteem, regard and affection for our fellow-creatures, as will effectually move us, on every occasion, to promote their happiness, and to do them all the good offices that we possibly can.

IN discoursing farther from these words, I shall endeavour, *first*, To show in general, how God's love to mankind is a motive and argument for our loving one another: and,

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*Secondly*, Show what particular obligations the love of God in Jesus Christ lays upon Christians to love their brethren.

As to the *first*, God's love to mankind is an argument for our loving one another, in these two respects,

I. As it sets before us a pattern and example that we are bound to copy after; and,

II. As it lays upon us the greatest obligations, in gratitude, to the performance of this duty.

I. IT is an observation as true as it is common, that men are moved by example

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ample more than by precept. We naturally incline to imitate those we esteem, and ambitiously aspire to be like those above us. This principle of emulation has given birth to the greatest and most noble actions. In the present state of things indeed, where greatness and wisdom are not always joined, and men of the most exalted stations are not always adorned with the most refined virtues, we are frequently led by it into the most ridiculous follies, and often into the most shameful vices. But this only shows, how powerfully it works in our souls, and that like the other passions it will prove mischievous, when misapplied and exerted upon wrong objects. Of itself it is a noble beneficial principle, planted in us by our wise Creator, to incite us to the pursuit of whatever is great, good, or excellent: And as he is himself the Architype of all perfection, the source and fountain of every beauty and virtue to be found in the creature, its great design was to raise our souls to the  
imitation

imitation of him, that by forming our lives after his blessed example, we might become as like to him, as finite beings can approach in likeness to one who is infinite.

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Now that all rational creatures are under the strictest obligations to imitate the Deity, and regulate their lives after his example, requires no long deduction of argument to prove.---By the fundamental law of our beings we are bound to pursue our own happiness: our happiness lyes in the perfection of our natures; the perfection of our natures lyes in their resemblance to the supreme perfection. This therefore must be set before us as our rule and pattern, if we would attain to that perfection in which consists our happiness. Man was originally form'd after the image of God; it was the honour and dignity of our natures to bear some similitude to the Deity. In the brightness of this image consisted the happiness of man in his prim-

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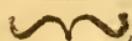


eval innocent state: from its being de-  
 faced and darkened flows all our misery  
 and woe. Would we then have our na-  
 tures restored to their primitive honour  
 and happiness, this image must be renew-  
 ed in its former beauty and lustre. Of  
 such importance is this, that the whole  
 of religion is sometimes represented as  
 consisting in the imitation of the Deity.  
 This sublime notion of religion even the  
 more enlightened heathens seem to have  
 had, when they tell us, that the best way  
 of worshipping and serving God is to imi-  
 tate and endeavour to resemble him. This  
 likewise is very agreeable to what we are  
 taught in the word of God, where our  
 duty is summ'd up in these general pre-  
 cepts, of being *holy as God is holy, perfect  
 as he is perfect, and merciful as our Father  
 in heaven is merciful*; and where we are  
 called to *be followers of God as dear chil-  
 dren*. Of the divine perfections there are  
 some, in which it is absolutely impossible  
 for us to imitate or resemble him in the  
 smallest

smallest degree; in which it would be impious and absurd to attempt any likeness to Almighty God the Supreme Being; such are the immensity, eternity, and the other natural perfections of the Deity. When therefore we are called to the imitation of God, it can only be understood of his moral perfections, his holiness, his faithfulness, his righteousness, and above all his goodness and mercy, which is now particularly the subject of our consideration: for all the love that God has manifested to the children of men, flows from this, the most amiable perfection of his nature, which sheds a beauty and lustre on his other excellencies, and makes him in a peculiar manner the object of the love and adoration of his creatures.

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To enumerate the various instances of the divine goodness, as it is manifested in the works of creation, of providence and redemption, and thus to set the divine example of love in its proper light, is a work

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that I dare not undertake. The subject is vast and extensive: for where can we turn our eyes on the works of God, or on his dispensations to mankind, where we shall not see the most conspicuous marks of his kindness, benignity and love? The most exalted angel cannot comprehend the whole; but he must be below a man, who sees not enough to raise his wonder and adoration. *The whole earth is full of the goodness of the Lord*; he has spread it over all his works. This gave birth to the whole creation, and adorn'd it with such beauty and magnificence: this preserves and upholds the world in its harmonious order: this gave life and breath to every living thing: this form'd our bodies in so wonderful a manner, and breathed into us immortal souls: this hath *holden us up from the womb*; hath *given us bread to eat and raiment to put on*, and *made us to dwell in safety, preserving our going out and our coming in*. This *giveth us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons*, and *filleteth our hearts*  
with

*with food and gladness.* This delivereth the poor when they cry, and is the helper of them that have no help of man: this is a *Father to the fatherless, a Judge of the widow, and the orphans stay in time of need.*

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BUT how much more surprizing is the scene that opens, if we turn our eyes to the dispensation of the divine love and goodness in Jesus Christ? If we view, on the one hand, the children of men sunk in sin, buried in corruption, hastening with a fatal thoughtfulness to endless misery and woe: and, on the other hand, see the bowels of the divine love and compassion move towards them, sending the eternal Son of God to undergo a course of misery in our nature, to pass his life in contempt and poverty, and to end it by a cruel ignominious death, that he might heal the diseases of our sinful natures, redeem us from the power of Satan, hell, and death, and restore us to immortal life? Here our minds are lost. This love is too  
great,

SERM. great, too wonderful for us to comprehend: and well may we join in the apostle's exclamation, *O! the height, the depth, the breadth and the length of the love of God in Christ Jesus, that passeth knowledge.*

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THIS is a faint, imperfect view of the example of love God sets before us; upon the review of which, I am sensible, this thought will naturally arise in our minds: What? can weak corrupted man arrive at the least resemblance to such divine excellence? Is it not in vain to propose a standard to ourselves to which we can never rise?----The imperfection indeed of our natures makes it impossible that this virtue should be in our minds, either in that boundless height, or in that unmixed purity that it is in God. But some seeds of goodness there are in our natures, which it is our duty to improve: no more is required of us, than it is possible for us to perform; and when we have done our best, we have done our duty. We all  
 move

move in a very narrow sphere, and 'tis but a small part, even of our own species, we can benefit by our love. Our various stations in the world with respect to riches, power and authority, make a difference as to our capacity of exerting this virtue, and consequently as to the measures of it which are required of us. This, however, is certain, that every man without exception may have a concern and affection for his fellow-creatures, may wish and desire their welfare, and carefully avoid any thing that may disturb or hinder it: this is in every man's power, however straiten'd and indigent his fortune be; and, if a man be really so situated in the world, that he cannot possibly express this affection by acts of beneficence, the sincerity of the affection will no doubt be accepted by God; in whose eye the humble poor man may be found to have as true and generous a love to mankind, as the most beneficent prince.

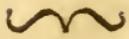
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BUT,

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BUT, if we consider the great extent of this duty, and the innumerable ways in which one man may do good to another, we shall find it scarce imaginable, that any man (living in society at least) should be placed in such circumstances, that he may not have it frequently in his power to express his love, by actions that are really useful and beneficial to his neighbour. Were our breasts warmed as they ought to be with this generous affection, we would find, that in every station of life, our real beneficence might reach vastly farther than we are apt to imagine. How much good might even those of the lowest rank find within their power? How many of their fellow-creatures are there to whom they might be useful, by advice, instruction, reproof, maintaining their good name, and many other important offices of kindness, to the performance of which the advantages of riches or power are not required? All this, and much more, is within the reach of those of a middle

middle station in life. The duties and good offices just now named may, by them, be performed with greater success, and to a greater extent; and besides these, an actual relief of the poor and distressed is required of them. For the first step a man advances from poverty himself, he is obliged to look back and give his assistance to those he has left behind him. But what a spacious field opens to such as are exalted above others in riches and power? Here lyes the true dignity and grandeur of their superior rank; in this consists their chief honour and happiness, that they have it for their privilege to bless vast numbers of their fellow-creatures, and to make perhaps a whole people happy. For this superior advantage would a truly virtuous man covet large possessions, and be ambitious of power; and for nothing else would he aspire at a station exposed to so numerous temptations and disasters.

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IN the character of that good and great  
man

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man *Job*, we have a shining instance, how far a man of superior station and opulent fortune may render himself a public blessing; and at the same time, 'tis observable, that he seems particularly afflicted with his indigent state, when he remembers the pleasure he formerly had in relieving the distressed and miserable. *Ob! that I were as in months past*, says he in the beginning of his lamentation, (chap. xxix.) *as in the days when God preserved me, when I washed my steps in butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil: when the ear heard me, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame; I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not, I searched out. Did I not weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor? his loins blessed*

*blessed me, and he was warmed with the fleece of my flock.*

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THIS is the most divine and glorious character man can be adorned with, to be as if he were God's substitute on earth, relieving the calamities of men, and spreading joy and gladness all around him, receiving the blessings of them he has delivered from misery, and the praise of every good and virtuous soul. This is the pattern that God has set before us, and these are the measures in which it is possible for us to imitate him, in our different situations in the world.

