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S E R M O N S
O N
SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbishop of CANTERBURY.

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By BEILBY PORTEUS D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

His Grace's Chaplains.

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C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

P H I L. iv. 8.

*Finally, Brethren, whatsoever Things are true,
whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever
Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure,
whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever
Things are of good Report; if there be any
Virtue, and if there be any Praise, think on
these Things.*

p. 1

S E R M O N II.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord,
choose you this Day whom you will serve:
whether the Gods which your Fathers served,
that were on the other Side of the Flood; or
the Gods of the Amrites, in whose Land ye
dwell: but as for me and my House, we will
serve the Lord.*

p. 25

S E R M O N III.

M A T T H. xxii. 37, 38.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind. This is the first and great Commandment.

p. 49

S E R M O N IV.

M A T T H. xxii. 39.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.

p. 97.

S E R M O N V.

Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.

M A T T H. iv. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the Wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil.

p. 103

S E R M O N VI.

Preached at the Chapel Royal, St. James's; on Palm Sunday.

P H I L. ii. 21.

For all seek their own, not the Things which are Jesus Christ's.

p. 125

S E R M O N . VII.

Preached at the Chapel Royal, St. James's ;
on Palm Sunday.

G A L . vi. 14.

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the
Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ : by whom the
World is crucified unto me, and I unto the
World.*

p. 147

S E R M O N . VIII.

Preached on Easter Sunday.

C O L . iii. 1, 2.

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those Things
which are above, where Christ sitteth on the
right Hand of God.*

*Set your Affection on Things above, not on Things
on the Earth.*

p. 171

S E R M O N . IX.

I J O H N ii. 7, 8.

*Brethren, I write no new Commandment unto
you, but an old Commandment, which ye had
from the Beginning : the old Commandment is
the Word, which ye have heard from the
Beginning.*

Again,

*Again, a new Commandment I write unto you :
which Thing is true in him and in you ; because the Darkness is past, and the true Light now shineth.*

p. 195

S E R M O N X.

I P E T E R iv. 8.

And above all Things have fervent Charity among yourselves : for Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins.

p. 217

S E R M O N XI.

M A T T H. x. 34.

Think not that I am come to send Peace on Earth : I came not to send Peace, but a Sword.

p. 241

S E R M O N XII.

I S A I A H i. 16, 17.

Cease to do Evil, learn to do well.

p. 267

S E R M O N S XIII. XIV.

2 S A M. xii. 13.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto

C O N T E N T S.

vii

*David, The Lord also hath put away thy Sin:
thou shalt not die.* p. 289, 311

S E R M O N S XV. XVI.

E P H. V. II.

*And have no Fellowship with the unfruitful
Works of Darkness: but rather reprove them.*

P. 333, 355

S E R M O N XVII.

L A M. III. 40.

*Let us search and try our Ways, and turn again
to the Lord.*

P. 379

S E R-

SERMON I.

PHIL, iv. 8.

Finally, Brethren, whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report; if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praise, think on these Things.

AS the excellent Characters of the first Believers and Teachers of Christianity are in general a strong Recommendation of it to Mankind: so that of St. Paul in particular shines with distinguished Lustre through his whole History; but especially his Epistles, the faithful Pictures of his Soul. Even in this short one to the *Philippians*, it is surprizing to observe, how great a Variety of most exalted and engaging Virtues he shews. The Authority of the Apostle is so perfectly tempered with the Condescension of the Fellow-Christian:

the Expressions of his Tenderness for those to whom he writes are so indearing and instructive at the same Time: his Acknowledgments of their Kindnesses to him, so equally full of Dignity, Humility and Disinterestedness: his Mention of his past Persecutions is so mild; and of his present Danger, (for he wrote from a Prison) so cheerful: his Attention to the supporting of their Courage is so affecting; and his Confidence, that both he and they should persevere and conquer, is so noble, and yet so modest: his Deliberation, whether Life or Death be eligible, is so calm; and his Preference to live, even in Misery, for their Sakes and that of the Gospel, is so genuinely heroic, yet fully equalled by the composed and triumphant Mention, which he elsewhere makes, of his approaching Martyrdom: his Zeal for propagating Religion is so ardent; yet attended with so deep a Concern, that it be indeed true Religion: he is so earnest to guard them, both against a superstitious Reliance on outward Observances, and a licentious Abuse of the Doctrines of Faith and Grace; so solicitous to improve them in rational Piety, and meek benevolent Virtue; so intent to fix their Minds on every thing worthy and amiable, and raise

them above every thing gloomy or anxious ; his Warmth in this glorious Cause, is so far from being affected or forced ; and every Expression so evidently flows from a Heart, which cannot help overflowing, that, whoever shall read but this one Epistle with Attention and Fairness, under all the Disadvantages of a Translation made Word for Word, and broken into short Verses, will feel a strong Impression on his Mind, that the Writer of it must have been an uncommonly great and good Man ; every Way deserving of the high Rank, which he claims, of a commissioned Servant of God, and incapable of claiming it falsely.

But, besidos being thus moved with the admirable Spirit expressed, and the sublime Precepts diffused, throughout the whole ; it will be still a new Subject of Esteem and Wonder; to see the Force and Substance of them all collected at last into one brief Exhortation ; comprehending in so narrow a Space, the intire Compass of virtuous Dispositions, and right Behaviour, as is done in the Text: to which he subjoins with conscious Boldness, appealing to all which *they had learned and received, and heard and seen of him*, that this had been his own Disposition and Behaviour: yet

humblly considers himself as *not having already attained or being already perfect*, but merely as *pressing towards the Mark of the Prize of the high Calling of God^b*; and not only uses his own *Prayers*, but begs *theirs* also, that, *through the Supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, all things may turn to his *Salvation^c*. We cannot help honouring such a Character: but, if we hope to be the better for it, we must also imitate it. And therefore let us examine with this View, that Description of it which I have read to you. Had the several Phrases, used in it, been as nearly as possible equivalent, and accumulated only to convey the intended Meaning more fully and strongly, this would have been warranted by the Example of the great *Roman Orator*: who professes to have done the same Thing on a like Occasion^d. But there is a superior Accuracy and Beauty in the Words of the Apostle. Each of them singly hath a distinct Sense: and

^b Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^c Phil. i. 19, 20.

^d Nihil enim habet præstantius [natura], nihil quod magis expetat, quam honestatem, quam laudem, quam dignitatem, quam decus. Hisce ego pluribus, nominibus unam rem declarari volo: sed utor, ut quam maxime significem, pluribus. Cic. Tusc. Disp. l. ii. c. 20.

See also A. Gell. l. xiii. c. 24. where several Instances of this Manner of speaking are given, and Reasons for it alledged; and Cic. De N. D. l. ii. § 7. and De Fin. l. iii. c. 4.

joined together they form a connected and complete Body of Duty, as will appear by examining them separately: which I shall therefore do in the first Place; and then, Secondly, make a general Observation upon the Whole.

Truth, always present to the Mind of God, is the Ground of his Commands; and, so far as discerned by us, is the Ground of our Obedience. On this accordingly the Apostle here builds, and lays for the Foundation of his whole Superstructure, *Whatsoever Things are true*: that is, conformable to the clear Perceptions of our Understandings, the inward Feelings of our Hearts, the known Circumstances of our Situation. Setting out thus, he excludes, in the first Word, from being any Part of Christian Duty, every thing romantic and visionary, all Refinements of false Honour, all Enthusiasm of a heated Fancy. But he enjoins at the same Time, whatever is reasonable and right; be the Practice or Notions of the World as contrary to it, as they will: whatever the sovereign Principle of Conscience dictates, though Passions and Appetites may draw powerfully another Way; whatever the impartial State of any Case requires, let Vanity or Interest make ever so much against it: what we owe to our Maker, no less than what is due to our

Fellow-creatures : what divine Revelation teaches, no less than what human Faculties discover : what the future as well as the present Condition of our Being demands. For our Relations to God are as real, and infinitely more important, than to Man ; those Parts of his Will which only Scripture makes known, the Authority of Scripture being proved, are intitled to equal Attention with those which Reason dictates of itself : and such Consequences of our Actions, as will follow beyond the Grave, are but a single and a short Step more distant, than the visible and daily ones that follow them here. These Maxims are the solid Basis of proper Conduct : the whole Creation cannot shake them ; and every other Scheme of Life is built upon the Sand, and will crush us under its Ruins. God himself proceeds invariably according to the Reason of Things ; he must therefore expect Man to hold it sacred ; and both the Honour of his Government and the Holiness of his Nature stand engaged, that, sooner or later, every one shall find his Account in observing this Rule, but none in transgressing it. For *his Righteousness is an everlasting Righteousness, and his Law is the Truth* ^c.

^c Psalm cxix. 142.

The second Head of the Apostle's Injunction is, *Whatsoever Things are honest*: or rather, as the marginal Translation hath it, *venerable*, intitled to Respect: for so the original Word in the Greek confessedly signifies, as indeed the Word *honest* itself doth in the Latin Tongue, from whence it is derived into ours.

If, pursuant to the former Direction, we consider, according to Truth, the inward Frame of our Hearts and Minds, we shall perceive, that, as Man was created at first in the Image of God, so there still remains in our Nature, however defaced by the Fall, a Sense of Dignity and Worth, which we ought to reverence in ourselves and others. The lowest of Men, with Reason, think Falsehood and Dishonesty beneath them; and the highest, if they descend to use them, lose, by so doing, a much truer Greatness than they retain. Worldly Advantages leave the Possessors of them but just the same Men, which they would have been without them. Personal Accomplishments as often produce wrong Conduct, Hatred, Contempt and Misery, as they do the contrary. At best, neither the one nor the other can give more, than a short-lived, and precarious Distinction. But Scorn of Wickedness, and Esteem of our Duty, shewn in Practice,

tice, this is the valuable Pre-eminence, which will continue an Ornament to us through every Condition of Life, through every Period of our Existence; will intitle us to inward Veneration, as well as outward Regard, and recommend us, not only to fallible Beings, but to the unerring Searcher of our Hearts, and final Rewarder of our Deeds. Whoever therefore would obtain a truly honourable Character, must preserve himself above dishonourable Actions: and never permit either Profit, or Pleasure, or Favour, or Power, titular Pre-eminentes, or popular Opinion, to debase him into doing any Thing ill.

Keeping up this Kind of Superiority to the Height carries no Pride in it, no Temptation to Pride. For, though a worthy-minded Man knows every Thing to be mean, in Comparison of right Behaviour; yet he must know too, that his own Behaviour is very imperfectly right, even in the Sight of Men, much more of God: and were it completely so, it would still amount to no more than his bounden Duty. He will therefore always proceed with great Humility, though with great Steadiness, in the Discharge of his Conscience; patiently expecting, what he will certainly find, that many other Things,

and

and some of them very bad ones, will greatly out-shine, in the Eyes of the World, so plain and unpliant a Qualification, as this, of uniform Uprightness : which yet is indeed beyond all others the respectable one: the only Ground of conscious Self-approbation, of mutual Esteem, and Trust, of public Order and Safety.

For, however common it is become to treat all Pretence of Principle, as mere Hypocrisy ; and both to give with great Gaiety, and receive with great Complacency, Intimations, which one should think could do neither Side much Credit, as if Interest or Inclination would induce them, or any one, to do almost any Thing ; yet such general Representations are both false in themselves, and pernicious to human Society. The worst of Men are not thoroughly bad, without some Mixture of good. But nothing can go farther towards making all Men so, than treating it as an acknowledged Point, that they are so already, and cannot be otherwise. In Proportion as this Doctrine prevails, no Guilt will be out of Countenance. Now what the Consequences of that must be, is easily discerned ; and the Prophet hath told us very plainly: *Were they ashamed, when they had committed Abomination ? nay, they were not at all ashamed,*

ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall—At the Time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, saith the Lord^t. Undoubtedly the Wickedness of Mankind is great: and those in high Stations have particular Opportunities of seeing it in a strong Light. But still, they, who feel any good Qualities in themselves, cannot justly think, there are none in others. And be there ever so little Probity in the World, it is our most serious Interest, to cultivate and increase it. For what Comfort, or what Safety, can there be in the midst only of the Profligate and Abandoned? Or how shall either Authority or Merit support itself, if that inward Reverence of Duty and Worth be worn out of the Minds of Men, without which all the Solemnities of external Forms will soon come to lose their Influence? But if earthly Tranquillity could be preserved by other Means: yet heavenly Happiness can be enjoyed only by Souls exalted to a Capacity of it; purged from every Thing mean and base, and, by generous and honourable Dispositions, *made meet to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light^s.*

The third Branch of the Apostle's Exhortation, *Whatsoever Things are just*, is naturally con-

^t Jer. vi. 15.

^s Col. i. 12.

nected

nected with the second. Had we nothing superior in our Nature to restrain us, Force and Fraud would be as allowable between Man and Man, as between Brute and Brute. But the Consciousness which we have of peculiar Dignity, includes the Obligation to mutual Justice, as Part of itself, and yet there was Need to mention this Part separately; because else, the higher the Notion which each entertained of his own Value, the more apt he might be to overlook others, especially his Inferiors, and trample upon them carelessly. Therefore St. *Paul*, in the Text, immediately subjects the mutual Behaviour of all the Sons of Men to one common Measure; and requires, that the highest and the lowest should each treat the other, as each might expect, were Circumstances changed, the other should treat him; which single Precept observed would keep the World in Quiet: and if it be transgressed, nothing is left to stop at, short of universal Confusion. Every one therefore, in every Part of social Life, should be vigilant against the Influence of Pride, and Passion, and Interest: should inquire with Diligence, and hear with Candour, in order to judge with Impartiality: should remember, that nothing is truly Justice, but what is Equity

at

at the same Time : should do frankly and immediately what he knows he ought to do : and so temper his Prudence with Innocence, as always to prefer Harmlessness to worldly Wisdom, whenever they interfere. That others will act very differently, is so much the worse for them : but no Consideration for us to be moved by, in the least. The whole we have to be concerned for, is to act right ourselves. A wise and good God will take Care of the rest.

Next to Justice, the Apostle ranks, in the fourth Place, a Virtue equally flowing from the Dignity of human Nature, and seldom violated without grievous Injustice, that of shunning the Pollution of criminal Pleasures, and practising *whatsoever Things are pure*. Some Kinds of sensual Excess, as Gluttony and Drunkenness, are acknowledged to be contemptible, hateful Vices. And however favourably too many look on the free Indulgence of another Appetite, at least in one Sex, yet their Opinion cannot alter the Nature of Things. Irregular Gratifications must still remain what they are, dishonourable to our Reason, destructive to our Happiness. And it is surprizing, that they, who have any Rightness of Mind, can fail either to discern or to reflect, what Meanness

ness it is to make these Things the Business of their Being ; and associate, for the Sake of them, with the profligate and abandoned ; what Imprudence, to ruin or to hazard their Healths, Fortunes, or Reputations, in such wretched Courses ; and what Mischief, to destroy the Virtue and Peace of the Innocent, and harden the Guilty in their Crimes ; to violate Faith and Honour, distress Families, embitter the nearest and tenderest Relations of Life, confound Descents and Inheritances, extend Infamy, and perhaps Diseases also, to successive Generations. Indeed the Sins of this Kind have not always all these bad Effects : but they undeniably produce in general, by innumerable Ways, more thorough Wickedness, and more exquisite Misery, than almost any others. And even those Transgressions of Purity, that may seem the least hurtful, are so wrong in themselves, and so contrary to the good Order, Strength, and Welfare of Society ; they lead on so naturally to worse ; they set so dangerous an Example, and give so plausible an Excuse to others, for going a little and a little farther in the same Way, (as indeed there is no possible Ground to make a sure Stand upon, if once we depart from strict Virtue) ; that whoever considers,

fiders, will be far from thinking, either the Precepts, or the Threatenings of Scripture, on this Head, too rigid and severe.

But abstaining from dishonourable, and injurious, and criminally sensual, Actions, is by no Means sufficient, unless we are careful to do becoming, beneficent, and engaging ones ; or, in the Apostle's Words, *whatsoever Things are lovely* : Which class of Duties he hath put in the fifth Place with great Propriety. For the Good-nature and Agreeableness, required under this Head, is not to supply the Room of the Justice and Purity required before ; nor can possibly make Amends for the Want of them ; but we must first resolve to be innocent, then study to be amiable. Now the two great Branches of amiable Conduct are those, on which the Gospel hath laid so peculiar a Stress ; Mildness in bearing Injuries, and Bounty in relieving Necessities : one of them expressly made the Condition of our being forgiven ; the other the Foundation of our being rewarded.

But, besides these endearing Virtues, the Apostle undoubtedly designed to enjoin every other Act of a generous and disinterested, a candid and sympathizing, Heart ; every Instance of Gentleness to the Faults, and Condescension

scension to the Weaknesses, of Men ; Moderation and Humility in advantageous Circumstances, and patient Composedness in low and afflicted ones ; every ornamental, as well as more substantial, Duty of Life ; Affability of Conversation, obliging Attentions, kind Compliances ; whatever will make our common Journey through the World mutually comfortable and pleasing, without making it dangerous ; and exhibit Religion in its native Cheerfulness, as a reasonable Service paid to an infinitely good Being. For all these Things are comprehended under the Character of *lovely* ; and constitute a much more valuable Part of Christian Practice, than many seem to be aware of. Indeed Piety and Virtue, however unpolished, deserve high Esteem ; and it would be a most unhappy Mistake, to prefer superficial Accomplishments before intrinsic Worth. But still, both Religion and Morals, disguised under a forbidding Look, appear so much less to Advantage, than when they wear an inviting one ; that we wrong our Profession, as well as ourselves, if we neglect to shew it in as much Beauty, as a modest Simplicity will permit ; and thus to *adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things*⁴.

⁴ Tit. ii. 10.

Nor is it enough to practise what we think right and worthy and becoming, but we ought further to respect, in a proper Degree, what the rest of Mankind esteem so. And therefore the Apostle adds in the sixth Place, *Whatsoever Things are of good Report*: and places this Head after the others; because, if a Competition arises, Conscience is always to be preferred before common Opinion. And indeed numberless are the poor Wretches, who have been utterly ruined, by sacrificing at once their Virtue and common Sense to reigning Sins and Follies. Not that, in general, the public Voice is nearly so favourable to wrong Conduct, as some are willing to imagine. All, who are not guilty of it, we may be sure will disapprove it. Many who are, condemn it, even in themselves. Nay, such as encourage others in it, often censure them for it severely notwithstanding. Or, was every bad Man true to his own bad Cause, yet both their Weight, and even their Number, is less considerable, than they would have it thought. The gay and the loud, the bold and the forward, nay the great and the noble, however they fill the Eye, are by no Means the whole of the World: but there is Reason on many Accounts to look beyond these: and inquire,

quire, what the serious and considerate, what the Generality and Bulk of Mankind, whom it is neither modest nor prudent to despise, will think of our Conduct; what hath been the Judgment of Time past on the like Behaviour; what is likely to be the Judgment of Time to come; when we shall be spoken of without Ceremony, and have the Characters that we appear to deserve, indelibly fixed on us: a Matter about which we can not really be indifferent, though we may affect it.

Nor ought the Opinion of Mankind only to assist in deterring us from what we know to be Wrong; but restrain us from many Things, that we possibly imagine very allowable. We may apprehend, perhaps, that such and such Liberties have no Harm in them. But if others, worthy of Regard, apprehend they have; may not we be mistaken as easily as they? And is not the safer Side the better? or were we sure that we judge right, is there no Deference owing, in Point of Decency, to the contrary Judgment? Especially if it be the general, the established one? Besides, may we not endanger Duties of great Importance, by destroying wantonly even the slighter Outworks that defend them? May not our transgressing what is

commonly esteemed sacred, lead some to esteem Nothing sacred; and others to suspect, that we esteem Nothing so? Now this latter Effect alone, or any Thing that approaches towards it, would surely be very undesirable. And they, who have no Concern what they are thought to be, are in Danger of having but little Concern what they do.

The Apostle, having thus recommended every Thing that we can discover to be a Law of Life, and every Thing accounted such by the Wise and Good, may seem now to have gone the utmost Length that Precept could go. But he had still one Thing in Reserve for the seventh and last Place, to complete and crown the whole. Besides the constant Obligations of all Men, expressed hitherto; some, indeed most, on one occasion or another, are qualified for Actions of distinguished Excellence, transcending the common Measures of Duty. And though none should aim at what is beyond his Strength, and all should first ground themselves thoroughly in Things necessary, before they aspire farther; and ever beware of doing the least Evil, to bring about the greatest Good: yet, these Precautions being observed, *If there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praise; any*

singular Opportunity for exerting superior Goodness, and acquiring proportionable Honour; to this also the Word of God, far from discountenancing an Ambition so laudable, excites and encourages in the Text. Here then every one is called forth, by the Voice of Heaven, to every Thing great and good, that shall at any Time lie in his Power: to serve his Creator, and benefit his Fellow-creatures, the most eminently that he can, by all the Means, that his Knowledge and Wealth, his Example and Persuasion, his Influence and Authority, can furnish out. And *blessed is that Servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing*¹.

These then are the *Things*, on which the Apostle directs us to *think*: and the general Observation which I would make upon them, in the second Place, is, that we cannot think of them in earnest, as enjoined by our Religion, without honouring it highly, and being strongly moved by it to every Part of right Temper and right Conduct. Such Precepts evidently prove, that Christianity is not a Contrivance to make Men, by Faith in Speculations, and Exactness in observances, happy in another World, without being good in the present. Articles of

¹ Matth. xxiv. 46. Luke xii. 43.

Belief, and Institutions of Worship, are Instruments only: proper indeed, and appointed ones: and we must never hope to be amended or accepted, unless we take the Way to be so, which God hath marked out. But neither must we hope, that a formal Use of the Means will be sufficient, without serious Care to attain the End. *Now the End of the Commandment is Charity, Love to God and Man, out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned^k;* which Words express the very same Temper with those in the Text.

If then these be the Things, which Mankind have Need to learn, and God expects; it should be remembered, that they are taught in Perfection by the Scripture Revelation, and the Methods of acquiring them too: that neither the one, nor the other, were ever taught, without Revelation, either generally, or statedly, or without gross Defects and Errors: and that they, who reject this Way of Instruction and Worship, have not pretended to substitute any other; but shewn, by neglecting the Commands, and transgressing the Restraints, of natural Religion, that their Disregard to Christianity proceeds from bad Motives; and will produce,

^k 1 Tim. i. 5.

in Proportion as it increases and spreads, the very worst Effects. Whoever, therefore, is indeed concerned for true Virtue and moral Piety, will affectionately esteem those incomparable Lessons of each, which the Gospel affords him: and whoever hath at all a due Sense, how very often he hath violated, on one Occasion or another, the Dictates of both, will rejoice from his Heart in those Assurances and Means of Forgiveness for what is past, and Assistance in what is to come, with which nothing but the Gospel can bless him. For, however thoughtless Offenders may flatter themselves, every considerate Mind must see and feel, that Sin deserves Punishment, and Repentance is not Innocence; that Pardon and Grace are not Debts, but voluntary Favours; and God alone can inform his Creatures with Certainty, on what Terms he will bestow them, and to what Degree. Now he hath accordingly informed us, that only *Faith* in Christ, *working by Love*, availeth any Thing¹; and that shall intitle us to every Thing.

But then Faith is not mere Belief; nor is Love mere Admiration, of the Advantages and Promises of the Gospel: but being moved by

¹ Gal. v. 6.

these to an uniform Practice of its Laws is the single Evidence which proves their Genuineness : and unhappily is the very Attainment of which the Generality of Men fall short. Some there are, who retain the Name of Christians, and seem to think it their Due, though perhaps they scarce remember the Time, when they performed any one Act of Christian Devotion, at least in private. On public Worship, it may be, or some Part of it, they do attend sometimes, to save Appearances, or in Hope of Entertainment, or from a confused Notion of its being, they scarce know why, a Duty : but without the least Conception, almost, of any further Difference, between having Religion, and having none. Others, that make a Conscience, such as it is, of Part of what they are commanded, have no Regard at all to the rest : but they will be pious without Virtue, or virtuous without Piety ; or they will chuse, just as they fancy, which of the Laws of either they will obey, which they will not. Even the more truly good seldom think of aspiring to Eminence of Goodness : and they, who in many Respects attain high Perfection, often fail, most unhappily, of adding the Beauty of Holiness to the Reality

of it, by an amiable and obliging Deportment and Conversation. Thus it comes to pass, that some despise Religion, as useless; and others are disgusted with it, as harsh and disagreeable: that not a few of its Professors will find it contribute only to their heavier Condemnation; and many of those who are intitled to Reward will obtain a much inferior Reward to what they might have done; and all owing to the Neglect of thinking, as they ought, on the important Virtues recommended in the Text. We give much Attention to low and transitory Things; too much, it may be feared, to sinful and forbidden ones. We must know these excellent Qualifications to be the worthiest Objects of our Thoughts: why should they not also be the most constantly present to them? But suppose they were, it is of no more Use to think with speculative Delight on the Precepts, than the Privileges of the Gospel: but we must so consider both them and ourselves, as diligently to examine, and faithfully bring to Account (for this the Word *thinking on* strictly denotes in the Original) our Duty and our Practice under each Article; and compute the Goodness of our Condition, not by the Share that we possess,

either of the gay, or the solemn Trifles, to which alone Men commonly attend; but solely by the Result of this momentous Inquiry, made with great Impartiality, and with earnest Prayer for the divine Illumination. Nor will thinking on our spiritual State, merely enough to know it, benefit us; without thinking effectually how to mend and improve it: by imploring God's Pardon for every Thing wrong, and ascribing to his Grace every Thing right in us; and asking and using his future Assistance, to withstand all Temptation, and increase in all Goodness. *These Things, therefore, think on and do: and the God of Peace shall be with you^m.*

^m Phil. iv. 9.

S E R M O N II.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this Day whom you will serve: whether the Gods which your Fathers served, that were on the other Side of the Flood; or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose Land ye dwell: but as for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.

TH E Sovereign Disposer of all Things, being resolved to destroy the Inhabitants of the Land of Canaan for their impious and barbarous Idolatries and unnatural Lusts, was pleased to make the Jews, who were a much better, though far from a blameless, People, the Instruments of their Destruction, in order to warn them the more strongly against the like Sins. Their Leader in this awful Work was Joshua: who after he had accomplished it, divided his Conquests amongst them; and then, having received, from the Gratitude of the People,

People, an Inheritance in his own Tribe^a, no Way considerable, which however was all that he asked; appears to have retired thither, and spent the rest of his Days in an honourable Privacy; leaving the Administration of Affairs, in Time of Peace, to the ordinary civil Magistrates; till, finding his End approach, he gathered all *Israel*, and called for their Elders, their Heads, their Judges and their Officers^b; and they presented themselves before God. In this solemn Assembly, the last he was to see, requesting nothing for himself or his Post-
erity, but strictly following the Example of *Moses*, who had in no Respect exalted his own Descendants above the rest of the People; he expresses the strongest Solicitude for what he knew the public Happiness to depend on; the Preservation of true Religion, and consequently of Virtue, in Opposition to the superstitious Follies, and shocking Vices, of the Nations round them. To promote this End, the venerable Chief recounts to them, by the especial Direction of Heaven, the miraculous and gracious Dispensations of Providence, which their Fathers and they had experienced, and he had been so long a constant Eye-witness of; concluding the History with their present

^a Josh. xix. 49, 50.

^b Chap. xxiv. 1.

happy Condition: and his Inference from the Whole is, *Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him, in Sincerity and in Truth*^c. But being sensible that Mankind are strangely apt not to think themselves in a good State, when they are in the best; he proceeds to intreat them, that if any are dissatisfied with the Fruits of observing their present Religion and Laws, they would consider well, under what other, upon the Whole, they would wish to be; for under some they must. They might, if they pleased, after all he had said, try a Change, and take the Consequences: but he had seen too much of the Benefit of adhering to God, to have the least Desire of experiencing what would be the Effects of forsaking him; and his Prayer and his Endeavour should be, that all under his Influence might tread, for ever, in the same Steps. *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you, this Day, whom you will serve:—but as for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.*

In these Words we have,

- I. An Intimation of the Danger there is, that Men may grow weary of true Religion.

^c Josh. xxiv. 14.

II. An Admonition, that such would think seriously what they propose to exchange it for; and what Advantage they expect from thence.

III. The Resolution which prudent Men will make, whatever others do; to continue in the Practice of it themselves; and preserve a conscientious Regard to it amongst all that are placed under their Inspection.

I. An Intimation of the Danger there is, that a great Part of the World may grow weary of Religion, even whilst it is taught in Simplicity and Truth.

Undoubtedly one of the strongest Prejudices against it hath arisen from the absurd, and often hurtful Mixtures, with which, from Time to Time, it hath been corrupted, either by mistaken or designing Men. These have tempted many to reject the whole, good and bad promiscuously; without separating what was of God from what was of Man. Now, were every Thing else to be treated in this Manner, not one of the rightest Principles of Behaviour, or the most valuable Blessings of Life, could possibly escape. For what is there on Earth, that hath not been frequently misunderstood, perverted
and

and abused, both by Weakness and Wickedness? It is therefore the grossest Partiality, not to distinguish in the Case of Religion, when we do it in every other: indeed, not to be as zealous for every real Part of it, (for they are all highly useful) as against the Corruptions it hath unhappily undergone. And yet, even in a Country where it is the purest, some can allow themselves to talk, as if it were Fraud and Imposition throughout: can gratify their Vanity, defend their Vices, or serve their Interests, by insisting confidently on the most groundless and exploded Objections; sometimes against all Reverence to Him who created them; often against the Revelation he hath made to them: nay, can slight it as entirely, without being acquainted with the Shadow of an Objection, as if they had the strongest in the World: think it a Reason abundantly sufficient, that they see others of good Figure do so; and at last, perhaps, set themselves to make it their Scorn, without having once considered in earnest, whether they ought not to have made it the Rule and Comfort of their Lives.

This is going great Lengths; yet not absolutely the greatest of all. For it hath happened too commonly, that those very Things, for which

which Religion ought to be honoured most, have been the true Causes of Mens opposing and forsaking it. The *Jews*, for Instance, were disgusted with theirs, because it was too spiritual and refined for them. We, indeed, who are blessed with one yet more so, may be tempted to find the contrary Fault with that of *Moses*. But think what the Worship of the World was at that Time: Worship of the Sun, Moon and Stars; brute Beasts, Stocks and Stones; Altars under every green Tree, and upon every high Hill; Ceremonies numberless, unmeaning, immodest, inhuman. How prodigious a Reformation was it then, to introduce, instead of these mischievous Absurdities, the Adoration of one only invisible Being, the Maker of all Things! and the Offering of Sacrifices to him in one only Temple upon Earth; with Rites and Observances, few in Comparison, and directly pointed against Idolatry and Superstition! But what was really the Merit of their Religion, was the Ground of their Clamour against it: *Make us Gods to go before us*^a; let us have Deities, that we can see and feel, to carry along with us; was the Cry of the People: and whenever they forsook the Lord, it was for these more

^a Exod. xxxii. 1, 23.

substantial Objects of Devotion. This may seem unaccountable enough; and yet, amongst ourselves, Converts are frequently made to a Communion, one of whose chief Recommendations must be, that it strikes the Senses, with Images and Formalities, Pomp and Shew.

But, as some are prejudiced against true Religion for being too rational; many, it may be feared, are averse to it for being too moral. As long as Piety can be made, in any Shape, consistent with Sin; whether by trusting in Faith without Works, or substituting Works of no Value for those of real Value; or abounding in some one Sort of Duties, instead of honestly practising every Sort; so long it may be borne with. But if the Teachers of it will assert and prove, and attempt to convince Mankind, that no one can be pious, without being uniformly virtuous; then there remains no Possibility of compromising Matters: but, if Religion will give no Quarter to Vice, the Vicious must give no Quarter to Religion: a very bad Inducement, I own, but a very strong one; and it deserves careful Reflection, whether a principal Reason, why Christianity is now, more than ever, disregarded, be not this;

this; that now, more than ever, since the primitive Ages, it is so preached, as to leave no Room for being godly and wicked at once. But, however this be, there appears, in general, but too much Danger, indeed but too much Experience, that Men may be tired even of true Religion; that it may *seem evil unto them, to serve the Lord their God.* Therefore the Text contains,

II. An Admonition, that such, as are disposed to throw off the Bonds of Duty to their Maker, would think seriously, what Sort of Change they are about to venture upon, and how they hope to be Gainers by it.

No other Course, that they can take, so much as promises any Good with respect to a future State: yet they must own there may be one: nay, if God be either just, or wise, or good, or true, there will; and if there be, it is the most important Interest we have, or can have, to be happy in it: yet nothing but Religion, provides against our being miserable in it. A Consideration, which takes little Time to express; but very few spend enough in thinking of it: for what are the poor Pleasures of this short Life, compared with the Joys or the Pains of Eternity? But

even

even as to the present World, how much Freedom soever bad Men may affect, some Master they must serve; some Restraints they must be under, and some Mortifications they must go through. Consider the Pursuits of the selfish and ambitious; are not they obliged to suppress their Inclinations, and contradict their Passions, in a thousand Instances, to carry the single Point of their worldly Advantage? Consider the Indulgences of the voluptuous and intemperate, the Sallies and Flights of the wild and extravagant; we are apt to say indeed, that they deny themselves Nothing: but is it true? Are there not Multitudes of Things, that all of them wish for, and cannot have: and still greater Multitudes; in Proportion as they give their Wishes a larger Scope? Is any possible Scheme of Life to be carried on, without Self-denial in some Thing or other? Or, if Men can, and will, do just as they please at first; what comes of it? Is it not the perpetual Consequence, that they must suffer for it at last; and bear much the heavier Burthen, after a Time, because they set out with the Resolution of bearing none?

If therefore every Method, we can pitch on, hath at least, either its Restraints, or its Sufferings; and probably both: which are most

reasonable? which are most beneficial? Those of Religion and Morals; or those of the various Masters, which, on departing from Religion and Morals, we must obey? It concerns us highly, in such a Question, not to flatter ourselves, and take Things for granted; not to guess, and run the Risque, but to examine and choose: whereas the Misfortune is, Men enter upon a Course, and follow it their whole Lives, without ever deliberately chusing it at all: *halting*, as the Prophet expresses it, *between two Opinions^a*, whilst they proceed in one Tenor of Practice; and that, the wrong one. For the unsafe one is certainly the wrong: and, unless Religion cannot be true, neither Impiety, nor Immorality, can be secure. Whoever therefore allows himself in either, ought before-hand to know very certainly, what is impossible to know (for we cannot know Things to be true, which are false); first, that Nothing remains to be hoped or feared in another Life: and then, that Wickedness bids fairest for Happiness in this.