EVEN supposing we were not under any strict obligation to imitate the divine example, and that it had not, as it really has, the nature of a command upon us, there are some circumstances in the example itself most worthy to be attended to, which ought to have a peculiar force to recommend to us the performance of this duty of mutual love.

IN

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IN the *first* place, Almighty God the possessor of heaven and earth, tho' he be infinitely removed from any want, and incapable of receiving any addition of happiness or glory from any of his creatures, being all-sufficient and perfectly happy in himself, yet has extended his love in the most signal manner to us, the race of mortals, who *are as nothing before him, even less than nothing, and vanity.* Has this Great God shown such kind affection and regard to a rank of beings so inconsiderable in his sight, and shall not we love those of the same order and species, the same frame and constitution with ourselves, our friends, our brethren? Has the all-sufficient God exercised his goodness towards those from whom he cannot receive the least advantage or return, and shall not we do good to those on whom we daily depend for their reciprocal good offices? We are weak indigent creatures, not only depending on God for all we enjoy,

joy, but standing in need of the help and assistance of our fellow-creatures on almost every occasion. What a wretched forlorn thing is man in a solitary state? worse even than the beasts of the field; scarce would he find wherewithal to support a decaying body, or preserve an uneasy life amidst the thousand dangers that surround him.

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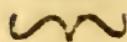
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THAT men are form'd for society, to help and be helped by one another, the circumstances of their bodies, and the faculties they are endowed with, abundantly declare. That this society cannot be preserved without a mutual affection between the members thereof, is also abundantly plain. If then we had neither the example of God to move us, nor his command to oblige us to this duty, it were our interest, and consequently our duty to practise it. But when we have a pattern proposed to us by the infinitely great God, who can have no such interest, no such  
advan-

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advantage in view, and yet exerciseth such wonderful love to us, on whom he is altogether independent; should not this excite in every breast the like affection to those, on whom so great a part of our happiness depends, from whom we daily receive innumerable advantages, without whom we could scarce preserve our very beings? Should not the example of a beneficence so noble and so disinterested inspire us with the like virtue, at least, in a case where our own interest and well-being are so deeply concerned? This sets the reasoning of the apostle in the text in a very strong light, that *if God loved us, us from whom he had nothing either to hope or fear, we ought also to love one another*, to love our neighbour, on whose love to us our happiness or our misery so much depends. There is another circumstance in the divine example, which deserves our consideration in the

*Second place.* Almighty God is good  
unto

unto all, even to the most undeserving: SERM.

*He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil:*

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*He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and his rain to descend on the just and on the unjust.* Tho' we daily provoke

him and trample on his authority, yet he continues to do us good. The greatest obstacle to the prevalence of love and good understanding among mankind, arises from the ungrateful and injurious returns which too frequently are made us. This cools our affection to our fellow-creatures, and renders us averse from doing them acts of kindness and beneficence. It seems a hard command, and scarce to be submitted to by flesh and blood, to persevere in the exercise of love and kindness to those who frequently injure us in the most sensible manner. But did we, my friends, duly consider the frailty and imperfection of our natures, the heat of our own passions, the false views which we are apt to entertain of men and things, by which we ourselves are prone to injure others, and to afflict

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afflict them in as sensible a manner as we can be afflicted by them: did we then turn our thoughts on the example of the blessed God, who tho' infinitely good to us, tho' *holy in all his ways*, and *righteous in all his works*, and incapable of ever injuring or provoking his creatures, yet is daily provoked by their impiety and rebellion; and notwithstanding this continues unwearied in doing them good: of what powerful influence should all this be to make us pass by the petty offences of our fellow-creatures, when they trespass against us, at the worst, in a far less hainous manner than we trespass against God? Are their offences as numerous as ours are against the Divine Majesty? Dare we say, that we were never guilty of the like offences towards them ourselves? that we were never injurious in our resentments, nor unjust in our suspicions, nor violent in our passions, and that in none of our actions we have done to our neighbour what we would be sorry he

he should do to us? and shall it then be matter of such high offence to us, that our fellow creatures have the same infirmities and vicious passions with ourselves, that we must inexorably pursue them with hatred and revenge? Shall God forgive us his *ten thousand talents*, and shall not we forgive our brother *his hundred pence*?---- Thus the example of the divine love to men, considered in every light, is the most powerful inducement and obligation to brotherly love among ourselves.

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BUT now to place the argument of the text in another point of view; In the *second* place, the love of God to mankind is a motive for mutual love, as it lays us under an obligation to express our gratitude to Almighty God by loving our fellow creatures. It is eternally fit and reasonable that we should in some manner express our grateful sense of the manifold favours of God. But what shall we render to him for his goodness and his *mercy that*

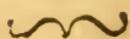
X *endureth*

SERM. *endureth for ever?* He is the Lord of  
 IX. heaven and earth, who is infinitely happy  
 in the enjoyment of his own perfections :  
*our goodness extendeth not unto him, and we  
 cannot by all our righteousness profit God.*  
 The only way in which we can show our  
 gratitude is by love and beneficence to  
 our neighbours; whatever is done to them,  
 God interprets as done to himself. With-  
 out this all the praises and thanksgivings  
 we offer to him are to no purpose ; and at  
 the bottom are indeed but mere hypocri-  
 sy : *to do good and to communicate are the sa-  
 crifices with which God is well pleased.* This  
 is the homage, the tribute, he requires of  
 us for all we hold of him. When we are  
 obliged to any of our fellow creatures for  
 any important and considerable favour,  
 what a pleasure is it to the man of a ge-  
 nerous soul to be able to make the least  
 return ? how will he search for opportu-  
 nities of showing that he is not guilty of  
 the worst of vices, Ingratitude ? If his  
 benefactor himself be above receiving any  
 service

service from him, how fond will he be to express his gratitude to his relations, his friends, his acquaintances? how ready to serve any whom his benefactor recommends to him? nay, to show, a more than ordinary love and respect to his very servants? All this his benefactor with the greatest reason constructs as done to himself, and is thereby fully assured, that were he in circumstances that admitted of it, the same or higher expressions of gratitude would be shown to him.

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Now all mankind being the children and offspring of our heavenly father, to whom we are infinitely more indebted than we can be to the whole world; being his friends whom he recommends in the most earnest manner to our love and favour; being his servants sent here upon their Master's work; shall we deny to them, who are thus related to our heavenly Father, the author of all our mercies, what we would not refuse to those who

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stood in the same relation to any benefactor on earth? The ingratitude, the guilt and folly of such conduct will still more fully appear, if we consider,

THAT our heavenly Benefactor bestows these gifts and blessings upon us, not for our own sakes only, but with intention that we should employ them for the good and advantage of others. The happiness of his creatures is what God proposes in all his dispensations; in this he declares that he delights; 'tis with a design to promote this, he bestows particular gifts and blessings on any of his creatures; and so far as they do not lay them out for this noble purpose, so far they frustrate the design of God, and as it were alienate and embezzle the good things he has entrusted them with; than which nothing can be more base and unworthy.

LET us, for the improvement and illustration of this thought, take a short  
view

view of some of the most distinguishing gifts God bestows on men ; let us consider how God designs they should be improved, and what ingratitude of consequence there is in the contrary conduct.

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-----Has God for instance blessed a man with greater parts, and a higher measure of understanding and judgment than the generality of mankind? his design in it is, and he requires it of him, in acknowledgment of his owing that valuable gift to him, that he lay it out on studies and inquiries that may tend to the good of mankind. Thus men of these distinguished endowments may be singularly useful to others, by searching out methods how their lives may be render'd more agreeable and easy to them; how their health and vigour may be preserved and restored; how their laudable industry in every employment may be crowned with success; how trade and the arts necessary to mankind, and beneficial to their country, may be improved and carried on to the best  
advan-

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advantage, and (which is the noblest study men of superior talents can be engaged in) how men may be engaged to the love of religion and virtue; laying themselves out to answer their objections, to remove their prejudices, and to convince them that their happiness as men and members of society depends on their living *soberly, righteously and godly*. By such means as these, men of eminent abilities of mind have it in their power, and are required to be public blessings and patriots in the noblest sense. But how mean and unworthy is it in them to throw away their abilities on studies trifling and whimsical, that minister to no purpose except to feed their own pride and self-conceit? How monstrously ingrateful is it to lay them out in projecting schemes to disorder the society of which they are members, in sowing dissension and discord, in blasting the reputation of their neighbour, and such other vile designs? How superlatively base is it to prostitute  
 their

their knowledge and learning in fruitless endeavours to sap the foundations of religion and virtue; or their wit in foolish attempts to turn them into ridicule? What is this but turning the gift of God against himself, and ungratefully attacking him with his own weapons?

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LET us next, for another instance, take the men advanced to power and authority. God requires of them, that they should acknowledge him as the fountain of power, the great Governor among the nations; by being the ministers of God for the good of mankind, by studying the welfare and happiness of those under their authority; by promoting peace and good order; by *removing violence and spoil, and taking away exactions from the people*; by defending the poor and the fatherless, doing justice to the afflicted and the needy, and delivering them from the hands of oppressors. As there is no gift of God whatsoever that enables a man, and affords

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fords him opportunities of doing more noble shining acts of beneficence than this of power and authority, so there is no gift bestowed on men with a more express condition that it should be thus laid out. The great, the only end of government is the good of mankind. This therefore should be the only end proposed by those who are advanced to it. And for a man to imagine, that he as the particular favourite of heaven is set over a people, for his own sake, to pursue his own designs; that he by a divine right has got the property of a whole nation, and may without controul use them as his slaves or his cattle; is an absurdity so monstrous, that it is surprizing how it ever entred into the mind of man. How ungrateful must we reckon them, who turn this gift of God, designed for the safety and protection of mankind, to their ruin and destruction, by *decreeing*, as the prophet expresses it, *unrighteous decrees, and writing grievousness, which they have prescribed, to turn aside the needy from judgment,*

*ment, to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless. †*

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I SHALL only mention another distinguishing gift, and that is riches and an opulent fortune, which likewise enables those on whom it is bestowed to do great good to their fellow-creatures, and which is in the same manner to be considered as a trust reposed in them for that end. All men being naturally equal, have an original right to an equal share of the good things of this world; and one main reason why God has established a diversity of condition among men is, to give them an occasion of exercising this noble virtue of goodness and beneficence, that the rich might honour him with their substance, by being *ready to distribute, willing to communicate, dealing their bread to the hungry, covering the naked, and bringing the poor that are cast out to their houses*; as every

† Isa. x. 1, 2,

SERM. one hath *received the gift of God*, so *min-*  
 IX. *istring the same one to another*, and ac-  
 cording to the kindness God hath shown  
 to them, so doing to their neighbour.  
 The thanksgiving most proper for the  
 rich man to offer up to God is this, that  
 God has put him in the blessed condition  
 of giving rather than of receiving. He  
 should remember, that tho' in the eye of  
 the world he is master of his own estate,  
 and may give or not as he thinks proper,  
 yet in reality he is only the steward of God  
 our heavenly Father, who has entrusted  
 him with so much of his treasure to dis-  
 tribute to the poor on earth according to  
 their necessities. How unworthy of this  
 trust then, how ungrateful must the wretch  
 be, who *wraps up this talent in a napkin*,  
 keeps it uselefs and unemployed, and un-  
 mercifully allows the children of the fa-  
 mily to starve for want of food? And how  
 base must we esteem him, who squanders  
 away on himself in a gaudy magnificence,  
 intemperance or luxury, what God design-

ed to be the patrimony of the poor? Thus these great gifts of God, understanding, power, and riches ought to be employed for the good of mankind, if we have any just and grateful sense of the goodness of God in bestowing them, and of the design on which they are bestowed.

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IN like manner every other gift or endowment which we possess, should be improved, and our employing them to any contrary purpose is frustrating God's gracious design in bestowing them, and is employing against him what he gives us to be laid out in his service. It is thus we reason in the like cases; when a man is retained in the service of his prince, eats his bread, and daily receives marks of his favour and generosity, what a monster of ingratitude do we reckon him, if he be found privately counteracting the designs of his master, which tend to the good and advantage of the subjects, if he applies

to

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to his own private use what was designed for the public, and much more if he employs to their hurt and misery what was designed to promote their welfare and happiness; on such a man we very liberally bestow the worst names. And what better is he, who is daily supported by the kindness of God our great Sovereign, and receives distinguishing marks of his goodness and beneficence, if he misapply the valuable gifts that are bestowed on him, if he improves them not in the way that God has designed and required; and if, instead of being a blessing, he becomes a curse to his fellow-creatures? This is acting the traitor to his heavenly King, and doing all in his power to disturb the beautiful order, and destroy the divine harmony of the government of the Deity, which in every part of its administration through the whole universe, is designed to bring about that glorious end, the good of the whole.

HAVING

HAVING now finished the *first* part of the subject, and illustrated the argument for brotherly love, which arises from the general consideration of God's love to mankind, I proceed to the *second* general head, which was to show, how the particular instance of God's love, in sending his Son into the world, heightens the obligation we are under to the love of our brethren.

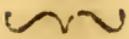
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IN order to make this appear, the same reasoning which was before used must be applied here, drawn from the pattern set before us, and the obligations from gratitude which we are laid under.

IN the *first* place, God's sending Jesus Christ into the world, gives us a more bright discovery of his goodness, a more perfect pattern and example than we could otherwise have had, and consequently lays us under stronger obligations to imitate this goodness, and copy after this example. Here it might be of use to consider

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der distinctly the imperfectness of our discovery of the divine goodness from the works of creation and providence, and to compare it with the superior light with which it shines in the work of our redemption. The goodness of God is no doubt manifested through the whole creation. When we reflect on ourselves, how wonderfully we are framed, and how more wonderfully preserved in being; when we consider the vast variety of creatures that fill the earth, and how they are made to supply our wants, and to minister to our pleasure and delight; when we view the rich beauties of the material world, designed to please our sight, and inspire us with harmless joy, it would be impious not to raise our souls in praise to him, whose goodness has thus distinguished the children of men. But after all, 'tis certain, we now see the darker side of things. Had man continued in the blessed state of innocence and virtue, in which he first was made, as he had been a worthier object  
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of the divine love, so every thing in him, and all things about him, would have more loudly proclaimed the goodness of his Maker. But man soon fell, and his innocence and happiness ended together : his strength is now weaken'd, his days are shorten'd, and he is *born to trouble as the sparks fly upward*. A train of diseases make havock on his body, noxious passions harrass his mind, the troubles and calamities he is daily exposed to render the *days of the years of his pilgrimage both few and evil*. The external frame of nature seems to have shared with man in his fall. Famine and pestilence, earthquakes and tempests, often present us with dismal prospects, and seem to deform the face of nature.

THESE, and such things as these, in some measure eclipse the divine goodness. These things making greater impression on the minds of men than the blessings they enjoy, led some of the heathens to conceive

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ceive of their gods as grievous and hurtful to mankind; and others to imagine two different principles or superintending agents, one good and kind, the author of our happiness; the other cruel and ill-natured, from whom flowed our misery. These opinions, no doubt, were equally absurd and impious, and must have proceeded from a careless partial view of the works of God, and a gross ignorance of his nature. Yet such, it is certain, is the present calamity of our nature, and such our situation in the world, that the sovereign universal goodness can be only imperfectly known from the works of creation and providence, as they appear at present to our view.

BUT, if we turn our thoughts to those discoveries made us by revelation of the love of God to men in Jesus Christ, the most full and complete exemplification of perfect goodness opens to us at once. Here are no clouds to darken the prospect, no

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occasion of fears, jealousies, or doubts, to arise and perplex our minds. But the Deity is presented to us under the character of the most affectionate and compassionate parent, interposing to rescue his creatures from extreme distress, and to restore order among his works, by delivering his own Son to the death, when no inferior propitiation could answer the ends of justice and wisdom. All the circumstances attending this most remarkable dispensation concur to heighten the idea it gives us of the divine goodness. On these I shall not now enlarge, having lately illustrated them in another discourse\*. But taking it for granted, that in this instance, far above all others, the divine goodness is displayed to the view of Christians, I shall proceed to show what force and influence it ought to have upon us, considered as a pattern of goodness and love, for forming us to the like spirit with regard to our brethren of mankind.

\* Vid. Serm. VIII.

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IN common life there are many things which we are taught by example and pattern; and, where the case admits of it, it is justly esteemed the surest and readiest method of instruction. When a man has had the advantage of being instructed in any art, by examples of the most noble and complete kind, we reasonably conclude, that he must have failed in his duty extremely, if he has not acquired some considerable knowledge in that art. The person, on the other hand, who has had the misfortune to have a more imperfect and less valuable pattern set before him, as we have not reason to expect so much from him, so we will not be surpris'd if he be found defective. This case, however low, may perhaps serve to give some light to the present subject.

THE great design of religion is to instruct us in virtue and goodness; as a proper means for this, we are directed to copy after the example of the infinitely  
perfect

perfect God. Here then God may be considered as our master and teacher in virtue. He teaches, by setting before us the example and pattern of his own moral perfections. On some he bestows the means of knowing these perfections in a smaller measure only, and in a more dark and imperfect way: the pattern they have to follow therefore must be less perfect. To others he discovers them in the fullest and brightest manner, and consequently the example set before them is more perfect and complete; God our heavenly Father may be said to bestow more pains on their instruction than on the others: and if they who have this superior advantage make not a suitable proficiency, or if they neglect to copy after the example that is set before them, they must be vastly more inexcusable than others; and, if the neglect of the duty be in them more inexcusable, their obligation to it must be stronger and of greater force.