Too many indeed appear to think the latter Point, at least, a very clear one. But remember, the Inquiry is, not merely, what will

* 1 Kings, xviii. 21.

afford us most Pleasure just at the present; or even for a few Years; though it is seldom, that the vicious find Reason to applaud their own Conduct so long: but what will continue to please, what will give us the Advantage upon the whole, taking inward Satisfaction into the Account, as well as outward Gratifications; and not only delight us in the first and smallest Part of the Journey of Life, but support us in the Remainder, that needs it most; and enable us to conclude it with Comfort and Credit. That abandoned Wickedness cannot do this, every one, who thinks and observes, must see; and they who do not, will soon feel. Some therefore contrive to take a middle Way: indulge themselves beyond Virtue, yet restrain themselves short of Profligateness. And undoubtedly there would be less Guilt in this, if it were not, that being so deliberately guilty is a great Aggravation. There may also fewer worldly Inconveniences follow from it: but still, if great Deviations from Duty lead to great Mischiefs; the smaller must, in Proportion, lead to some. And besides, they, who intended to go but a little out of the Way, are almost always either invited, or driven gradually farther and farther: and can never know before-hand, where they shall

stop. Indeed what is there to stop them? Desires multiply and strengthen. Duty is out of the Question. Prudence grows accustomed to submit: perhaps falls low enough, to advise covering one Sin with another. What now shall keep such Persons back from any Crime? A Principle of Honour, it may possibly be said. And true Honour, so far as it goes, is a noble Principle indeed. It is uniform Virtue, adorned with Dignity of Manners, with Attention to every Thing praiseworthy and amiable, and Scorn of every Thing base and mean; judging what is so, by Reason and Truth, not vulgar Opinion. But the false Honour of the vicious is an airy Phantom, changeable as Fancy and Fashion vary, that permits in Multitudes of Instances, and requires in some, the wickedest, the cruellest, the absurd Behaviour; and sets Men up for Objects of Respect, that have no one good Quality, merely because they profess calling to Account whoever shall fail of the Regard they demand, or ascribe to them any bad Quality, which they do not care to own. It can never be, that so wretched a Counterfeit as this should be the Guide of Life. There is therefore none to be trusted to, if Virtue be rejected; and Virtue, without Religion, neither is complete,

plete, nor will be effectual. If other Superiors and Benefactors are intitled to Reverence, God is. If outward Expressions of Reverence are to be shewn them, they are to be shewn Him: both to preserve it alive in our own Minds, and to spread it around us. And if any Expressions of it are due, those which he hath appointed are due. Paying such Regard to God, joined with Attendance on proper Instruction, must naturally produce a serious Care, to abstain from every Thing injurious, to do every Thing beneficial, in human Life: as not only our indispensable Obligation, but our most important Interest. And what other Motive can either extend so far, or influence so strongly? If then there be any Need, that the World should grow better, or not grow worse; that Men should live together innocently and usefully; have Comfort under Afflictions in this Life, or look for eternal Blessedness in the next; Principles of Piety must be encouraged. Nay, could we possibly be content to give up all these Advantages, there would still remain other Considerations of great Weight on the same Side. Though we may throw off Religion so far as not to be governed by its Precepts: we shall be made, on that very Account, from Time to Time, extremely uneasy

by its Threatenings: and the Consequence of not obeying God as Children, will be dreading him as Criminals. What if here and there a few profess to have got over these Fears? Perhaps inwardly they know the contrary; or, however, they come to know it when they least think of it; or, could they be sure never more to experience them on Earth, they will too soon feel surer and greater Torments in Hell, for having thus wickedly hardened their Hearts. But Mankind in general cannot get over the Fear of God. Some Religion they must and will have: and the only Question is, whether it shall be a good and true, or a false and bad one. *Joshua* therefore puts the Matter to the *Jews* in a perfectly just Light: *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you whom you will serve: whether the Gods which your Fathers served that were on the other Side of the Flood; or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose Land ye dwell.* It is true the *Israelites* were prone to Superstition: we are inclined to Profaneness; and therefore may seem in no Danger of the opposite Extreme. But universal Profaneness, and total Unbelief, never subsisted long any where, and never will: the World could not bear it: and the human

Mind hath a natural Bent the other Way. You have seen this in the Case of the Jews. What was that of the Gentiles when they forsook the Truth ? That because, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful ; they became vain in their Imaginations, and their foolish Heart was darkened, till they changed the Glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like unto corruptible Man, and Birds, and four-footed Beasts, and creeping Things^c.

We of the present Age indeed cannot well go thus far at once : but by how easy Steps may we come to it ! Were not our Forefathers near it, but a little more than Two Hundred Years ago : worshipping, with more Zeal than they did their Maker, Images of pretended Saints, many of whom had lived and died great Sinners, and addressing Prayers to them in a Language they did not understand ? Now the same high Road, that of Popery, is open yet. And will not Numbers be inclined to take it, if they can be persuaded, from what they see, that the Profession of the Protestant Religion is the direct Way to the Profession of no Religion at all ? When public Worship and Instruction are once deserted, or attended on with visible Indifference and Contempt ;

^c Rom. i. 21—24.

when Persons are taught Nothing, and guarded against Nothing; will they not of Course be in Danger of every Thing? And have we not Seducers among us in every Corner, trained up with the most artful Subtlety, to work on the Ignorance of some, the Guilt of others, the private Interest of a third Sort; to lead them over unto a Communion, that hath corrupted the Notions of Piety, and weakened the Bonds of moral Obligation; done infinite Mischief to Mankind by Tyranny, Perfidy and Cruelty; and must be an eternal Foe, whatever it may sometimes pretend, to that happy Establishment of Truth and Liberty, which may God preserve to us and ours? Whoever therefore hath a Dread of Superstition, Bigotry and Slavery, should be zealous in the highest Degree for pure Religion, and if ever he would have his Zeal effectual, must express it in the same Manner, that we find in the

III^d Part of the Text, the Jewish Chief did; by resolving, that, *whatever others do, he and his House will serve the Lord.*

Fear of Singularity hath a most powerful Influence on Mankind: and, in Matters nearly indifferent, it is very useful that it should. But in Points of Importance; our Concern is, to act as we ought ourselves, let those around

around us act as they will : take all the innocent Care we can, neither to provoke their Anger nor Contempt ; but still do the right Thing, and stand by it : preferring the Testimony of our own Hearts, that we deserve Approbation, before receiving from Men ever so much of it. But especially in Religion, both Reason and Scripture dictate this Behaviour. And yet many, who can even affect to be singular in Trifles and Follies, have such a cowardly Fear of being thought so in the Case of seriously professing Religion, where it would be truly honourable, and they would in Fact be honoured for it, perhaps even by their present Acquaintance, or at least by better whom they might chuse, and by the World in general ; that, to avoid this imagined Evil, they will incur the most real ones, a guilty Conscience in this World, and the Wrath of their Maker in the next. If this be not contemptible Weakness, what is ? And if it be, serving the Lord, let ever so few do it, is true Wisdom.

But then it must be observed, that, though every Degree of genuine Regard to God will produce to us proportionable Benefits, and preserve us in some Degree from Sufferings ; yet

yet the Life and Immortality, promised in the Gospel, can be attained, and, where it is faithfully preached, eternal Punishments can be avoided, only by Obedience to the Terms proposed in the Gospel. The Doctrines, therefore, which God hath revealed there, plain or mysterious, must be received with humble Faith ; the Duties he hath enjoined there, moral or positive, must be observed with pious Reverence ; and our Hope of future Happiness must be placed, not in the Merit, either of our own good Works, for without the Grace of the Holy Spirit we cannot do any ; or of our own Repentance, for being sorry that we have sinned is not being innocent ; but solely in the Divine Mercy through our blessed Redeemer, who died for us that we might live to Him. And, how much soever these Rules may be overlooked or despised in the World, yet he hath repeatedly assured us, with uncommon Strength of Expression, that our *not being ashamed of him and his Words*, of which these are Part, is an indispensable Condition of his *not being ashamed of us at the great Day^r*.

But serving the Lord, as good Christians ourselves, is not sufficient, when we are in-

^r Mark viii. 38.

trusted with others also. Now, in some Degree, we are intrusted with all who are placed under our Influence, especially if they be under our Authority too: and God, with Justice, expects every one to do the Good, which he hath given him Abilities for doing: for, conferring them, is the highest Honour he can bestow on his Creatures; and using them, is the noblest Way of at once obeying and resembling our Creator. But, not to exceed the Limits of domestic Life, to which the Text points our View: Parents are, by Nature and Scripture, intrusted with their Children: bound in Conscience to endeavour, that the Being, which they have given them, prove not a miserable one: bound in Prudence to provide, that, when they grow up, they may be a Comfort and a Credit to them, not a Shame and a Curse. And yet, how commonly is the ornamental and superficial Part of their Education the only one attended to? Perhaps a slight Form of catechetical Instruction, and a Prayer or two are learnt by Rote, as a Task in their Childhood, fore mere Form's Sake, and perhaps not: but, after that, very little Care taken in teaching them Rules of common Prudence; less still in giving them any consistent Principles

ciples of Morals ; none at all in binding them down to both, by a serious inward Sense of Religion ; of the Purity of God's Law ; their Depravity, and Need of a Redeemer and Sanctifier ; the Importance of Christ's Ordinances, without which, nothing will be inwardly, or often outwardly, such as it ought : and then, at last, either great Surprize and Anger is expressed, at their coming out, what it must be expected they should : or else their Ruin is stupidly acquiesced in, as unavoidable from the Beginning : and Men sit down contented, that they who are nearest, and ought to be dearest to them, shall be wicked, and wretched, and despicable ; or, however they escape here, undone to Eternity.

But, not only our Children should be led to esteem and practise the Obligations of Piety, but our Servants and Dependents. We cannot indeed force them to it, and we need not. But we can give them Opportunity, and Advice, and Encouragement : we can remove the obstinately bad, to preserve the rest : we can put the Instruction of good Books in their Way : we can call them to Family-Devotions, from the lamentable Omission of which Duty, a very great Part of our Sins and Follies proceed ;

ceeds ; and we can likewise bring some of them at one Time, and send the rest at another, to the House of God. It is very true, praying and reading at Home, and going to Church, are neither the Whole nor the Main of their Duty ; and they will be faithfully told so, when they come here. But these are Parts of the first and great Commandment, Regard to Him that made us ; and they are such Parts as, if they neglect, they will too easily think they may as well neglect the rest. Most of them would be glad of this kind Attention to them ; all of them would respect us for it : and, were ever so many of them indifferent about it, or worse, ought it to be an Affair indifferent to us ? When poor, ignorant, thoughtless Creatures come to live under our Roof ; is it Christian, is it human, to let them go on, just as they will, to their own Destruction of Body and Soul ? They contribute a great deal to our Happiness : why should not we contribute, since we so easily may, in this important Point, to theirs ? But indeed is not our own, present as well as future, deeply concerned in it too ? Our Ease, our Characters, our Fortunes, our Lives, depend on the Honesty, the Veracity, the Sobriety, the Diligence,

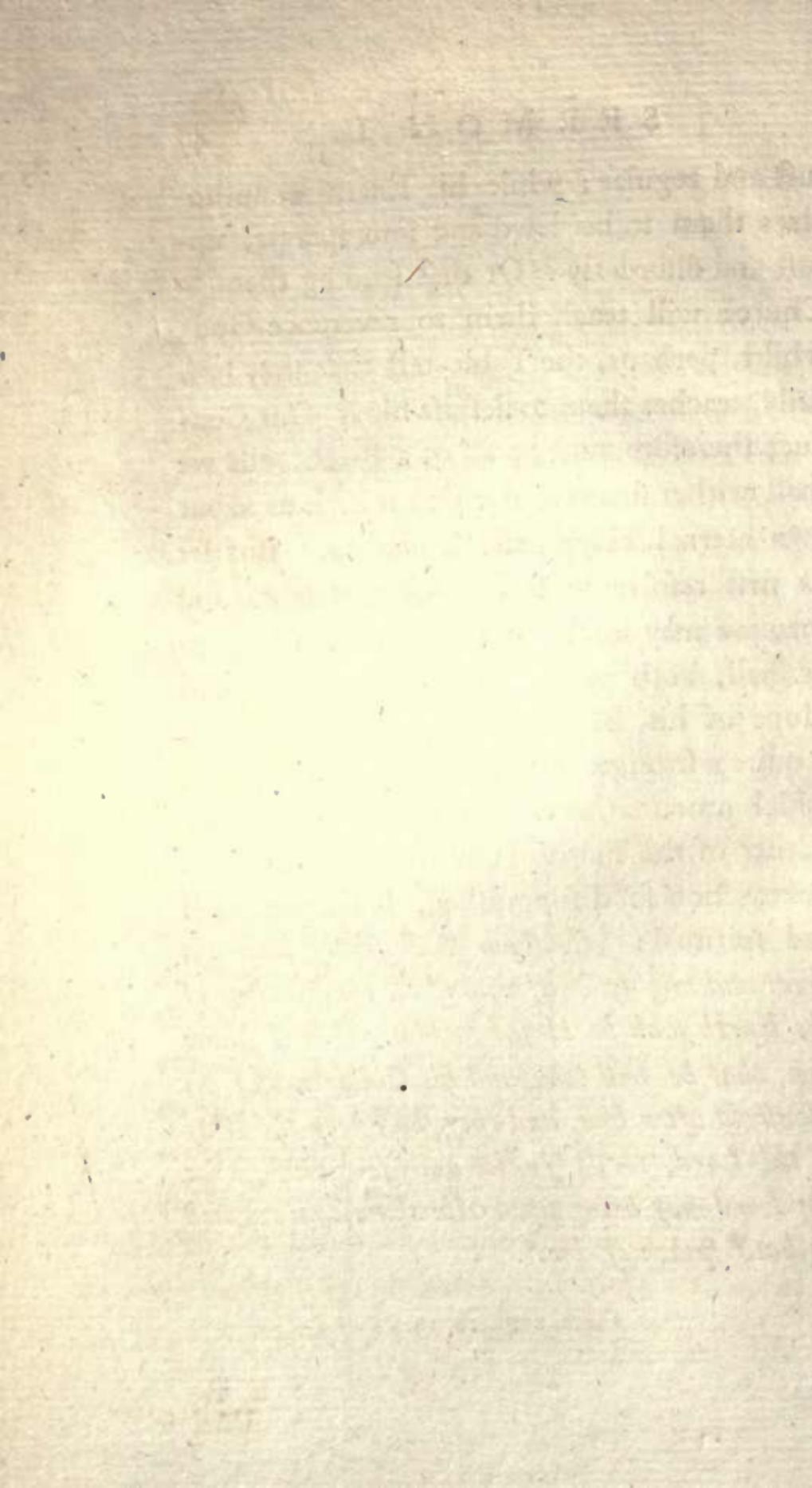
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of those about us. And what can secure these Qualities in them so well, as their being persuaded, that God requires them at their Hands; and will treat them, as they treat us? Were this Motive weaker than it is, no real one ought to be despised. Loud Complaints of the ill Behaviour of the lower Part of the World, are made continually; but whom have the upper Part to thank for it but themselves, if they take no Care to prevent or mend it? With the best Care, it will happen too frequently; but, without it, what else can happen?

Upon the Whole, it is astonishing, that any, who pretend to be good, can fail to endeavour, that their Children and Servants may be religious; when not a few, confessedly bad, take such Precautions as they can to make them better than they are willing to be themselves. And undoubtedly this is very prudent, so far as it goes. But, as the Prudence of such People is throughout essentially defective, so this Instance of it, ordinarily speaking, can go but a very little Way. For what Likelihood is there, that a few right Exhortations, or Directions, from the Head of a Family, will make the Members of it modest and sober,

just and regular ; while his Example authorizes them to be lewd and intemperate, unjust and disorderly ? Or that sending them to Church will teach them to reverence God ; whilst, perhaps, the Table-talk that they hear daily, teaches them to despise him ? Our Conduct therefore must be all of a Piece ; else we shall neither succeed, nor will it avail us to our own eternal Happiness, if we do. But let us first resolve to serve God ourselves ; and then we may insist, that they who belong to us shall, both with a good Grace, and good Hope of his Blessing : to which we cannot acquire a stronger Title, than by that Method, which procured, as we read in Scripture, to the Father of the Faithful and his Descendants, a Benediction so distinguished, both temporal and spiritual : *Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty Nation, and all the Nations of the Earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his Children and his Household after him, and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that, which he hath spoken of him^e.*

^e Gen. xviii. 18, 19.



S E R M O N . III.

M A T T . xxii. 37, 38.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind.

This is the first and great Commandment.

THESE Words contain the former Part of our blessed Lord's Answer to the Question, *Master, which is the great Commandment in the Law?* It was put to him by one of the Scribes or Lawyers, the authorized Instructors of the People, *tempting him:* that is, designing to make Trial of his Knowledge, and the Soundness of his Doctrine. For the Man's Intention plainly appears to have been no worse than this, from his immediate Approbation of our Saviour's Judgement; and the gracious Assurance he received in Return, that *he was not far from the Kingdom of God,* as we read in the parallel Place of St. Mark^a.

^a Mark xii. 34.

Which of the Commandments is the greatest, may seem to us a Question of more Curiosity than Importance: because undoubtedly the least, as well as the greatest, ought to be observed. Yet still it was a Point of some Consequence in itself: since two Precepts might interfere: and Men be obliged to omit one in order to obey the other: now in such Cases it was material to know, which they should prefer. But the Notions entertained amongst the Jews increased the Necessity of a right Decision of this Doubt*. They divided the Injunctions of the Law, as appears from their Books yet remaining, into weighty and light ones. The former, they held, a Man must keep strictly, *if he would enter into Life*^c eternal: but the latter, some of them affirmed, had only a small Recompence belonging to them, and that in this World; so that a Man might neglect them, one Rabbi saith *trample upon them*, without much Danger. Nay, there were Teachers of considerable Reputation amongst them, who asserted, that God had given his People so great a Number of Precepts with this View, that, by observing any one, meaning probably any of the weighty

* Vid Schoetgenii Hor. Heb. & Talm. in loc. c Matth. xix. 17.

ones,

SERMON III. 51.

ones, they might obtain Salvation^{*}. This was very bad: but their Opinions, which were the weighty ones, made it worse yet. Some insisted that those alone were weighty, the Transgressors of which, it was expressly threatened in the Law, should be cut off; and all the rest light. Some held the third Commandment, some the fifth, some the Observation of the Sabbath, some that of Circumcision, to be the weightiest. In our Saviour's Time, it seems by the Reply which the Scribe made him, that Sacrificing was commonly thought the principal Article of the Law. And indeed many Passages, not only in the Gospels, but in the Prophets, evidently shew, that the Nation in general were fond of exalting the ceremonial Precepts above the moral ones, because they found them less disagreeable. In themselves, it must be owned, the former were a heavy Yoke, though in their Circumstances it had long been a needful one. But to bad Men Nothing is so heavy, as reforming their Hearts and Lives. It is true, their Sacrifices, and all their Observances, rightly interpreted, required this, in order to their final Acceptance with God. But the outward Act being a Matter of great Form and Punctuality, and sometimes

* Pocock on Hos. xiv. 2. cites this from Ikkarim, l. iii. c. 29.

Expence too, they easily persuaded themselves of what they had a great Mind to believe, that a scrupulous Performance of such troublesome and shewish Duties would certainly be sufficient, whatever their inward Dispositions and common Behaviour might be. Yet, at the same Time, the *Essenes*, no inconsiderable Sect amongst them, though affecting Privacy, and probably therefore not appearing in the History of the Gospels, ran into the contrary Extreme: and, professing great Sanctity of Manners, omitted the Temple-Sacrifices intirely*.

In such a State of Things as this, it was natural to ask the Sentiments of so remarkable a Teacher as our blessed Lord: and very important, both for the Instruction of the People and for his own Character, that he should declare them. Undoubtedly he had now a fair Opportunity of securing the Applause of the Multitude and their Leaders, by an Answer suitable to the Notions in Vogue; instead of gaining, as he did, by contradicting them, only the single Approbation of one good Man. But for this Cause came he into the World, that he should bear Witness unto the Truth^f: which

* Philo, Liber quisquis virtuti studet, vol. ii. p. 457. ed. Mang.
Joseph. Ant. l. xviii. c. 1.

^f John xviii. 37.

yet he did with such Prudence, as never to prejudice the least Part of it in his Zeal for the greatest. When he blamed the Scribes and Pharisees for preferring the minutest of ritual Observances to the weightier *Matters of the Law, Judgement, Mercy and Faith*, he added immediately, *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*^a. In the Text he proceeds with the same Caution: and, well knowing how prone Men are to draw false Consequences from the truest Doctrines, not content with deciding *which was the first and great Commandment*, he assures them, that the second, a very comprehensive one, was of the same Nature and Obligation with it: nay, for yet fuller Security, subjoins a Declaration, that, though to these were subordinate, yet with these were connected, whatever Things else the Scripture had required. *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind. This is the first and great Commandment^b. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.* Here then we see the whole System of

Matth. xxiii. 23.

^a Azen Ezra saith, the Love of God is, שרש כל המצוות the Root of all the Commandments. Buxt. Floril. p. 278.

our Duty, standing on its proper Foundation, and exhibited to our View in its natural Order: beginning with the Love of God, proceeding to the Love of our Fellow-creatures, and perfected in a careful Attention to every Regard of every Kind owing to either; which we cannot pay, without a virtuous Government of ourselves.

The Love of God is the Subject to be explained at present: which I shall do by shewing,

I. Its Nature.

II. The Importance of it in Point of Duty.

III. Its Influence on our Happiness.

IV. The Methods which infinite Wisdom hath employed, to cultivate it in our Minds.

I. Its Nature.

Various Affections cannot fail to arise in our Hearts from contemplating the Attributes and Actions of our Maker. His Eternity and Presence every where must needs raise in us Wonder and Astonishment. His unbounded Power and Knowledge, besides increasing this greatly, must also fill us with Apprehensions, that our Happiness or Misery depends on his Conduct towards us. But there is no determinate Ground in all this for being either pleased or sorry. If then we consider next, that the same being is perfectly just and righte-

ous, this immediately gives us absolute Security, so far as we are innocent; and great Comfort, that he, who can do all Things, will do only what is equitable. It gives us Fear indeed, with Reason, in Cases where we are conscious, as in Multitudes we all are, of ill Desert. But such Dread, even in the guiltiest of Men, must be accompanied with a real, though unwilling, Approbation of the Character: and the penitent Concern of better Minds will be attended with reverent Esteem. Yet, were we to stop here, our Veneration for God would be incomplete, because there still remains a more valuable and engaging Quality than any that we have hitherto been ascribing to him. But let us advance one Step further, and place before our Eyes the universal Bounty and Mercy of our heavenly Father, proved by the plainest Reason, experienced in the Works of his Creation and the Course of his Providence; but exercised most fully beyond Comparison in the unspeakable Blessing of our Redemption, and revealed to us most plainly in the Declarations of his Holy Word: then, if our Souls have any Feeling, there will spring up in them, lively Sentiments of Complacency, of Gratitude, of Love. And when once Good-

ness hath made the Impression, every other Perfection of his Nature will both strengthen it inexpressibly, by enabling him to do us continually all possible Acts of Kindness, and at the same Time regulate it duly, by a proper Temperature of that awful Respect, with which our tenderest Affections towards *the High and Holy one, that inhabiteth Eternity¹*, ought ever to be intimately mixed.

Such then is the Love of God. And as our Sense of the Divine Excellence cannot be too strong, but must indeed at the best fall infinitely short of what he deserves; we are commanded to love him *with all our Heart, with all our Soul, and with all our Mind*; that is, with the utmost Exertion of our inward Powers. Not that we are to confine our whole Affection to him: for it follows, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* Whatever hath any Thing amiable in any Degree, we ought, as far as we can, to esteem in Proportion: and consequently Him beyond Expression most, who hath in the highest Degree possible every Thing that can appear amiable to our rational Faculties, duly exercised. All Objects therefore are to be excluded, so far as Attachments to them would be

¹ Isai. lvii. 15.

inconsistent with Devotedness to our Maker. Now the Worship of false Deities is peculiarly inconsistent with it. And for that Reason the Love of God, when prescribed to the *Jews* in the Old Testament, is usually explained by adhering to him with conjugal Fidelity, (for under that Image it is often expressed) in Opposition to his Rivals, the Idols of the Nations ; and not dividing themselves, as they were extremely apt to do, between *Jehovah* and them. But if, instead of these Idols, we *set up* any others *in our Hearts** ; make unlawful Pleasure, Power, Profit, Resentment, our Deities ; this also is an evident Breach of the Faith which we have vowed to our sovereign gracious Lord. Nay, if we value the most allowable Objects of Desire so highly, as to forget or think little of the Supreme God, we still incur the same Kind of Guilt. For we ought to consider whatever we have Cause to love best, as bestowed on us by his Hand ; and therefore as a Motive to love him above all, *from whom every good and perfect Gift cometh down*¹. To say indeed, that we ought to love it in this View only, as coming from him, would be going too far : because, had we been ignorant of God, most

* Ezek. xiv. 3.

¹ James i. 17.

Things, that deserve our Liking now, would in their Degree have deserved it then. But still, the more we attend to the Goodness of God in every Thing, without neglecting the inferior Attentions to which he hath bound us, the nearer we approach towards being what we ought.

And further, the more affectionate this Regard to him on all Occasions is, the better it will suit, not only the Words of the Commandment, but the Dictates of Reason itself: which clearly teaches, that the warmest Piety is due to the Author of all our Enjoyments. But then it must be observed, however, that Love to a Being intirely spiritual cannot, ordinarily speaking, raise in us those Perceptions of animal Fervour, which earthly Passions can: nor ought we to esteem ourselves upon them, if we had them. For Experience proves, that very bad Men may feel at Times high Raptures of this Kind; and very good Men may scarce ever feel any Thing of them: so much do they depend on Constitution. Far therefore from affecting such Emotions, when we really have them not; which is a Sort of Hypocrisy, whether shewn before Men, or in the Presence of God alone; we ought not to be too earnest in

our Wishes for them. If he gives them, we are to be thankful : if he with-holds them, it is either for our needful Correction, or, perhaps, our true inward Improvement. And by labouring to work ourselves up to them, nay, by merely indulging them when our natural Frame inclines us powerfully towards them, we may be quite bewildered and lost in unmeaning or injudicious Transports, little or nothing akin to that sublime Duty, of which they would put on the Appearance. But still less ought it to be confounded, as it often hath been, with a blind, or what is worse yet, a bitter Vehemence of religious Zeal. For the most ardent Devotion, so far as it either produces Injustice or Indifference to our Brethren, or proceeds from unworthy Conceptions of God, is indeed by no Means the Love of Him, but of a Phantom of our own Imagination, placed in his Stead. And the real and only Test of the Genuineness and Strength of this divine Affection in our Breasts, is the unvaried Constancy of a sincere and reverent Delight in the Father and Lord of all, as the perfectest, and best, and most beneficent of beings ; expressed in humble and hearty Praise and Thanksgiving, in a studious Imitation of him, and a chearful Obedience to him,

The next Thing to be laid before you is,

II. The Importance of cherishing and acting
from this Principle, in Point of Duty.

Most People seem to think, that what they are pleased to call moral Behaviour, though perhaps in some Points grossly immoral, is their whole Duty. Others, who have some Notion of Piety, carry it little further than attending public Worship, more or less frequently, perhaps with very little Thought of what they are about. Some, who make a Conscience of private Prayer also, it may be doubted, neither feel, nor endeavour to feel, much of the good Things they say in it. Or, whatever Sense a few may have of the Fear of God, they have usually none almost of Love to him. Any real Experience of that Affection, they have heard so often treated, even by professedly serious Christians, as mere Enthusiasm, that they are apprehensive of Danger from it. The Scripture doth indeed enjoin it: and so they will bear with the Mention of it in Discourses from the Pulpit, provided it be passed over slightly, or interpreted away to just Nothing: else they conceive it to be at best entirely Supererogation; and leave it accordingly with all their Hearts to such as chuse to have more Religion than they need.

And, it must be confessed, this Way of Thinking hath received too much Countenance from the indiscreet and extravagant Manner in which the Subject hath been sometimes handled. But surely, explained as you have heard it now, there can be Nothing more reasonable, or of greater Moment. If we have any Principle of Goodness in ourselves, that must lead us to esteem and love it in others. Now in God is perfect Goodness: and therefore not to esteem and love Him, is to be void of right Affection towards that Being who deserves it infinitely the most. Our Duty consists in such Behaviour as the Relations of Things require of us. To whom then are our first and most important Relations? Are they not evidently to our Maker, Preserver, and gracious Benefactor, to our sovereign Lord, and final Judge? Other Claims, however like in their Nature, must be unspeakably inferior in their Degree to His. What Sort of Morality then is that, which dwells only on the transitory Obligations of Men one to another, and overlooks the eternal Bonds, which tie us, *so long as we have our Being^m*, to Him; *of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all Thingsⁿ*? The Regards that we owe him, indeed, are nu-

^m Ps. civ. 33.

ⁿ Rom. xi. 36.

merous;

merous; and vary in some Measure as our spiritual State doth. But still, as Goodness, though combined with other Attributes, was in the Beginning the active Principle in the Mind of God, and ever prevails through all his Dispensations: so is Love, though occasionally associated with other Movements of Soul, the original and universal Affection, due to him from all his rational Creatures: or, in our Saviour's Words, *the first and great Commandment.*

Suppose, in the mutual Intercourses of this World, any one should value, as he ought, a Person of but low Desert; and yet be insensible to much higher Merit, well known to him, in another; should be duly grateful to the former for Favours, not worth naming in Comparison with those which the latter had done him, and yet should leave him and all his Kindness out of his Thoughts: would not such a Turn of Mind be very wrong and criminal? Would not such an excellent and beneficent Person be very unequally and unjustly treated? Yet this is exactly the common Behaviour of Mankind. Here we live amongst poor imperfect Creatures, like ourselves. We receive a few small Benefits from some of them, and see a little Glimmering of Goodness in others; and should be very blameable, if we did

did not feel and express a proper Esteem for them, on Account of both. Now there is at the same Time, not only within our Knowledge, but ever most intimately present with us, a Being of inconceivable Perfection and Loveliness; from whose Bounty we and this whole Universe have received our very Existence, and every Capacity of Enjoyment that belongs to it; by whose continual Support we are upheld in Life; whose Grace excites us to every Thing good; whose Forbearance passes over our daily Transgressions; nay, *who hath commended his Love towards us, in that, while we were yet Sinners, Christ, his only Son, died for us, that, being justified by his Blood, we might be saved from Wrath^o, and rejoice in Hope of the Glory of God^p.* What then have we Cause to think of ourselves, if we love not Him, who himself is *Love^q*; if such Acts of Kindness make none or faint Impressions on our Hearts; if we reflect but seldom upon them, and are influenced but little by them? Is there, or can there be, an Instance of Ingratitude from Man to Man, that bears the least Proportion to the Unworthiness of such a Temper? For that God hath no Need of our Acknowledgments, as our Fellow-creatures often have, only

• Rom. v. 8, 9.

▪ Ver. 2.

¶ 1 John iv. 8.

proves his Goodness to be the greater; and therefore ought not surely to make our Sense of it the less. Now, if these Things are thus evident to our View, in how much stronger a Light must they appear to his all-seeing Eye? And with what Dislike and Indignation must he look on so shocking a Depravity, as that of refusing him the very Affection, which he purposely and principally formed us to exercise towards himself, its most deserving, its only adequate Object? For, as all that in a moral Sense is good in his whole Creation, is but the Shadow of Divine Perfection; so the Esteem and Love of what is good must ever be essentially defective, till it leads us to, and terminates in, the Love of Him.

But let us now consider also the Effects of this Principle on other Parts of our Duty. We must set our Hearts on something. Worldly Things are all of them Trifles. Many of them are not to be attained, but by unlawful Means: however attained, Fondness for them debases and corrupts us. We see and feel it every Day: all the Wickedness that prevails on Earth springs from it. Therefore, to avoid this Danger, Men have been directed to fix their Attention on the Rightness, the Amiability of Virtue:

tue : and right and amiable it is, no Question. But, without having Recourse to unhappy Experience, the plainest Reason shews, how weakly and how transiently the bare Idea, the abstract Notion of moral Excellence must affect such Creatures, surrounded with such Temptations as we are, compared with an affectionate Regard to Him, in whom the Fulness of it dwells, and overflows on all the Works of his Hands. Every Sort, indeed, of Regard to God, is a more powerful Incitement to Virtue, than any other Motive: but Love hath a peculiar Force; often in beginning a Change from Evil to Good, but always in carrying it on, and compleating it. While we obey only from Fear of him, we are unwilling and backward, imagine Difficulties, contrive Excuses; and think it a Point gained, if we can persuade ourselves, that this or that needs not be done. If Hope be added to it, without any Inducement more generous, we shall still be in Danger of aiming to get our Reward by doing as little for it as we can. But those, whom we love, we serve with Alacrity and Zeal; forget our own Inclinations to adopt theirs, hate every Thing that displeases them, despise every Thing that doth not recommend us to them, look on their Com-

mands as Favours and Honours, rejoice to encounter Difficulties for their Sakes, and think we can never do enough to testify our Attachment to them. What noble Improvements then must Love to God make in the Performance of our Duty; and how can it fail,

III. Of increasing our Happiness, even in this World, as well as the next!

For Want of cultivating this delightful Affection, the Thoughts of him are dreadful to the Generality of Men. Too many are tempted to wish in their Hearts, if they durst, that he were not, or had no Regard to human Conduct: and if any of them can but persuade themselves for a while, on the Strength of some poor Cavil, to hope what they wish, they triumph in the imagined Discovery, that sets them so much at Ease. From the same Default, humbler and righter Minds consider him very often in no better Light, than as a rigid Lawgiver, arbitrarily exacting a Number of almost impracticable Duties, and inforcing them with the Dread of insupportable Punishments: whence they are ready to sink under the Terrors of Religion, even while they are conscientiously fulfilling its Precepts. Looking on God as the Object of Love would rectify these mistaken Conceptions intirely. We

Should all see and feel, that a Being of infinite Goodness, directed by infinite Wisdom, is the highest Blessing; and the Want of such a one would be the greatest Calamity, that is possible: we should be satisfied, that the strictest of his Laws, and the severest of their Sanctions, are Means which he knows to be needful for our Good; that his Mercy will forgive on Repentance our past Transgressions of them, that his Grace will strengthen us to keep them better, and that he will never reject a Soul affectionately devoted to him. In Proportion then as we are so, all terrifying Apprehensions will vanish from us. *There is no Fear in Love,* faith St. John; *Fear bath Torment; but perfect Love casteth out Fear.*

Another Sort of Men there is, who have not much Uneasiness, but little or no Pleasure in Religion. What they call performing their Devotions, is commonly nothing more than going heavily through a few customary Shews of Respect, and repeating by Rote a certain Number of good Words, without any Life, or almost any Meaning. No Wonder, if the Benefit of such Worship seems to be so small, that more than a few, whose Consciences would not suffer them to neglect it,

[¶] *John iv. 18.*

cannot however help considering it as a burthensome Task, enjoined them, they scarce know why. But were these Forms and Shadows turned into Substance, by the real Exercise of that devout Affection which is professed in them, we should none of us any longer think hardly or meanly of the highest and happiest Employment of the human Soul. We should be filled with pleasing Reverence in doing Homage to the gracious Lord of all, celebrate his Perfections as interested in every one of them, give Ease to our Hearts by a penitent Confession of our Offences, make our Claim to his promised Mercy with most joyful Gratitude, vow to him chearfully a more vigilant Obedience, feel a double Satisfaction in every Comfort from having received it as his Gift, and disburthen ourselves of every Anxiety, by committing to his Providence all our Wants, and all our Cares.