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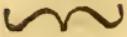
Now in goodness and beneficence, which of all the divine perfections is the most glorious in itself, and the most proper for our imitation, God instructs us, by his example, through the whole of his works and his dispensations to the children of men. As we are just now situated, in the works of creation and providence we are presented with a pattern less bright and perfect. In the dispensation of the divine love, in our redemption, we have an example, which in brightness and perfection infinitely exceeds all we are capable of conceiving. Here it is that we are taught in a most lively manner, how good and merciful God himself is, and what kindness and love he would have us to show to our brethren. In proportion therefore as this pattern which we enjoy is more perfect than the other; in the same proportion we are bound, by stronger obligations, to copy after it in love and beneficence to our fellow-creatures: and we will be more inexcusable than those who  
 have

have only the less perfect pattern, if we SERM.  
 be not thereby *transformed into the image of* IX.  
*God, and become followers of him as dear*  
*children, perfect as he is perfect, and mer-*  
*ciful as our heavenly Father is merciful.*  
 Thus much concerning the first view, in  
 which we are to consider this instance of  
 the goodness of God, as it sets before us a  
 pattern and example.

In the *second* place, God's love in send-  
 ing Jesus Christ into the world, lays us  
 under particular obligations to love one  
 another, as it is a greater favour and blef-  
 sing than God had ever bestowed on man-  
 kind, and consequently lays us under  
 stronger obligations to express our grati-  
 tude and thankfulness to Almighty God,  
 by loving and doing good to our fellow-  
 creatures. That we are bound to show  
 our thankfulness to God for the favours  
 he bestows on us, is a thing too plain to  
 need any proof: and that loving and do-  
 ing good to our fellow-creatures is the best  
 way

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way of expressing this thankfulness, is also abundantly evident, and has been illustrated in the preceding part of this discourse. Now our obligation to gratitude is always according to the nature and value of the favours bestowed on us; and, if love to our fellow-creatures be the best way of expressing our gratitude for the favours we receive from God, we must be bound in a greater or lesser degree to this love, in proportion to the nature and value of the blessings he has conferred upon us; and consequently, if Jesus Christ be the most valuable gift of God, if the blessings we enjoy by him be superior to all others, we are thereby laid under the highest and strictest obligations to this love and beneficence.

I MUST not attempt in this place to give any account of the infinite worth of this blessing; the subject is too large and extensive. The eternal, the only begotten Son of God, was the noblest, the most beneficial

neficial gift that it was possible, even for him, who is the fountain of all goodness, to bestow. By him we are taught the ways of truth and righteousness; by him we are delivered from the wrath of God, obtain the pardon of our sins, are rescued from the slavery of Satan, and advanced to the dignity of being the *sons of God*. By him we are *created again unto holiness*, and *made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*; and by him, if we are his faithful disciples, we are at length put in possession of the crown of glory, the celestial happiness that shall never decay. This, in short, is a blessing so rich and valuable, that from it the apostle authorises us to draw this great conclusion, *That if God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* As the blessing is in its own nature most valuable, so there are certain circumstances attending it which greatly contribute to enhance its value; and, by consequence,

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ought to increase our gratitude for it: that it was bestowed when we were in circumstances most deplorable, and had the least reason to expect or hope for so great a mercy: that it is a blessing which, in a peculiar manner, distinguishes the children of men as the favourites of heaven; not common or promiscuous like many other mercies we enjoy, but a blessing in which neither the higher nor the lower parts of creation share with man, and which was not vouchsafed to a much nobler order of beings, the angels who fell; tho' they stood as much in need of it as we.---By reasoning from this instance of divine love, above all others, we shall see the obligations to our duty, and the baseness of the contrary conduct appear in the strongest light.

LET us for illustration of this take some of the principal instances of beneficence we have occasion to show to our brethren, and consider with what convincing force they

they may be deduced from the principle of gratitude to God, for his love in Jesus Christ.

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IN the first place then, as to the love we ought to show to our brethren in their outward and temporal concerns; has God sent his Son into the world to deliver us from hell and destruction, and shall we scruple to relieve the miseries of our poor indigent brethren? Is God calling us to immortal glory and happiness, and shall not we in return lend our assistance to make the lives of our fellow-creatures as happy as possible? Has God bestowed on us this heavenly gift, the greatest he could give, and shall we grudge him a part of our worldly goods? How small is the demand, and disproportioned to the favour! What are all earthly possessions to the blessings offered us in Jesus Christ! And can we have a just sense of their value, if we think a small part of our perishing riches too high a testimony of our gratitude

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gratitude for them? The apostle *John*, in the preceeding chapter of this epistle, carries this point much farther, verse 17. *Hereby perceive we, says he, the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* A strong expression, to denote, that we are not to reckon any thing in our power too much, whereby we may contribute to the good of our fellow-creatures; even the sacrificing our lives, if it may tend to their advantage, is no more than what we are bound to, in return for that love of God which delivered his Son to the most accursed death, to redeem us from endless misery, and purchase eternal life. And from this the apostle, in the next verse, draws a very evident conclusion: *But whoso hath this world's goods, says he, and seeth his brother have need, and skutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* The laying down of our lives is an instance of benevolence we are seldom called to, the circumstances of

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of our brethren seldom requiring it; but how oft are they oppress'd with want, even of the necessaries of life; and shall we, who are obliged to devote our lives for them; scruple to relieve their necessity, when we can do it at the cheap rate of bestowing on them what to us is superfluous and unnecessary? Surely if we do, all our pretences of love and gratitude to God for his amazing goodness are empty, false and hypocritical.

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IN the next place, has God shown such concern for our souls, and shall not we show some concern for the souls of others? The great, the glorious end, for which the Son of God was sent into the world, even our redemption from the power of sin and the slavery of Satan, points out to us, as the most proper instance by which we can express our gratitude, the promoting the eternal happiness and welfare of our fellow creatures. This is the natural expression of thankfulness for such a favour. And as  
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the soul is more valuable than the body; as the blessedness of heaven is superior to all worldly happiness, and the misery of hell more terrible than the greatest wretchedness in this life; so the benevolence that respects the spiritual welfare of our fellow-creatures, vastly surpasses any kindness we can show them in their outward estate and temporal concerns. Thus the instructing the ignorant, giving advice to the weak, reproofing the careless, and even chastising the obstinately wicked, when done from a right principle, and with prudence, by persons of a proper character, are works of charity of a very noble kind.

CAN any man who himself is sensible of the importance of religion, who feels the happy influence of it on his own soul, who knows the blessedness of having peace with God, peace with himself, and the hope of eternal life; can such a man, without the most tender compassion, look on his brother, whose mind is blinded by his lusts and passions, and who is rushing head-



headlong to eternal destruction? Will not gratitude to that God who has made such a blessed change on his own soul, powerfully move him to do all he can to awaken his brother from his fatal sleep, to rouse him from that lethargy, which, otherwise, will soon end in death? Will he not recommend to him religion and virtue, and endeavour to convince him, that *her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace?* Will he not warn him of the deceitfulness of vice, and, with all the energy of the most real and friendly concern, set before him the trifling imaginary pleasure, and the vast, the terrible danger there is in treading the paths of sin?

WE must however beware of thinking, that by this beneficence to the souls of men, of how exalted a kind soever in itself, we may compound with them for showing no regard to their outward necessities. We must not think that instruction will serve instead of alms to the  
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beggar, or Christian advice for bread to the hungry. No ; for at this rate, all the concern we can show for their spiritual welfare will pass for a solemn piece of hypocrisy, the artful cloak of a niggardly uncharitable mind ; and we will be said to *love in word and in tongue, but not in deed and in truth.* But according to our several abilities we ought by relieving them in their temporal wants, first to convince them of our love and concern for them, and then our other endeavours will be better accepted, and meet with greater success. There are many other important good offices to our neighbour, which here might have been mentioned, and deduced from the principle of gratitude to God for his wonderful love to us ; but the time not allowing this, I come now to conclude the discourse with a general reflexion on the whole subject.