Every other Love may cause the acutest Misery. The Object of our tenderest earthly Regards may be insensible or ungrateful; may prove many Ways inferior to our Expectation; may be wretched, and make us so; may be snatched away on a sudden for ever. But Love to God is subject to no Disappointment; is indeed a Cure for all that can possibly happen to us.

us. While we set our *Affection on Things above*^{*}, the chief Treasure of our Soul must ever be safe: even those *Things*, that seem to be the most *against us*^t, we are expressly assured, are *working together* all the while *for our Good*^u: and the more of our inferior Enjoyments God requires us to sacrifice to him, the fuller Opportunities he gives us of manifesting that supreme Value for him, which he seldom fails to reward amply here, by infusing into us a Sense of his Favour, greatly superior to all worldly Pleasure; but at least *he hath prepared in Heaven for them that love him, Things which Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entered into the Heart of Man*^v.

Indeed, how large a Part, that Love itself, which we have preserved inviolate through the Trials of Life, will then make of our Felicity; when we shall be raised above all our present low Objects of Desire, and have every Faculty of our Souls adapted to embrace the only worthy one; when we shall experience his immediate beatific Presence, feel Joys unutterable, flowing directly from him, and be compleatly assured, that *this God is our God for ever and ever*^x: how transporting the Move-

* Col. iii. 2.

^t Gen. xlvi. 36.

^u Rom. viii. 28.

^w 1 Cor. ii. 9.

^x Ps. xlvi. 14.

ments of our Affections towards him may then become, is not for us now to say or conceive. But so much Apprehension of it we must surely have, as will shew that our most important Interest lies in forming ourselves to that Disposition of Heart towards him in this Life, which is necessary to our Blessedness in the next. For the principal Felicity of Heaven consists in God: and unless we love him, we cannot enjoy him, or be happy with him.

Let us therefore proceed to consider,

IV. The Methods which infinite Wisdom hath taken to cultivate so excellent a Principle in our Minds.

Love owes its Being to Goodness; and so may be produced, either by a general Contemplation of its Amiability, or by Favours personally received from it. That we are capable of the former and purer Sort of Love, Delight in a benevolent Character, though we have never been benefited by it, nor possibly can be, is a Truth, of which every Day gives Proofs with Respect to our Fellow-Creatures, whom we affectionately esteem, though inaccessible distant from us, though dead many Ages before us. And therefore we are doubtless capable also of admiring and adoring the infinitely superior Benevolence of our Creator,

abstracted

abstracted from the Thought of our own sharing in it; as indeed we surely all of us love him for his Bounty to the rest of the World, as well as to ourselves. But then, this mere disinterested Affection, though natural to our Hearts, is very weak and languid there, in the midst of so many other Passions and Appetites as our Condition upon Earth makes necessary for us, and the original Depravity and superadded evil Customs of Mankind have so unhappily strengthened and perverted. Our Hearts are pre-engaged and filled up, for the most Part, with temporal, it is well if not with criminal, Objects of Desire, long before we come seriously to reflect on the spiritual and truly valuable one. Nor, when we do, can mere speculative Meditation upon that be expected to prevail over the importunate Calls which we have to other Attentions: but Experience of his Bounty must be added, to invigorate Esteem by Gratitude. And plentifully it is added by our heavenly Father in his Works of Nature and of Grace. *O that Men would therefore praise the Lord for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders which he doth for the Children of Men^y; that they w^yould love him, because he first loved us^z!* But Be-

^y Ps. cvii, 21.^z 1 John iv. 19.

nefits received are soon forgotten: and what-ever thankful Warmth they may raise, while the Relish of them is fresh and lively, cools and flattens; till, by long Possession, we grow apt to think every Thing that we enjoy our Due; and feel nothing in Relation to it but Discontent, if any Part is taken away or diminished. Knowing this, our indulgent Ma-ker, that he may attract us more powerfully to himself, hath joined with the Experience of present Mercies, the Hope of unspeakably greater to come: and *blessed is he whose Hope is in the Lord his God*^{*}. For though it be a less noble, because more selfish, Passion, yet, in the present Case, it partakes considerably of something moral and religious. Any real Desire of heavenly Bliss must imply a Degree of Love, both to Virtue and Holiness, in which it will chiefly consist, and to that holy Being who hath promised to bestow it. But, alas! worldly and sinful Attachments debase Mens Natures, that they cannot aspire to, cannot earnestly wish for, any Thing great and excellent. And therefore the wise Ruler of the World hath enforced his Laws by the only remaining Motive, Fear: that they, whom nothing better will influence, may at

least be influenced by considering the present Sufferings and future Misery, awaiting Wick-dness: a low and slavish Inducement, it must be owned; but however so far a good Sign in him who acts upon it, as it shews him not to be inflexibly obstinate in what is Evil. And, remote as it may seem from that generous Flame which our Maker seeks to kindle in our Breasts, yet the Son of *Sirach* hath justly observed, that *the Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of his Love*^b.

Fear, in the first Place, can with peculiar Efficacy restrain the outward Actions of Men, and keep them from adding Strength to bad Inclinations by Indulgence. Fear, especially of Punishment which they know they deserve, can make their Vices become tasteless and unpleasant to them. And when once they are brought to avoid forbidden Gratifications as hurtful, there is a fair Prospect, that not only virtuous Behaviour will recommend itself, as almost every Thing doth, by Custom, but that also its intrinsic Fitness and Beauty will come to be perceived, and awaken

^b Ecclus xxv. 12. See Philo de Abrahamo, p. 19. ed. Mangey: and a large Quotation from Maimonides, in Humphreys's Diff. on the Resurrection, prefixed to his Translation of Athenagoras, p. 52, &c,

suitable Affections. Or, if this be already the Case, and yet vehement Temptations hurry Men on to Sin; (a very common and very pitiable Condition) Fear may be so impressed on the Heart from above, as to overbalance these; free the rational Principle from the Oppression under which it labours, and enable it to resume its rightful Dominion. Then the Conduct will be reformed, the View of Things gradually brighten, and the more ingenuous Affections of Hope and Gratitude, and unmixed Love, spring up and flourish; till at length our Duty and our Maker, which at first we regarded unwillingly, on mere Compulsion, will no longer have Need of any other Force than their own native Attraction, to regulate every Thought of our Souls, and every Action of our Lives.

Thus then appears the Wisdom and the Goodness of those various Methods which God hath taken to unite us finally to himself. He hath planted in our Hearts that pure and disinterested Esteem and Love of moral Perfection, which leads directly to the Esteem and Love of him above all; and without which we should not have been susceptible of genuine Piety and Virtue. But having placed

us, with a Nature prone to go wrong, in a World full of Inticements, he hath not left us to the Guidance of this one Principle, which, though the best in itself, would have proved insufficient for our Direction; but hath kindly put us under the Tutorage of subordinate Affections, *to train us up in the Way wherein we should go^c*, till we become enlightened enough *to approve the Things that are excellent^d*, and animated enough to pursue them for their own Sakes. Let us therefore give up ourselves without Scruple to the Influence of every Motive to our Duty, which Reason or Scripture sets before us, of Pleasure or Terror, of this World or the next^e, and by Reading, Meditation and Prayer, imprint them strongly on our Minds; nor be at all dejected, though perhaps as yet the least worthy of them hath the largest Share in our Obedience; as probably it hath for a Time in that which most Children pay to their earthly Parents, for whose Persons and Precepts, notwithstanding, they acquire, by insensible Steps, the most dutiful and tender Esteem. But

^c Prov. xxii. 6.

^d Phil. i. 10.

לשם בא לשמן לעולם יטוק ארכט בתורה ובמצוות אפילו שלא
לשמן, Sota, fol. 22. col. 2. ap. Buxt. Floril.
p. 156.

whoever would strengthen within himself this blessed Disposition towards God, must frequently recollect and inculcate the Conviction, that other Incitements are but the Means, and *Love the End of the Commandment*: that we improve and grow inwardly better under the heavenly Discipline, only in Proportion as we advance in unfeigned Affection, and are transformed by it into real Likeness to the Supreme Good. Open your Hearts therefore to feel his Goodness towards yourselves, and imitate it towards your Brethren. *For God is Love; and he that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God, and God in him*.

1 Tim. i. 5.

1 John iv. 16.

S E R M O N IV.

M A T T H. xxii. 39.

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy
Neighbour as thyself.*

THIS is the latter Part of our Saviour's Answer to the Question, *Which is the great Commandment in the Law?* He had already answered sufficiently, by saying, it was the Love of God. But most of the Jews before whom he spoke, thought the best Proof of their fulfilling that Duty was a scrupulous Exactness in some, or all, of the ceremonial Precepts that God had enjoined them. And on the Merit of this, they indulged themselves in great Hardness of Heart, even towards their Brethren of the same Religion; and in utter Disregard, if not implacable Hatred, of all who were of a different Religion, perhaps of a different Sect only. So that, if he had carried his Reply

Reply no further, his Hearers, *who had a Zeal for God, but not according to Knowledge^a*, would in all probability have understood him according to their own preconceived Notions: and never have suspected him of designing to condemn their Superstition and Uncharitableness. Therefore he immediately subjoins, from the express Words of *Moses^b*, another Commandment, which, if they misinterpreted the first, might shew them their Mistake; and if they did not, would plainly appear, to any considerate Person, *like unto it* in its Nature, and second in its Dignity and Use; *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* But this also the *Jews* contrived to explain in a wrong Manner, that they might gratify wrong Inclinations. For which Reason he took an Opportunity to set them right. And besides the *Jews*, Multitudes of others, both before and ever since, have done the same Thing. Nay some, not content with perverting, and so disobeying, have directly found Fault with it.

Yet whoever believes in a wise and good Ruler of the World, must believe it to be his Will, that Humanity should be practised amongst Men: and whoever feels in himself

^a Rom. x. 2.

^b Lev. xix. 18.

kind Affections, must think the Exercise of them his Duty. But then Doubts are raised, who are intitled to our Kindness, and in what Degree: both which Points therefore the Precept, now before us, briefly determines. And I shall explain and vindicate its Determinations, by shewing you the Meaning, *first*, of the Word *Neighbour*; *secondly*, of the Expression, *loving him as ourselves*: and proving in some Measure all the Way, but principally at the Conclusion, the Reasonableness and Necessity of having so much Regard for so many as the Text requires.

I. Our *Neighbour* then commonly signifies in Scripture, and not seldom in Heathen Writers, every Person who is placed within our Reach and Influence. Accordingly, St. Paul, instead of saying, he that loveth his Neighbour, faith, *he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the Law*^c. We have usually the most frequent Opportunities of doing Good to those who live with us, or near us. But if any one, however distant from us, or unknown to us, particularly wants our Help, he is, in Effect, by that very Thing, brought near us for the Time, and put under our Care. God's Benevolence is absolutely universal: ours should be

^c Rom. xiii. 8.

extended as far as it can: and the Extent of Mens Power being extremely various and uncertain; (for the meanest Subject may sometimes, by one single Discovery, do more general Service to Mankind, than the greatest Monarch is capable of) the Word *Neighbour* hath this peculiar Advantage, and therefore Propriety, that it contracts or enlarges its Signification, just as the Case demands; and either takes in the Extremities of the Globe, or confines itself to our own Home.

Some have carried their public-spiritedness too far: and piqued themselves on manifesting Good-will to their Fellow-Creatures, by Undertakings out of their Province, and even beyond their Abilities; while their proper Neighbours, those with whom they had close Connexions, and their proper Business, that which their Circumstances bound them to mind, were disregarded: an injudicious Conduct, when it proceeds from the best Intentions; but highly blamable, if Vanity, or a meddling Temper, be the Source of it: on which Head these Persons would do well to examine themselves. But the far more ordinary Fault is the opposite one: narrowing the Bounds of our friendly Dispositions; and excluding those from

from the Benefit of being our Neighbours, who have a Right to it.

The principal Causes of this are three : Hatred, Pride and Selfishness.

1. One chief Ground of Hatred long hath been, and is, Diversity of Faith or Worship: of which Case we have a most remarkable Instance, *Luke x. 25, &c.* There a certain Lawyer standing up, and tempting our Saviour with the Question, *What shall I do to inherit eternal Life;* he draws from his own Mouth the Answer, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and thy Neighbour as thyself:* then tells him, *Thou hast answered right : This do, and thou shalt live.* But he, willing, as the Evangelist observes, *to justify himself,* said unto Jesus, *And who is my Neighbour?* imagining, no Doubt, as the Sequel shewed, and as most of his Countrymen thought at that Time, and many Ages after^a, if they do not still, that none but the Members of his own Communion deserved the Name; and that all others were to be deemed unrelated to him, and held in Abhorrence. This abominable Notion our blessed Lord might have confuted by numerous Passages of the Old Testament^b: but he thought it more useful to

^a See Lightfoot's Harm. of New Test. and on this History.

^b Exod. xxii. 21. xxiii. 9. Lev. xix. 33, 34. Deut. x. 19, &c.

humble the vain Man, by convicting him from the Testimony of his Conscience, and making him confess, without perceiving it, how unjust his Interpretation was. For this End he tells him the moving Story, that you all know, of the *Jew* and the *Samaritan*; of which two Nations the former detested the latter beyond all others; and having easily brought him to declare, that the *Samaritan* had acted the neighbourly Part, as he ought, to the *Jew*; it evidently followed, that a *Jew*, upon Occasion, should act the same Part to a *Samaritan*. *Which thinkest thou was Neighbour to him that fell amongst the Thieves?* And he said, *He that shewed Mercy on him.* Then said Jesus unto him, *Go and do thou likewise.* O that all Christians of all Denominations had learned, or would yet learn, from hence and from the whole Tenour of the Gospel, what some of them in particular are lamentably ignorant of, or worse: that Kindness and Tenderness, and much more Justice and Equity, are due to those of every Sect and Party, from whom they differ the most widely; and due, as a Condition of their inheriting eternal Life!

Another Thing, which often withholds our kind Regard from very fit Objects of it, and excites Hatred to them, is Rivalship in Profit,

Advance-

Advancement, Affection, Reputation. And we may see in the World, perhaps feel in ourselves, if we examine, as we every one should, that Competitions, not only about Matters of some Weight, but the merest Trifles, can turn the best Neighbours, the nearest Relations, the dearest Friends, into absolute Strangers, if not bitter Enemies. Nay the bare Success of others, where we neither were nor could be their Competitors, is enough sometimes to alienate our Hearts from them to a strange Degree. Yet surely we ought not to be hated by others, either for aiming at, or obtaining Advantages, by any fair Means; nor consequently they by us. Nay, should they, in such a Case, thwart an important Interest of ours, to secure an inconsiderable one of their own: even this, though a sad Defect of Generosity, may in Strictness of Speech be no Injustice.

But further, supposing a Man hath directly done us a palpable Injury, still he is our Neighbour. Perhaps it was ignorantly, or inadvertently, or from such Frailty, as we and all Men are liable to: or it is but a flight or a single Offence: or we had provoked him to it; or received Favours from him, that overbalance it, or he hath good Qualities in other Respects,

that intitle him to our Esteem. Or if he be, on the whole, wicked: yet possibly he is not incorrigible. While we are too much offended to bear with him, our heavenly Father, whom he hath much more offended, bears with him; and is graciously trying all Methods to reclaim him. You will say, “God cannot be hurt by ‘his Wickedness.’” Why, neither need you. By Patience, you may always turn it to your spiritual Improvement: by Prudence, you may generally avoid any temporal Harm from it. You may, if it be necessary, punish him for it: yet consider him as one whom you could heartily wish to treat more gently.

2. The same bad Effect, that Resentment hath on some, Pride alone hath on others: they cannot allow such low Creatures, as the Multitude are, to claim their Notice, and even their Love, by a presumptuous Name, which implies a Sort of Equality with them. But indeed they are not only our Neighbours, but our Brethren: for God *bath made of one Blood all that dwell on the Face of the Earth*^f. They have the same Principles of human Nature, the same Rights of human Society, the same Protection of Divine Providence here, the same

^f Acts xvii. 26.

Covenant of eternal Glory hereafter. And if we cannot, for the sake of these Things, overlook the Contemptibleness of their outward Appearance, and treat them with Compassion and Beneficence, instead of Scorn ; we are much meaner Wretches than great Numbers of them.

3. A third Inducement to deny others a Claim to our neighbourly Regard is Selfishness : a worse Turn of Mind, on some Accounts, than either of the former. A Man's Anger and Pride can affect but Part of his Neighbours, usually a small one : to the rest he may still be friendly and beneficent. But the selfish Man acknowledges no Neighbour : is concerned solely for himself, and what he is pleased to reckon his own Interest ; which he places in Wealth or Rank, Power or Pleasure. And they who seek Wealth only by excessive Frugality, are generally disliked rather more than they deserve. But such as enrich or advance themselves by the wickedest Rapaciousnes and Baseness, provided they live splendidly and expensively, are considered with an Indulgence that hath extremely pernicious Fruits. And the most abandoned Pursuers of immoral Pleasure obtain, by their shewish Gaiety, the Cha-

racter of the best natured People imaginable ; though they often have originally, and seldom fail to acquire, the most absolute Insensibility to public Welfare, the ties of Hospitality and Friendship, the Distresses of Families, and even of the unhappy Creatures who have believed their Professions of the tenderest Sentiments.

But next in Guilt to such as mind none but themselves, is he, that fixes upon one, or some few, Relations or Favourites, for the Objects of his whole Affection : a Fault the more dangerous, as possibly it may appear to him a Virtue. He is doing his Share of Good : taking Care of those, who naturally, or by a Sort of Adoption, belong to him. And doubtless we are peculiarly intrusted with such : but not authorized either to injure or neglect others for the sake of exalting these to a Height that is needless, and perhaps hurtful even to themselves. Kindness of Heart was planted in Men, not to divide the World into little Parties, each of which should keep separate from and be zealous against the rest ; but to unite all, as much as could be, into one Neighbourhood, indeed one Body, animated with one Soul. It is not for our Family, or our Friends alone,

that

that God is concerned, or would have us concerned: but universal Good is his End, and universal Good-will is the great Instrument which he hath given us to promote it. Therefore we must always bear in Mind the common Relation of Man to Man: and, whenever it is doubtful whether that, or the particular Ties of Blood or Intimacy require the Preference, far from following the strongest Propensity blindfold, we should labour to preserve the sincerest Impartiality in forming our Judgment: for that and that only will effectually plead our Excuse, if we err, as without Question we often do.

Having now seen the scriptural and rational Extent of the Phrase, *Thy Neighbour*, let us consider

II. What, and how necessary, that Love is, which the Commandment in the Text enjoins us to bear him. This, I hope, hath appeared already in some Measure; but must be shewn more distinctly, because too many object, that they cannot help hating some Persons, and see no Cause to love many others.

Now, it should be considered, we have two Sorts of Love: one of Esteem, founded on the Opinion that Men are deserving; the other, of mere Benevolence, founded on the

Knowledge that they are capable of Pleasure and Pain. The former we may justly be expected to have for all we can : the latter, for all absolutely. There are People in the World, for whom we cannot well have much Esteem. Yet every one hath some valuable Qualities. Those whom we dislike, it is great Odds, have more than we allow them : possibly, were it not for our Passions and Prejudices, we should find several of them to be highly worthy and amiable. And, though we are not always obliged to be acquainted with their Merit, we are obliged not to detract from it. But, whatever Ground we may have to think ill of them, Nothing hinders us from wishing well to them. If they are bad, is there not great Need of wishing they were better ? Continuing such as they are, is it not reasonable to wish them every Enjoyment, that will do no Harm to them or others ? Do they not often in this World, and will they not certainly in the next, pay dearly enough for their Wickedness ? And is it not the Part of Humanity then to exercise Pity towards them ; and leave Vengeance to Him whose it is ?

“ But they are our Enemies : is that a Title “ to our Love ? ” No, certainly. You are not commanded

commanded to love them because they are your Enemies, or the more for being so: but only, in a due Measure, notwithstanding they are your Enemies. Perhaps indeed they are not so: at least, to near the Degree that you imagine. But if they were: hath not God loved us, and sent his Son to die for us, *when we were Enemies*⁵? Hath he not abundant Right to expect this Return from us? Doth he not expressly tell us, he expects it? Hath he not planted a natural Principle of Relenting and Forgiveness in us? And is he not ready to assist us continually, by his Grace, in the Revival and Cultivation of it?

But you will say, “Even to our Enemies we will do no Wrong: should a proper Occasion offer, we will do them Service: and then, how can it signify any Thing, what our Affections to them are?” Why, you may profess to behave thus, without loving them at all; and you may possibly design it; but you will not keep up to it. Such as your Affections are, such will your Actions be: and endeavouring to restrain the latter, without amending the former, you will find, is continual Uneasiness, and much Labour, to little Purpose. Rectifying your inward Disposition

⁵ Rom. v. 10.

is going to the Root of the Matter. To think of your Neighbour with Mildness and Candour, and therefore behave to him with Equity and Kindness, is a plain Way. But when you pretend never to do him Harm, though you always wish it him ; and to be ready to promote his Happiness, while you desire his Misery : either you are not in Earnest, or you do not know yourself ; it is too hard for human Strength. So that in this, indeed, in every Instance, where Christianity may seem to have made our Duty more difficult, by enjoining the Reformation of our Hearts as well as our Lives, it hath on the contrary made it practicable and easy, by putting us in the only true Method. Besides, regulating the one, without the other, if we could do it, would be utterly insufficient to answer our Maker's great End, the purifying of our Natures, and exalting us to a Capacity of heavenly Bliss. The Affections, in the moral Sense, are the Man. And if you give up to God your outward Actions only, your Sacrifice is defective and unacceptable. You will plead, it may be, that to him you give up your whole Soul : for you love God intirely, though you hate bad Men. But loving them, is one main Proof which he requires of your loving him. If you loved, you would

would obey, you would imitate him. And therefore St. John declares, *If a Man say, I love God, and hateth his Brother, he is a Liar^b.*

Observe also, that as your Love to your Brethren must be inward and sincere, so it must have in View, not merely their present Gratification, but their lasting Benefit, even in Opposition to that; and not merely their Welfare in this World, but in the next too. For never was there surely a more dreadful Abuse of Words, than to call that Good-nature, which complacently allows Acquaintance, Dependants, Friends, Relations ever so near, to go on unmolested to Ruin, here and hereafter: nay, too often, directly invites and leads them to it. The Scripture, in prohibiting this Behaviour, gives it the opposite Name, and very justly. *Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thine Heart: thou shalt rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him^c.* Whence, take Notice again, that mere Desire of Good to another, when more is in our Power, will by no Means be sufficient. Love is an active Principle: and if we stop short, be it through Penuriousness, or be it through Indolence, contented with only wishing well to those, whom with moderate Pains

^b 1 John iv. 20.

^c Lev. xix. 17.

and Expence we might actually serve ; it is leaving that Affection to spend itself in doing Nothing, unless it be cheating us with an Imagination of our being better than we are, which God hath commanded us to cherish and exert for the noblest Purposes,

But admitting, that we are to *love our Neighbour* in this Manner, still doth not the Command of loving him *as ourselves*, extend to something impossible ? Certainly not. For we meet with several Instances of Persons being said to love others *as their own Souls*, or themselves, both in the sacred^k and profane Writers^l : and we are to understand the Phrase agreeably to their Meaning ; not to stretch it farther than they can mean. In Scripture, at least, it doth

^k Deut. xiii. 6. 1 Sam. xviii. 3. xx. 17.

^l In quibus enim eadem studia sunt, cædemque voluntates, in his sit, ut æque quisque altero delectetur, ac se ipso : efficiturque id, quod Pythagoras ultimum in amicitia putavit, ut unus fiat ex pluribus. Cic. Off. i. 17. Ex quo perspicitur, cum hanc benevolentiam late longeque diffusam vir sapiens in aliquem pari virtute præditum contulerit, tum illud effici quod quibusdam incredibile videatur, sit autem necessarium, ut nihil sese plus quam alterum diligat. Quid enim est quod differat, cum sint cuncta paria ? Cic. de Legg. i. 12. where see more. But he requires this Degree of Love not to every Man, but between perfectly wise and good Men. The Doctrine of the Epicureans was, Nullo modo possumus amicitiam tueri, nisi æque amicos & nos ipsos diligamus. Cic. de Fin. i. 20. where see more.

not denote the very highest Affection that we are capable of. For the Duty of loving God is plainly designed to be expressed in stronger Terms, than that of loving our Neighbour. Yet the latter must imply, not only Good-will as real as we bear to ourselves; for, if it be inconsiderable, it will be ineffectual: but also a large Degree of Good-will; for that also we bear to ourselves. And farther, we are to love him in Proportion as we love ourselves: to pay a more attentive Regard to his Interests, the more powerfully we are addicted by Nature or Custom to regard our own; and so preserve the Balance of our Affections in due Poise. This, however, we shall do much better, if we also take the Expression, as we justly may, to comprehend an Injunction, that we love and consider our Neighbour just as much as we should love and consider ourselves, were we in his Case. For, though we be equally affected by his Circumstances and our own, so far as we can know and feel both, this will carry us no unfit Lengths in his Favour: because we cannot know and feel both in the same Degree: and, though we could, no Harm would follow. Indeed we are sometimes bound, in the practical Sense, to love our Neighbour more than ourselves: to shew a

greater Concern for his Good, not only than we do shew for our own ; for which, God knows, in the principal Points, we often shew none at all ; but than we ought to shew for our own : because a very important Advantage of his may be in Question ; and a small one, in Comparison, of ours ; which it would be Meanness not to slight : or the Advantage of many may be in one Scale, and our own singly in the other. Now, when that happens, we may be obliged to go so far as to *lay down our Lives for our Brethren*^m; not only for their eternal, but temporal Welfare. Still, unquestionably, in all Cases that but approach towards an Equality, we act allowably in preferring ourselves, where no Obligation of Justice or Truth exacts the contrary. And, in the endless Variety of Circumstances that occur in human Life, all that could be done by Precept, at least by any one short Precept, and such Mankind must have, was to give as awakening a Caution as possible against the greatest Danger, and as clear a Direction as possible how to avoid it ; which, I hope, you are sensible, the Precept before us hath done ; and then to leave both right and wrong Minds to shew what they are : the one, by cheerfully

^m 1 John iii. 16.

taking, and diligently seeking, if there be Need, fit Opportunities of doing Acts of Humanity; the other, by raising Scruples, inventing Evasions, and neglecting the plainest Calls, because some are doubtful.

Men may indeed be too prone to follow every good-natured Impulse. And the few who have Cause to suspect they are, should consider what they owe to themselves, and to other Demands upon them, present, or probably future, as well as to the Object which now strikes them: they should ask the Judgment of pious and prudent Friends: they should have some Regard to the Judgment even of the less good Part of the World; else they may possibly discredit the Duty which they would wish to recommend. But giving ourselves up to be influenced solely or chiefly by common Opinion and Practice, is the Way to extinguish every Thing that is right in us. To a proper Degree therefore the Son of Sirach's Advice is necessary to be observed: *In every good Work trust thy own Soul, for this is the keeping of the Commandment^a.* Upright Meaning, with a moderate Share of Discretion, will be a safe Guide through whatever Perplexities may at any Time arise in Relation to this Precept.

^a Ecclus xxxii. 23.

Still you will say perhaps, that, explain and limit it as we will, it is very hard after all, that, in order to obey God, and demonstrate our Love to him, we must disobey the Dictates of the strongest and usefulllest Principle he hath planted in our Nature; the Love of ourselves, and adopt others, often of very undeserving Characters, in our own Room. But consider: Self-Love is not Happiness; it is not always the Instrument of procuring Happiness; but makes us uneasy and wretched. It can procure Happiness no otherwise than by exciting us to gratify our natural Inclinations, when that will do us Good; and restraining us from gratifying them, when it would do us Harm: Now Love to our Fellow-Creatures is one of our natural Inclinations. We all feel and shew it to be so, in some Instances, more or less. And why is not the Indulgence of it, within the Bounds now prescribed, as likely to do us much Good and little Harm, as that of any other? It is a pleasing Movement of Mind in itself. Reflection upon it affords a second Pleasure. We approve and esteem ourselves for having it, and for attempting what it prompts us to. If we succeed, we have exquisite Joy: if we fail, it is no inconsiderable Comfort, that we meant well.

And,

And, ordinarily speaking, all around us commend and applaud us for it. By these Means our Goodness often brings us great worldly Advantages: and very often is attended with no worldly Disadvantage. For there are many and daily Ways of exercising it without Expence or Trouble. And if the rest do cost us something, perhaps we can well bear it, and not be at all the worse. But, were it more, do our Indulgences of other Inclinations cost us Nothing? Do not the Debaucheries, the Resentments, the Amusements, the Vanities, the Caprices of Men, interfere much more frequently and irreconcileably with the truest and nearest even of their temporal Interests, than the Love of their Neighbour doth? “ But “ these Things, you will say, give much “ higher Delight.” Perhaps not. For Multitudes pursue with strange Eagerness what yields them very little Satisfaction. At best, it is a very unwise Delight. And possibly you are pleased with your present Objects of Desire, only because you have set yourselves to be pleased with them. Set yourselves therefore to be pleased with promoting the Welfare of others: and you will find your Account in it, beyond any Thing in this World.

Indeed almost all the Misery of this World proceeds from the Want of it. The unavoidable Evils of Life are nothing to those which we bring upon one another voluntarily, by Ill-Nature, Insensibility and heedless Disregard. These are the heavy Sufferings, that every one complains of and groans under, and always must, if every one will be guilty of such Behaviour: and Nothing can put an End to it, but social Love. Instead therefore of being against the Interest of any Man, it is most essentially for the Interest of all Men: and were it to prevail universally upon Earth, no Injury would be attempted, no Act of Kindness neglected. For, as St. Paul argues: *This, Thou shalt not commit Adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false Witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* Love worketh no Ill to his Neighbour; allows no Commission, no Omission, that may be hurtful to him: therefore *Love is the fulfilling of the Law*¹: all the Obligations of human Society are summed up in it. With perfect Justice then doth our blessed Lord declare, that *on*

¹ Rom. xiii. 9, 10.

these two Commandments, right Affection to God and to Man, both which imply it towards ourselves, hang all the Law and the Prophets^m.

But still, it may be, you will plead, “ how happy soever the World would become, were all Men influenced by these Principles; yet, since they are not, why must we?” Because the Whole can be amended only by the separate Amendment of each Part. “ But, you will say, unless the rest will amend, of which, to speak moderately, there is no Likelihood in our Time, the Wickedness and Misery of Mankind must, if we are to love them so well, and seek their Good so earnestly, occasion us much fruitless Pain, innumerable Disappointments and melancholy Reflections.” Why, so it will, if we engage in too great, or too difficult, or too many Undertakings; if we raise our Expectations too high; or suffer Opposition, either to kindle us into Vehemence, or plunge us into Despair. But we may go on very comfortably, if we preserve the true Temper: exerting a calm settled Benevolence on all fit Occasions, because we ought; without hoping to succeed very often, or to produce on the whole any remarkable Change for the better: but

^m Math. xxii. 40.

labouring the more constantly for this very Reason, that not a little of what we do will, to all Appearance, with Respect to others, be Labour lost. *In the Morning sow thy Seed, and in the Evening withhold not thine Hand: for thou knowest not, whether shall prosper, this or that; or whether they both shall be alike goodⁿ.* But thus much we know however, that the seemingly most unprofitable Exercises of Kindness will not only be of unspeakable Benefit to ourselves in the Upshot, which might surely suffice us, but will prove some Means in the Hands of Divine Wisdom for bringing forth at length general Good out of all Evil. Being therefore thus *Labourers together with God*^o, why should we not be happy in our Proportion; as he is perfectly, notwithstanding the Failure of his gracious Purposes towards a World, which he loves infinitely better, than the best of us can?

But you will argue further yet: “ Whatever
“ Peace we may have within, we shall have
“ none without, but be laughed at for poor
“ tame Wretches, and trampled on securely.”
No such Thing. Though few may imitate you, very few will in earnest despise you, and fewer still attack you in any material Point. Love to

ⁿ Eccl. xi. 6.

^o 1 Cor. iii. 9.

all Men cannot often provoke any Man. And in Case of Assault, you are not forbidden the just Methods of Self-preservation; you are commanded to be prudent, as well as *harmless*^p: you have the Laws to protect you: all the good to support you, from Inclination; and most of the bad, if for no better a Reason, yet lest they should suffer next. You will scruple, I own, taking some Advantages, by which they often succeed: but you will also avoid some Disadvantages, by which they are often ruined. And, besides human Helps, you will have the Providence of God on your Side, both to defend you, and perhaps to reward you openly even here. Or, should he see it best for you to go without temporal Recompences, nay to suffer temporal Inconveniences ever so grievous: bear but all patiently from a Sense of Duty to Him, and you will be filled with Consolation in this World, and assured of Glory in that which is to come.

Trust him therefore boldly with the absolute Direction of your Hearts and Lives. Let those, who resolve to be too cunning for their Maker, suppress and extinguish every friendly Sentiment in their Breasts, be blind and deaf to the

^p Matth. x. 16.

Distresses of all around them, pursue with unrelenting Fervour their own Interests, their own Pleasures, their own Schemes of Malevolence, *hateful and hating one another*^a. But let us be simple concerning Evil, and wise only unto that which is Good^b: shew Mercy with Cheerfulness, love without Dissimulation, be kindly affectioned, in Honour preferring one another, distributing to the Necessities of the Saints: rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep; be not high-minded, but condescend to Men of low Estate^c: look with Pleasure on the Virtues, the Accomplishments, the Success of others; be slow to believe their Faults, think of them with Concern, and treat them with Mildness: love even our Enemies, bless them that curse us, do Good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us. For so shall we be the Children of our Father, which is in Heaven; who maketh his Sun to rise on the Evil and the Good, and sendeth Rain on the Just and on the Unjust^d.

^a Tit. iii. 3.^b Rom. xvi. 19.^c Rom. xii. 8—16.^d Matth. v. 44, 45.

S E R M O N V.

M A T T H. iv. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the Wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil.

AS the Word of God acquaints us with many Things of great Importance, concerning our present and future Condition, which we could not else have known: so it opens to us particularly, a very interesting Scene, in the Discoveries which it makes of our Connexions with the Inhabitants of the invisible World, both good and bad. Indeed, that various Orders of rational Beings besides Man, and superior to him, exist in this Universe, is of itself extremely probable. That some, even of the highest of them, should become wicked, is only a Wonder of the same Kind, as that too many of the best Abilities amongst Men should make the worst Use of them. That for their Wickedness they should be *cast down*^a from their first

^a 2 Pet. ii. 4.

Eflat^b, and confined to a very different one, is a natural Consequence of the Divine Justice and Rectitude. That, though Sufferers already for their Crimes, they should yet be *reserved unto the severer Judgment of the great Day*, is but just the very Thing that Reason teaches concerning the Sinners of the human Race also. That they should be desirous in the mean Time of seducing us into Transgression, is very natural: for we see the profligate amongst ourselves desirous every Day of doing the like. That this should be possible for them, is by no Means inconceivable: for, since the material Frame of our Earth is confessedly liable to powerful Influences from other Parts of the Creation, why may not the intelligent Natures in it be so too? That evil Spirits should be permitted to assault us in a Degree consistent with our Freedom of Will, is evidently as reconcileable both to the Holiness and Goodness of God, as that we are suffered to tempt one another, often perhaps full as dangerously. That they should be capable of conveying their Suggestions to us, and we not know their Manner of doing it, can hardly be called strange: for we scarce know the Manner how any one Thing in the World is done, if we examine it to the Bot-

^b Jude 6.

tom; not even how we convey our own Thoughts to those with whom we converse. And that we should be exposed to these Temptations, without perceiving them to proceed from any such Cause, is far from incredible: for we are frequently influenced, and strongly too, by Persons of no higher Powers and Abilities than ourselves, without perceiving that they influence us at all.

But, though every one of these Things is rationally supposeable, yet Scripture only can satisfy us, that they are true in Fact: and so accordingly it fully doth. For though it tells us, that bad Angels are held *in everlasting Chains under Darkness^c*, it tells us likewise, that *our Adversary the Devil as a roaring Lion walketh about*, meaning, doubtless, within the Extent of his Chain, *seeking whom he may devour^d*. And yet, even after the Testimony of Scripture given to these Doctrines; as they relate to Matters which lie out of Sight, and therefore affect the Mind but faintly, unless the Truth and Importance of them be carefully impressed upon it, we receive them too commonly with only a wavering Kind of half Belief, which produces no Manner of serious Thought about them. And so by Degrees

^c Jude 6.

^d 1 Pet. v. 8.

we first overlook, and then doubt, and then reject, one Part after another of what is revealed concerning the hidden Regions of the Creation ; (as, indeed, if once we begin, where shall we stop ?) till, at length, instead of *walking*, as Christians ought, *by* that *Faith*^e, which *is the Evidence of Things not seen*^f, we come to consider earthly Objects as the only Realities, and Heaven and Hell, and the Inhabitants of each, as Nothing at all. •

Some, it must be owned, far from disbelieving what they understand their Bible to teach on these Subjects, make it almost a Point of Religion to believe a great deal more : whereas the plain and safe Rule certainly is, to go as far as Scripture goes, but also to stop where Scripture stops. For whatever Notions are credulously entertained, beyond its Warrant, will always, in the Event, weaken, instead of confirming, the Persuasion of its genuine Articles. But, undeniably, the prevailing Extreme at present is, that of questioning, or slighting, though we do not question, whatever is placed a little without the Reach of our own Faculties, be it ever so clearly asserted by our Maker himself. This Turn of Mind is highly undutiful ; and tends to mislead us,

^e 2 Cor. v. 7.

^f Heb. xi. 1.

in the Whole of Religion first, and then of common Life. The Remedies for it are, to think of ourselves with Humility, and read and consider the Doctrines of God's Word with reverent Attention. That of our being tempted by invisible Powers needs not have any wrong Effects upon us, and may have very right ones. For, as these Temptations are not distinguishable by us from those which arise of themselves in our own Breasts, and may be resisted effectually by the same Methods, the Belief of them can by no just Consequence drive us either into Superstition or Despondency. But the Consideration of having such an additional Adversary, besides the World and the Flesh, must naturally increase our Watchfulness, and thankful Dependence on the Help of Divine Grace : and the Reflexion that, in committing Sin, we are complying with the Suggestions, and gratifying the Malice, of the Enemies of God, of our own Souls, and of the whole Creation, cannot but incline us to a strong Abhorrence even of such Transgressions, as we might else have been disposed to view in a pleasing Light.

Now, of all the Passages of Scripture which relate to this Point of Doctrine, there are none more

more instructive, than those of the Evangelists, in which we find our blessed Lord himself assaulted by the Tempter: whose Victory, for that Reason, the Wisdom of the Church hath taken Care to set before our Eyes in the Gospel for this Day, as the properest Admonition to us in the Beginning of the present Season: the Business of which, if we purpose to be at all the better for it, is arming ourselves against those Temptations with which we may meet hereafter, as well as humbling ourselves for having yielded to so many already. And therefore I shall now endeavour,

I. To explain this Part of our Saviour's History.

II. To point out, in a few Words, the practical Uses that flow from it.

I. To explain this Part of his History.

The Number of wicked Spirits is represented in Scripture as very large. And yet one only, denoted by the Name of *Satan*, or the Devil, is generally mentioned as enticing Men to Sin. The Reason of this, in other Places of Holy Writ, may be, that, as they are all united under one Head, and engaged in one Design, they are to be regarded by us as one Adversary: for, in the common Language of War, we speak of the Enemy in the singular Number, when yet

we mean a Multitude. But there is more especial Ground for it, in the Text, as unquestionably *the Prince of the Demons^t* himself would personally engage in so arduous a Combat, as that with *Jesus* must appear likely to prove. That he, who bears Ill-will to all Men, should earnestly wish to mislead and pervert one, whom he could not but see to be a very extraordinary Man, and sent on some Errand of singular Benefit to the human Race, was to be expected. And that he should hope to do it, may be accounted for, partly from hence : that as wicked Men, though of eminent Abilities, are perpetually attempting very absurd Things, so may wicked Spirits too : as indeed all Wickedness implies, in its very Nature, the absurdest Hope and Attempt in the World ; that of being Gainers by disobeying a wise and just Ruler, of infinite Power. Besides, the Devil had fallen himself, even without a Tempter : he had succeeded by the Means of Temptation against the first Man, and more or less against all Men since ; and probably he knew not distinctly what Manner of Person

^t Matth. ix. 34. The Word here is not Διαβόλος, nor is that ever used of wicked Spirits in the Plural Number : and therefore it is properer to say Demons, than Devils.

this was whom he assaulted. For, though he might know him to have been declared the Son of God, still that Name is capable of various Meanings. Or, if he knew him to be the promised Messiah, yet he might imagine that this Promise, as well as others, was a conditional one, though no Condition was expressed; and therefore liable to be defeated. Or, at least, Rage might urge him to molest, though he despaired to overcome.

But then, why *the Lord of all*, who quickly afterwards cast out Demons with a Word, submitted previously to such repeated Indignities, as these Trials made of him by the Power of Darkness, perhaps we cannot fully say. But this at least may be said very safely, that, for any Thing we know, it might *be above him*, not only, in general, *to be made in all Things like unto his Brethren*, that so he might resist the Devil on our Behalf perfectly, whom we resist very imperfectly; but, in particular, to give the Enemy all Advantages and Opportunities, in order to make his Defeat more conspicuous: besides that we may gather, as I shall shew you in the Conclusion, much Instruction and much Comfort from the Benefit of his Example, and from the condescending Assu-

rance, which *his having suffered himself, being tempted*, affords, that he will succour us when we are tempted also¹. The wicked one made this Attack upon him at the Beginning of his public Appearance, because undoubtedly he thought no Time was to be lost for preventing the Good intended by it. And *Jesus was led up of the Spirit* purposely to meet him, because the Divine Omniscience foresaw the Event. As for the Choice of the Wilderness for the Scene of Action ; we find, that he often retired into Places of Solitude for Meditation and Prayer : and no Wonder if he did it now, before he undertook the inexpressibly weighty Office, for which a Voice from Heaven had just marked him out. The Addition of Fasting to his Devotions was another Instance (his Baptism had already been one) of fulfilling all Righteousness², by doing, in Obedience to God's general Appointment, what, if he did not want, good Men in all Ages have experienced, when used on fit Occasions, and to a proper Degree, very needful and beneficial. His fasting the determinate Number of forty Days, leads us immediately to recollect, that *Moses* the Giver of the Law, and *Elias* the

¹ Heb. ii. 17, 18.

² Matth. iii. 15.

Chief of the Prophets, did the very same Thing in their Times, which he, who *came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets*¹, did now. Nor are there wanting remarkable Coincidences of the Number of forty on other Occasions. What Secret of Providence may lie concealed under them; appears not yet: future Occurrences, perhaps, will shew it. But, in the mean while, we may venture to say this: that as our Saviour used so long and total an Abstinence but once, and we are incapable of using it so much as once; repeating a faint shadow of it every Year cannot be our Duty merely from his Example: and that, neither himself nor his Apostles having laid any such Command upon Christians, the Fast of *Lent* stands only on the Footing of human, though ancient, Injunction, and private Prudence.

During these forty Days, it is observed by St. Mark, our blessed Redeemer *was with the wild Beasts*: which Words must imply, else they are of no Significance, that the fiercest Animals were awed by his Presence, and so far laid aside their savage Nature for the Time: thus verifying literally what *Eliphaz* in *Job* faith figuratively concerning a good Man. *At De-*

¹ Matth. v. 17.

struction and Famine shalt thou laugh, neither shalt thou be afraid of the Beasts of the Earth: for they shall be at Peace with thee^a. Nor doth St. Mark only, but St. Luke also acquaint us, that throughout these whole forty Days he was tempted of Satan^b; though in what particular Manner, they have not said; nor perhaps did he inform his very Apostles: there being many Things in his Life, that were mysterious even to them; and no Marvel then, if they are so to us.

When the Days of his miraculous Fasting were completed, the Tempter came to him in a visible Form: a Thing, which we have neither any Reason from hence to fear will ever be our own Case, or to believe is ever the Case of other common Men; nor yet to doubt of its having been his, from its never being ours or theirs. For the whole Life of Christ was so full of Wonders, that the History of his Temptation is perfectly agreeable to the rest: and we must either question all, or no Part. In what Likeness the Devil appeared, we are not told: probably resembling one of the good Angels, who seem by St. Mark to have attended our Saviour, and ministered unto him^c, in the

^a Job v. 22, 23. ^b Mark i. 13. Luke iv. 2. ^c Mark i. 13.

Course of this wonderful Dispensation, before his Combat, as well as after his Conquest. We learn from St. Paul, that *Satan* hath been sometimes transformed into an *Angel of Light* ^q. And such a Transformation, on the Occasion before us, not only suits best with his two last Temptations, but was certainly the likeliest to procure him Success in any of them. At least he certainly did not appear what he was: for that would intirely have frustrated his Intent. And accordingly we find, that as soon as he knew himself to be discovered, he despaired and fled.

The first Attack which the Tempter made, was grounded on the bodily Necessities of our blessed Lord; now again permitted to feel the Appetite of Hunger; and destitute, where he was, of all Means to satisfy it. On this Foundation the Devil raised a Proposal of refined Artifice: that he should instantly make an Experiment, and give a Proof, of the Truth and Extent of the late Declaration from Heaven in his Favour, *This is my beloved Son*^r, by ordering a supernatural Supply for the Want which pressed him. *If thou be the Son of God, command that these Stones be made Bread*^s. Every one, perhaps, may not immediately see where the

^q 2 Cor. xi. 14.

^r Matth. iii. 14.

^s Chap. iv. 3.

Fault of this would have been ; which is the very Circumstance that made it a fit Temptation. *Satan* had no Prospect of being able to lead him at one Step into a gross Transgression : and any real Deviation, however small, from either Piety or Virtue, would have answered his End. Now, Compliance with this Counsel would have been a Deyiation. The Voice from Heaven alone carried Evidence enough along with it of God's especial Regard to him : and desiring a yet fuller Demonstration of it would certainly have argued a blame-worthy Diffidence. He had been supported by the sole Word and Will of his heavenly Father for forty Days : why must he now, without any sufficient Notice of the Change of that Will, attempt a new Miracle for providing himself Bread to live on ; as if the old one, which enabled him to live without it, had lost its Force ? When God designed him to return to the ordinary Way of Life, he would furnish him with every Thing requisite for it : but in the Interval, it had been as absurd for him to think of producing Bread for himself in the Wilderness, as for *Moses* to have thought of producing it for the *Israelites* there, instead of the Manna, rained down from Heaven for their Sustenance. And therefore he answered, with the utmost

Propriety, in his own Case, exactly what *Moses* had observed to them upon theirs, *that Man doth not live by Bread only, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of the Lord*¹.

The wily Serpent, appearing in all Likeli-hood perfectly satisfied with this Answer, and convinced that acting otherwise than our Sa-viour did, would really have been distrusting God, proposes next, (and possibly under Colour of making Amends) to give him the most illustrious Opportunity of shewing the highest Confidence in God that could be. And, the meek *Jesus* patiently yielding to what he clearly discerned the Intention of, the Tempter conveys him through the Air, (no Wonder that he suffered it, for he suffered wicked Men to take much greater Liberties with him af-terwards) and places him on one of the Battlements of the Temple of *Jerusalem*: exhort-ing him to cast himself down in the Sight of all the Worshippers there assembled, and procure that Glory to the Deity, and that Ho-nour to himself, which must be the Conse-quence of their seeing publickly and literally fulfilled in him that Prediction of the Psalmist concerning a pious Man, which so eminently pious a one as he had certainly both Reason

¹ Deut. viii. 3. Matth. iv. 4.

and Faith enough to depend on: *He shall give his Angels Charge concerning thee: and in their Hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any Time thou dash thy Foot against a Stone*^a: possibly insinuating farther, by the Use of these Words, his own Ambition of being employed as the Instrument of so noble a Miracle, for which he had just before shewn himself qualified, and the tutelary Spirit of so excellent a Person. But the Redeemer of Mankind, far from being disconcerted by the sudden Change of the Argument, or dazzled by so specious a Plea, calmly answers by another Text of Scripture, explaining and limiting that, which the Seducer had quoted imperfectly, and applied wrong: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*^w. As we ought not from Diffidence to ask new Proofs of his Power, where we have had sufficient ones already, so neither must we from Presumption urge him to do for us what we have no Need of, and what therefore he hath given us no Right to expect. For they, who throw away the natural Means, which he hath bestowed on them for preserving themselves, forfeit all Title to a supernatural Protection:

Though unsuccessful in both these Assaults,

^a Ps. xci. 11, 12. Matth. iv. 6.

^w Deut. vi. 16. Matth. iv. 7.

the Tempter, notwithstanding, begins another without Delay, probably built on the Defeats which he had undergone. He places our blessed Lord, still giving Way to his vain Efforts, on a commanding Eminence; represents to him from thence, in extended View, or mimic Imagery, or pompous Description^x, whatever was great and splendid in the Kingdoms of the Earth; alledges, that to himself, as the Vicegerent of the Almighty, the Dominion of this sublunary World was granted; over which he was willing to place, on the reasonable Terms of Homage done to him for it, one, of whose superior Understanding and Rightness of Mind he had now made so thorough a Trial. *All this Power will I give thee: for it is delivered unto me. If therefore thou wilt worship me, all shall be thine.* To each of the former Suggestions

^x Heuman, Diff. Sylloge, tom i. p. i. Diff. 7. thinks he only pointed towards each Kingdom, and shews that *deixuvw* and *stendo* signify this. Bibl. Germ. 1748, Jan. p. 108. Spartan, in the Life of Severus, saith, that from the Top of a high Mountain he saw Rome, *& orbem terrarum*. Cyprian, ad Donatum de Gratia Dei, p. 4. Ed. Fell, exhorts him: Paulisper te crede subduci in montis ardui verticem celsiorem, speculare inde rerum infra te jacentium facies; & oculis in diversa portrectis, ipse a terrenis contactibus liber, fluctuantis mundi turbines intuere. And hence he supposes him to see the Whole of it.

^y Luke iv. 6, 7.

the holy *Jesus* had replied without Emotion : but now, when the Majesty of his heavenly Father was injured, and the Faith of his own Allegiance to him assailed, by so vile a Falsehood, he bears no longer ; tells the Hypocrite, he knew him well for the Adversary of God, who had granted to no created Being, much less to him, the Honours, or the Authority, which he claimed ; and commands him that Moment to quit his Presence. *Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the Devil leaveth him, and Angels came and ministered unto him^a,* doubtless whatever his Condition required.

All Hopes of seducing him were now at an End. What remained was only to oppose and persecute him. And, as this Method was taken very soon after the former failed, St. Luke observes, that *the Devil departed from him but for a Season^b*. Accordingly *Christ* himself expresses the whole of his public Life on Earth by the Phrase of *his Temptations^b*. But as every Contrivance of *the Ruler of Darkness^c* against him proved ineffectual ; so that, which he laboured

^a Matth. iv. 10, 11. ^b Luke iv. 13. ^c Luke xxii. 28.

^c Eph. vi. 12.

most, and at Length accomplished, the taking away of his Life, instead of preventing the Erection of our Saviour's rightful Kingdom, gave the mortal Blow to his own usurped Tyranny. For through Death the Son of Man destroyed him who had the Power of Death, that is the Devil^a: and having spoiled Principalities and Powers, triumphed over them on his Cross^b.

II. I come now to speak briefly of the practical Uses that flow from this Part of our Saviour's History. And the following are not inconsiderable: that the best of Men are no more exempt from Temptations than others; but may possibly be tried with a larger Share of them, and such as are harder to be withstood; that every one therefore ought, in every Part of Life, to prepare for them; and no one, merely on Account of his suffering ever so many, to doubt of the Favour and Love of God: that Allurements to Evil may perhaps beset us with peculiar Importunity in the Entrance upon our Christian Course; but, if we resist them faithfully then, may cease in a great Measure afterwards; and God's Grace enable us to go safely and honourably through the severest Conflicts of any other Kind: that Retirement and Medita-

^a Heb. ii. 14.

^b Col. ii. 14, 15.

tion, Fasting and Prayer, are the right Preparatives against all Solicitations to Sin ; which yet may come upon us in the very Midst of our religious Duties, and strictest Observances ; nay, *Satan* may seek Advantage from them to mislead us : that if, even at such Times we are not secure, much less are we so in the Midst of the Cares and Pursuits, but especially the Pleasures of Life ; by thoughtless Indulgence of which, we invite and aid the Tempter, whom we ought to shun and oppose : that we should never venture out of the plain Road of Duty, to supply the most urgent Necessities ; never run into needless Danger, in Hope of extraordinary Deliverance ; never accept the greatest Advantages, when offered as the Price of our Innocence : that Riches, and Honours, and Power are the most dangerous of Trials, being reserved for the last in the Case of our blessed Lord : and whoever can reject them instantly with Indignation, when offered on sinful Conditions, as he did, is far advanced in the Road to Perfection : that laying up the Doctrines and Precepts of Scripture in our Hearts, ready for Use, is providing the best Defence against our spiritual Enemies ; yet that Scripture itself may be easily perverted to misguide us, unless we carefully interpret one

Part of it by another, and every one by the Design of the Whole: that the effectual Way of dealing with all evil Suggestions, is to repel them with an immediate, and short, and determinate Answer, founded on God's Word; and that permitting them to reply to us, and plead with us, is only giving them a Handle to deceive and destroy us: that they, who are led by the Providence of God to meet Difficulties, will, if they ask it, be filled with the Spirit of God to go through them; and so with the Temptation he will also make a Way to escape^f: or, to speak in St. James's Words, that if we resist the Devil, he will flee from us; and if we draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us^g. That since we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the Feeling of our Infirmities, but one, who was in all Points tempted like as we are, we may come boldly through him to the Throne of Grace, and find Help in Time of Need. But then, as he was tempted without Sin^h, we must imitate, though we cannot equal, him; and really, though not perfectly in this Life, conquer Sin also: for only to him that overcometh will be granted to sit with him in his Throneⁱ. Yet, as the Tempter departed

^f 1 Cor. x. 13. ^g James iv. 7, 8. ^h Heb. iv. 15, 16.

ⁱ Rev. iii. 21.

from our Lord himself only for a Season, we are not to imagine, that he will ever depart wholly from us: but may still comfort ourselves, that if we *put on the whole Armour of God, and wrestle against him as we ought*, we shall be able to stand against all his Wiles^k: nay, every Attempt to weaken our Virtues, shall only prove a wholesome Exercise to strengthen and improve them; till at Length, having fought the good Fight of Faith, we shall lay hold on eternal Life^l; and not only the Angels, who minister to us now Assistance in our Conflict, shall join with our Fellow Saints in applauding our Victory, but the Captain of our Salvation^m himself acknowledge us openly for his good and faithful Soldiers and Servantsⁿ. Blessed is the Man that endureth Temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the Crown of Life, which the Lord hath promised to them who love him^o.

^k Eph. vi. 11, 12. ^l 1 Tim. vi. 12. ^m Heb. ii. 10.

ⁿ Matth. xxv. 21. ^o 2 Tim. ii. 3. ^p James i. 12.

S E R M O N VI.

P H I L. ii. 21.

For all seek their own, not the Things which are Jesus Christ's.

THESE Words contain both an Account what the Practice of Mankind is, and also an Intimation what it should be. And therefore, in discoursing upon them, it will be proper,

I. To consider what is meant by *seeking our own Things*.

II. What by *seeking the Things of Jesus Christ*.

III. To explain and prove the Assertion, that *all seek the former, not the latter*.

IV. To shew what we are to learn from it.

I. *Seeking our own Things*, is pursuing our own Inclinations and Fancies, or imagined worldly Interests. And many strange Fancies People of all Ranks indulge. Some never ask themselves, whether the Course which they are taking is likely to be for their Good: others

never

never slacken it, though from Time to Time they strongly suspect it is not. Often they adopt, without Examination, the Opinions of those about them, whom yet they are far from esteeming: and either will not see, that better Judges think differently; or do see it, and will not regard it, but follow Custom blindfold, even against their own Liking. Or it may be, they think a little, but think short; neither to the End, nor to any considerable Part, even of the present Life: imagine what pleases now, must always please; and what brings no Inconvenience yet, will never bring any. Indeed, usually, it is their principal Point, to acquire the Things which others wish for, though visibly of no real Use; and they are vehement for whatever will make them envied as happy Persons, though it produce little else than Vexation and Guilt. Some will not trust even their own Experience against their Prepossessions: but force themselves to believe, that the Lives which they lead must needs be delightful, though they feel the contrary. Many lose the Opportunities, and even the Relish, of moderate and rational Pleasures, by a wild Pursuit of visionary and extravagant ones. Nay, there are some

who

who not only follow wrong Ways, but, as the Text hath it, *seek them*: go purposely out of the plain Road, as it were, in Search of Misery. It were much to be wished, that all these were more studious of their Interest, even their temporal Interest, than they are: it might be one Step towards becoming what they ought. But still the most faithful and assiduous Worshippers of the World's great Idols, Applause, Advancement, Profit, Power, entirely mistake, if they hope that any of these Things will either secure them lasting Enjoyment, or preserve them from acute Misery. A little Reflexion discovers, that Happiness consists in somewhat stable and inward: whence the more thoughtful have learned to seek it in themselves. But, alas! when we inspect ourselves, what a Mixture do we find, of Ignorance which we cannot enlighten, of Weakness which we cannot strengthen, of Wrongness which we cannot set right! Besides that all Creatures, as such, are essentially insufficient for their own Happiness; there is by Nature a Void within us, which must be filled from above, or we must remain for ever craving and unsatisfied. Let us therefore look upwards, and consider,

II. *The Things which are Jesus Christ's:* the Benefits that he hath procured for us, with the Knowledge of them that he hath communicated to us. And indeed what have we of Value, that is not his? Some have pretended they could investigate all the Doctrines, the Duties, the Rewards of Religion completely by their own Reason, and form themselves to a suitable Disposition by their own Strength. But the History of Heathenism clearly shews, that no one ever did this; nor probably therefore ever would. The one true God was scarce known. False Deities of the worst Characters were adored, instead of him, with Rites that seldom, if ever, mended their Votaries, often corrupted them. The common Rules of social Life were by no Means thoroughly understood; as the shocking Custom of exposing Children to perish, the barbarous Combats of Gladiators, the promiscuous and unnatural Practices of Lewdness, publickly allowed, give dreadful Proofs. But the internal Virtues of the Heart were still less regarded; and they who seemed possessed of them, ascribed the Merit wholly to themselves: very few said so much as the Pharisee, *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other Men are:* scarce any with the Publican, *God be*

be merciful to me, a Sinner^a. Yet how continually are the best of Men guilty of Faults! But they had hardly any Notion of the universal Need of Repentance, or any Name for Humility of Soul. Forgiveness of Injuries was very unsteadily taught: Benevolence to Enemies lay yet farther out of Sight. Courage injuriously exercised, Patriotism shewn by invading the Rights of their Neighbours, and Numbers of other splendid Sins, passed for heroic Excellencies. There was very little Hope of future Bliss to give Men Spirit in doing what was right, and less Fear of future Judgment to deter them from what was wrong. Such were the best instructed Nations: and such, or worse, had we been probably now, but for the Compassion of Jesus Christ. Indeed without him we should never have known, till too late, how bad our Condition was. The real State of Mankind, with respect to God, was, in a great Measure, unknown to them, till he underwent what he did, at once to lay open to us our Danger, and to free us from it on most equitable Terms. Even the mysterious Parts of what he taught for this Purpose lead us to reverence the Divine Wisdom, and think modestly of our own; while the more

^a Luke xviii. 11, 13.

distinctly intelligible direct us to every Thing that is right and fit.

The Gospel hath laid the Foundation of our Duty in that pleasing and thankful Veneration of God, which his creating Bounty, his providential Care, his redeeming Mercy, excite: and which tends to inspire us, with a deep Concern for whatever we have done offensive to him, an earnest Desire of obeying his Commands, an humble Sense that we need his Assistance, a firm Persuasion that he will grant it to us, a cheerful Reliance on him for every Thing that we want, in Regard to this World or the next. This excellent Frame of Mind must powerfully suppress irregular Appetites of Sense, immoderate Desires of Wealth, vain Fondness for Pomp and Pre-eminence, anxious Cares about worldly Events. And on such Love of God Christianity builds its second great Commandment, Love of our Neighbour: a Duty, enjoined in a higher Degree, and carried to a greater Extent, though still a reasonable one, in Scripture, than in any other Institution of Religion. It prescribes the most accurate and tender Attention to the Obligations which result from the nearer Connections in Life, the most industrious Endeavours to be useful in whatever Station we fill, the most affectionate

Faithfulness to the Community of which we are Members, tempered with universal Good-will to the rest of Mankind: benevolent Respect towards those who excel us; Readiness to pardon, as far as can be safe, all who have wronged us; Esteem of whatever in any Person deserves it; sincerely kind Wishes to those whom we esteem the least; Compassion for the Wretched, and Relief to our utmost Ability, though we straiten ourselves. Nor doth our blessed Redeemer expect us only to pity, as he did, the temporal Wants of Men; but, as he did also, their spiritual ones unspeakably more; a Precept peculiar to the Gospel, and comprehending a great Variety of important Particulars: Provision for instructing the young and ignorant; and combining afterwards pious Advice with outward Relief to the sick and needy; seasonable Warnings, and mild Reproof, when there is Hope of their being regarded; constant Circumspection to set a prudent, as well as innocent Example; that we lead not others into Danger, by what, perhaps, we can do ourselves with Safety; but submit to considerable Restraints, rather than let our Liberty, as the Apostle expresses it, *become a Stumbling Block to them that are weak^b.* Studying to

^b 1 Cor. viii. 9.

observe these Rules, for they require and merit Study, is *seeking the Things that are Jesus Christ's*. And they are opposed to our own, not as being really contrary even to our present Interest: very far from it. Only through the inbred Dis-order of our Hearts, and the general Prevalence of evil Habits, we are apt to delight in very opposite Dispositions: and hence a good Life comes to be a self-denying one, which else would be the constant Practice of Self-love. The ambitious would *seek the true Honour that cometh from God*^c; the selfish would *have Respect to the heavenly Recompence of Reward*^d; the Lovers of Pleasure would secure *the Fullness of Joy which is for evermore*^e: and the Means of being happy here and hereafter would evidently appear to be the same. But now the Difficulties of performing our Duty are so great, and our Failures in it so many, that, amongst *the Things that are Jesus Christ's*, we must seek with peculiar Earnestness his Grace to strengthen us, and an Interest in his Merits to procure us Acceptance, which thus the weakest and worst of us all may be sure of obtaining.

Yet, great as these Blessings are, the Apostle hath said, that *all Men seek their own, not the Things of Jesus Christ*. Let us therefore

^c John v. 44.

^d Heb. xi. 26.

^e Psal. xv. 12.

III. Examine into the Meaning and the Truth of this melancholy Assertion.

It is plainly not to be taken in the utmost Extent. For he had given the contrary Character of *Timothy* just before, as he hath of others elsewhere. But he may well be understood to say, that all absolutely have some Share of Blame in this Respect: and the Generality, which in common Speech the Word *all* frequently signifies, are highly and dangerously blameable. For who can deny this to be Fact? Many are vicious in every Way that Inclination prompts them to. Many, who regard some Parts of Virtue, disregard others, perhaps avowedly. The more uniformly regular would do well to ask themselves, Whether it is from a real inward Sense of Duty, or for the Sake of Reputation or Convenience? They who make a Conscience of behaving right in common Life, do they make any of paying due Honour to God? Our strongest Obligations of every Kind are to him: yet Numbers think highly of their own Merit, while they neglect him; and, it may be, pique themselves on neglecting him. If we profess ourselves Believers in him, do we stately and fervently pray to him, and give him Thanks for his daily Blessings? Do we live

in his Fear and Love, and the Hope of his future Mercy? Supposing we sincerely embrace natural Religion; have we carefully inquired into the Truth of Christianity; unprejudiced by Attachment to forbidden Pleasures, by the vain Fancy, that nothing can be true which we comprehend not fully, by ludicrous or sophistical Misrepresentations? And, to guard us against these, have we consulted proper Books and Persons? If we call ourselves Christians, do we observe conscientiously all the Institutions of Christianity; or slight them when any Trifle intervenes: and do we observe them otherwise than as mere Forms? Do we use them to impress on our Souls the Importance of the Doctrines, the Pardon, the Grace, the Rewards of the Gospel? And do we employ our Faith of all these Things to improve us in every Part of a Christian Temper? This Temper, and our Inclinations, too often interfere: Which do we prefer? And where do we lay the Foundation of our Conduct? We ought not to lay it in Attention to our own Interests or Amusements, joining now and then with them a little Appearance, or perhaps a little Reality, of Religion, provided we can make it agree with them. But the Rule is, *seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his*

bis Righteousnes^f. The Ground-work of every Thing good, is a devout Resolution to do our whole Duty. Each is to do it suitably to his own Station: but all, in whatever Station, high or low, are to make it their inviolable Concern: for God *bath given no Man Licence to Sin^g.* Whoever doth not feel this Truth, as the most important one that belongs to his Existence; and govern his Conduct by it, in trying as well as ordinary Cases, hath not *sought the Things of Jesus Christ* in a due Manner. And think then, I entreat you, how few have. A sad Reflexion! but we must remind our Hearers to make it. Else how much pleasanter would it be to congratulate the good on their happy State, than to terrify the wicked; to encourage the modest and timorous, than to confute the presumptuous, and alarm the thoughtless!

But, such being the Condition of the World, let us now consider,

IV. What we are to learn from it.

And certainly we ought to learn great Mildness towards others, who are faulty; since, more or less, all are so. Even the first Christians, even the first of the Christian Clergy, for of these, it must be owned, the Apostle peculiarly

^f Matth. vi. 33.

^g Ecclus xv. 20.

speaks in the Text, fell very short of Perfection. And ever since, the best have had their Defects, and the worst their good Qualities. Let us therefore think and hope, as well as with any Reason we can, of all. Yet still, they who abandon themselves to Wickedness, and especially they who labour to pervert others, either in Principles or Practice, and to make a bad World worse, be they ever so agreeable, be they ever so useful to us, are to be avoided, and checked with more Care, the more Danger there is of their doing Harm. That we are unable, from various Circumstances, to exert this right Spirit, may sometimes, perhaps often, be a just Plea: but ought never to be made a false Pretence. The firm Purpose of doing it should always be kept in Mind, and executed as soon as possible, with Amends for the Delay, At the same Time, in Proportion as the bad give real Marks of Reformation, they should be diligently encouraged, yet with prudent, and cautious, and gradual Kindness. But above all, the honest, the virtuous, the conscientious, the pious, ought to be countenanced, brought forward, and cherished, as *the Salt and the Light of the Earth^b*, who preserve Society from Cor-

^b Matth. v. 13, 14.

ruption and Dissolution, who shew Men the Way to present and future Happiness. Nor should they be rejected or despised, though sometimes inferior in Qualifications of less Moment, nay, though, in some Respects, hurting, through Mistake, their own good Cause : of which, however, it is very unjust, though very usual, to condemn or suspect them, without or beyond Reason.

But the principal Point is, what we are to learn in Regard more immediately to ourselves. If the World be so bad, there is great Need to ask our Hearts, what are we who make a Part of it ? Conforming to it implicitly is by no Means the Rule either of Scripture or of Reason : yet is it not too much our Practice ? A little honest Home Inquiry would soon furnish the true Answer. But we turn our Eyes from what we have no Mind to discern, and try to deceive not only others, but ourselves. Yet to what End ? God knows the Truth. Men will know it, if they do not ; and Angels too. We ourselves know it in Part all the while ; and shall know and lament it to Eternity, if we refuse to take the proper Notice of it in Time.

Examine therefore what the Tenour of your Conduct is. If it be dissolute or intemperate,

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the Necessity of amending it is glaringly visible. If, though otherwise innocent, you consume your Days chiefly in Trifles; such Waste of precious Time, given for other Ends, is highly criminal. Besides that, both the supinely indolent, and the busier Votaries of idle Amusements, expose themselves to various Temptations, and set a dangerous Example to those around them: the Tendency of which, as it spreads, must be, to make Persons of all Ranks, even the most important, and, by Consequence, the Community composed of them, insignificant, contemptible, and vicious. Further still: though your Disposition be to Things of more Use, and so far commendable, yet if on any Occasion you indulge either Resentment or Malevolence, however calm, towards any of your Fellow-creatures; if you are injurious or hard-hearted, from Selfishness; or but thoughtlessly inattentive to the Rights, the Interests, the Wants, the Feelings, of those whom you ought to regard, you may thus have contracted, in many Ways, most heinous Degrees of Guilt. Nay, supposing you have been, and are, beneficent as well as harmless, but less so than you might; even this Defect is a Failure of Duty. Not that you are to give Way to Scruples; there is no End of them;

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but to consider maturely, and consult worthy Friends; what you can add to the Good which you do already. Possibly it may be more than you imagine. Be it ever so little, do it but according to the best of your Judgment, and God will accept it. But, at the same Time, be sure to remember, that the rightest Demeanor in worldly Matters will not suffice; but our chief Regard must be to him who made us, and whose therefore we are. From his Goodness all that we enjoy proceeds: from his Authority over us all our Duties flow: and those, which are owing immediately to himself, surely require our principal Care. But such Duties as natural Reason teaches, are far from being the only Concern of those to whom he hath prescribed additional ones, founded on the important Alterations which our primitive State, as we learn from Scripture, hath undergone. Man is a fallen Creature: *We are dead*, as the Apostle strongly expresses it, *and our Life is hid with Christ in God*¹. Our Hope of future Happiness lies not in ourselves, but is reposed in the Hands of the blessed Jesus, who purchased it with his Blood: and *where our Treasure is, there must our Hearts be also*². Without affec-

¹ Col. iii. 3. ² Matth. vi. 21. Luke xii. 34.

tionate and habitual Movements of the Soul towards the Father of Mercy, the Author of Salvation, the Inspirer of Holiness; without a deep Sense of past Guilt and present Imperfection, an humble Faith in the Merits of our glorified Redeemer, and a firm Reliance on the Grace of the Divine Comforter, all our Virtue, all our Piety, will avail us nothing. For, when we have done our best, *we are but unprofitable Servants*¹.