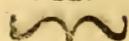
HERE then we have set before us the most excellent means of raising and preserving



serving in our souls this noble, this gener-  
 ous affection of love to our fellow crea-  
 tures ; even the serious and devout con-  
 templation of the goodness of God, that  
 love he has manifested to the children of  
 men in all his works and ways, but more  
 especially in Jesus Christ. Were our  
 minds duly impressed with a sense of the  
 divine goodness, and did we often raise  
 our thoughts to the glorious pattern here  
 proposed, how natural would it be for  
 every ingenuous spirit to draw the con-  
 clusion in the text, *if God has so loved us,*  
*ought we not also to love one another ?-----*  
 How happy were it for us, to be in this  
 respect Christians indeed, as we are in  
 name and profession ? Our religion is tru-  
 ly a religion of love ; this is the sum of  
 all it commands us ; this shone most con-  
 spicuously in the character of our blessed  
 Lord while on earth ; and this he has  
 appointed to be the mark and character  
 of his disciples to the end of the world.  
 The time has been, when this virtue shin-  
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ing brightly in the lives of Christians recommended their religion to others, and extorted praises even from its bitterest enemies. When the kindness, the charity, the love that mutually prevailed among Christians forced the learned heathen to conclude, that the doctrine which produced such blessed effects must needs be divine. But to our shame, we have *fallen from this first love*; we have forgot, or we despise the sacred ties by which as Christians we are united together. The benevolence of a Christian, no doubt, ought to be universal, and it is the honour of our religion that it enjoins love to all men. But it is not in the least inconsistent with this, that there should be a particular love required between those that are members of the Christian society, as there subsists a particular connexion among them. The warmer affections that are between father and son, brother and brother, and friend and friend, were never thought inconsistent with universal benevolence. These  
more

more private affections, if well regulated, will rather dispose us for the other : and without these 'tis to be feared there would be little of that extensive love in the world. The Christian religion therefore requires nothing mean and unworthy of its character, when it commands us to *do good unto all, but especially to those of the household of faith.* We are all fellow-servants of the same Lord, we are *all members of one body, whereof Jesus Christ is the head; a body which God hath so tempered together, that there should be no schism in it; that whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or whether one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.\** Have we all *one master, even Christ,* and shall we not *have peace one with another?* are we all brethren, and shall we not love as brethren? are we all *members of one body,* and shall we not join in promoting each other's happiness and welfare? shall we not be grieved with each

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\* 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

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others

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other's pain, and mutually rejoice in each other's health and soundness? shall a trifling distinction of rank beget envy or contempt? shall every fall of passion raise hatred and revenge? shall *foolish* and *unlearned questions* gender strife? shall the too eager pursuit of riches and power disturb that peace and harmony that ought to be among those who profess the religion of love? No, sure; but *let us as the children of God, holy and beloved, put on bowels of mercy, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, humility, forbearing one another and forgiving one another; and above all, let us put on charity which is the bond of perfectness; and thus we shall shew ourselves to be the disciples of him, who has commanded us to love one another as he has loved us.*

The Characters of TRUE and FALSE  
WISDOM.

A

LECTURE.

JAMES iii. 13.----to the end.

- V. 13. *Who is a wise man, and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*
14. *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.*
15. *This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.*
16. *For where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work.*
17. *But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*
18. *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

**I**N order to our having a distinct view of this excellent passage of scripture,

it will be of use to inquire into the connection of it with what goes before, and the occasion upon which it is introduced. From the beginning of the chapter the apostle had represented with the greatest eloquencé the dreadful wickedness of a malicious unbridled tongue, that *unruly evil which is full of deadly poison; that world of iniquity which defileth the whole body, which setteth on fire the course of nature, and is itself set on fire of hell.* With equal force of reason he shows, how absurd and contradictory it is, that the member which we employ in the heavenly exercise of  *blessing and praising God, should ever be prostituted to so base and so impious a purpose, as the cursing and reviling those who are made after the similitude of God; how unnatural and monstrous it is, that the tongue, which this moment is employed in adoring the divine mercy and goodness, should the next be employed in backbiting and slander, and casting about firebrands, arrows and death. Doth a fountain,*

*tain, saith the apostle, send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries, either a vine figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh; and neither ought there out of the same mouth to proceed blessing and cursing.*

BUT as the apostle very well knew, that how strong and just soever these reasonings were, yet they would not make sufficient impression on the bulk of men; he therefore, in the verses which were now read, sets himself to trace this evil to the source, and to correct those false principles from which all the disorders of the tongue flow. Whence is it that the tongue has become the instrument of so much wickedness and confusion in the world? Is it from pure unmixed malice? Can we from the infamy, disgrace or misery of our fellow-creatures in themselves, reap pleasure or happiness? and are men wicked merely from love to wickedness itself? No; this

is a height of vice, which our nature, fallen and degenerate as it is, ought not to be charged with. But it is pride, that selfish passion, which tells us, that by every bright and shining character our own is darkened and eclipsed, and persuades us, that by blackening the characters of others, our own will appear in a more advantageous light. It is pride that makes us blind to our wants and failings, and at the same time renders us quick-sighted in discerning the smallest imperfections of others: and whence comes this pride, but from a conceit of superior worth and merit in ourselves, from an opinion of our being possessed of those good qualities, which we despise others for the want of, or of our being free from those faults and blemishes which we observe and censure in others?

Now, of all the accomplishments that men value themselves upon, the endowments and abilities of the mind bear the  
first

first place : to these, men have thought fit to give the honourable name of wisdom, and it is the conceit or affectation of a superiority in this wisdom, which is the great source of pride, as pride is the source of those evils the apostle has been inveighing against. This bad effect it had in a remarkable manner on the *Jews*, to whom you find this epistle particularly directed. They were so excessively proud of an imagined superiority in wisdom and knowledge, that they looked down on the rest of mankind with a disdainful haughtiness, reviled them as no better than dogs, and judged them unworthy of their regard and friendship. Their doctors, who spent their time in the study of the law, advanced in insolence and ill-nature, as they did in learning, expected to be adored by the people, and treated with the greatest bitterness and most scandalous reproaches all that opposed them, or refused them that profound respect to which they thought themselves intitled. Even those  
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who had become converts to Christianity still retained too much of this pride, malice and bitterness. These evil passions ordinarily vented themselves in reviling and calumny, and produced the greatest disorder and confusion in society. To put a stop therefore to these practices, so inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel, the apostle here examines this wisdom of theirs, and proves from its producing such effects, that it must be false and corrupt, *earthly, sensual and devilish.* And as the comparing of two contrary objects makes each of them appear in a stronger light, he sets the characters and effects of true wisdom in opposition to those of that wisdom which they gloried in; that by the beauty and excellency of the one, the deformity of the other might make the deeper impression on their minds.

In the 13th verse, he addresses them in a general way, *Who is a wise man, and endowed with knowledge amongst you, let him shew*

*shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*----Ye court the name of *Rabbi*, and distinguish yourselves by the title of the wise men ; but is there any amongst you, who would appear eminent for wisdom, and would really deserve that honourable character you so much pretend to ? it must not be by an extraordinary proficiency in this or the other piece of learning, nor even by a greater knowledge in religion and the mysteries of the law, that you are to support this claim : it must not be by assuming airs of superiority, and treating with ill-nature and contempt those whom you think below you. But *let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.* Let him by a good conversation, a life of virtue and goodness, show his works, the effects of his wisdom, *in meekness.*

THO' there is nothing men pretend to more generally than wisdom, nothing which they can bear worse than the contrary

trary character, yet there is nothing in their notions of which they have been more generally mistaken. That wisdom is the pursuing the worthiest ends by the most proper means, has indeed always been acknowledged; but in chusing the ends most worthy of their pursuit, mankind have too generally failed, and thus have catched at shadows instead of the substance. As the worthiest end that can be pursued by a rational creature is the perfection and happiness of his nature; as the proper means for this is the improvement of himself in virtue and goodness; so the only valuable wisdom must lye in the pursuit of happiness, by the practice of holiness and virtue. This is what the apostle here expresses by *a good conversation*; and this is the notion of true wisdom, which is given us in the word of God. *Behold the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way. I lead in the way of righteousness, saith Wisdom,*

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dom, *in the midst of the paths of judgment; pride and arrogance, and the evil way and the froward mouth do I hate.* All the other qualifications which the world have dignified with this name, are only valuable, when they are accompanied with this, and conduce to it as their great end. The man of clear understanding and extensive learning has commonly pass'd with the world for a wise man, and the man who has the dexterity of managing the business of life with art and prudence we commonly honour with the same character. But these qualities are not of themselves sufficient to denominate the possessors of them truly wise. The men of the greatest abilities may, and often do, lay out these abilities in designs the most base and pernicious; and the art of managing worldly affairs is too commonly employed in overreaching and taking the advantage of those we deal with, and frequently deserves the name of knavish cunning, rather than wisdom. But if a man employ his knowledge  
and

and judgment in regulating his own conduct according to the rules of virtue, in advancing the glory of God, and the welfare of his fellow-creatures; if he lay out his talent for business in promoting what is just and laudable, in relieving the oppress'd, and supporting the interests of equity, mercy and truth in the world, then only it becomes that true wisdom, which is the greatest ornament of our nature.