You will object, perhaps, that indulging Contemplations of this Nature would engross our whole Thoughts and Time: the Affairs of common Life must be utterly neglected for them. But are you indeed at all near the Borders of that Danger? Or do not such Objectors take thorough Care to keep far enough out of the Reach of it? You are by no Means called only to Acts of Devotion, or only to the more sublime of moral Duties. Prudent and moderate Concern for our worldly Interest is a Duty. Every Propriety and Decency of Life is a Duty. Even ornamental Accomplishments have their Value. But from these Concessions Men conclude, that they may safely pay their main Attention to what deserves but the smallest Part;

¹ Luke xvii. 10.

and imagine they are abundantly good Christians, almost without any one peculiarly Christian Action or Sentiment. At best, a few pious Formalities, practised now and then, constitute their whole Religion: and the rest of their Life, and all their Heart, is given up to what hath no Tincture of Religion in it: whereas inward Reverence of God, as he is manifested to us in the Gospel of *Jesus Christ*, ought to be our ruling Principle; and extend its Influence throughout each Article, of our Business, our Conversation, our private Thoughts.

Perhaps you will object again, that so very serious a Turn of Mind as this, will cast a Gloom over every Thing: and one must have some Pleasure surely. But learn to be pleased with what you ought: and you will have inex-pressibly more Pleasure than you possibly can else. In other Things you take Pains, no small Pains, to acquire a Taste; often, for what is of no Value; sometimes, for what is bad: and perhaps, after all, can succeed no further, than to put on the Affectation of liking what you really do not, or get by Habit a wretched Craving for Gratifications, which you cannot but despise and condemn. Employ yourselves better. Esteem what is estimable, and it will exalt instead

stead of debasing you: love what is amiable, and it will reward your Affection. *Love him above all, who hath first loved you*^{*}; and his Service will be delightful: become such as he requires, and you will find Satisfaction in every Thing. It is a strange Mistake, to imagine the Burthens of Religion insupportable; while we take much heavier upon ourselves from Fancy and Fashion. Were the Gospel to enjoin the Fatigues, the Expences, the Dangers, which on Reflexion we shall perceive Caprice and Custom do, that one Argument against it would be accounted decisive.

The most serious Person in the World may justly be also the cheerullest. Even Penitents, in the Midst of their Sorrow, at the very Beginning of their Amendment, enjoy a blessed Hope of Forgiveness and Acceptance, infinitely preferable to the highest Pleasures of Sin. But Persons of confirmed Goodness have a *Peace* within their Breasts, *which passeth all Understanding*^{*} of those who have not experienced it, and all Description of those who have. They feel no tormenting Remorse, no disquieting Dread of God or Man. They are never agitated by Malice or Envy: seldom, and but

* 1 John iv. 19.

* Phil. iv. 7.

gently,

gently, moved by Anger. Pity indeed they often experience ; but gratifying it comforts both others and themselves. Their Behaviour is friendly, and therefore agreeable : their Discourse lively, if Nature hath qualified them for it ; but at least inoffensive and conciliating. Their Hearts are open, in a proper Degree, to all the innocent Amusements of Life, and they long for none of the prohibited ones. Virtuous Discretion preserves their Health and Spirits as much as worldly Uncertainties permit, makes their Circumstances easy, their Families and Dependants orderly and happy. Their judicious Beneficence is very useful, their blameless Example yet more. Thus they become Blessings within the Compafs of their Sphere : and surely reap no little Joy from the Esteem of others, but unspeakably more from the Testimony of their own Consciences. The best of them indeed are sensible of many Failings : but all consistent with that Sincerity, which God, they know, will recompence. They see through the whole Course of Life, that they are in the only right Way ; and whatever may happen to them, all will end well. Disappointments, Unkindness, Ingratitude, Losses of Friends or of Fortune, Necessity, Pain, Sicknes, and Death, *work together*

gether for their Good°, and unite to form an infallible Plan for increasing their final Felicity. Never will Society grow gloomy, but inex-pressibly the cheerfuller, for being composed of such Persons as these: and such ought the religious naturally to be.

Therefore you, who are truly religious, appear in Character, and do Credit to your Cause. Despise with Good-humour and pity the im-potent Ridicule of the inconsiderate: let the World see that you are happy, and that your Belief in God is the Ground of it. Wear no dejected Looks, put on no forbidding Appear-ances; be affable, be courteous, be joyful. Avoid improper Amusements; guard against Fondness for those in which occasionally you may do well to join: but express a decent and modest, a mild and compassionate, not an angry or censorious, Disapprobation of the common Excesses in them; shew that you can relish Life perfectly well without them, by engaging with Alacrity in the proper Business of your Station, improving yourselves, and doing Good to others. Never unseasonably magnify in Talk, but assiduously demonstrate in Fact, the Com-fort you have in observing the Precepts and

• Rom. viii. 28.

expecting

expecting the Rewards of the Gospel. Manifest, whenever Opportunities present themselves, yet without any Ostentation, the benevolent Serenity which Christian Faith inspires, your Enjoyment both of Conversation and Solitude in their Seasons, your Composure under Doubts and Uncertainties, your Fortitude under Crosses and Afflictions, and your settled Persuasion, that you shall ever be enabled to possess your Soul in Gladness of Heart^p, and rejoice in the Lord alway^q.

Such Behaviour will surely convince even the vicious and the prejudiced, if they have any Reflexion, that to seek their own Advantage with Success, they must seek the Things which are Jesus Christ's. And if they ever intend it, the present Time is always the best: but this present Time is peculiarly so. Decency prohibits now the usual Diversions: apply your vacant Hours to a better Purpose. The Offices of the Week throughout express in the most affecting Manner, what your gracious Redeemer hath done and suffered for you: think deliberately in it, what you ought to do for him, indeed for yourselves. Think what you have been, and are, and what the

^p Luke xxi. 19. Acts ii. 46. ^q Phil. iv. 4.

Faith you profess requires you to be : consider what fatal Consequences will follow, perhaps very soon, if you neglect to amend, and how you shall accomplish this necessary Work. Read with Reverence the Rules and Declarations of God's Word ; read with Attention other awakening, yet prudent Books, reflecting as you go along ; and engage some pious, but judicious Friend, to excite, support, direct, and, if there be Occasion, restrain you. Form discreetly by their Helps needful Resolutions ; and beg earnestly of God Strength to fulfil them : else they will all prove ineffectual. But remember, that the Piety of the Week, however strict, is not to end with it ; and cannot be really Christian, if it doth. You are called to Recollection now, that you may practise Vigilance all the rest of your Days. Temporary, periodical *Goodness*, that is like the *Morning Cloud*, and as the early *Dew* goeth away^r, will be of no Avail to any one ; but they, who, by patient *Continuance* in well-doing, seek for *Glory* and *Honour* and *Immortality*, are secure of obtaining *eternal Life*^s.

^r Hos. vi. 4.^s Rom. ii. 7.

S E R M O N VII.

G A L. vi. 14.

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross
of our Lord Jesus Christ : by whom the World
is crucified unto me, and I unto the World.*

WE must have some Foundation, real or imagined, for thinking well of ourselves and our Condition ; or we must be wretched. And innumerable are the Méthods which Men take to procure the Esteem of their own Minds. Too many *glory in their Shame*² : are proud of Notions and Discourses, which misrepresent sacred Truths, degrade human Nature, and tend to dissolve human Society ; of gratifying their Passions, their Appetites, their Fancies, whatever Mischiefs it produces ; of doing what visibly hurts, and must finally ruin, their Characters, their Fortunes, their Healths, their Souls. Others value themselves on more plausible, yet insufficient, Pretensions : on the Lustre of an ancient Fa-

• Phil. iii. 19.

mily, which perhaps they disgrace ; on the Inheritance or Acquisition of Wealth, which they employ to little or no good Purpose ; on Agreeableness of Person, which makes them vain and imprudent the short Time it continues, and miserable when it decays ; on Liveliness of Wit, which either provokes Enemies, or invites dangerous Friends ; on Depth of Knowledge, often falsely so called and pernicious, often wholly foreign to their true Business ; on Elegance of Taste in smaller Matters, while they are contemptibly injudicious in the greatest ; on Pomp and Shew, which give a Pleasure as fleeting as it is childish ; on making a Figure in the idle Hurry of Amusements, which encroaches on every valuable Purpose of Life, and wears out the Spirits under Pretence of raising them ; on the Favour of the Great, by whatever Arts attained, and however precarious ; or on the seemingly more solid Possession of Power, which it is hard to abstain from using ill, and extremely hard to use in a due Measure well ; which disobliges by the Exercise of it many more than it can possibly oblige ; is accompanied with perpetual Fatigue and Uneasiness, yet with perpetual Envy ; causes innumerable Vexations

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while it lasts; and yet commonly grievous Regret when it is gone.

If all these be wrong Grounds of Self-complacency, how few of us have right ones! There are those, however, who profess to build it on something more substantial, on Virtue. But, alas! the Virtue of great Numbers consists almost wholly in specious Words, Honour, Benevolence, Good-nature, which are either a mere Ornament of their Talk, or influence their Behaviour only on some Occasions, or to some Persons. And the more uniformly well inclined towards others are often strangely addicted to blamable Indulgence of themselves: or, however inoffensive otherwise, are lamentably defective in the Discipline of the Heart, particularly in forming it to that deep Humility, which becomes Dust and Ashes. If we think too highly of ourselves, we shall be fatally misled: and, if we think reasonably, we shall experience the daily Mortification of being faulty, more or less, even in those Things for which we are applauded. Besides, our Virtue itself will frequently oblige us to do what others will dislike, oppose, revenge. Or, though we escape such Evils, yet the unavoidable ones of Fear, Sorrow, Languor, Pain, Sick-

ness, Death, are usually more than enough to make our present State a pitiable, rather than a glorious one, if the Consciousness of our own Rectitude be our whole Support under them.

Wiser Men, therefore, in their Search of Comfort, look beyond themselves to God. And, indeed, Faith in him, provided it represents him as a righteous Governor, observing, distinguishing, and recompensing, unspeakably dignifies our Condition, and adds Importance to our Prospects. But still, our best Obedience being only his Due, and paid only out of what we have received from him, we could neither boast nor merit, though it were perfect: and what his free Goodness would bestow on us even then, beyond Security from being Sufferers on the Whole, Reason could never ascertain.

Or, were the Innocent assured by it of ever so great Rewards; are we innocent? Thoughtless Presumption may answer hastily in the Affirmative: but what doth the deliberate Voice of Conscience say, after a faithful Scrutiny of our past Actions, Words and Thoughts, as in the Divine Presence? Such and so many as our Duties are, of Love, Reverence, and Resignation to our Maker, of Justice, Equity, Goodness, in the numerous Relations of Life,

virtuous

virtuous Command of our various Inclinations, careful Use and upright Government of our Understandings; have we been always as blameless in each of them, as infinite Purity can demand of us, though we see that no one round us hath? If not, let us remember it, we are Sinners, and Sin deserves Punishment. *God forbid then that we should glory in our moral or religious Characters:* God grant we may find Mercy for our Failures in them.

But how can Reason assure us that we shall? Doth it know, what the Holiness of his Nature, the Honour of his Government, the Admonition of other Parts of his Creation, may render needful? Sorrow for what is past cannot annihilate it: and living well for the Time to come, though it were not mixed, as what we call so is, with perpetual Faults, no more makes Amends for past Transgressions, than avoiding to incur new Debts pays off the old. Still our Hearts dictate Hope. But Hope, far from being Certainty, is not so much as Persuasion. And though Pardon were unquestionable, future Happiness, much less eternal, would not. The Possibilities therefore, the Probabilities of these Things, which Nature can suggest, how reviving soever, compared with absolute Despondency,

spondency, have to Christians, as the Apostle speaks in a similar Case, no Glory by Reason of the Glory that excelleth^b: they fade away and vanish before his precious Promises^c, who was delivered for our Offences, and raised again for our Justification^d.

Here then we have sure Ground for glorying: not in ourselves indeed; for we have contributed nothing to this merciful Dispensation, besides falling into the extremest Need of it by our Offences: but Christ Jesus is made unto us of God, Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption; that, as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord^e. We have only to embrace, with acknowledged Unworthiness, the gracious Offer of our heavenly Father, on the equitable Conditions annexed to it.

But we must embrace the Whole, not Part only. Multitudes profess to respect the Gospel very highly, for its many rational Doctrines, its holy and mild Precepts, its interesting Sanctions, its Provision for instructing Mankind, the good Example of its Publisher, its Declarations of Forgiveness, nay perhaps also for its Assu-

^b 2 Cor. iii. 10.

^c 2 Pet. i. 4.

^d Rom. iv. 25.

^e 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

ances of inward Assistance. But of the Efficacy of what our Redeemer underwent to procure these Benefits, they entertain the lowest Conceptions: raise Difficulties on every Article of *the great Mystery of Godliness^f*, and explain away the Scripture Doctrine of it into Nothing: strive to form a Christianity as much as possible without Christ, and be saved, if not by their own Merits, however not by his. Therefore the Apostle in the Text lays the Stress where it really lies: *God forbid, that I should glory in any thing, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*: in his Submission to die upon it, not merely as a Confirmation of his Sincerity, which puts his and his Apostles Martyrdoms almost on a Level, but as a propitiatory Offering, by *which*, to speak the Language of holy Writ, *he hath reconciled us to God, making Peace by the Blood of his Cross, in the Body of his Flesh through Death^g*. That he appeared on Earth to establish true Religion there, bore the Inconveniences of this mortal State, *endured the Contradiction of Sinners^h*, and yielded up his Life to their Malice, is the universal Belief of all Christians; and why might not God, foreseeing

^f 1 Tim. iii. 16.^g Col. i. 20, 21, 22.^h Heb. xii. 23.

these Things from Eternity, graciously accept his condescending to them for our Sakes, though otherwise wholly foreign to a Nature united to the Divine, as a Sacrifice offered on our Behalf to infinite Justice: bestowing on the Priest and Victim the most acceptable Retribution that he could possibly receive, the Right of pardoning, reforming, and making eternally happy, as many as should throw themselves on the Mercy thus tendered them, and prove the Sincerity of their thankful Faith, by that of their Obedience? We are far from pretending to know all the Reasons of a Transaction, *into which even Angels desire to lookⁱ*: yet surely considerate Minds may trace in it evident Footsteps of Holiness, Goodness, Wisdom: but at least humble Hearts will recollect, that *the imagined Foolishness of God is wiser than Men^k*; and finding, as every one living must on due Search, that they have no Cause to glory in themselves, will glory most cordially *in the Cross of Jesus Christ*: ascribing to his Intercession their Forgiveness, to his Strength their good Actions, to his Merits their Reward. *Not by Works of Righteousness, which we have done, but according to his Mercy, God*

saveth us, by the washing of Regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he sheds on us abundantly through Christ Jesus our Saviour, that being justified by his Grace, we should be made Heirs of eternal Life¹. Blessing, and Honour, and Glory, and Power, be unto him that sitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever^m.

But then we cannot be intitled to such Exultation, unless we are qualified as the latter Part of the Text intimates. *Faith indeed saveth usⁿ : but that alone which worketh by Love^o, to God, to our Fellow-creatures, to every Thing good : which cannot consist with a ruling Love to the Ways of an evil World.* Therefore St. John saith, *If any Man love the World, that is, preferably, the Love of the Father^p is not in him ; and St. Paul only expresses the same Meaning a little more strongly, when he reminds us by his own Example, that we must be crucified, dead to the World, and it to us^q : we must sacrifice all inordinate Fondness for it to him, who sacrificed himself on the Cross for our Salvation ; and mortally hate whatever is wrong in it, at the risque of being mortally hated by it.* Still

¹ Tit. iii. 5, 6, 7.

^m Rev. v. 13.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 8.

^o Gal. v. 6.

^p 1 John ii. 15.

^q Gal. vi. 14.

the Comforts of Life, which God hath provided for us, are to be enjoyed with duly proportioned Gladness and Thankfulness: the Subordinations of Life are to be maintained, the common Busines of it followed, the Proprieties and Civilities of it preserved, and perverse Non-compliances diligently avoided. But, when all this is done, much will remain to be renounced and *crucified*. For, as St. John hath admonished us, *we are of God, and the whole World, even what calls itself the Christian World, lieth in Wickedness*: powerfully encouraging every bad Thing, to which our Appetites and Passions prompt us, and many to which they do not.

Fashion makes some Men Missionaries of Infidelity, objecting against Religion, even what they know to be false: others, implicit Believers in them, to shew their own Freedom of Thought; and a third Sort, utterly negligent of every Act of Piety, without so much as imagining they know why. Fashionable Honour urges Men to Demands of Satisfaction, equally wicked and absurd, often for no Injury at all. Fashionable Discourse abounds with Oaths and Imprecations, and irreverent Uses of the most sacred Names, not less foolish than profane; or, if clear of this Fault, commonly sets the

Whole of what we are concerned to believe and do, in a mistaken Light. Fashionable Extravagance consumes in Gaming, and Luxury, and idle Expences, what ought to provide for our Families, for the worthy and the poor. Fashionable Gratifications of the various Pleasures of Sense defeat the chief End of Man's Being. Even more innocent fashionable Amusements swallow up the precious Time, of which we should be frugal for better Purposes. Fashionable Hours interfere with the Order of Nature, with the public Worship of God, with the regular Disposition of all Sorts of Affairs. And fashionable Complaisance places the vilest of human Beings on the same footing with the most unexceptionable, to the dreadful Weakening of the essential Distinction between Good and Evil.

Yet in all these Matters Men will follow, with strange inconsiderateness, even the profigate. But they conceive themselves fully authorized to imitate, in every Thing, such as common Speech calls decent and reputable: Titles, in some Ages, to be had exceeding cheap. In one Sex especially, and the other is copying after it, very small Remnants, even of moral Virtue, will suffice: and in the upper Part of both, yet less of Religion, if

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any at all, is needful. Accordingly many, who, from Conscience, preserve some Forms of it, rather look desirous to have them thought mere Forms, and are wonderfully shy of uttering a Word to shew the contrary: pass off any Mention of their Regard to it as slightly as may be, and are content to let others treat it with as much Indignity as they will: instead of *glorying in the Cross of Christ, ashamed to confess him before Men*, though he hath passed on that Shame so awful a Sentence^{*}; and perfectly indifferent whether Piety hath the Support, which they must know it wants, provided they can make an acceptable Figure to those around them; a Point about which they are as solicitous, as if the Apostle had said, *Be ye conformed to this World*, instead of, *Be ye not*^t. Perhaps the more seriously educated scruple going at once the utmost Lengths of the Mode in wrong Things: but are gradually familiarized to follow their Leaders from one Step to another, till they advance imperceptibly to a frightful Distance from their first setting out; and it may be at last grow ambitious of being Leaders in their Turn of a little World of their own, that shall tempt the great one into still worse Enormities.

* Matth. x. 32, 33. Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26. xii. 8, 9.
† Rom. xii. 2.

Through the Whole of this giddy Progress, innumerable Attentions, and incredibly earnest ones, to most insignificant Matters, fill their Hearts, and expell or deaden every devout and virtuous Feeling. If they find Leisure to reflect on their Conduct, it is chiefly to invent Excuses and Palliations: if they still go to Church, it is without Desire of improving there: nay, if they still pray in private, which probably few of them continue long, it is little more than repeating thoughtlessly a few good Words: and thus, by Degrees, they come to have no real Affection or Veneration for their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier, no penitent Sense of their own Imperfections or Transgressions, no practical or steady Persuasion of future Recompences; but form their whole Manner of talking and judging, as if the present State were all: are extremely eager about their worldly Interests and Pleasures, but equally unconcerned about the Rightness of their Dispositions: will on no Account be absent from a Meeting for Business which they have at Heart, or a gay Assembly to which they are invited, let their Health or what will suffer; but neglect the appointed Seasons of Divine Worship, on the poorest Pretences,

Pretences, or without any: crowd Busines, Journeys, Diversions, into the most sacred Seasons, contrary to the excellent Ends of their Institution, contrary to all Law, and all Shame; but would think their Reputations undone by going to the House of God at any unusual Time, or even making, with Seriousness, a momentary Acknowledgement to him over their daily Food: consult neither Scripture nor Reason to discover their Duty; but make the artfullest Use of either, to fence against what they are unwilling to own for such; or, if Need be, avowedly prefer the Opinion and Practice of the World to both; disdainful Rebels against Heaven, but mean-spirited Slaves to they scarce know whom.

Yet most of them tolerate, and perhaps approve, some Appearances of Religion, especially in some Persons; but suspect any great Reality of it, as a Degree of Madness: have the utmost Terrors of seeing this poor Land over-run with Enthusiasm and Superstition; but not the smallest Dread of Profaneness and Profligateness: are startled at any new Declarations of Authority against either, but comforted by the Hope, that they will prove ineffectual, and all go on as it did: read almost any Thing written

to depreciate Christianity and relax moral Virtue, but almost Nothing in Favour of them; are very cautious of meddling with Treatises of Piety, however judiciously composed, for Fear of turning their Heads, but devour ever so many idle and even lascivious Books, without the least Apprehension of corrupting their Hearts: allow themselves to be much more expensive in the vain-glorious Display of private Magnificence, or towards the Support of Entertainments called polite, though neither of good Tendency nor good Taste, than liberal to the truest Charities: or, how bountiful soever to the temporal Distresses of their Brethren, have no Compassion at all for their spiritual Wants: nay, perhaps, have made formal Resolutions of giving nothing to such and such pious Uses, against which it is grown customary to inveigh, and hear no Answer.

Yet many of them had originally no Relish for this Turn of thinking and acting: indeed still rather affect to seem, than really are, happy in it: nay, possibly feel tormenting Doubts from Time to Time, how it will end. But these they are taught to consider as mere Fits of Gloominess, which they must dissipate by every mirthful Avocation they can invent, and learn

to despise themselves for ever having been in so strange a State of Mind, and so unsuitable to living in good Company. Or, if Reflexion will, notwithstanding, be troublesome, Arguments must be sought for to quiet it. And accordingly they do argue, that Mens Stations, Connexions, and Spirits require some Relaxation, and they must take such as they can get, amongst those with whom it is to be had. But are they grieved or rejoiced at this pleaded Obligation? Do they stop at the Quantity or the Kinds that are really needful, or go beyond them at Pleasure? Are they growing better or worse all the While? Are they setting good Examples or bad? Surely these are material Questions. Yet they make a Shift either to feel or to acknowledge nothing of their Force; but whatever they like to join in, peremptorily insist, that it is harmless, useful, necessary, just what they please: yet reserving a Liberty, when once it loses Credit, to censure it as absurd and wrong every Way, and be full as fond of something else, that deserves it as little, without confessing the least Inconstancy.

For, with the World on their Side, they come at Length, instead of apologizing for themselves, to assume a sovereign Authority over others;

others ; confute their Objections with barely a contemptuous Laugh or Look, or by fixing on them any Name in Vogue, that denotes Preciseness ; attack and persecute the most silent Nonconformists to their Notion, and haughtily overbear all that stand in their Way. Such as worship the same Idol with them, be their Characters ever so doubtful, must not be suspected ; be they ever so notoriously criminal, must not be condemned ; or counted unfit for their familiar Acquaintance; or even particular Friendship, let the Consequences, private or public, be what they may. The pert Ridiculers of Religion and Virtue are to be allowed abundance of Wit in the silliest and grossest Things they utter : and the most hard-hearted Libertines must be held to have true Good-nature, because they have superficial Gaiety. If they ruin themselves by their Vices, they are only to be pitied : if others also, they are to be excused to the very utmost, it is well if not looked on as the more considerable. But Men who have always been regularly virtuous are to be regarded as Objects of Derision. And such as add to their Virtue inward Religion, regulate their Conduct by it, abstain from Things on Account of it, appear to take Pleasure in its Doctrines, its Ordinances, its Pro-

mises, and give any Tokens of what the Text calls *glorying in the Cross of Christ*, they are to hope from this Quarter for a very small Share of the charitable Candour, which is lavished so profusely on others. Their Sincerity, or their Understanding, is to be strongly questioned: their good Dispositions and Actions denied, or passed over in Silence, or scornfully undervalued: ridiculous and dangerous Singularities to be imputed to them, on the weakest Evidence, or none; and if ever they fall into any such, they are to be aggravated beyond Truth or Credibility; and no Plea whatever to be admitted in their Favour. So very far are too many from answering the Psalmist's Description of the Man *who shall dwell in God's holy Hill*, that *in his Eyes a vile Person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord*^u.

Even an Infidel, were he to speak honestly, would tell such, that they are no Christians. Yet, perhaps, they would be very angry with any one but an Infidel for saying so, and in Reality are by no Means Unbelievers. But why then will they not become consistent? If the Gospel of Christ deserves any Regard at all, it deserves a thorough Regard: either it

is Nothing, or it is the most important of all Things. And they who profess it, yet seldom think of it, who are influenced by it, if at all, to scarce more than a little outward Shew, and slight and scorn the Frame of Mind which it was intended to create in them, *better had it been for them*, unless they amend, *never to have known it*^u. All Sorts of Persons are concerned beyond Expression to recollect this often: but two Sorts beyond the rest. If you of the upper Part of the World, who have most to be thankful and most to be answerable for, instead of being exemplary in serving God, are remarkable for neglecting his Worship and his Laws; not only the Ingratitude, but the Perniciousness of your Behaviour, will greatly increase your Punishment. And if we of the Clergy, who teach others by our Exhortations to *set their Affection on Things above, not on Things on the Earth*^x, teach them the Reverse by our Practice: make it our Study to acquire Applause, or Wealth, or Power, or Rank, to partake of Amusements and Diversions in the poor low Degree that for Shame we can, or enjoy ourselves in some graver Kind of voluptuous Indolence; to do any thing, in short, but labour diligently in

^u 2 Pet. ii. 21.^x Col. iii. 2.

God's Vineyard from first to last for the Good of Souls; we shall receive a double Condemnation. And they who patronize any such of us, will share deeply in our Guilt.

It is not Rigour that dictates any of these Assertions to me. It was not Austerity, but the tendereſt Compassion, that moved St. Paul to say, *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the Enemies of the Cross of Christ, who mind earthly Things*^x: not always designed Enemies, but real ones however. Our Saviour hath told us, *He that is not with me, is against me*^y. And they that will be with him to Effect, must be with him heartily, openly, and uniformly. We may have Qualities very amiable, and do Actions very laudable in the Estimation of Men, and yet our Hearts be far from *right in the Sight of God*^z. He requires, as well he may, that we should consider ourselves principally as his Creatures, as Sinners, as favoured with Offers of Mercy and of Grace, as bound to *live soberly, righteously, and godly, looking for the blessed Hope of his glorious Appearance*^a. However the Preference, which the World gives to very different

^x Phil. iii. 18, 19.

^z Acts viii. 21.

^y Matth. xii. 30. Luke xi. 23.

^a Tit. ii. 12, 13.

Matters, may buoy us up now in overlooking these, it will be no Protection to us, when *the Dead, small and great, shall stand before God*^b. And however insipid or insupportable a Life may appear to some, which is to be humbly spent in regulating their Desires, doing their Duty, and expecting their Reward ; they will find upon Trial, that every other Scheme produces miserable Disappointments ; and this, as much Happiness as our present State is capable of. Length of Days, easy Circumstances, general Esteem, domestic Tranquillity, national good Order and Strength, are the smaller Advantages that usually attend practising the Rules of Religion : but the constant ones, the calm Peace and joyful Prospects of all whose Minds are duly affected by the genuine Principles of it, these are Blessings inexpressibly great.

You are not exhorted to begin a new Course of Life, and retain your old Inclinations ; making yourselves uneasy, without making yourselves better : but to acquire such Sentiments, that you may delight in all you do. The vigorous Exercise of good Sense will contribute not a little to this desirable End ; for, indeed, the Ways of the World are often flat Contradictions to it.

^b Rev. xx. 12.

But the fundamental Rule is, Learn a just Value for the Cross of Christ, for the Pity he hath shewn, the Pardon he hath purchased, the Felicity he hath provided for you ; and you will soon come to love the Restraints and Observances which he hath appointed, to look with Indifference, or sometimes with Disgust and Abhorrence, on what you have hitherto admired, and find the Degree of your Satisfactions unspeakably increased, by changing the Nature of them from trifling, disgraceful, and noxious, to rational, noble and beneficent. Still Difficulties there will be, and to some Persons peculiar ones, in breaking settled Habits, and dissolving the Ties by which you have been long held. But God will give you both Courage and Prudence, to make it easier than you think. Though you will do what is right with Steadiness, yet you will do it without Ostentation, and with chearful Good-humour : speak mildly of others, and keep on as good Terms with all Men as you safely can. But, if you are too solicitous to please them, you will gradually slide back, and forget, as Thousands have done to their eternal Ruin, your former Convictions. Therefore, whenever you feel any, suffer them not to die away through Inattention,

tention, or be choaked by Cares and Pleasures, or blasted by the Breath of Scoffers: but impress them on your Souls immediately and frequently, form Resolutions corresponding to them, and confirm these by reading good Books, by the Conversation and Countenance of good Persons, by Attendance on God's public Ordinances; but especially by fervent private Prayer, suited to your spiritual Condition. With this, *out of Weakness you will be made strong^c*: and without this, the seemingly firmest human Purposes, think as highly of them as you will, can never be effectual. *For God resisteth the proud, but giveth Grace to the humble^d.*

^c Heb. xi. 34.

^d Jam. iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5.

S E R M O N VIII.

COL. iii. 1, 2.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those Things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right Hand of God.

Set your Affection on Things above, not on Things on the Earth.

THIS Day we are met to celebrate the yearly Memorial of our blessed Lord's rising from the Dead. Now the genuine Method of paying Honour to every Article of our Creed is allowing it the proper Influence on our Hearts and Lives. Christ's Resurrection is vain with Respect to us, unless we be raised by it to the Faith of a better World; and the firmest Faith of that is vain also, unless it excite us to love and *seek the Things which are above.* This Passage of St. Paul therefore is justly made one principal Part of our *Easter Day's Service:* and the Degree of our practical Regard to it will be the true Measure of our

Improve-

Improvement by the Discipline of the past Season, and of God's Acceptance of our Celebration of the present. That each of these then may be such, as we are concerned beyond Expression that it should, I shall lay before you the chief Motives to a due Regulation of our Desires and Behaviour, in Relation to earthly and heavenly Objects, which Motives arise from considering ourselves,

- I. As rational Beings :
- II. As Believers in God :
- III. As Disciples of Christ : on which last Point I shall enlarge the most, as it deserves.

I. Let us consider ourselves merely as rational Beings, who are to live for a While on Earth ; and suppose, that we had no farther Prospect. Then indeed we could not *set our Affections on Things above*: but still we might set them a great deal too much on Things below. For, if our Attachments to worldly Objects be strong, we shall frequently, either pursue what is hurtful, or be miserable that we dare not pursue it, or enraged at being crossed in our Designs, or dejected on finding small Happiness in our Attainments : which indeed are incapable of yielding much. The Delights of Sense are destructive, when indulged to Excess :

cess: and low and inconsiderable, when conducted with Moderation. Wealth and Power and Rank are acquired with much Difficulty, attended with much Anxiety, and soon become familiar and tasteless. Fondness for gay Amusements rather makes Men uneasy when they are without them, than gives any mighty Pleasure in the Midst of them: and, unless they manage with uncommon Prudence, wastes their Fortunes, wears out their Spirits, hurts their Characters, exposes them to Contempt. Indeed we cannot help on Reflexion contemning ourselves, for setting our Hearts on any of these Gratifications, to the Neglect of Matters visibly worthier. But if we follow them to the Loss of our Innocence, which generally happens when we follow them earnestly, then we have Cause to hate ourselves too, for transgressing the Dictates of that inward Principle, which we feel ought to rule us, and which rewards us, when obeyed, with that pleasing Consciousness of having acted well, which is the truest Satisfaction we can taste, though all were to end at Death. But even from this Enjoyment, without the Aid of Religion, we can promise ourselves but little. Our Failures and Imperfections in Virtue must be daily mortified: our rightest and kindest Behaviour will

will often have ill Returns made to it: they whom we love with the most deserved Affection, may be miserable, or may be snatched from us: and if not, we must very soon leave them, and whatever we value. In such Circumstances, Disengagement is evidently the only Way of securing any Comfort. It will indeed, at the same Time, render our Condition flat and insipid: but we can aim at nothing better from the Things of this World; without meeting with something worse: and if we are not contented with such a State, (as in Truth how can we?) our sole Remedy is to look beyond it: and consider ourselves,

II. Not merely as happening to be Inhabitants of the Dust of Earth for a few Years, we know not how or why, but as created by the Power, and placed under the Authority and Protection, of a perfectly wise, and holy, and good Being, who hath made us capable of knowing and honouring, and therefore doubtless originally of imitating and obeying, him. On this farther View of Things it will plainly appear, that the Principle of Conscience, which otherwise might often serve only to perplex and disquiet Men, is the Law of God written in their Souls; and therefore that

yielding

yielding to it will always end well : generally in this World, but certainly in another ; for which human Nature was evidently framed. Here then the Distinction between *Things above* and *Things on Earth* begins to open, the Connection of Virtue with Happiness becomes manifest ; and excites us to despise the poor short-lived Advantages that little Minds are fond of ; to esteem and practise what is right, be it ever so difficult, or ever so unfashionable, and devote our intire Existence to the adorable Author of it. The principal Object, beyond Comparison, of one who believes in God, must surely be God himself : and our Reverence and Love, our Dependence and Trust, are so to be placed on him, as on nothing else in his whole Creation. But, above all, should these Affections be exerted towards him in Respect of that future Recompence which we hope to receive from him. And we are greatly deficient in Prudence, as well as Gratitude, if we make not that Expectation the Support and the Delight of our Lives. But then the Temper of Heaven must be formed in us here, or we can never enjoy it hereafter : and therefore, if we would fix our Hearts on any Thing above to good Purpose, we must fix them on resembling him who dwells there, in Purity and benevolent

nevolent Goodness. Cultivation of these Dispositions is both an appointed Requisite, and a necessary Preparative for our supreme Felicity: whereas immersing ourselves in Cares, or dissipating ourselves in Pleasures, unrelated to Piety and Virtue, were they ever so harmless to those around us, must be pernicious to ourselves; rendering our Minds either gross and sensual, or trifling and vain; unfit for the Enjoyment of spiritual Bliss. Every Believer then, were it only of so much as Nature teaches, must think it his primary Concern to cherish religious Sentiments. And though he were uncertain of the Truth of his Belief, yet, in a Case of such infinite Importance, there could be no Doubt of his Obligation to chuse the safer Side. But, without farther Guidance, though he were not under that Necessity, he must be subject to others, and very alarming ones. It doth not appear to the Eye of unassisted Reason, what Degree, or what Duration, of future Happiness we might promise ourselves, even were we innocent: much less what Sinners, as we all are, abundantly worse than most of us think, have to expect from the Lord and Judge of all, to the Honour of whose Government Repentance and Amendment alone

may be no adequate Satisfaction, were they in our Power, which Persons left to themselves have too much Experience that they are not; yet however, since we are very sure, that right Sentiments and Behaviour must make every Man's Condition better, and wrong ones worse than it would be else; looking up to God, with Sorrow for our Transgressions, with Thankfulness for his Mercy hitherto, and humble Hope for it hereafter, must be the Duty and the Interest even of those who have no other Light than their own Understandings can afford them. But still the Obscurity of their Prospect must greatly diminish both their Consolation from it, and its good Influence upon them, and fill them with dreadful Terrors from Time to Time. God be thanked, therefore, that we are not left in the Darkness of natural Religion, but blest with that View of the Things above which proceeds from considering ourselves,

III. As the Disciples of Christ. If the Gospel of *Jesus* be true, and we have innumerable Demonstrations of it, then there is full Evidence, that a future State of eternal Happiness beyond Expression is attainable by Faith in our dear Redeemer, notwithstanding our past Sins, notwithstanding our present Infirmities.

For, having purchased for us Life by his Death, he hath given us Assurance of it by his Resurrection, and, in Effect, raised up us at the same Time with himself. *If then we be thus risen with Christ, where shall our Hearts be*, but where *our Treasure is*^a: fixed on him, whose Compassion planned the Scheme of our Salvation; on him whose Love executed it; on him whose Grace enables us to share in it; on that Kingdom of Glory, in which we shall reign after Death; on those heavenly Doctrines and Precepts, by which we are to prepare ourselves for it in the mean While? That we *walk not by Sight, but by Faith*^b; that we *labour not for the Meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to eternal Life*^c; that we *love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World*^d, but have our *Conversation in Heaven*^e, as *Fellow-citizens of the Saints, and Members of the Household of God*^f.

There is a Possibility indeed of taking such Exhortations in too strict a Sense, for Want of observing, that Rules, which we are apt to neglect and explain away, must be expressed in very strong Terms to prevent this: and that

^a Matth. vi. 21. Luke xii. 34.

^b 2 Cor. v. 7.

^c John vi. 27.

^d 1 John ii. 15.

^e Phil. iii. 20.

^f Eph. ii. 19.

often in Scripture, when one Thing is commanded, and another seemingly prohibited, the Prohibition is not intended to be absolute, but comparative: as in the known Instance, *I will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice^s*: when yet Sacrificing was both lawful and enjoined; but still to be looked on as forbidden, if it came in Competition with a Precept of more Importance. Thus then we are to interpret the Direction of withdrawing our Hearts from this Earth. Not that we should lay aside the common Affairs of Life, in order to spend our whole Time in Devotion: Diligence in these Affairs is one great Duty of our *heavenly Calling^b*. Not that we are restrained from using the good Creatures of God with Pleasure; for he hath *created them to be received with Thanksgiving^t*, and given us richly all Things to *enjoy^k*. Not that we are to confine ourselves to mere Necessaries; for undeterminable Scruples would arise, what are Necessaries; and as Heaven hath provided us more, it would be only Perverseness, or Weakness, to refuse taking it. Not that Industry to raise and better our worldly Condition is blameable; for a Blessing from above is promised to

^s Hos. vi. 6. Matth. ix. 13. xii. 7.^b Heb. iii. 1.ⁱ 1 Tim. iv. 3.^k 1 Tim. vi. 17.

such Industry. Not that we are to live in a perpetual Fright, because it is doubtful, how far precisely we may gratify our natural Desires in this Thing or that: for we serve a gracious Master, who means that we should be always cheerful and easy in his Service, so long as to the best of our Judgements we are faithful in it. Not that we are to think even the gayer Accomplishments of Life sinful: but rather chuse to make Virtue and Piety more amiable by them; provided it be only Virtue and Piety that we adorn with them. Not that we are bound altogether to decline Amusements and Diversions, in which others are immoderate, unless Example to them, or Danger to ourselves, requires it: for their Abuse doth not of Necessity make our Use of them unlawful, nor possibly sometimes unexpedient. Not that we are to measure the Degree of our Goodness by that of our Austerities and Abstinences: *for*, if I may make a small Change in the Apostle's Words, *neither if we eat not, are we the better; nor if we eat, are we the worse¹.* The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness and Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost^m. Much less are we to censure Persons of a free Beha-

viour: for conscientious Watchfulness is very consistent with an unconstrained Appearance; and though *John the Baptist*, an excellent Man, was rigid and strict; yet our blessed Lord, much the superior Character, *came eating and drinking*, and conversed familiarly, as a Friend, with *Publicans and Sinners*ⁿ.

Again: in like Manner we are to interpret the Direction of *setting our Affections on Things above*. Not that we must keep, or strive to keep, our Thoughts as intent upon them continually, as we possibly can: for neither our Condition here, nor indeed our Frame, will bear it; which wants daily Relaxation as much as nightly Rest; and without it, our Spirits will be overcome, our Health impaired, our Temper soured; and, by Consequence, more Ground lost in our Way to Heaven than we hoped to gain. Not that we should doubt of our spiritual State, if the Movements of our Souls towards God, and our Delight in the Contemplation of future Happiness, be attended with but little Warmth and Passion; for, though strong religious Feelings are perfectly rational, and extremely desireable, yet some Tempers are moved but weakly by any Thing; and what is present,

ⁿ Matth. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.

and strikes our Senses, will, on the Whole, agitate most, if not all, of us more, than what is distant and spiritual. Still, if under these Disadvantages, we so *love God us to keep his Commandments*^o, from reverent and thankful Motives of Duty to him, we give him that Proof of our Attachment, which he requires. Without this, the most fervent Affections will be unavailable: and with this, the calmest, which are often the truest and most persevering, will be accepted. Nor, lastly, are Men to despair on finding, that Regard to a better World is not only, as an inward Sentiment, much cooler, but, as a Principle of Action, much fainter than they have Cause to wish; and the Workings of earthly Desires in their Breasts powerful and vehement. For if the Victory be obtained, the Reward shall be in Proportion to the Toil of the Combat. And though it be not a complete Victory, yet if it be a real one, God may enable us to go on *from Strength to Strength*^p, till we are *in all Things more than Conquerors*^q. Or, at the worst, Failings, that will diminish our Recompence, may by no Means forfeit it.

^o 1 John v. 3.^p Psal. lxxxiv. 7.^q Rom. viii. 37.

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But though a few, who are worthy of the utmost Regard, have so peculiar a Seriousness and Tenderness of Soul, that shewing them how gentle and mild in Reality the seemingly severe Doctrines of Scripture are, is requisite, both to secure their Peace and direct their Conduct: yet the general Propensity is much on the other Side; and there is most Need to fear, that when once the Precepts on this Head have been acknowledged to signify nothing impracticable or extreme, they will soon be overlooked, as if they signified scarce any Thing at all. Now, it is possible to deceive ourselves with almost whatever Imagination we will: but surely it is not easy to think That a slight Duty, of which the Word of God speaks in such Terms as you have already heard; in such Declarations as that of St. John, *If any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him*; in such Parables as that of the rich Man, who, not indeed merely for enjoying this Life, but for taking it as his Portion, and looking no farther, was irreversibly doomed to the Place of Torment. We may very allowably, in our Passage through the present World, both feel a Complacency in the Agreeableness of the Road,

• 1 John ii. 15.

• Luke xvi. 19, &c.

and endeavour to procure good Accommodations upon it: nay, by moderate Attentions of this Kind, prudently conducted, we may qualify ourselves the better, both for the Business allotted us during our Journey, and the Employment for which we are designed at the Conclusion of it. But if we turn aside into every flowery Path, and engage in every Pursuit that Inclination suggests: if we forget we are Travellers, consider our Inns as Places of Abode, and adopt the Land of our Pilgrimage for our Country: what shall we answer at the last to him, who hath sent us hither to do his Work; limited the Time for it; and given us the fullest Warning, that our future Condition depends on our present Industry or Negligence?

Let us reflect, therefore, whilst it may avail us, in what Manner we are going on. The Bulk of Mankind, it is necessary, should spend their Days in worldly Labours. But then it is equally necessary, that these should be undertaken from a Principle of Religion, conducted suitably to the Laws of Religion, and accompanied with the Practice of religious Duties, public and private. They who plead Want of Leisure for Devotion, can always find enough for Follies and Sins. They who plead Want of Capacity

Capacity or Instruction, have, the meanest of them, been taught and learnt the indispensable Rules of Life: to believe in their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier; to behave virtuously, love Mankind, and honour God: doing which, they may offer up to him a Life of the lowest Occupations in sure Faith of his Acceptance. And if so much Regard to Things above be justly required even of these; what will be the Case of their Superiors, who voluntarily plunge themselves so deep, either in Cares or Pleasures, that he who made them *is not in all their Thoughts^t*; or, if they cannot help sometimes remembering him, is indolently forgotten again, or studiously driven out? It is very true, Business must be attended, but always in Subordination to the one Thing needful. Recreations must be allowed; but not so as to become the great End of our Being. What Proportion then do our Employments of real Consequence bear to our trifling ones: and what Share, even of our serious Hours, do we give to God, to Improvement in Virtue, to the Contemplation of our latter End, to the Hope of Immortality? Too probably, much may be wanting to fit many of us for our final Account. And how joyfully so-

^t Ps. x. 4.

ever they who are conscious of their Title to Heaven, may partake of the innocent Delights of Earth: yet it is dreadful to see those, who must know, if they would reflect, their Guilt to be unforgiven, and whose Sentence, whatever they imagine, is possibly just ready to fall upon their Heads, running round in a Circle of thoughtless Gaieties, instead of applying with penitent Humility for Pardon and Grace.

But, indeed, were the Goodness of such examined, as are conceived by others and themselves to have a great deal, would it not prove to be solely or chiefly relative to this World? We do Justice and speak Truth: but is it from any better Motive than Reputation or Convenience? We pity and relieve the sick and poor: but have we a like Concern for the spiritual Wants of Men? We are chaste and temperate perhaps: but is it because *the pure in Heart shall see God^a*, or to avoid Expence, and Disease, and Disgrace? Our very Sense of Duty, is it of Duty to the Author of our Beings; or do we not consider more, what we owe to ourselves, or other Men, than what we owe to him? Our Obligations to our Fellow-creatures we acknowledge frequently; but, except it be in a common Phrase, that comes now

^a Matth. v. 8.

and then out of our Mouths without attending to it; when do we express any Thankfulness, any Subjection, any Relation at all, to the Giver of every good Gift? Or, if we have Sentiments of this Kind now and then, are they vigorous, or are they languid? We bestow, it may be freely, our Money, our Time, our Pains, to gratify our Fancies, or promote our Interests, or serve our Friends: what Share of these do we employ to support the Cause of Religion, to advance the Divine Honour? Temporal Disappointments fill us with the deepest Sorrow: but do even Transgressions, and especially do Failings and Imperfections in Christian Virtues, affect us in any Degree approaching to it? And would not a considerable Solicitude on such an Account appear to some of us, who are far from thinking themselves void of Religion, rather an Evidence of a disordered Mind, than a well-grounded Concern? Prospects of temporal Advantage elate us with the highest Joy: do we experience equal Satisfaction, though we ought to experience much greater, from the Hopes of eternal Blessedness? We are usually very ambitious of making as good a Figure as we possibly can in our present State: what Desire do we shew of obtaining an honourable Distinction in the

next? Instead of this, we seem careful to exclude all Reflexion on future Existence. When we speak of the Death of an Acquaintance, when we put the Supposition of our own, how commonly do we consider it, as if Nothing whatever were to follow after, and how seldom as an Introduction to an infinitely more important Life! Are we not indeed, somehow or other, ashamed to mention, as if it were improper, our Faith in a Judgment to come, as a Reason against Sin, a Motive to Holiness, a Support under Affliction; or to acknowledge ourselves influenced by it in any one Article of Conduct? Or, if we do admit another State to suggest itself to us, perhaps we think more of Hell with slavish Terror, than of Heaven with filial Gratitude. Nay, even when we think of Heaven, too commonly, if the Truth were known, we have extremely faint Wishes for it, or Inclinations towards it. Yet, we can neither attain it, nor enjoy it, without loving it: and to love it in Deed, we must love Purity and Benevolence, the Company of good Men, the Worship of God: love to celebrate the Praises of him that sits on the Throne, and the Lamb at his right Hand: to meditate on the Mercy of our heavenly Father,

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the Condescension and the Glories of his eternal Son, the gracious Inspirations of his holy Spirit; our miserable Condition by Nature, our blessed one through the Gospel of Christ, our Prospect of improving in pious and virtuous Affection to all Eternity. Now these, it may be feared, are the Things of all others, that the Thoughts of many of us dwell on least, and with the least Satisfaction: yet we call ourselves Christians, and hope to be saved.

Nor must it be denied, that great Imperfection in spiritual Desires may be consistent with a State of Acceptance. But the farther such Desires come short of their due Vigour, the weaker Evidence we shall have of what we are most concerned to know: the nearer they advance towards it, the greater will be our Comfort and Help from above; for *to him that hath, shall be given*^w: and though, from natural Causes, they may sink, without Danger, beneath what they once were, in sensible Warmth, yet if their practical Effects begin to lessen, it should be an alarming Admonition, to remember from whence we are fallen, and *repent and do our first Works*^x; to be watchful and strengthen the Things which remain, that are ready to die^y.

^w Matth. xiii. 12.

^x Rev. ii. 5.

^y Ib. iii. 2.

The Methods to restore, to preserve and heighten our devout Breathings towards *the Father of Spirits*^z, and the Place of his Abode, are these: that we appoint, and resolutely secure to ourselves frequent Seasons for examining and rectifying those wrong Apprehensions of Things which our own corrupt Natures, the Commerce of the World, and the Suggestions of the wicked one are so apt to give us: that then we recollect the Vanity, Instability, and momentary Duration, of every earthly Good, the Certainty of the unseen State, the eternal Continuance of its Joys and Sufferings, the inseparable Connexion of the one or the other with our present Sentiments and Behaviour; the Authority and Holiness of God, our own Frailty, Guilt, and Weakness; the Sacrifice and Resurrection, the Ascension and Intercession, of our blessed Mediator; and when we have filled our Souls with these great Truths, lay open the Workings of them before the Lord of all, in suitable Confessions, Petitions, and Praises: that, if we find not at first the Pleasure or the Benefit we wish from such Exercises, we persevere in them notwithstanding; yet so as not to let them become, either on the one Hand empty Forms, or on the

^z Heb. xii. 9.

other unnecessary Burthens ; but employ them discreetly, as Means to arrive at our End : that we assist our Devotions and Reflexions chiefly by the inimitable Spirit that breathes in the Holy Scriptures : but also by the Use of other good Books, and religious Conversation, judiciously chosen : that we abstain conscientiously, as far as we can, from every Thing, of every Sort, which we find hath a Tendency to corrupt or deaden our Hearts ; but particularly that we shelter our tender Piety from the Blasts of Scoffers with the utmost Caution ; indeed rather hide it from their Knowledge, than expose it to their Ridicule, yet never deny ourselves to be what we are : that we constantly attend the public Service of God, not as Matter of Custom or Entertainment, but with a faithful Care to join fervently in his Worship, to learn meekly from his Word, and cherish by Reflexion afterwards whatever good Impressions we have felt at the Time : that we stately come to the holy Table with due Preparation, vow peculiarly, in partaking of it, *to live by the Faith of the Son of God*^a ; and, as we profess uniting ourselves to him by Means of it, remember, that *He who is joined*

^a Gal. ii. 20.

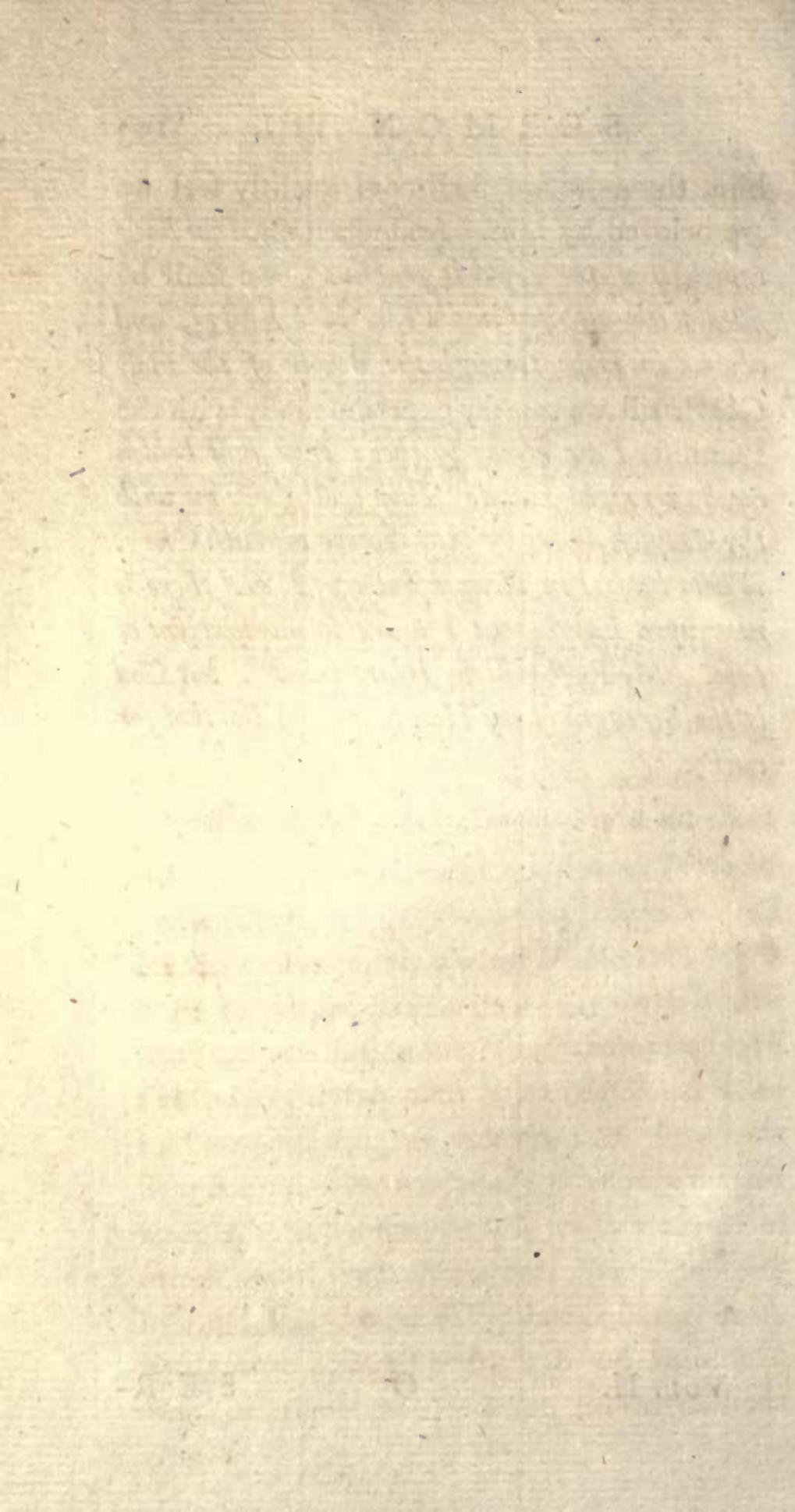
to the Lord is one Spirit^b. Nor should we consider only the Duty of being heavenly-minded, but also its Advantages. We shall cease to fear Death in Proportion as we set our Affections on what is to follow it; and have Hope, as an Anchor of the Soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the Vail, whither the Forerunner is entered for us^c. We shall scorn to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season, if we have Respect to the Recompence of Reward; bear whatever Sufferings our Christian Obedience may expose us to, as seeing Him, who is invisible^d. We shall take joyfully the Loss of worldly Goods, knowing we have in Heaven a better and an enduring Substance^e. When we are deprived of our dearest Friends, we shall refrain our Voice from Weeping, and our Eyes from Tears, for our Work shall be rewarded, and they shall come again from the Land of the Enemy^f. We shall run with Patience the Race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, who endured the Cross, despising the Shame, and is set down at the right Hand of the Throne of God^g. The more we contemplate him, the more we shall love

^b 1 Cor. vi. 17. ^c Heb. vi. 19, 20. ^d Ib. xi. 25, 26, 27.

^e Ib. x. 34. ^f Jer. xxxi. 16. ^g Heb. xii. 1, 2.

him, the more we shall consequently feel we are beloved by him. And when once we have tasted, that the Lord is gracious^b, we shall be filled with all Joy and Peace in believing, and abound in Hope through the Power of the Holy Ghostⁱ, till we can say experimentally with the Psalmist, *I am alway by thee : thou hast holden me by my right Hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy Counsel, and after that receive me with Glory. Whom have I in Heaven but thee ? and there is none upon Earth that I desire in Comparison of thee. My Flesh and my Heart faileth : but God is the Strength of my Heart, and my Portion for ever^k.*

^b 1 Pet. ii. 3. ⁱ Rom. xv. 13. ^k Ps. lxxiii. 22—25.



S E R M O N IX.

I JOHN ii. 7, 8.

Brethren, I write no new Commandment unto you, but an old Commandment, which ye had from the Beginning: the old Commandment is the Word, which ye have heard from the Beginning.

Again, a new Commandment I write unto you: which Thing is true in him and in you; because the Darkness is past, and the true Light now shineth.

THese Words contain a very useful Piece of Instruction, expressed in a Manner somewhat obscure and enigmatical, on Purpose to excite that Attention, which they will soon reward by the Discovery of their Meaning. Probably they were designed to be more especially understood of the great Precept, inculcated immediately after them, of universal Good-will: an original Duty of Mankind, but strangely forgotten throughout the Earth, till our Saviour taught it more

clearly, and inforced it more strongly, than had ever been done before. Yet they are equally applicable to the Whole of Christianity: and it might very well be the Apostle's Meaning to extend them so far, and set forth in them a Truth, wonderfully fitted to give both a just and engaging Notion of the Gospel: that its general Purpose is to make Men happy, by restoring amongst them the Belief and Practice of the primitive universal Religion of rational Beings; that its peculiar Doctrines were all introduced by the Change of human Circumstances, and are the same in Substance with those, of which the Patriarchs and *Jews* received imperfect Notices, and typical Representations in antient Time: that being thus, in Respect of God's early Promulgation of it, an *old Commandment*; it was yet, with Respect to the Age in which our Saviour republished it, a *new* one; as *Darkness* had covered the World, which by his Means was driven away; and the *Light* of Truth displayed again, with a Brightness and reviving Warmth, till then unknown. For Christianity added much Evidence and Distinctness to many important, and many comfortable Articles of Faith; and then building on them the corresponding Obligations

tions of Duty, completed on the old Foundations a Structure, only so far new as the State of Mankind required it should be. This is, doubtless, an advantageous View of the Christian Dispensation; representing it as doing for us exactly what we needed to have done; and that it is likewise a just View of it, I shall endeavour to shew, by laying before you,

The Nature of Religion as it stood at first.

The Condition of Mankind afterwards: and
The Fitness of the Gospel to that Condition.

The Duty of Man, so far as it was discoverable to him by Reason, whilst he continued innocent, must consist in Love, Honour, and Obedience, to his Maker, Benefactor, and Sovereign Lord, joined with the Care of copying the divine Goodness in his Behaviour to his Fellow-creatures, and the divine Holiness in the rational Government of himself. It is plain, that he could be obliged to no more, unless God was pleased, by Revelation, to superadd more; and as plain, that he was obliged to the Whole of this. For to pretend Reverence to our Father in Heaven, yet to misuse his Children and our Brethren on Earth; or to behave with Affection, Dutifulness and Gratitude amongst them,

and yet shew none to him ; and to profess both a righteous and godly Life, yet to fail of the Obligations of a sober one, contradicting and debasing Reason by brutal Excesses and Irregularities, is evidently faulty and inconsistent. The same Regard to Truth and Right, which requires any of these Things, requires them all. So that neither Piety and Morals can be separated from each other, nor any Part of either from the rest : but the Whole hath one Foundation ; and is indeed one Temper of mind, only exerted towards different Objects. In this happy Rectitude of Heart and Behaviour, consists the Image of God, the Perfection of Man, the original Religion of all Creatures, capable of Religion, throughout the Universe.

Supposing, therefore, any Creature fallen from this blessed State, restoring him to it again must be the only ultimate End to which any useful Endeavours of his own, or any gracious Designs of Heaven for his Good, can be directed. Now, this is our Case. We are fallen, by the Fault of our first Parents transgressing an easy revealed Commandment, superadded very justly to the natural ones, as a further Trial of their Obedience ; we are fallen, I say, thus from Uprightness

tightness of Nature and Immortality : and we feel convincing Effects of that melancholy Change. We are also fallen, by our own Fault, lower still, from personal Innocence into personal Guilt ; and from this Condition we want to be recovered. But that we cannot be, nor desire to be, till we are sensible of our Misery and Danger, and sorry for the Sins that have reduced us to so wretched a Condition. Here then begins the Necessity of Repentance : a Duty for which there was no Room in the primitive State of Things ; but in ours, the Ground-work of all that we have to hope for. And this Duty comprehends, not only that we condemn ourselves of Folly, for having acted contrary to our Interests ; and of Baseness, for having violated the Dictates of our inward Sense of Virtue ; but of ill Desert in disobeying God. The Grief and Shame attending Repentance will vary in their Expression, according to the Variety of Mens natural Constitutions. But Disapprobation of Sin, and Care of Amendment, are necessary Proofs of its Genuineness. And to these the Offender is absolutely bound, how small soever his Hope of Pardon may be. For having done amiss can, in no Circumstances, justify the Neglect of doing better :

every Increase of Guilt must be expected to increase the Punishment.

But still, as our Spirit and Vigour in acting will be proportionable to the Encouragement on which we act; without some good Prospect of Forgiveness and Acceptance, Men would have so little Heart to go through the Difficulties of Reformation, that scarce any Regard to Religion would be preserved in the World. And therefore God hath enabled us, by the mere Use of Reason, to conclude it probable, that as Goodness is always the Object of his Favour, so whenever we return to it really, though imperfectly, he will look on us anew, with Tenderness and Complacence. For *like as a Father pitith his Children, so the Lord pitith them that fear him: for he knoweth our Frame, he remembereth that we are but Dust*^a. But then, whether it be consistent with the Holiness of his Nature, and the Honour of his Government, that Repentance should obtain Pardon in all Cases, or in which; and whether in any, without some admonitory and exemplary Correction first; and how severe such Correction may be; though it nearly concerns us, who can say, unless Knowledge be given him from above?

^a Psal. ciii. 13, 14.

Another Point, of great Importance to fallen and sinful Man, is this. Partly by the original Depravation of our Nature, partly by our actual Transgressions, the Strength of the human Mind is grievously weakened, and we find in ourselves a sad Inability of doing, what yet we know we ought to do, and were made for, and cannot become happy without doing. Now what shall relieve us here? When indeed we contemplate God's continual Providence and Care, even over the meanest of his Works, and reflect that the Improvement of his rational Creatures in Piety and Virtue must be the principal End of his Creation; we cannot but hope, that he will condescend to assist us in it; inspire us with good Purposes, and direct and strengthen us in the Execution of them. But still Hope is not Certainty: and the weaker our Hope is, the fainter will our Efforts be: and whether, after great and habitual Sins, we may promise ourselves the aid of his Spirit at all, though then we need it most, Reason cannot judge on any certain Grounds.

A third most material Article, on which it throws a little Light, but a Light greatly overcast with Clouds and Doubts, is that of a future State. Considering the immortal Nature of Man's

Man's Soul, the evident Capacity it hath for much higher Degrees of Knowledge and Virtue, than it ever attains here ; and the earnest Desires of a future Being, which the wisest and best Men feel beyond others : considering the many Miseries to which we are subject in this Life, the few and low Enjoyments of which we are capable, and the strange Disproportion with which both are divided ; while the good too frequently suffer every Thing that is terrible for the Sake of their Goodness ; and the bad very commonly obtain the utmost Prosperity by the Means of their Wickedness : Men have never failed in any Age of the World to entertain some Expectation of a better and more equal State hereafter. But how long or how short its Duration will be, how great or how small its Reward, and what Qualifications will intitle us to any, and what Share of them ; our unassisted Faculties only guess : and the Subject appears in a very great Measure to lie out of our Reach.

But the divine Mercy gave additional Hopes to Men from the very Beginning, beyond what Reason was able to furnish ; with useful, though general and obscure, Intimations of the Means, by which these Hopes were to be accomplished.

complished. Our first Parents were told, that the *Seed of the Woman should bruise the Head*, and destroy the Power, of that *Serpent^b*, which had brought into the World Sin and Death. Sacrifices were accepted, as early as the Days of *Abel*. *Enoch*, for his Piety, though undoubtedly not a faultless one, was translated to a happier Life. *Noah* was assured, that the *Spirit of God strove with Men^c* to reform them. And these reviving Truths, possibly with many more Circumstances and Evidences of them, were certainly propagated amongst all *Noah's Children*: of which there remain clear and numerous Footsteps in the following Ages.

But by Degrees Negligence and Wickedness introduced Ignorance and Superstition: and these in their Turn augmented Negligence and Wickedness: till the Patriarchal Doctrines were forgotten or perverted; the spiritual Worship of God laid aside for Idolatry; and his Nature and Perfections so grossly misunderstood, that it is no Wonder if Pardon of Sins, Assistance in right Conduct, and a Recompence after Death, were either not thought of, or expected on Conditions absurd, and even immoral. For the Knowledge of the commonest Duties of Life was in

^b Gen. iii. 15.

^c Ib. vi. 3.

many Cases utterly lost ; and shocking Crimes considered as perfectly lawful, nay exalted into Acts of Religion. Thus then did the Nations of the Earth, to speak in the Language of St. Paul, *walk in the Vanity of their Minds, having the Understanding darkened, being alienated from the Life of God*^a.

Suppose now any one to have made it his Business, in this lamentable State of Things, to teach Men their Duty to God, their Fellow-creatures, and themselves ; and to have given them only such Instruction in it, with such Hopes of Acceptance and Recompence, as the mere Light of Nature could afford : what a Publisher of good Tidings, what a noble Benefactor to Mankind, would such a one have been ! And had he further appointed a Number of his Followers to travel through every Land, combat the reigning Errors and Follies, establish the Truth in their Stead, and settle a Succession of Men to support it for ever ; how highly would the Institution, and the Author of it, have been honoured by the well-disposed throughout the Earth ! But no Person appeared, who had either Abilities to execute, or Greatness of Mind to conceive, so vast and

^a Eph. iv. 17, 18.

excellent a Design. The Founders, Law-givers, and Rulers, of Kingdoms and Commonwealths, if they studied the temporal Welfare of those under their Care, for which they often provided very injudiciously, had little farther Regard even to their Morals, and to their Religion scarce any at all: but patronized and set up whatever Form of it, either the People were accustomed to observe; or their own Fancy, or the Example of their Neighbours, happened to suggest. So that there was not, for many Ages, in all the known Countries of the Gentile World, a single Instance of rational public Worship of the true God. Then for the Philosophers; most of them spent the chief of their Time in Speculations, that had small Connexion with Virtue and Piety. And they who did turn their Minds to examine into the Obligations and the Hopes of Men had very imperfect, very erroneous, Notions of both; tolerated, and even applauded, great Sins; had scarce any Notion at all, either of inward Humility, or of Repentance towards God; were very wavering, to say no worse, in their Belief of future Rewards; and had yet less Apprehensions of future Punishments. Besides, they differed from one another in most material Points,

Points, but all agreed in conforming to whatever false Worship was established : and, had they held more Truth than they did, were so little regarded, in any Thing right, by the Generality of their Fellow-citizens ; that they confined their Discourses to a small Number of their private Disciples, and left the Multitude to live and die like the Beasts that perish. This undeniably was, and had long been, the Case, when Christianity appeared. And though human Reason might have taught Men more than it did ; yet they, whom it did not, were never the better for that Possibility : nor was there any Likelihood of its becoming Fact.

Such was the Condition of the Gentiles. That of the Jews in the mean Time was very different, but became at Length almost as bad. They had received, from their Ancestor *Abraham*, further Notices of God's gracious Intentions. They had received, from their Legislator *Moses*, a great Blessing, an authorized written System of true Religion and moral Virtue ; with additional Precepts, to preserve them from Idolatry, separate them from the Nations that professed it, and exhibit to them a more particular, but dark, Representation of good

good Things to come, which would naturally engage their Attention and Expectation all along ; and, being explained when God saw fit, would shew, that the Purpose, which he executed in later Times, he had formed in the earliest. After this, they received from a long Succession of Prophets, ampler and more spiritual Instructions, fuller Assurances of God's Forgiveness and Grace, clearer Notifications of a future State, and more circumstantial Accounts of an extraordinary Person to arise from the Family of *David*, by whom all the divine Blessings were to be conveyed to all the World, on the Condition of believing and obeying him.

These undoubtedly were great Advantages. Yet for a long Time, notwithstanding them all, they were continually associating Idols with the true God, and even the vilest Parts of Heathen Worship with his. And when they came to profess a stricter Adherence to their own Religion, they grievously perverted the most essential Articles of it. They worked themselves into a Hatred of other Nations, against whom they were indeed commanded to be on their Guard, but still to love them. They promised themselves a temporal Deliverer,

to

to establish for their Benefit an universal Kingdom of this World: instead of one to free them from Sin and Death. They neglected the weightier, the moral Parts of their Law; and grew so minutely and absurdly observant of the ceremonial, that at Length they imagined, their whole Duty to God consisted in outward Forms; by a scrupulous Practice of which, they conceited themselves to merit every Thing from him, without any one good Quality within.

When therefore the Wisdom of the wisest Nations had proved Foolishness, and the Piety of the best instructed sadly degenerated into Superstition, our heavenly Father mercifully and seasonably sent forth his Son, to renew *the old Commandment which was in the Beginning*, to perfect those Additions to it which the Alteration of human Circumstances had required, and perpetuate the Knowledge of the Whole to the End of Time.

That the ultimate Design of Christianity is re-establishing the Love of God, the Love of Men, the Love of Virtue, is obviously plain from the whole New Testament: particularly, from our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount; from his Answer to the Question, *Which is the great Command-*

Commandment in the Law^e: from St. James's Declaration, what is *pure and undefiled Religion before God and the Father^f*: from St. Paul's Discourse to the *Athenians*: from his Observation, that *Love is the End of the Commandment^g*: from his explicit Assertion, that the *Grace of God appeared* for this Purpose, to teach all Men, that, denying *Ungodliness and worldly Lusts*, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present *World*, looking for the glorious *Hope^h* of a better. And the Re-establishment, which the *Gospel* hath made in this Respect, is perfect. It requires such Love of *God*, as will incline us effectually to imitate, as well as honour him; such Love of Men, as extends to the whole *World*, and seeks both the temporal and the spiritual Good of all; such Love of Virtue, as is free from Ostentation, from Austerity, from Self-Opinion. It lays us under a Necessity of remembering, that we are frail, that we are Sinners; and therefore most firmly bound to Humility in our own Hearts, Mildness towards others, Penitence in the Sight of *God*. To those who are in any Degree thus disposed, it not only repeats the obscurer, yet instructive and comfortable, Inti-

^e Matth. xxii. 36.

^f James i. 27.

^g 1 Tim. i. 5.