A PROFOUND knowledge in religion, and skill in nicely determining cases of their law, was the wisdom of the *Jewish* doctors: but of what use was all this knowledge, if, in proportion to it, their lives were not more holy and righteous, and more conform'd to those precepts they had so much studied? Knowledge in religion is necessary to regulate our practice in it; but if we apply it not to this purpose, it can be of no other use, but to render our condemnation the greater; as it is the misimprovement of greater advantages.

Therefore,

Therefore, says the apostle, *Is there any man endowed with knowledge among you? this knowledge is good for nothing, if he cannot show the effects of it by a good conversation; and this good conversation, by which we are to show our wisdom, in which true wisdom really consists, must be accompanied with meekness. Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*

As *meekness* itself is a considerable part of the virtuous character, so it casts a beauty and grace on all the other parts of it. It is *an ornament, which in the sight of God is of great price*, and a constant attendant of true wisdom. The truly wise man will so rule his own spirit, as to think humbly of himself; to love, regard, and honour his fellow-creatures; will not be filled with pride, ill-nature and frowardness; but inspired with moderation towards all men, so that *in lowliness of mind he will esteem another better than himself, will be ready in honour to prefer him, and*  
tho'

tho' *strong*, will bear the *infirmities of the weak*. It is only false wisdom which is consistent with wickedness and folly, which is productive of pride and ill-nature, and is seldom to be found without them. How oft may we see men, by superior attainments in learning, and a conceit of brighter parts, so swelled with pride and arrogance as to become intolerable to those they converse with? Tho' meekness and modesty be the amiable qualities that set off superior endowments, and make them valued and admired by the world; yet there is nothing more certain than the apostle's sentence, that *knowledge puffeth up*; fills men with pride, and an insolent contempt of the rest of the world. The apostle therefore very justly lays down this particular quality of meekness as the distinguishing mark, by which we may discern between true and false wisdom, the one being always accompanied with it, and the other, for the most part, with the

quite

quite opposite qualities, which the apostle goes on to shew in the

14th VERSE. *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.* If that wisdom of yours beget envy and strife, instead of meekness, *glory not*; value not yourselves too highly on your possessing it, nor flatter yourselves, that it is so excellent an attainment. *Lie not against the truth*; that is, pretend not that it is the true wisdom, which deserves the approbation of our own minds, and the highest regard and honour from mankind. Nothing is more certain, than that the false wisdom, of which virtue makes no part, is frequently productive of the worst dispositions, and especially of envy, that noxious passion, which is poison to every good quality of the heart; and which indeed of all our passions is the vilest in its nature, and the most dangerous in its consequences. *Wrath is cruel, anger is outrageous, but who can stand*

*stand before envy?* Does any of their fellow-creatures excel or but rival these pretended wise men in fame, for those accomplishments to which they lay claim? Their proud hearts cannot bear it; they begin to look upon him with a malicious eye, and their secret grudge soon breaks out in all the arts of reproach and calumny to lessen his character; they question his attainments as false and superficial, and leave no way untried to rob him of the esteem and respect of the world. This *bitter envying* naturally begets *strife*; destroys that peace, friendship and good understanding which sweetens society, and in the room of these produces enmity and contention. In how many instances may we see the ambitious pursuit of reputation for this false wisdom followed with all these mischievous effects? Men who from their childhood have been companions and friends, when their characters come to be opposed to each other, and the world is putting the question, who has the superiority,

periority, will then begin to show a sensible coldness to each other: their mutual confidence ceases, their friendly intercourse is at an end, and by degrees their former friendship degenerates into an inveterate enmity; and yet these very men will glory in their wisdom, and all the quarrel is, that the one pretends to have more than his neighbour of that which with the men of the world passes under that term. But tho' they have *said they will be wise, yet it is far from them, for their foolishness hath perverted their ways, and the thoughts of their hearts are vanity.*

FOR *this wisdom* which occasions such *strife and envying*, verse 15, *descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.* It is not the true, the heavenly wisdom which assimilates us to God, of which he is the most perfect pattern; of which, he is the fountain and source; and which, by the benign influences of his grace, is begot and nourished in the minds of men. But *it is earthly*: as things in a figurative

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way are said to be *heavenly*, when they are of a noble exalted kind; so in opposition to this character, when any thing is said to be *earthly*, it denotes the lowness, meanness and baseness of its nature. And this wisdom is not only *earthly*, in this sense, as there is nothing heavenly or excellent in its nature; but as it has no higher aim than attaining the honours and profits of the present life, and is moved by a vain ambition for fame and reputation, or a meaner passion after riches and wealth; while the true wisdom has a nobler aim, and a more exalted view, and by the pursuit of virtue and goodness here, aspires at that happiness, which consists in the perfection of virtue and goodness above: *The way of life is above to the wise to depart from hell beneath.* ❀

*Sensual*; The word so rendered is commonly in the new testament translated *natural*. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God*; and the meaning

meaning here must be, that it is a wisdom that can only take place, while our natures are corrupted, and before they are sanctified by the spirit of God; a wisdom which is not the *fruit of the spirit*, but of the *flesh which lusteth against the spirit*; among the works of which the apostle numbereth *hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife and seditions*.

BUT this wisdom is not only *earthly* and *sensual*, but *devilish*. As every good gift and valuable quality is in the new testament ascribed to the influence of the divine grace, so the contrary dispositions and effects are ascribed to and represented as flowing from an opposite principle; even the power of evil spirits in our minds. But without confining it to this view, this character of the false wisdom may be explained as denoting that it inspires us with ill-nature, malice and cruelty, and thus gives us a great resemblance to those fallen angels, who having irrecoverably forfeited their own

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happinefs, delight in destroying the happinefs of others. To prove that this wifdom which begets *strife* and *envy* deferves thefe bad characters he had given of it, the apoftle fubjoins in the

16th VERSE, *For where envying and strife is, there is confufion and every evil work.* Such is the mifchievous nature of envy and strife, that when they have taken poffeffion of mens hearts, they deftroy the peace and quiet of their lives, produce the greateft tumults and diforders in fociety, and lead men to the commiffion of all manner of wickednefs. How miserable muft he be, whofe mind is harrafs'd with thefe uneasy paffions? The man of a friendly benevolent temper enjoys a fweet calm in his own mind; he is happy in the happinefs of thofe about him; he reaps a fenfible pleafure and joy from the welfare of his fellow-creatures, and thus has a double fource of peace and delight. As for the envious man on the other hand,

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the prosperity and welfare of those around him is to him gall and bitterness, and blasts the comfort he might otherways have in the most favourable situation of life. His turbulent and vitious passions allow him no rest, but unweariedly push him on from one dark contrivance to another. And the bad consequences of these passions are not confined within his own breast, but produce the greatest disturbance in society, for *where envying and strife is, there is confusion.*

How oft may we see the pride and ambition, the envious seditious temper of one single man, set a whole people in a flame; and that which was originally but a quarrel between two private persons, divide a nation into parties, and ferment into the greatest heat, noise and tumult? Could we trace back to their first springs those intestine wars that break the peace of nations, we would find them to have arisen from private contentions and animosities  
reigning

reigning at first in the breasts of a few men, but which, like fire spreading by degrees, at length produce a general conflagration. These more secret springs will no doubt be carefully hidden, and the most specious pretences will be given out to draw others into the contention; religion, liberty, and every thing that is valued and esteemed by men, will be brought into the cause, and even peace itself will be brought upon the field to countenance confusion and war; while, in the mean time, the vain ambition or unbounded avarice of some, and the envy and strife of others, is at the bottom of all.

But strife and envy produce not only *confusion*, but *every evil work*. How justly the apostle has added this clause, every one will see, who reflects to what an extraordinary height of wickedness men frequently arise, in the pursuit of those contests occasioned by their envy and strife. All the arts of slander, defamation and calumny

ny will be put in practice ; corruption and falshood, partiality and injustice, nay violence and oppression will go easily down, if they but seem to tend to the advantage and success of their designs ; designs base beyond all doubt, when brought about or supported by such execrable means. Can then a quality which has such pernicious effects, and which gives birth to such corrupt dispositions, descend from above ? Can hatred and envy come from him who is love ? or strife and confusion from the God of peace and order ? Can that which gives rise to so much wickedness proceed from him whose *name is holy, all whose ways are righteousness and truth* ? Can that deserve the name of wisdom, which robs our souls of rest ? which raises a thousand uneasy passions in our breasts, and is inconsistent with the peace and happiness of our fellow-creatures ? How great is the degeneracy and corruption of mankind ! There is nothing worthy and excellent which they have not defaced,

have

have not preverted into a sort of conformity with their own vitiated minds. Religion and wisdom were things too venerable to be entirely exploded; but men have found means to make religion consistent with wickedness, and wisdom with vice and folly; to turn religion into the superstitious observance of rites and ceremonies, and entirely to exclude virtue from the notion of wisdom; that tho' they had no pretensions to religion and wisdom itself, they might at least be flattered with the honourable name.