^h Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13.

mations, of Pardon, Grace, and Reward; which the Patriarchal Ages enjoyed, as a *Light shining faintly in a dark Place*¹; and which After-times lost, and wandered on in the thickest Night: but it visits Men like the *Day-Spring from on high*, close followed by the Sun of Righteousness beaming forth to cheer our Hearts, and *guide our Feet into the Way of Peace*². Instead of the Shadows and Figures of the *Mosaic Law*, which veiled, and, in a great Measure, concealed, what they exhibited; it presents us with the undisguised Truth and very Substance: sets before our Eyes that great Atonement to the Justice of Heaven, which other Victims were appointed to presignify; and opens the whole Treasure of divine Bounty; free Forgiveness, kind Assistance, eternal Happiness, to the worst of Sinners, on the equitable, the advantageous Terms of ingenuous Sorrow, thankful Faith, and universal, though still imperfect, Obedience. *Come every one that thirsteth, come to the Waters of Life, and buy without Money and without Price*³. Instead of a heavy Yoke of ceremonial Restraints, and rigorous Observances unexplained, necessary for the immature and injudicious Age of the Jewish Dis-

¹ 2 Peter i. 19.² Luke i. 78, 79.³ Isa. iv. i.

penstation;

pensation; God hath considered Christians as grown up to a manly Capacity of rational Service, and fuller Knowledge of his Counsels. He hath therefore communicated to us a much greater Number of doctrinal Truths, all fitted to instruct our Worship, and inflame our Gratitude: but hath reduced our ritual Performances to two: both of them clear and important in their Meaning; easy and affecting in their Use, and fully guarded against being esteemed beyond their Use: first, Baptism, which most aptly signifies our Engagements to preserve ourselves from the Defilement of Sin, and God's Promise to look on us as free from the Guilt of it: then the holy Eucharist: which, with equal Propriety, expresses our Saviour's giving his Body to be broken, and his Blood to be shed, for the Sake of Man; and our being nourished, and strengthened, and united to him for ever, by imbibing and digesting his Doctrine, and receiving into our Souls, by Faith, the beneficial Influences of his Death.

Thus then the *new Commandment*, delivered by our blessed Lord, is an authentic Republication, both of the primitive Religion of Man before the Fall, and of the additional Instructions given him after it; with such

Improvements of these last, as make up, together with the former, a complete Institution of Piety, fitted to answer all our Necessities to the World's End. To prevent or detect any Corruptions or Mistakes in so important a System of Doctrine, the blessed Author of it hath provided, that we should have the very Words, in which he delivered it, recorded in the Gospels; and his true Meaning confirmed, and further explained, in the Writings of his immediate Disciples: which inestimable Treasure Providence hath watched over through every Age: and, by its Assistance, the *old Commandment* hath once more in these latter Days been rescued from dangerous Perversions, and happily restored to its original Purity.

But besides, he hath made yet another Provision for securing, not only the genuine Belief, but the faithful Practice of it. As Man is a social Creature, and capable of receiving at least as much Benefit from uniting in Religion, as in other Things: so he hath formed his Followers into a spiritual Society, or Church; to celebrate the Worship of God more solemnly, and bear a public Testimony to his Truths; to exhort, and provoke

one another to love and good Works^m; to restore in the Spirit of Meekness them that are overtaken in Faultsⁿ, but put away from amongst them the grossly and obstinately wicked^o; that, if possible, the Reverence of so awful a Censure may bring them to recollect themselves and repent; or, supposing it fails, that yet the Innocence of the rest, and the Honour of the Christian Name, may be preserved. And that all this may be performed in a due Manner, he hath instituted a regular Subordination and Succession of *Pastors and Teachers*, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the edifying of the Body of Christ^q. An Appointment evidently suitable, both to the Nature of a Being, which so greatly wants Instruction and Admonition, as Man; and to the Nature of a Religion, that will so very well bear to be shewn in a full Light. However defectively, therefore, or wrongly, this Institution may be administered through our Faults; or how much soever it may be despised, or obstructed, through yours; yet, in itself, it is visibly of excellent Use; and, which is remarkable, peculiar to the Religion delivered in Scripture. For, in the Gentile

^m Heb. x. 24, 25.

ⁿ 1 Cor. v. 13.

^o Gal. vi. 1.

^p Eph. iv. 11, 12.

World, through many Centuries, we have no one Instance of any public Teaching, much less any moral Discipline, attending their Worship. And indeed, when *Julian* attempted to set up Preachers of Heathenism, in Opposition to those of Christianity, it was immediately foretold him, and the Event verified the Prediction, that what had proved so effectual to establish Truth, would only serve to expose and ruin Error.

Such then being the Nature of our holy Religion, and such the Methods taken to preserve it from Corruption, and make it a perpetual Instrument of present and eternal Happiness to Mankind; whoever sincerely honours God, loves his Fellow-Creatures, or wishes well to his own Soul, must see and feel himself deeply concerned to embrace and respect the Gospel of *Christ*; which God cannot have revealed for such noble Purposes, and left any one at Liberty to slight a single Part of it. But then we must remember, that neither professing nor admiring it, will serve for any Thing but our Condemnation; unless we receive it into an honest and good Heart^r, and bring forth the Fruits of it in pious and virtuous Lives. *Little Children,*

^r Mark iv. 20. Luke viii. 15.

S E R M O N . I X . 215

let no Man deceive you : he that doth Righteousness, is righteous : he that committeth Sin, is of the Devil. For this Purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil ; and hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his Commandments.

* 1 John iii. 7, 8.

* 1 John ii. 3.

THE
MAYOR
OF
NEW YORK
TO
THE
CITY
COUNCIL
OF
NEW YORK
1852

S E R M O N X.

I P E T E R iv. 8.

And above all Things have fervent Charity among yourselves: for Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins.

A Religion, the Precepts of which are all just and good, must immediately be acknowledged to be so far true; but if, besides, the general Temper from which it appoints every particular Duty to be done, be the proper and right one, then the Argument in its Favour strengthens. And if, lastly, the Means which it prescribes to form this Temper, be well adapted to produce it in the worst of Men, and raise it still higher in the best, nothing more can be wanting to prove the practical Part of such an Institution, which is always the most important Part, worthy of him, who alone perfectly knows both the Obligations arising from our original Nature, and the Assurances needful in our present Circumstances.

Now

Now this is evidently the Case of Christianity. Its Injunctions comprehend every Dictate, the very purest and sublimest, of natural Piety and Virtue, without any single Article contradictory to them: whereas all Religions of human Invention have both omitted right Things, and commanded wrong ones. The Precepts it hath added, peculiar to itself, are few and unexceptionable. And the Motives from which the Whole is to be practised, are two, the most rational and excellent that can be conceived: *the first and great Commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart; and the second like unto it, thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself**: both which have one original Source; that inward Esteem of moral Goodness and Rectitude, which must incline us to adore it in our Maker, cultivate it in ourselves, and exercise it towards our Fellow-creatures.

This is the genuine Spirit of the Gospel: and it is plainly the worthiest and noblest that our Nature, or any Nature, is capable of: too noble, indeed, for human Minds, weak and depraved as they are, to be wholly influenced by at first. And therefore we are trained up to it

* Matth. xxii. 37, 38, 39.

gradually,

gradually, by a preparatory Discipline of Threatenings to restrain, and Promises to excite us ; of religious Appointments to remind us of our Duty, visible Signs to make stronger Impressions of it, worldly Trials of many Kinds to exercise and confirm us in it ; till, through a Course of this improving Education, we grow up to our Maturity ; and *that which is perfect being come, that which is in Part be done away*^b. Then God in his own good Time shall translate us into a better World, and removing, as superfluous, now, those temporary Aids, which, in some Degree, obscured the Building they contributed to raise, its Beauty shall appear complete, and its Duration eternal.

Therefore, in every Act, and every Thought of Religion, we should always remember, that the only true Measure of our Improvement, is the Increase of that virtuous Affection, which St. Paul hath declared to be *the End of the Commandment*^c, Love to God, and Love to his whole Creation ; especially our own Species, or as large a Proportion of it as our Behaviour can affect. The former Part of this blessed Temper, that which regards our Maker, hath been taught so unintelligibly, and perverted so

^b 2 Cor. xiii. 10.

^c 1 Tim. i. 5.

wildly,

wildly, by some, and, partly in consequence of that, rejected with such Scorn, or admitted with such Diffidence, by others ; that to the great Disadvantage and Dishonour of Religion, it hath obtained but little Place in the Souls of Men, even of those, who think themselves pious and devout. And yet, if Goodness be the natural Object of Love, and infinite Goodness of the highest Love that we can exert, surely the Meaning of Love to God is as plain, and the Obligation to it as indispensable, as the Feeling of it is delightful, and the Fruits excellent.

Love to our Fellow-creatures, the second Precept of our blessed Lord, which in the Text is rendered *Charity*, the original Word being the very same, hath indeed so far escaped better than the first, as to be in general Terms well spoken of by all the World. But, at the same Time, its Nature hath often been ill understood ; and its Worth seldom considered near enough, yet sometimes exalted a great deal too much.

For these Reasons, I shall endeavour,

I. To settle the right Notion of this Virtue.

II. To shew the just Value of it : particularly its Influence in what both St. Peter and St. James ascribe to it, *covering of Sins.*

I. To

I. To settle the right Notion of it: a Thing the more necessary, because the Word, by which it is here expressed, hath greatly altered its Meaning. Charity, in common Speech at present, almost constantly signifies, either judging favourably of the Actions and Intentions of others, or relieving their Distresses: whereas, in the New Testament, it never signifies these particularly, and scarce ever any single Virtue, but that general Benevolence of Disposition, which prompts us, on all Occasions, to mild Thoughts and beneficent Deeds; and on which, wrought in us by the Grace of our Redeemer, depends their true Worth and Acceptance with God. For this Reason, St. Paul very justly supposes a Case possible, which else might well seem a very strange one, that of a Man's bestowing all he hath to feed the Poor, and not having Charity; for he may only have Vanity or Ambition; and as justly determines upon it, that such Liberality shall profit him nothing^d. Charity, therefore, is an inward Principle of universal kind Affection: and the Seeds of it are sown in that constitutional Goodness of Nature, of which, notwithstanding our lamentable Degeneracy by the Fall, every Man hath some remaining De-

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

gree ; the larger the happier, if we manage it with due Care. For in this, as in every Part of our Frame, watchful Conduct and judicious Culture of our Powers and Propensities, promoting their Growth in some Instances, restraining it in others, and directing it in all, is highly necessary to their attaining Maturity, and bringing forth valuable Fruit. When properly regulated, the most terrible of our Passions, Anger, becomes the Minister of Good ; and, when left to run wild, the most amiable of our inward Feelings, Good-nature, is often almost wholly useless, and sometimes the Parent of much Evil.

Thus, to say Nothing of those, whose Pretences to it are mere Affectation, who extol Benevolence to the Skies in Talk, but give no Proof of it in any Thing beyond Talk : the Good-nature of some, who have a Sort of it, is intirely notional and romantic. They can be affected most deeply by a moving Story ; weep over even a feigned Distress, when well described, or barely represented to them by Fancy ; and perhaps weep a second Time at reflecting on their own meritorious Tenderness : yet, in real Cases that come before them, can see the heaviest Afflictions without being moved ; nay,

can even produce them with a most unrelenting Steadiness, when their Pleasures, or Interests, or favourite Schemes, require it. And thus they cultivate, in Idea, the most refined and exalted Sentiments of Humanity, which no one living is ever the better for.

Some again are a little more in Earnest than this comes to: but so very little, that, instead of *fervent Charity*, it amounts to no more than languid ineffectual Good-will. They wish well, it may be, to all the World: applaud others highly, when they relieve the distressed; approve it, are sincerely glad of it; will, on occasion, solicit and press them to it: but if they themselves are called upon to do likewise, know not how to part with any Thing worth naming, be they possessed of ever so great Superfluity; and have a thousand Reasons to alledge, why they cannot, or need not do, what most evidently they both can and ought.

Another Sort of Persons will give their Money freely enough: for they have no Regard to Money. But if they are wanted to bestow a little Pains or Contrivance towards extricating any one out of Difficulties, that is too hard a Task, though it would do ever so much Good. To think of the Distress of a Fellow-creature

is grievous to them ; but to set about helping him would be more so : and therefore, instead of condemning and throwing off their Indolence, they turn their Eyes another Way to make themselves easy, and let every Thing grow as much worse as it can.

The Goodness of a fourth Sort is very warm, but extremely short-lived. They will promise Wonders and mean all they say ; but forget it in a Day's Time : and just then would do every Thing for a Man, whom in their next Turn of Humour they will do Nothing for. So that, till they are known, they mislead and disappoint almost as many, as they undertake to serve.

Another very blameable Kind of Good-nature is a partial one. That Principle must evidently be planted in us for the Benefit of all without Exception : and yet we most of us, it may be feared, either openly or secretly, except Multitudes. The very Gospel of *Christ*, that was designed to establish universal Charity, hath been dreadfully perverted to destroy it : and the Doctrine of Love abused, to excite in Men the bitterest Hatred to every Persuasion but their own. Nor have they, who profess the greatest Abhorrence of such Practices, by any Means been

been free from a very ill-natured Zeal against Religion, while they have censured most vehemently that Kind of Zeal for it. But in the Affairs of civil and common Life ; many, that on some Occasions have the easiest and mildest Tempers, on others, preserve no Temper at all. Sometimes the Spirit of Party takes such Possession of very well-meaning Men, that they abominate one Half of the World round them, it may be for they do not well know what. Sometimes again the most humane Creature upon Earth to those whom he happens to like, entertains and delights them with the keenest Satire and Ridicule on such, as he or they happen to dislike, or barely to consider with Indifference. The Agreeableness of not a few, who have a great deal, is almost intirely lavished on mere common Acquaintance : while those nearer Friends at Home, who are intitled to the largest Share of their Good-humour and Regard, experience continually their Peevishness or Neglect. And on the contrary, others are so tenderly and immoderately fond of one or more Bosom Favourites, that they applaud themselves, and, to be sure, are applauded by these at least, as the best and worthiest of Mankind : yet will slight most contemptuously all but such dear

Friends ; and injure most unmercifully every one else, that stands in the Way of them : nay perhaps too, must as constantly have some Persons to hate without Cause, as others to love without Merit. From a Foresight of this Danger it probably was, that our blessed Saviour, though he had recommended private Friendship by his Example, enjoined it by no Precept ; as well knowing, that a proper Degree of general Good-will would seldom fail to unite Men as closely, as was requisite for their own Benefit, or consistent with that of others.

But still, an undistinguishing Good-nature may be full as bad as a partial one. Too often the inconsiderate, or indolent, give themselves up a Prey to whoever lays hold on them. Confident Forwardness prevails upon some : a Talent for entertaining and diverting them takes with others, abject Flattery with a third Sort, and little Officiousnesses, well-chosen and well-timed, with a fourth. By such as excel in these Arts only, they suffer their whole Stock of Beneficence to be exhausted : and never take the Trouble of thinking, how very much better it might be employed : by which Means they at once give the worthy the Uneasiness

easiness of seeing themselves overlooked, and raise the unworthy to a Capacity of doing Harm.

Nay indeed, when they have done Harm, and been guilty of pernicious Crimes, there is a false Tenderness in many, that makes them unwilling to have past Misdemeanors punished, so as may be likely to prevent future ones. They have no Compassion for human Society, and nothing but Compassion for the Disturbers of it. To say the Truth, some will shew a kind Regard to bad Characters, which they will shew to none else: and do more to assist the most profligate Wretches, under the Difficulties and Dangers that their Profligateness hath brought them into, without either Design or Desire of reforming them, than they would to supply the most pitiable Necessities of an innocent Person or Family. Now this preferring such before others, in Acts of Beneficence, is Love of Wickedness, not Humanity. Or, if there be sometimes a Sort of what is called Good-nature in it, it is a false Sort; and one that approaches very near to being directly vicious: as unquestionably some Dispositions are, which in common Speech bear this excellent Name. Such, for Instance, is the yielding Flexibleness, that will

let Men deny nothing to their immoral and imprudent, or perhaps artful Companions, whatever Pain it gives their worthiest and most respectable Friends. Such is the superficial Gaiety, that first invites and deceives others into Sin ; then, without the least Concern, abandons them to Ruin. Such, lastly, is the thoughtless and profuse Generosity, that often usurps the Place both of proper Charity and even of Justice : and, by prompting Men to do at some Times immoderately great and kind Things, without Need ; reduces them to do, at others, mean and hard, and oppressive Things, contrary to the strongest Obligations.

These wrong Sorts of Good-nature (and, melancholy as the Number of them is, there are still more) should never tempt us to be unreasonably suspicious of others, though vigilant Caution is an essential Part of Wisdom : but they ought surely to put us on a careful and frequent Trial of our own Hearts. Is the Benevolence of Temper and Behaviour, for which we value ourselves, and expect the World to value us, of the right Stamp ? Is no Instance of it Ostentation, to catch Applause ; or Cunning, to carry Points that we have in View ? Are we good to those, who

differ from us in their Way of Thinking, whose Reputation eclipses, whose Competition obstructs us, whose Interest with others is superior to ours? Are we ready to befriend unadorned disagreeable Merit; to bestow private Favours on such as can make us no Return; and exercise bountifully, when Occasion requires, those Kinds of Beneficence to which we are otherwise least addicted? Doth our Kindness to particular Persons flow from, at least is it consistent with, a sincere Concern for the Happiness of all Mankind? Are we truly desirous and active to promote their spiritual and eternal, as well as temporal and present, Welfare? And lastly, are the Demonstrations, that we have given of this excellent Temper, proportionable to the Degree of it which God conferred on us originally, and the Means we have had of improving and exercising it since? For from those, who have enjoyed a greater Share of these, a greater Share of Usefulness in their respective Stations is as much to be expected, as a more plentiful Contribution of Alms from the Rich.

If the foregoing Questions can be well answered, then our Benevolence is a genuine moral Virtue. But still there are Qualifications

of unspeakable Moment wanting, to exalt it into that Christian Grace, which the Scripture calls Charity: that we place at the Head of all our Motives to it, the Love and Fear of God, producing a Desire to imitate and obey him: that we humbly plead the Pardon, obtained by his Son, and promised in his Gospel, for the many Imperfections, which a serious Review will always discover in our best Dispositions and Performances: that we earnestly beg the needful Aid of his holy Spirit, to carry us, in this and every Virtue, beyond the poor insufficient Lengths, which fallen and unassisted Nature can go. All this God hath enjoined: and those who presumptuously or carelessly neglect it, he will not, he cannot, accept; how fair an Appearance soever they make, in the Eyes of others, or their own.

Having thus explained the Notion of true Christian Charity, or Love to Mankind, I proceed,

II. To shew the Value and Advantages of it; first to the World in general, then to the charitable themselves.

The Importance of a social Spirit to the Happiness of Society, the Necessity of mutual Friendliness among Creatures so mutually dependent,

pendent, of Compassion in a World so full of Misery, of a mild forgiving Temper amidst so much Frailty, Thoughtlessness, and Ignorance, need not be proved ; and, one should think, cannot easily be overlooked. The heaviest and bitterest Part of the Sufferings of Life will be found, I believe, on Inquiry, to flow, from Want of Good-will, or Want of Care to shew it : and what Felicity then would there rise from Mens becoming universally reasonable, humane and courteous ; attentive to the Interests and Inclinations, the Hopes and Fears, the Wants and Sorrows, one of another ? But, not to amuse ourselves with the vain Expectation of every one acting thus, let each Person only think, what beneficial Effects, to those about him, would follow from his own doing it,

Good-nature, though expressed but in the slightest Intercourses of Life, gives Pleasure, and encourages right Behaviour sufficiently to make it worthy of being looked on, even in this lowest View, as a Duty of great Consequence. Whatever hath an immediate and continual Influence on the Happiness of others, be it in ever so trifling Instances, must, on the Whole, have a much greater Influence than we are apt to imagine. Even the lesser Demonstrations, therefore, of obliging Conde-

scension in Superiors, of Respectfulness and Deference in Inferiors, of Desire to please, and Willingness to be pleased, amongst Equals, are Matters highly worth regarding; Ways in some or other of which we can every one of us be good to all around us; and it is the only Goodness that most of them want from us.

But no one either needs or ought to confine the Proofs of his Benevolence to such narrow Bounds: but, without seeking much for Opportunities of exercising it, (an Employment, however, the most rational and honourable of all others) will easily find no contemptible ones laid in his Way, be his Condition in the World almost what it will. Those of distinguished Rank, for Instance, do the most extensive and important Service to their Fellow-creatures, while they recommend the Practice of Religion, of Virtue, of Prudence, by their Example, and inforce it by their Authority. Persons engaged in a Life of Business, have considerable and frequent Opportunities of shewing valuable Kindness to Numbers, at one Time or another, in their respective Professions, with little or no Loss or Trouble to themselves. They, whom a better Understanding, or longer Experience, hath made

made abler Judges of any Branch of Conduct than others, what Opportunities have they of directing the ignorant, warning the thoughtless, and setting the mistaken right, where, perhaps, an Error persisted in may be fatal to them for ever? Especially if such as are intitled to give Advice, would but study a little, first to make good Counsel agreeable, and afterwards, if there be Occasion, Repentance easy, by receiving Offenders back from wrong Courses with Tenderness, and endeavouring to shelter them from hard Censures, on Account of the Faults they have once forsaken.

But above most others, they, to whom God hath intrusted Riches, have obvious and daily Opportunities of doing Good, by extending Bounty to the poor: under which Name, though all ought to be included, whose Circumstances are too strait for the Station in which they are obliged to appear; yet the lowest Part of the World hath undoubtedly, in general, by much the strongest Title to the Benefit of that Denomination. For the Distresses of these, when helpless through Age or Infirmities, or sunk under the Burden of a numerous Family to feed and cloath, are heavy to a Degree, of which they, who see nothing around them

them but Plenty and Clearfulness, usually think little. And yet they are bound to think often and seriously, that our Maker's Providence hath not permitted so great Inequalities of Condition in the human Species, for one Part of them to languish in Misery, and the other to look down with Contempt upon them. *God accepteth not the Persons of Princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor: for they are all the Work of his Hands.* And his gracious Intention was, that the Virtues of Beneficence on one Hand and Gratitude on the other, should be exercised, and the Joy, both of doing and receiving Good, be felt amongst Men. We are, therefore, none of us, at Liberty, either to with-hold our due Proportion out of Covetousness, or to disable ourselves from giving it by Expences of other Kinds. It is true, indeed, even Luxury, by the Multitudes it employs, performs in Part the Work of Charity; for so the Wisdom of Heaven hath ordered Things, that such as will do no Good from right Motives, shall do some by their very Vices. But then the Good done by luxurious Expensiveness is very unequally done; and to such, for the most Part, as need and deserve it least: besides that,

all the While, it doth infinite Harm both to private and public Virtue and Happiness. Useless Professions are increased and enriched, while the more necessary ones are left destitute of Hands, or impoverished by the exorbitant Price of Labour: a superfluous Number, well able to work, are maintained in Idleness, and too commonly in Wickedness also; while true Objects of Compassion are left to the scanty Allowance of the Law. Besides, other Evils, absolutely inseparable from Luxury, would greatly over-balance the above-mentioned accidental good Consequences arising from it, were they much more considerable than they are. It gives, in many Respects, a very wrong Turn to the Minds of the great; and excites a most pernicious Emulation of their Follies and Sins in those below them: tempts both to such Behaviour, and entangles both in such Difficulties; as have every where proved the final Ruin of all Virtue and all Happiness public and private. But were it to do no harm at all, and ever so much Good; yet who, that indulges himself in it, can seriously say he intended that Good; intended any Thing indeed, but the Gratification of his own Vanity and Voluptuousness? Whereas, enjoying one Part of a large Income, with decent

decent Moderation, and disposing of the other in prudent Liberalities, produces Good every Way; may better, both here and to Eternity, the Condition of those who partake of such Bounty; and must be beneficial in the highest Degree to him, who bestows it from a Sense of Duty: which is the second Particular wherein the Value of true Charity was proposed to be shewn.

The wise Author of our Beings hath kindly formed us all with a natural Tenderness towards each other: which, as it gives us Pain on the seeing or hearing of the Miseries of our Fellow-creatures, unless we wickedly harden ourselves against them; so it rewards us, when we relieve them, with the sweetest Joy that we are capable of experiencing: a Joy that neither is succeeded by uneasy Reflections, like many others; nor vanishes quickly into nothing, like most others: but which the Heart dwells upon with lasting Delight and humble Self-approbation. But were this Pleasure much less, than whoever habituates himself to it will find it to be, the same Goodness of Nature, which is the Parent of charitable Beneficence, is also the best Qualification for enjoying the Satisfactions and moderating the Vexations of social Life: and therefore

therefore we cannot do a more prudent Thing, than to strengthen it by Exercise. Besides, Good-will to others gives us the surest Claim, that any Thing can give, to Good-will in Return; the Proofs of which we may easily come to want on many Occasions. But though the World, and even those Persons in it whom we have served, recompense us ever so ill, yet not the smallest kind Action, that we have either done or designed, shall be lost. For God sees them all; and will be proportionably gracious, not only to the Virtues, but even the Failings of those, who have made it their faithful Care to shew the Mercy which they hope to receive.

And this is that never-failing Motive to universal Benevolence, which the Text urges: *have fervent Charity among yourselves: for Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins.* Not that either the outward Acts, or even the inward Temper, of this one Virtue, though it were extended to all our Fellow-creatures, and much less if only to some small Part of them, nor that perhaps the most deserving, shall excuse the wilful and unrepented Neglect, either of due Reverence to God, or moral Government of ourselves in other Respects. But seldom, indeed, will it happen, if at all, that the profane or debauched, let them

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be called the best-natured Men that ever were, shall do near so much Good as Harm in the World, were the whole Consequences of their Behaviour well computed. But could this be ever so much otherwise, yet to honour and worship our Maker, in the Manner which he hath appointed, is one of our essential Obligations, and to observe the Rules of Chastity and Temperance, Decency and Order, is another. Now what we are bound to observe, we cannot possibly be left at Liberty to break through or despise. And therefore *be not deceived: God is not mocked^f.* Whoever lives in the known and indulgent Transgression of any Duty, or Commission of any Sin, whatever Excellencies in other Points he may seemingly or really have, shall not enter into the Kingdom of God. Great Promises are made to other single Virtues, in other Passages of Scripture, as well as to Charity in this. And the Meaning is not, that we may get to Heaven by any one good Quality that we please: for surely there will no one be found so bad as to have none: but each of them is supposed, though practised more eminent than the rest, to be accompanied by them; not separated from them, and set up against them: a

^f Gal. vi. 7.

Supposition made will still more Reason in the present Case, than any other of the same Kind: because the true Love to our Neighbour not only comprehends every good Disposition towards him, but flows from Love to God, and Faith in our blessed Redeemer, and dutiful Regard to the Motions of the Holy Spirit. Indeed all these united, in the poor Degree that we possess them, can by no Means merit Pardon for our Failures in all; but only qualify us for obtaining that Mercy which St. Peter, in the Beginning of this Epistle, ascribes to *the Sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ*. And nothing less than a prevailing Habit of every Virtue will complete our Qualification for final Acceptance: but that of each particular one shall contribute towards it, in Proportion to its Value. And as Beneficence, practised in its whole Extent on right Principles, is of the highest Value, the Text very properly teaches, and was designed only to teach, that Charity, Kindness to our Fellow-creatures, practised from a Principle of Conscience, in every Way that we have Opportunity, shall contribute, in a distinguished Manner, to fit us for receiving Forgiveness from our Creator, and thus shall

cover the Multitude of our Sins at the last Day. Since, therefore, being good to our Brethren will give us a peculiar Claim to the Goodness of our heavenly Father: whoever is sensible of his past Offences, let him take this Way especially of evidencing his Repentance; and whoever would intitle himself after Death to the noblest of Rewards, let him serve God throughout Life in this most excellent of all Duties.

S E R M O N XI.

M A T T H. X. 34.

*Think not that I am come to send Peace on Earth:
I came not to send Peace, but a Sword.*

THAT these Words of our blessed Saviour expres, not the Design of his appearing in the World, but the Effect it would have very contrary to his Design, through the Wickedness of Men, both his Life and Doctrine sufficiently shew ; and, indeed, all Sorts of Men have acknowledged. For though too many Christians have acted as if they understood him to desire what he only foretels, and thought it their Duty to make his Words good : yet none of them, I think, have ever professed to understand him so. And Infidels themselves have done him the Justice of allowing, that he meant to establish Good-will and Virtue among Men. But then his Religion, they say, hath so miserably failed of answering his Purpose, hath produced such dreadful Evils, and been of so exceeding small

Benefit, that they cannot imagine a wise and good Being, as God is, would ever take such very extraordinary Methods as the Gospel asserts, to introduce and establish it. And though few, it may be hoped, will think it reasonable to carry the Matter thus far; yet many may be tempted by such confident Affirmations, if not to doubt of the Truth of Christianity, yet to have less Delight in it, less Thankfulness and Zeal for it, than they would otherwise have.

We shall do well, therefore, to inquire, both how far the Facts alledged in this Objection are true, and whether the Conclusion drawn from them is just.

That considerable Evils have taken their Rise from our Saviour's Doctrine, must be owned. He himself, we see, declares they would: and he had Reasons to declare it in Terms as strong, as the Truth would warrant. For as the Jews expected nothing but Peace and Prosperity, for themselves at least, under their *Messiah*, it was both honourable and prudent to give them fair Warning of what was to happen, that they might not first be elevated with false Hopes and heated into presumptuous Behaviour, and then complain they had been deceived and misled. Besides,

as he undoubtedly thought the least Degree of Evil a great deal too much, he could not speak lightly of that which he foresaw. But still he could never design to say, that it would over-balance or go near to equal the Good: for thus he might have discredited his own Mission, and contradicted the whole Tenour of his own Discourses.

The Allegations, therefore, of the Argument before us cannot be proved from this Text, nor, indeed, from any other. But the whole Proof must be drawn from the natural Tendency of Christianity, and the Experience of its Effects. Now it cannot, consistently with common Modesty, be denied, that the Tendency of Christianity to the Welfare of Mankind is very powerful. Justice and Mercy, Obedience to Superiors, Condescension to Inferiors, mutual Tenderness and mutual Usefulness, are the main Precepts that every where occur in it: to these peculiarly the Reward of everlasting Happiness is annexed; and nothing contrary to them is ever taught throughout the Scripture. It is very true, Pleas have been made from it in Support of Tyranny and Cruelty; but they are so absolutely groundless, that Unbelievers themselves have vindicated our Religion in this Respect;

by charging it on those whom they apprehended to claim exorbitant Powers, that they assumed what their own sacred Books did not give them the least Colour for.

Nor indeed do I remember any Accusation against the Gospel, as hurtful in its Nature, at all worth Notice, excepting that of the great Stress it is said to lay on right Belief: from whence, we are told, all who imagine each other to believe amiss have been prompted to reciprocal Hatred and Persecution; whereas, the Heathens had no Articles of Faith, and therefore lived in Peace^a. But indeed every Profession, both of Religion and Irreligion, must have some Belief to ground itself upon: else it will be a Profession of Nothing. Deists, and even Atheists, have their Creed; consisting, as they would find upon Inquiry, of much stranger Doctrines than ours doth: which also they believe to be of vast Importance, otherwise they would be self-condemned for propagating it. Nay, if we may judge of what many of them would do, by the Spirit they manifest in what they say: as they inveigh against Christianity now both with Bitterness and Unfairness, they would employ

^a See Letter to the Minister of *Moffat*, p. 7. and the Answer to it.

against it, if they had Power, Violence as well as Fraud^b. Then, as for the Heathens, whose Mildness in these Matters is so extolled ; both *Jews* and *Christians* had most dreadful Experience of their Want of it. Nor were they by any Means totally guiltless of religious Quarrels among themselves. Nor hath the Gospel given the least Encouragement to such Quarrels by the Faith it requires. So much Faith it must require, as may be a Foundation for the Duties it enjoins. But all unnecessary Speculations it condemns in the fullest and strongest Terms. Be Mens Faith ever so right, it tells them plainly they shall never be rewarded, without every Part of a good Life : and be their Faith ever so wrong, it neither permits unkind Usage of them in this World, nor harsh Judgment with Respect to another. There are, indeed, awful Denunciations in the Bible, against such as corrupt the Gospel, *turn the Grace of God into Lasciviousness^c*, or abuse it to patronize any Kind of Immorality. But Nothing severe is ever said of well-meaning Persons that mistake ; nor any Thing more severe of bad Men that err in Opinion, than of bad Men that do not. Nor can there be

See *Leland against Tindal*, Vol. I. p. 302—312. • Jude 4.

stricter Injunctions against any Thing, or enforced with better Arguments, than those of *Christ* and his Apostles against all Sorts of Persecution. So that had they established ever so many Articles of Faith, and laid ever so much Weight upon them, yet as they have certainly laid equal Weight at least on brotherly Love; mutual Forbearance, and universal Charity: they can never have authorised doing any Harm in the World. And the Religion they taught is confessedly fitted to do all the Good in it, which the purest Precepts, and the strongest Inducements to practise them, the most regular Care to instruct Men, and the most friendly Discipline to watch over them, are capable of.

Yet some, notwithstanding, will insist, that in Fact it hath done Harm: and against Fact there is no arguing. But, in the Nature of Things, Nothing can do what it hath no Manner of Tendency to do. Christianity therefore may have been the Pretence, may have been the Occasion, of Evil; but the Cause it cannot. However, let us inquire, what the Proof is of its having any Way occasioned near so much Harm, as it hath directly produced Good. We readily confess, a long Catalogue may with Ease be given of the Sins and Sufferings that have followed

followed its Appearance and Establishment. In the first Place, its Professors underwent grievous Persecutions from the rest of Mankind. But evidently this is no more to be charged upon Christianity, than the Injuries which the wicked have often done to the good, on Account of their Goodness, are to be charged on moral Virtue. In the next Place, the *Jews*, having offended God by their inhuman Treatment of the Gospel, were permitted, by his just Providence, to turn the same bitter Spirit against each other, and against the *Romans*, and so to bring on themselves utter Destruction. But here also Christianity is perfectly clear, unless it be an innocent Man's Fault, that a Criminal is punished for having robbed or murdered him. And these Things it probably was that our Saviour had chiefly in View, when he spoke in the Text of *a Sword to be sent on the Earth*; or, as, perhaps, it should be translated, *on the Land*, the Country of *Judæa*.

But, we must acknowledge farther, Discord and Divisions prevailed very soon among Christians also, and produced lamentable Effects: till they came at Length to exercise Barbarities one towards another, equal to any they had suffered from Infidels. But then it ought to be allowed

us in Return, that though unjust spiritual Censures began even in the second Century, and the lower Degrees of temporal Persecution, such as Banishment and Confiscation, in the fourth, very soon after they had Power: yet the utmost Extremities were introduced much later, nor did they receive the formal Sanction of the supreme Authority, till many Ages after. I believe Twelve Hundred Years had passed, before any Law was made in any Christian State for putting Men to Death on Account of erroneous Faith. Since that Time, indeed, most shocking Tragedies have been acted by a wicked Zeal for Religion. But then many, that have seemed to proceed from that Cause, were but the real Truth known, would in all Likelihood be found, and indeed often have been found, to proceed from quite other Motives. Interests and Resentiments have been covered perpetually with a Mask of Piety. Zealots have often been only the Instruments of Parties, while they seemed to be their Directors; and the Mischief, done in the Name of God, would have been as certainly done without it under some other Pretence, if that had not offered itself. Religion is a specious Plea; and therefore was used whenever it could: but any Plea will serve

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for what Men are bent to do. And if the Mischiefs that have been disguised under a Form of Godliness, could not in some Cases have been so easily or so effectually accomplished else: yet the Whole of them ought not to be attributed even to the Pretence of Piety: but only so much as would not have happened, had not that been used. Religious Animosities, religious Wars, have been frequent and dreadful. But can we imagine, that if these had been avoided, no others would have arisen, during all the Time that they have filled? Such a Notion would argue strange Ignorance of human Nature. So that in Ages when the World hath appeared to suffer very much from the Abuses of Religion, it may indeed have suffered, very little from them. And of what it hath suffered, one great Part may have proceeded, not from the Bigotry of Believers, but the Artifices of such as were inwardly Unbelievers.