THE apostle having laid before us the bad consequences of those perverse notions which prevailed in the world, and having given a just account of the nature and effects of that false and spurious wisdom, in which the men of the world are ready so much to glory; in the next verse opens to us a scene more delightful and agreeable.

VERSE 17th. *But the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.* Here all I can propose, is, shortly to hint at what may be meant by these different characters of true wisdom. The general description of it is, that it *descendeth from above*: the import of which will be sufficiently understood, by what has been already said under the 15th verse. Some indeed, by this wisdom that is *from above*, do not understand wisdom, as it is an excellent quality, habit or principle of virtue in the soul; but take the apostle here to be giving the characters of the Christian religion, of that doctrine of morality which Jesus came down from heaven to teach the world, in opposition to that corrupt morality taught and practised by the *Jewish* teachers, which they think he had before represented as the wisdom which *descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual and devilish.*

THE ancients, when speaking of any valuable art or discovery highly beneficial to mankind, commonly deduce its origin from heaven, and acknowledge that they owed it to the teaching of the gods. Thus fire is said to have been stolen from heaven; the useful arts of agriculture, and such like, are ascribed to the direction of such and such particular deities; and philosophy itself is said to have come down from heaven. Whether they really believed that they owed every blessing, every valuable piece of knowledge to the goodness of their gods, and the kind interposition of heaven; or whether, by these ways of speaking, they would only express the excellency of the things themselves, needs not be inquired into. But here, in both these senses, may it be said of true wisdom, that it *descendeth from above*, as it is highly excellent in itself, and as it is the gift of him who *possessed wisdom in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old; who understandeth the way and knoweth the*  
*place*

place thereof; who giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. And indeed it must be owned, that many of the properties of the true wisdom are very applicable to the Christian revelation. It cometh from above, in the most excellent sense; it is not the product of imposture, the invention of crafty priests or designing politicians, but came from him who *was in the bosom of the Father*, and appeared on earth to reveal him to the children of men; who, by his wonderful works, his holy life, and his divine precepts, proved himself to be a teacher come from God. Again, as the design and natural tendency of the religion of Christ is to make us holy, peaceable, moderate, merciful and beneficent, these characters may, in a figurative way, be applied to the religion itself.

BUT as some other of these epithets cannot, without much force, be applied to any body and system of precepts, we  
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chuse to consider them in the same light in which we have already taken the characters of the false wisdom, as marks and properties, or distinguishing effects of a certain quality in the soul; as characteristics, by which we may know, whether we be endowed with that true wisdom which Jesus Christ has instructed us in, and which is the effect of the Spirit working on our souls.

THIS wisdom, then, is *first pure* or chaste. That is said to be pure and chaste in its kind, whose natural simplicity or beauty, goodness or excellence, is not polluted or tainted by the addition or mixture of any thing that can defile or debase it. When applied to the soul and its affections, it denotes, that the beauty of the soul, that is its innocence and virtue, is not corrupted and deformed by any irregular desires and vicious appetites. The wisdom which the *Jewish* teachers valued themselves upon, and which the generality of mankind  
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are ready to be so fond of, Superiority in knowledge and the abilities of the mind, is in its own degree a very valuable quality, if it be pure and chaste; that is, if it be not attended with pride and an overbearing opinion of a man's self; if it be not productive of *envy, strife, confusion, and every evil work*; but being, as is too frequently the case, joined, and as it were blended with these bad qualities, it loses its purity, and consequently its excellence. But the *wisdom which is from above* is not mixt with any vicious passion, is incapable of being moved by any wrong principle, or of proposing to itself any end that is unworthy or mean. As it is pure and excellent in itself, so it is pure in its designs, and pure in all the means it uses in bringing about these designs. As it proposes a higher aim than the acquisition of the riches, honours, or pleasures of the present life; as its designs are more generous and noble than those of the false wisdom, so it cannot pursue these designs  
by

by those base arts of dissembling and equivocation, ill-nature and malice, strife and contention, those ordinary means by which the pretended wise men of the world carry on their favourite designs. The truly wise man will never do evil that good may come of it, or persuade himself that the goodness, the lawfulness of the end will sanctify the means, however base and dishonourable.

HAVING mentioned this more general property, the apostle proceeds to those which are more particular. It is observable, that he gives the wisdom that is from above this character of pure, with an emphasis, *first pure*, and *then*, says he, *peaceable*; intimating to us, that whatever qualifications a man's wisdom may seem to have, it could not be from above, unless it were in the first place *pure*; that this is a qualification so fundamental, so necessary, that all the rest would be deficient without it. *Peace, gentleness*, and the  
 others

others that follow, are indeed excellent qualifications of wisdom ; but unless there be purity also, the character of the divine and heavenly wisdom will not be complete.

THE wisdom that is from above is *peaceable*. As this wisdom is pure and untainted with any vicious passions, so it must needs be peaceable ; for, *whence*, saith the apostle at the beginning of the following chapter, *come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even from your lusts that war in your members?* The truly wise man will abhor contention, and, *if it be possible, as much as in him lyes, will live peaceably with all men.* The wisdom which is moved by pride and ambition must needs engender strife and confusion, as it is not to be expected, that those worldly men will be so much mortified in their passions, as to bear with patience the disrespectful behaviour of others, and not endeavour to resent it, even tho' their own haughty behaviour has given the first cause of offence.

fence. Nay, how oft do the wise men of the world find tumults and divisions necessary to bring about their interested designs; how oft do they rejoice in them in secret, as happy occasions of showing the superior abilities they pretend to; and cherish and foment them as the effectual instruments of raising them to their wish'd for greatness. But the truly wise man, as he has no designs to pursue that are inconsistent with the interests of his fellow-creatures, and as he is under the influence of no unsocial passion that can render his behaviour offensive to those about him; so he must of course live peaceably with all men. He will delight in peace, as the best means to bring about those honourable purposes he pursues of promoting his own happiness by the good and virtuous government of his mind and affections, and of advancing the welfare of mankind. This and the former character are well put together in that precept of the apostle to the *Hebrewes*; *Follow peace with all men,*  
*and*

*and holiness, (or purity) without which no man shall see the Lord.\**

BUT this wisdom is not only *peaceable*, but *gentle*, humane and moderate. True wisdom will be so far from harbouring any of those passions that are injurious and offensive to our neighbour, and that disturb the peace of society, that it will inspire us with an amiable sweetness of temper. Here we receive some light from the opposite character, which *Solomon* describes of those who are *over-wise and righteous over-much*. There are men who affect an uncommon austerity and strictness, who, by their morose zeal and ill-timed severity, deter people from their company, and represent wisdom, religion and virtue in a very unpleasant light; who, by an excessive stiffness and solemnity of behaviour, and an affectation of extraordinary gravity on every the least occasion, seem to discover the inward sentiments of

\* Heb. xii. 14.

their hearts to be, that they are the *only wise men, and that wisdom will die with them*; and that they consider it as an instance of condescension, when they daign to converse with their fellow-creatures. This is the spirit, these are the manners of false wisdom. But true wisdom will make the generous love to mankind, that glows in our breasts, appear in an engaging affability and complaisance to those we converse with. Under the influence of this noble principle, instead of indulging a sour, a peevish or angry temper, on any little vexations we may meet with from them, we will look upon these with indifference, as what we must expect from the unavoidable weakneses and infirmities of human nature, and will demonstrate, by the continuance of our kind friendly behaviour, that we have overlooked these small failings.- Instead of giving way to any unbecoming heat and fury, upon any accidental opposition of sentiments, or clashing of interests, the truly wise man will bear it  
with

with a noble constancy and equality of temper; knowing, that it is as absurd to expect, in the present state of things, that his friend shall always think as he thinks, or always concur in the same pursuits, and never have any worldly interests separate from his, as it would be to expect that he shall have the same features and lineaments of face. He will support his own opinions and interests with calmness and fairness, and treat his friend that differs from him with candour, moderation and gentleness.

BUT further, this wisdom is *easy to be entreated*, or, as it may be better render'd, *easy to be persuaded*. If any one have given offence to the truly wise man, he will easily be persuaded to forgive him. If he himself has been in a mistake, he will patiently hear what others can say for rectifying his error, and will not persist in it against sound reason offer'd to the contrary. He will listen to any good advice that is

given him, and will not be hard to be wrought upon by the entreaties of those that desire his favour and assistance. All this I take to be included in this wisdom's being *easy to be entreated*. It is not being easy to be moved merely by noise and importunity, without reason, against the settled judgment of a man's mind; this would be levity and folly: but it imports an easiness to listen to every thing that can in reason be proposed to him, and a readiness to assent and comply as soon as ever he is convinced thereby.

BIGOTRY is the offspring of pride and ignorance, and a very despicable character it forms. As this was very remarkable in the *Jews*, whom the apostle has here particularly in his eye, so it is a frequent attendant of false wisdom. Men have such an overweening opinion of themselves, so low an opinion of others, that they consider their own notions as so many oracles and incontestable principles; they despise  
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whatever is said against them, are deaf to reason, and incapable of conviction; or, if the force of truth make any impression on their minds, they are too proud to acknowledge it, and would think it a degrading of themselves to own they had been in an error. But as true wisdom inspires a man with meekness and humility, so it gives him such a love of truth, that he will embrace it and rejoice in it, from whatever quarter it comes, and however opposite it may be to his former darling opinions, which perhaps he has published and defended. His ingenuous soul cannot stand or resist the force of evidence, and will rather give truth the victory, than at the expence of truth contend for conquest over one whom he may think a weaker adversary. Had men always been ruled by such noble and worthy principles as these, the church, the world had never been troubled with so many controversies and disputes of tedious length and useless bulk. But men, for the most part, are  
scarce

scarce well engaged in these debates, but the truth is immediately out of question; and the only contest is, which of the two shall be reckoned the learnedest man and the acutest disputant; which shall give the last blow, or shall first leave the field of battle. This is a weakness of the most scandalous, the most dangerous kind, and worse even than bigotry itself. The truly wise man, as nothing but superior evidence will ever move him from the profession of what he thinks the truth; so whenever this appears, he will embrace its welcome light, and no mean consideration will tempt him to disown or reject it.

THE wisdom that is from above, as it is *easy to be entreated*, so also is *full of mercy and of good fruits*. *Mercy* may be here taken for the inward principle, and *good fruits* for the effect of this principle in our outward actions. Divine wisdom fills men with tenderness and compassion towards those that are miserable in any respect, whether

whether it be from their infirmities of body or mind, or from any calamity that befalls them from without ; it supposes them to look on the case of others as if it were their own ; to have an inward feeling of their unhappiness, and consequently to do whatever lyes in their power for their relief or assistance ; to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, to comfort the disconsolate, to instruct the ignorant, to admonish and reclaim transgressors ; these are the *good fruits* which naturally spring from the *mercy* here mentioned, of which the apostle tells us the wise man *is full*. True wisdom will be particularly tender and compassionate towards those who have erred from the right path, either in their principles or practice, inclining rather to save than to destroy them, and trying every possible laudable means of bringing them back to a right mind. If a pure and well-tempered zeal for the glory of God, and a tender pity and compassion for our brethren

are the principles (as they ought to be) by which we are acted, these principles will show themselves by their *good fruits*; they will never bring forth ill-nature and malice, violence and cruelty, force and persecution. These principles will never lead us to make havock of mens bodies for the good of their souls, or to imagine, that stripes and chains, racks and tortures are the proper means to convert the finner, instruct the ignorant, or reduce the erroneous. These practices must flow from other, and from baser motives: and as every wise man must see that they are unfit to bring about the end they pretend to propose, so he that is endowed with this heavenly wisdom, of which *mercy* makes a chief character, will abhor them as worse than those evils they pretend to cure. But if his brother, who has gone astray, can be reduced by all the acts of charity, the testimonies of love, and good offices of friendship, by all the force of reason and persuasion, by the most convincing

vincing proof of his love and concern for him, these he will not fail to use, for these are the *good fruits* of his *mercy* towards his brethren. This is the wisdom which discovers itself to have truly come *from above*, even from God the Father of all good, who desireth the happiness of his creatures; who is the *Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and slow to anger, not willing that any should perish, but that they should turn from their ways and live*; from that God, who hath commanded us to *be followers of him as dear children, and to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful.*

THIS *mercy* and all the former graces, the apostle tells us, the truly wise man will exercise *without partiality*, or without putting a difference between man and man. This was the intolerable vice of the *Jews*; they confined all their love, charity and beneficence first to their own nation, and when that was split into parties,

ties, next to the faction they had joined with. This narrow contracted spirit made them odious even to the heathen world, whose writers we find representing them in the blackest colours, for this very reason, as refusing to show the way to a wandering stranger, or denying him a draught of water tho' dying for thirst. Of this likewise our blessed Saviour couches a very sharp reproof in the parable of the *Samaritan* and the wounded man. And this perhaps is too much the vice of many Christians, that they confine their charity to one party and denomination of Christians; they are blind to the highest worth and merit, if it be on a different side from them, and equally blind to the greatest faults and blemishes in those of their own way: they will search into private characters, and put the worst construction they can invent on the most indifferent actions of those that differ from them; whereas the zealots on their own side are sure to have the greatest crimes apologized

apologized for, and the worst character varnished over and set off in the best light.

BUT the truly wise man will judge of others according to their true and real characters, and not as prejudice or passion are apt to disguise them: as he will take no pleasure in raking into the vices of men of any side, so he will acknowledge and honour merit, wherever it appears. His soul is too great to be moved with these petty distinctions and differences that make such deep impressions on the minds of others, and warp both their judgment and their affections. He observes a generous uniformity in his beneficence to mankind, and embraces as his friend a good and virtuous man, in whatever company he finds him.

BUT this impartiality is to be shown not only in our judgments of men and our behaviour towards them, but likewise

in our judgment of opinions. It directs us not to allow the prejudices of education, or our veneration for any particular set of men, so to enslave our minds, as (without examination) implicitly to receive any scheme of doctrine, or blindly to reject whatever may be contrary to it.

THE apostle concludes his account of *the wisdom which cometh from above*, by telling us that it is *without hypocrisy* or dissimulation; which may either signify, that it will not delight in vain ostentation, as hypocrites are wont to do, whose highest design being to gain the esteem of men, they will take the utmost pains to proclaim their own goodness, to divulge their piety and pretended virtues and good qualities before the world. True wisdom, at the same time that it will do all that it can justly to deserve the applause of men, will yet be so humble and modest, as rather to shun than to court it. Or in the more common acceptation of the word,

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the phrase here used may denote being without dissimulation, honest and sincere. The truly wise man will abhor all trick and deceit, will neither be double fac'd nor double minded ; will not *blefs with his mouth and curse inwardly, speaking lies in hypocrisy* ; will be affable, civil and courteous to those he converses with, but will never descend to base flattery, or sooth bad men with compliments which his heart tells him they do not deserve. He will not, by a friendly behaviour, cover an unfriendly mind, cover hatred by deceit, or insinuate himself into the confidence of any man with a design to supplant and betray him. His whole behaviour towards his fellow-creatures will be nothing more than the expression of the inward respect and love he really bears to them in his heart. *The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, but he that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet ; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.*

THE apostle concludes the chapter, verse 18th, *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.* Which words may admit of two different interpretations. As the great design which the apostle has in view, as was before noticed, is to correct the pride, wrath and malice which prevailed among those he wrote to, which he does by laying before them its bad consequences, *strife and confusion*, and representing how inconsistent it was with that true and heavenly wisdom, which inspires men with *gentleness, peace and mercy*: in this verse he may be understood as showing the advantages of following this true wisdom, rather than indulging such noxious passions. *The fruit, the reward of righteousness is sown in peace*; is kept and reserved in a happier, a more peaceful and glorious state hereafter, *of them that make peace*, that is, for them that are endued with this wisdom, which delights in peace. The fruits are the reward of the toil of the husband-

husbandman; these fruits may be said to be *sown*, when that seed is sown which by the blessing of God will produce them. The apostle therefore tells us that *peace* is a seed, which whoever sows, it will by the goodness of God yield to him the *fruits of righteousness*; the like figure is used by the psalmist, *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart*; and by the wise man, *To him that soweth righteousness, shall be a sure reward; sow to yourselves in righteousness, says the prophet, and reap in mercy.*

OTHERS again conceive the apostle here to be answering an objection that might be raised against what he had said. Shall we by our gentleness and meekness indulge and cherish the wickedness of others? Ought we not rather to use all our zeal to punish and root it out? The truly wise men, says the apostle, by his compassion and meekness neither favours nor connives at vice and wickedness, but will  
correct

correct it with such moderation as is consistent with good order and peace, and shall thereby always have most success on the minds of men. Like a wise physician, he will treat his patient softly and tenderly, will not immediately apply the last and most dreadful remedies, but reserve them, till he has tried those of a milder nature without success. Thus, *in peace*, that is, by the most endearing means of persuasion and kindness, in the spirit of meekness, will the wise man who follows peace *show the fruits of righteousness*; correct the vices and reform the lives of those who have gone astray, and bring them to the practice of righteousness with infinitely greater success than those, whose unbridled zeal puts all things into disorder; whose harshness and severity may well frighten men, or raise their hatred and detestation, but will never succeed so as to persuade or gain them.

I SHALL conclude this discourse by recommending to our study and practice  
this

this heavenly wisdom, in the beautiful words of *Solomon*, who introduces wisdom herself addressing us in a most pathetic manner: *Now therefore hearken unto me ye children, for blessed are they who keep my ways; hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors; for whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.\**

\* *Prov. viii. 32---36.*

F I N I S.