But besides the Evil of Discord, Christianity hath been accused of obstructing Knowledge, and promoting Ignorance in the World^a. But in what Condition was the World before Christianity? Did not the grossest Ignorance,

^a That Christianity hath not been hurt by the Increase of Knowledge, see Warburton, Vol. II. Serm. xv.

about Matters of the highest Importance to Men, prevail almost every where, even in the politest and best instructed Nations ? And if the succeeding Times were not learned, what else could be expected ; when the *Roman Empire*, debased and sunk under Tyranny and Luxury before it received the Gospel, was soon after dissolved by that Inundation of Barbarians that overspread *Europe* with War and Desolation ? By these Heathens it was that Arts and Sciences were brought so low. What remained of Learning, remained among Christians : and as they became Christians, they shared in it. Little was left indeed. But had it not been for the Professors, and particularly the Teachers of this Religion, to which some would impute all the Darkness of the middle Ages, every Monument of ancient Days must probably have been lost^e. Christians they were too, and principally Clergymen, that have restored and improved Learning since ; and the Christian World is at this Day the Seat of it. Nor will the Unbelievers amongst us, I am persuaded, pretend, that what they have contributed to make it so, is at all material in Comparison, or presume to mention

^e The religious Orders established in the 11th Century, revived Learning in the 12th. See *Journ. des Sc.* July, 1744. p. 317. the

the Names of their few and arrogant Leaders in Competition with the Multitudes of truly great Men, who have adorned the Faith of *Christ* by their distinguished Excellence in every Branch of Philosophy and Literature. Indeed Learning is of such eminent Service, both to the Understanding and the Proof of our Religion, that we must of Necessity support it. And accordingly, more are bred up to Learning with a View of being dedicated to the Ministry of the Gospel, than with any other whatever. Few of them, in Proportion, we own, make great Improvements: but few in any Profession do. And preserving thus, though it be but a moderate Degree of Knowledge, amongst Men, cannot fail to be exceedingly useful; especially of that Knowledge which immediately relates to their moral Conduct. But were Infidelity once to prevail, the chief Inducements to all Applications of this Sort would cease: scarce any one would take the Pains to learn, what it would be no one's particular Duty to teach; worldly Pursuits and sensual Indulgences, having little to check them, would almost wholly ingross the Attention of Mankind; and produce not only a Neglect, but a Contempt, of more liberal

liberal Studies ; as I fear we have begun to experience already.

But we shall be told, that how little Harm, or how much Service soeyer, Christianity may have done to Learning ; it hath contributed nothing to the Virtue or Happiness of Mankind, and therefore cannot be a Religion worthy of God. Now, on the contrary, we apprehend, it hath contributed to both these very greatly : and it seems the Extremity of Unreafonableness to fay, that, in Spite of all its Precepts, Promises and Threatenings, it can make Multitudes bad, and yet by the Force of them all can make no one good. There is visibly no Possibility that either better Rules of Life should be given, or more interesting Motives to observe them, than the Gospel hath given. It must therefore reform those, whom any Doctrine can : and the only Objection against it on this Head must be, that it doth not reform those whom no Doctrine can.

Still it will be said ; look into the History of Christian Nations, into that of the Christian Clergy in particular ; and what will you find, but the same wrong Inclinations and wrong Behaviour, in at least the same Degree as amongst other Men ? And it must be owned,

owned, the Professors of the Gospel in general, but the Ministers of it above all, (because, though on the Whole we have by no Means been worse, yet we ought to have been far better than the rest) have much Cause to be humble before God and the World for the Dishonour we have done by our Negligence, our Sensuality, our Haughtiness, our Ambition, our Covetousness, our Unfairness, our Bitterness, to the worthy and holy Name whereby we are called. But as to the Degree of these Faults, it should be observed, that if Sins and Follies make the chief Figure in Christian Histories, so they do and must in all Histories. Virtuous and quiet Times, be they ever so long, virtuous and quiet Men, be they ever so many, furnish usually but slender Materials for a Narration, and fill up but a small Space in it^f; whereas great Notice is taken of the bad Things that are done in the World, partly from a natural Dislike of Wickedness, partly from personal Hatred to some of those who commit it, and partly also from the Pleasure Men have in framing Comparisons advantageous to themselves. But especially the Failings of such as lie under

^f Εἰδητος γαρ εστι, ἵποθεσιν οἱ ἱσόριογράφειν εθίλοντες οχ' οἰξεσιν. επει
καὶ ἡμεῖς—οχ' αὐτὸν πυρορωσαμεν ἵποθεσεν, ει δὲ φιλανθρώπεις τας εαστιν
ἥσυχαζειν ωφελεινο. Socr. Hist. Eccl. in fine.

peculiar Obligations of being pious [and exemplary], will always be seen in the very strongest Light, and Blame thrown upon them beyond all Proportion, when they act amiss. But when Men act well, and Things go on right, very little is said. The Good do not proclaim their own Goodness: and the World is seldom very inquisitive about it; hath other Matters to mind; thinks at the most they do but their Duty, and is much apter to seek for, and imagine Faults, than to own and remember Virtues.

In the primitive Times, when few were tempted to profess the Faith of *Christ* but such as embraced it in Earnest, and his Disciples were easily distinguished from the rest of Mankind, the Fruits of the Gospel bore a most convincing Testimony in its Favour. But when once the Profession grew general, and profitable: when real and pretended Christians were mixed together, and the virtuous hid amongst the immoral, no Wonder if then the Benefit was less remarkable. The whole promiscuous Collection going all under one Name, and many of them seeming but little the better for their Faith, both partial and careless Observers have hastily concluded that few or none are the better at all. And yet,

yet, there are great Numbers on the Whole, much greater than either the profane are ready to think, or even the pious have commonly the Means of knowing, whose Hearts and Lives their Belief hath wonderfully amended: some of good Dispositions raised by it to eminent Goodness: others of bad Dispositions excited to resist them effectually. And how much the Influence of religious Principles and religious Persons, whom our Saviour calls the *Salt of the Earth^g*, may contribute to preserve even the bad part of Mankind from utter Corruption and Dissolution, is not perhaps often sufficiently considered.

But were it true, though it neither is nor can be, that the virtuous would be equally virtuous without the Precepts, without the Promises, without the Grace of the Gospel: yet there is no Pretence, that they would be equally happy too. For the Christian Doctrine is adapted throughout in the highest Degree to support them under the Difficulties of Duty, and the Afflictions of Life, by such Assurances, as Reason unassisted can never give, that God will pardon, strengthen, and reward them, both here and to Eternity. Possibly to some this may seem at present a

^g Matth. v. 13.

small Matter. But there will come a Time, may it come before it be too late ! when they will be sensible, that these are the most important of all Things.

It must not be objected, that Believers in the Gospel are often full of Doubts and Terrors. For Believers in Natural Religion alone have infinitely more Cause for them, as both their Rule and their Hopes are infinitely more obscure. Nor must it be argued, that if Christianity adds to the Happiness of the virtuous here, it adds also to the Uneasiness of the vicious : for they ought to be uneasy for the World's Sake and their own. It may force them to grow better ; if not, it may restrain them from growing worse : at least, sooner or later, it may bring them back, in Part if not wholly ; and thus prevent an unknown Quantity of Evils, which else they would suffer, and make those around them suffer. So that, indeed, no one Person, where the Gospel is at all understood, can well fail to be in some Respect a Gainer by it. And be its good Influence ever so small on each singly, yet the Sum total must be very large. It is soon said in an angry Mood, that Religion doth no Good ; for the World cannot be worse than it is. But consider

der a little what the Face of Things would be, were the forming Hand of Christian Education to cease from its Work, and the continual Warnings of Christian Instruction to be laid aside. Nothing could be substituted comparable to them: Nothing would be substituted at all. Attempts for it, if they were made, which probably they might not be in Haste, would be disunited and inconsistent, disregarded and successless: all Persons would be left in a great Measure, and the lower and larger Part intirely, to the Guidance of Appetites and Passions grown up wild, with a very poor Mixture of a Reason uninformed, and more likely to be subservient and do Mischief, than govern and do good.

Nor have they alone, who profess Christianity, been made wiser and better by it, but others also. The chief Part of what is valuable in the *Mahometan* Religion, which hath spread exceedingly wide, is probably derived from the Old and New Testament. And certainly the Unbelievers amongst ourselves, who would fain represent Revelation as useless, have, notwithstanding, borrowed from it those rational Notions of Piety and Virtue, which they pretend to be the natural Growth of their own Understandings. For few or none of the most

learned of their Heathen Predecessors had them: but scarce the most ignorant of their Christian Contemporaries are without them.

Nor should we consider only what Good the Gospel hath done in other Respects, but how much Superstition particularly it hath extinguished or prevented. The Superstitions it hath occasioned, we are continually told of: but many seem to have forgot those it found in the World; the most absurd and abject, the most expensive and troublesome, the most immoral and barbarous, that could be. And none were more cruel, or upheld by a more dreadful Church-tyranny, than those of the *Druïds* in this Nation. Now who can say, how long any of these might have continued; who can say, how much worse they might have become, and have been at this Day, if Christianity had not rooted them out? The very grossest Corruptions of it, afterwards, were not quite so bad as those preceding Enormities. Besides, in many Countries, but in none more completely than our own, the Reformation of it hath driven out those Abuses, which the Perversion of it brought in: and it continually bears Testimony against them, wherever the Scripture is freely read. Superstition is by no

Means

Means an Effect of Religion, but a natural Weakness in the human Mind, to which it may be greatly subject even without Religion. The Gospel was intended to destroy it: the Clergy are intended for a standing Guard against it: and though too much of it still prevails among Christians, yet very much more prevails in all the rest of the World.

Taking therefore into our View the whole Benefit of the Scripture-revelation, both what it hath effected, and what it hath hindered: had it been the Pretence or the Occasion for all the Harm that is alledged, it may yet have been the direct Cause of unspeakably more Good; and Nothing can be unfairer, than attending only to one Side of the Account, instead of both. Indeed to state both exactly, or make any Balance approaching towards Accuracy, is utterly impossible, where so vast a Number of Things and Circumstances, through so large a Part of the World and so long a Succession of Ages, must come in before a Judgment can be formed. Every one may assert as boldly as he will to the Disadvantage of Christianity. But to prove the Assertion from Fact must be insuperably difficult. And when Facts cannot be sufficiently ascertained

and compared, the Presumption will always be a very just and strong one, that every Thing hath produced those Effects chiefly, which its natural Tendency fits it to produce. Now the good Tendency of Christianity no candid and considerate Reasoner will ever dispute.

But one Objection farther hath been raised, that how difficult soever it may be to judge of a Series of past Times, yet the Consequences of introducing the Gospel into Heathen Nations in our own Times may be judged of: and we have imparted it to none, but we have made them worse than we found them. Now supposing this dreadful Imputation true, is it by teaching them our Religion, that we have corrupted them, or by teaching them Sins absolutely inconsistent with our Religion? Had they learned our Christianity without our Debauchery, which is surely no Part of it, their Condition had been infinitely better than it was before: and had they learned our Debauchery without our Christianity, it had been still worse than it is now.

Nor doth this Observation hold with Respect to them only, but ourselves too. We compare the present Christian Times, in which numberless Incentives to Luxury and all Manner of

Wicked-

Wickedness abound, with the ancient Heathen ones, when the Poverty and Simplicity of their Manner of Life secured them from adding artificial, to their natural, Vices : and in whatever we find or imagine ourselves worse than them, we ascribe it to our Religion. Whereas the true Method of comparing is, to take a luxurious Heathen Nation ; *Rome* under its Emperors for Instance ; and a luxurious Christian one ; and then see where Crimes will appear to be most general, and carried farthest : only making due Allowance for one Thing, that the Sins and Follies we are offended at in our own Age, will look greater, because they are present ; and yet the Virtues of those we live amongst will seem less, because Love to ourselves will tempt us to depreciate those, with whom we shall be most compared.

But supposing it ever so questionable, what Good, or ever so clear what Harm, hath proceeded from Christianity ; how are we justified in doubting on that Account, whether its Origin be from God ? Think only of how little Benefit Reason hath been to a great Part of Mankind : how much Uneasiness it hath caused, by enabling them to reflect on their own Disadvantages, Dangers, and Sufferings ;

how much Mischief it hath brought to pass, by qualifying them to contrive and execute ill Designs against each other ; how much wiser and better many Brutes are, than many Men : yet doth not Reason proceed from God ? Again, what innumerable Evils in all Ages and Countries, have civil Governors been the Authors of ? The Abuses of Christianity cannot have produced so much Evil, as the Abuses of temporal Power, because they have not extended near so far. Yet is not Society and civil Government from God ? Indeed if Nothing could be from him, but what in the Event is an Advantage to us ; we must deny that the very Being of many Persons is derived from him : for too many doubtless had better never have been. The Good, which he intends absolutely and unconditionally, Nothing can hinder : but where he intends only to afford Men the Means of being happy if they will, he must leave it in their Choice to be otherwise : and what he doth for them, is not the less worthy of him, because they are so unworthy, as to despise or turn it against themselves. For never sure was it made an Argument against the Value of a Medicine, that they who neglect to take it, or who mix Poison with

with it, are not the better for it. Whoever will give Religion Leave to do him Good, will always be an Evidence of its Usefulness. And it is extremely hard, to have those alledge against us that there are but few such, who are continually endeavouring that there may be none ; and impute that Wickedness of the World to the Want of Efficacy in Christianity, which is so very much owing to their own profane Discourse and licentious Examples.

But farther : the Gospel-scheme is not completed yet ; and the Good it hath not done, it may do still. It hath subsisted indeed a Number of Years, that seems a large one, and sufficient to shew whatever is to be expected from it. But large and small are comparative Terms : and what Proportion its Duration hitherto may bear to that which it hath to come, or how differently the Power of God may be exerted in its Favour hereafter from what it is now, we none of us know. But this we know certainly, that the original Books in which it is contained, published at its first Appearance, foretold both its past and present Corruptions, and its future Purity and universal happy Fruits. The former of these Predictions, that Christianity should be made an

Instrument of Tyranny and Superstition, Bloodshed and Dissoluteness, was a very amazing one: a Thing which neither any Sagacity could have foreseen, nor any Enthusiast have believed; nor any Impostor would have declared, if he had believed it. And therefore the Fact, joined with the Prophecy of it, far from an Objection, is a Proof of our Religion; and shews us to be in the Midst of an Event; the melancholy Part of which having been so remarkably signified to us before-hand, we ought by no Means to judge of what will follow as we should in a common Case; but firmly believe, that as *the Mystery of Iniquity*^b hath been revealed, *the Mystery of God*ⁱ shall be accomplished likewise, and Truth and Virtue reign on this Earth.

But then let us remember, that full enough hath been done to verify the first Set of Predictions; and it is high Time we should begin to make good the latter. That Christ hath sent a *Sword on Earth*, no one doubts: let it now be our Care to shew him in a more amiable Light, as the *Prince of Peace*. We have sufficiently made the *Gospel minister to Sin*: let us at last bring forth *Fruit by it unto Holiness*.

^b 2 Thess. ii. 7.

ⁱ Rev. x. 7.

Then

Then we shall bear in our own Breasts the surest, the happiest, the only beneficial Proof of its Efficacy; and have our Conversation such amongst Unbelievers, that whereas they now speak against us as Evil-doers, and against our Religion itself for our Sakes, they may by our good Works, which they shall behold, glorify God^k: thus bringing forward that blessed Time, when the Wolf shall dwell with the Lamb, and the Leopard lie down with the Kid; when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all his holy Mountain: for the Earth shall be full of the Knowledge of the Lord, as the Waters cover the Sea^l.

Yet even this joyful Scene will be only a faint Shadow of that eternal State of Bliss, to which is reserved the complete Vindication of the Benefits of Christianity: and in which, however the present World were to go on, they must appear with irresistible Evidence, when the Righteous shall shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father^m, when 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 Painⁿ.

^k 1 Pet. ii. 12

^l Isaiah xi. 6, 9.

^m Matth. xiii. 43.

ⁿ Rev. xxi. 4.

S E R M O N XII.

I S A I A H i. 16, 17.

—Cease to do Evil, learn to do well.—

TH E Order, in which these Words are placed, was evidently designed to teach us, that the Foundation of acting right is avoiding every Thing wrong. Several other Parts of Scripture lay down the same Rule in almost the same Terms^a: and many express, or imply, the same Doctrine; putting Repentance before Faith and Obedience^b. Even Heathen Authors, in very distant Ages and Countries, have given the like Direction^c. And indeed

^a Psal. xxxiv. 14. xxxvii. 27. Amos v. 15. Rom. xii. 9.
1 Pet. iii. 11.

^b Matth. xxi. 32. Mark i. 15. Acts xx. 21, Tit. iii. 12, 13.

^c Θεραπευεις και ποιηζεις [η ταιδεια] τη καθαριη δυναμεις ειθ' οταν καθαρ θωσι, οτως αιλικεις εισαγεις αρχος τας αρσιας, κ. τ. λ. Ceb. Tab. p. 35. Ed. Salm. Sapientia prima est Stultitia caruisse. Hor. Epist. i. 1. Τας αρχομενις απο μοχθηροτερας αγωνις επι καλλιορα μηλασαιεις χρη αρωιος εξεμειν του της κακοζωιας ιον, και τοτε τοις της ευζωιας αιλιοις τρεφεσθαι.—Η γαρ αρροπαρεχεσα μοχθηρια τα προστοινα χρησια διαφθειρει.—ωστε η ταξις απαιτει της ειναγωνας καλαδοχην. Simpl. in Epist. c. 6.

every one must own the Justness of it: but still very few appear to perceive or attend sufficiently to its Importance: which, therefore I shall endeavour to shew you,

I. More briefly, in Respect of our Conduct in general:

II. More at large, in Respect of our Behaviour to each other.

I. In Respect of our Conduct in general.

It is plainly the natural and rational Method, to begin with removing what else will obstruct our Progress, and to make Unity within our own Breasts our earnest Care. He who hath only consistent Pursuits may follow them with a Prospect of Success: but a Mind, divided and distracted between contrary Principles of Action, can hope for Nothing, but to be drawn backward and forward by them continually, as they chance to prevail in their Turns. Things, indeed, that do but accidentally give some little Hindrance to each other now and then, may be prosecuted together, and the due Preference, when they interfere, be adjusted well enough. But Sin and Duty are so essentially opposite, that their Interests can never be reconciled. They flow from different Motives, proceed by different Means, aim at different Ends, and thwart one another perpetually.

petually. And it is to Men's overlooking this obvious Truth, that the Miscarriage of their good Intentions, the Irresolution of their Lives, the Incoherence of their Characters, in a great Measure, owes its Rise. Every one of us knows, in the main, what he ought to do: every one feels an Approbation of it; and so far, at least, a Disposition to it. But then he feels also Dispositions quite adverse: and though he sees them to be unwarrantable, yet it is painful to root them out, and not pleasing even to take Notice of them. So, to avoid Trouble, both Sorts are allowed to grow up together as they can; and which will thrive faster, soon appears. The Soil, corrupt Nature, is by far the most inclined to Weeds: they sprout up without Number and choak the good Seed. Perhaps but one or two Sorts of Wickedness were intended to be indulged: but these have unforeseen Connections with others, and those with more. Or, had they none, when Men have once yielded to do but a single Thing amiss, they have no firm Ground to stand upon in refusing to do a second, and a third: so gradually they lose their Strength, God withdraws his Help, and they fall from bad to worse. Often this ends in their present worldly Ruin. But if they escape -

escape it, nay, if they escape growing continually more wicked, still they are incapable of that delightful Consciousness which arises from uniform Integrity of Heart; they can have no true Peace, while Vices are struggling in their Breast with one another, as well as with Virtue; they condemn, they lament themselves: they make earnest Resolutions to reform in this, and that Point; but making none to reform in all, they relapse, and go on as they did before. Many of them try hard, and no Wonder, to get Opinions that will quiet them in their Practices: amongst which one of the most prevalant is, the Notion of compensating by good Deeds for evil. But how can our best Actions possibly make Amends for our Sins, when they are only *our Duly^d*, though we had never sinned? Or if any one doth bring himself to believe this; in Proportion as he becomes more easy, he will become more profligate. He will think himself at Liberty to commit any Crime he pleases, provided he doth but intend to give God such or such Satisfaction for it, which, perhaps, he will afterwards forget, or invent some Pretence to omit. But if he doth not; as they that run these Lengths

^d Luke xvii. 10.

quickly come to value their good Deeds at as high, and their ill at as low, a Rate, as they have a Mind ; they commonly reckon a very little of the former equivalent to a great deal of the latter. And if they are but noted for any single Instance of Obedience, it gives them Vanity enough to esteem themselves not only safe, but highly in the Divine Favour, let them disobey in ever so many : perhaps it dazzles and blinds them so, that they scarcely perceive their own Failures in any, or scarcely imagine them worth regarding. Nay, sometimes Acts of mere Superstition and Folly, indeed of Wickedness too under a thin Disguise of Religion, have been all the Atonement offered to Heaven for an ill-spent Life, and have been deemed a most meritorious one. But will God accept even a real Part of what we owe him, when paid with Design to cheat him of the rest ? His Nature, his Word, plainly tell us the contrary. He is holy, and requires universal Holiness. He hath warned us, that *no man can serve two Masters*^e: and that *whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all*^f. Such, therefore, only, as are careful to do every Thing which they ought,

^e Matth. vi. 24.^f James ii. 10.

and are sensible, that when they have done all, they *are unprofitable Servants*^s, intitled to Acceptance only for the Sake of a gracious Redeemer's Merits, have cause to hope well. Others *build on the Sand*, but they *on a Rock*^h. Their Superstructure will stand firm against Storms and may be safely raised to the greatest Heights. God will pardon their InfirmitieS, and assist their Endeavours: they will of Course be making a continual Progress, and for every Step of it will receive a proportionable Reward, probably here, certainly hereafter. In short, let Men devise what Methods they will, there is but one effectual: *keep Innocency and take Heed unto the Thing that is right: for that shall bring a Man Peace at the last*ⁱ.

But though avoiding to do Evil through the Whole of our Conduct is requisite, if ever we would do well: yet in the Text, by what precedes and follows, the Prophet seems to have intended it peculiarly as a Direction for our social Conduct: where, indeed, we shall find it peculiarly necessary, when we consider,

II. The Importance of behaving inoffensively to each other.

^s Luke xvii. 10. ^h Matth. vii. 24—27. ⁱ Psal. xxxvii. 38.

It is a remarkable Thing in the Constitution of this World, that we have much more Power of producing Misery in it than Happiness. Every one, down to the most insignificant, is capable of giving Uneasiness and Disquiet, nay, grievous Pain and Affliction to others, and often to great Numbers, without the least Difficulty ; while even those of superior Abilities in every Way, can hardly discover the Means, unless it be within a very narrow Compass now and then, of doing any great Good, or communicating any considerable Pleasure. Besides, the Effects of Kindnesses may always be intirely lost : but those of Injuries too frequently can never be remedied. And therefore we ought to watch over ourselves with perpetual Care, examine the Tendency of all our Words and Actions, and, not contented with meaning no Harm, be solicitous to do none. The Harm that we do through Heedlessness is certainly not so criminal, as if it were purposely contrived : but may be almost, if not quite, as severely felt notwithstanding : or though it were but slightly, why should we be so inadvertent, as unnecessarily to cause but an Hour's, nay, a Moment's, Vexation or Grief to one of our Brethren ; or deprive him of the smallest of those

innocent Gratifications, that help to alleviate the Sorrows of Life, and make the Passage through it comfortable? The little we enjoy of Good, is, with Reason, very precious to us: and we have a Right to expect, that others should take the Trouble of some moderate Caution, not to trample upon and destroy it. Human Happiness is a tender Plant, which every rude Breath is sufficient to blast: and all have so quick a Sense, and most Men so warm a Resentment of any Thing done, though innocently, against their Interests or Inclinations, that they ought by no Means to be indifferent about those of any one else. Yet how often are not only smaller Inconveniences, but heavy Sufferings, brought from very trifling or very bad Motives, on such as did not deserve them! Some, under Colour of the tenderest Affection, seduce inconsiderate Creatures, who, but for them, would never have thought of doing amiss, into Guilt and Wretchedness, merely to gratify a brutal Appetite, or gain empty Applause from Fellow-libertines. Others tempt their Acquaintance, by fallacious Arguments and bad Examples, to Imprudence, Extravagance, Intemperance, Impiety. A third Sort entertain themselves, and their ill-chosen Friends, by , exposing

exposing to Scorn, or disquieting with Vexation, just whomsoever their Fancy points out to them: often the very Persons whom they ought to respect the most. And the Authors of all these Distresses can raise themselves Diversion even from reflecting upon them afterwards; and, by doing Mischief with so much Good-humour, appear in the Eyes of the World, and in their own, to be very far from ill-natured. And, it may be, on some occasions they are not such: it may be, they have not, on any, deliberately purposed to be such. But still the Fruits of indulging either sensual Desires, or even Vanity and idle Gaiety, without Regard to Consequences, may be as bitter as those of the keenest Malice. Nay, indeed the disguised smiling Enemy is the more dangerous, as he is unsuspected; and the more wicked, as he is unprovoked.

But Men of more stayed and thoughtful Characters venture also too commonly on dreadful Ill-treatment of others, and yet make a Shift to think well of themselves: not only *withhold Good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the Power of their Hand to do it^{*}*, but prey upon their Neighbours by Oppres-

* Prov. iii. 27.

sion and Fraud, *grind the Face of the Poor*¹, take Advantage of the Necessity or Ignorance of those with whom they are concerned; exact, without Regard to Equity, whatever they can legally demand; and imagine it very easy to procure a Dispensation for all this, if they need any. Some have attempted it by voluntary Mortifications and Abstinence. But *the Fast which God hath chosen, is to loose the Bands of Wickedness, to undo the heavy Burdens, and let the oppressed go free*^m. Some by Acts of Devotion: but *he that turneth away his Ear from hearing the Law, even his Prayer shall be Abomination*ⁿ. Some by Liberalities to pious or charitable Uses: but God himself hath told us: *I the Lord love Judgment, I hate Robbery for Burnt-offering*^o. He expects Restitution to the injured, not Bounty to other Purposes, instead of it: much less indiscreet Generosities to the undeserving, or expensive Acts of Vanity and Voluptuousness, under Pretence of encouraging Trade and Labour; which many seem to think an abundant Counterbalance to ever so much Deceit and Rapine, as well as Debauchery and Irreligion.

¹ Isaiah iii. 15.

² Prov. xxviii. 8.

^m Isaiah lviii. 6.

^o Isaiah lxi. 8.

There

'There is yet a third Sort, who, valuing themselves highly on their Sobriety and Honesty, conceive their Disrespect to Superiors, their Contempt of Inferiors, their Want of Courtesy to Equals, their causeless or immoderate Anger, their Evil-speaking and Uncharitableness, to be small Sins, or none. Yet surely, if any Thing be our own, the Enjoyment of our Lives and Characters in Peace and Quiet, unmolested by rude Insults, malicious or peevish Resentments, unjust Aspersions, is our most valuable Property, and taking it away from us, one of the worst Kinds of Cruelty.

Were it ever so possible to do equal Good, in Return for the Harm done in one or other of these Ways: what Right hath any one to play thus with the most serious Interests of his Fellow-creatures; to commit Injuries first, then make Amends for them, when and how he thinks fit? If it be to a different Person, the Sufferer is not in the least the better for that. If it be to the same, still what Amends can there be made for seducing, impoverishing, blackening, breaking the Spirits of, another? Happiness in this World is not felt like Misery: and one poor Creature, treated in any Respect unmercifully, may soon undergo much more,

than Numbers, kindly used, or plentifully provided for, will ever enjoy.

Surely then to refrain from doing Harm is a very important Duty: and no Request can be juster for one of us to make to another, than that if we may not hope for any of those Acts of positive Goodness from him, which yet human Nature and Circumstances frequently call for, he would, however, abstain from hurting us; and allow us the undisturbed Possession of whatever we have Cause to think valuable, and he hath nothing to do with. In other Things commanded, there may be frequently some Room for a Plea of Ignorance or Doubt: in this hardly ever. The weakest and dullest of us can easily perceive, when we suffer Injuries: now it is not a Whit more difficult, only we have less Inclination, to observe when we are guilty of them: and therefore we have no Excuse for it. When Men are exhorted to Deeds of Charity and Beneficence, they can find a thousand Reasons against complying: their Ability is small, or the Calls upon them are many; or they cannot see, that they are bound to give more Alms than they do already; or they have not Time or Convenicnce for inquiring into Cases; or, if one be recommended to them, it

may

may be partially represented ; or the Care of it belongs rather to such and such, than to them : and numberless Evasions besides, by which an unwilling Heart betrays, while it studies to conceal, itself. But were they to be allowed every Allegation, that Scrupulousness of being too good can suggest to them : at least their Wariness and Caution should incline them to be equally scrupulous on the other Side. To do no Wrong, they certainly have in their Power ; and they owe it to every one ; and the Limits of this Obligation have no such great Obscurity, but that all the World will see, whether they exceed them or not. If, therefore, they will shew a right Disposition in, what is undoubtedly in their Power, being conscientiously inoffensive ; then it may be credible, but not else, that they would shew it in more Things, were they able.

And, strange as it may appear to speak of what seems a mere negative Quality, as a real Good : yet scarce any Words are strong enough to express, how much Good bare Cessation from doing Evil would produce. Consider only, how the World groans under the various Sufferings, which we bring upon each other : so various, that it is in vain to think of represent-

ing to one's self, in how many Ways the Lives, Healths, Fortunes, Reputation, Peace, Comfort of Men are fatally attacked : what Blows are sometimes given to the Happiness of Multitudes at once : how far more private Injuries frequently extend their Consequences ; involving undefining and unknown Persons in Calamities ; affecting successive Generations ; teaching and encouraging Wickedness by ill Example ; provoking Retaliation and Revenge ; perpetuating Contention, Bitterness, and Rancour. In short, the State of Man upon Earth would be quite another Thing than it is ; and the Whole of human Affairs put on a Face intirely new ; if we would be content to permit it ; if, without contributing to our mutual Happiness, we would only not obstruct it. Sudden Deliverance from any acute Pain hath been thought, by those who have experienced it, the most exquisite Pleasure they ever felt. How inexpressibly delightful then would the first Breathing of Ease be to Mankind, if, after the reciprocal Torments of so many Ages, they were all to leave off together, and become harmless at once ! But without hoping yet for the promised Time of universal Innocence, when Men *shall not hurt*

nor destroy in all God's holy Mountain^o, and in Consequence of it shall obtain Joy and Gladness, and Sorrow and Sighing shall flee away^p: at present, in each particular Instance, who-ever only takes off his Hand from those on whom it lies heavy, cannot fail to give them great Joy: and if he doth it in a proper Manner, may secure to himself as much Gratitude fróm them, as by the highest unmerited Obligation. Ill Usage of others naturally makes them our Enemies: the Marks of their Enmity provoke to worse Usage of them: and so the Evil increases without End, unless the injurious Party hath the Wisdom to stop first: and then it is generally in his Power, by an honourable Acknowledgement of his Fault, or, perhaps, a mere intimation that he is convinced of it, not only to be forgiven, but respected and beloved ever after. And who doth not know, how pleasing the Consciousness of being esteemed is, how mortifying that of being hated?

There would indeed be little Occasion comparatively for the Exercise of Kindness amongst Men, if Practices of a contrary Tendency were not so frequent. A very great Part of our good Actions is really Nothing more, than

• Isai. xi. 9.

^p Isai. xxxv. 10.

endea-

endeavouring to undo the Harm, that we or others have done. And abstaining from doing any would take away the Necessity of them; would strike at the Root of Misery, prevent the shocking Sight of it, the Burden and Expence of relieving it. Remedies for Evils are painful, uncertain, imperfect Things: always to be applied indeed, when they are wanted: but the true Precaution is, not to give Being to Unhappiness. Were we all to take the utmost Care, there would, notwithstanding, be too much of it. But the Obligation and Means of lessening it would be more evident: Mens Dispositions, when purged from Ill-will, insolent Negligence, and perverse Caprice, would be more tender and compassionate; and *from the good Treasure of the Heart, good Things would be brought forth abundantly*^a. With such a Temper, every one would enjoy most comfortable Reflexions within himself: and, though his Condition were ever so low and disadvantageous, would be often useful in one Way or another, and constantly agreeable, to all around him. We are formed to give and receive mutual Pleasure: and our common daily Conversation would be delightful to us, if Wrongs,

^a Matth. xii. 35.

and Unkindnesses, and Slights, did not estrange us from, and set us against, each other. Bad as we are, designing, suspicious, gloomy, haughty, negligent, provoking ; Society is necessary for us ; we have hardly any Notion of Cheerfulness without it : but what should we think and find it, were we assured of the Friendliness and Regard of all we met ? The very being together, the Countenance of Man, would be reviving : and continual Opportunities of innocent Entertainment would spring up, besides the occasional ones of reciprocal Service and Assistance in Matters of Consequence. But of these also there would be more and greater, when we were once inclined to look for them, than we can well conceive now. And though a Person could do Good only in small Instances, it would be pure and unmixed ; and that alone would be sufficient to make it considerable. But were it ever so little : though Man judges by outward Acts, the valuable Thing in the Sight of God is virtuous Intention : and the fundamental Part of that, is Care to avoid Evil. In Proportion as we root out hurtful Inclinations, right ones will not fail to shoot up, and bring forth Fruit : if in

in less Quantity, yet such as will be accepted; but probably in Plenty.

'Love, saith the Apostle, worketh no Ill to his Neighbour: therefore Love is the fulfilling of the Law'. Accordingly we find Righteousness, which, taken strictly, is nothing but abstaining from Injustice, often mentioned in Scripture, as the Whole of our Duty: because, if we begin with that, the rest will easily follow. And *David*, in describing the Qualifications of the Man, that *shall abide in the Tabernacle of the Lord, and dwell on his holy Hill*, principally insists on the negative ones. *He that leadeth an uncorrupt Life, and doth the Thing which is right, and speaketh the Truth from his Heart. He that hath used no Deceit in his Tongue, nor done Evil to his Neighbour*¹. Again, the abovementioned Apostle joins the Character of mere Innocence with the most honourable Title, which can be given to Men: *that ye may be blameless and harmless, the Sons of God without Rebuke*²: a Character, which it is the peculiar Prerogative of him, who is in the highest Sense the Son of God, to deserve in Perfection. But, as St. Peter observes, he *hath left us an Example, that we*

¹ Rom. xiii. 10. ² Psal. xv. 2, 3. ³ Phil. ii. 15.

should follow his Steps; who did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth^{}.*

Thus I have endeavoured to shew you the Importance of the plain humble Duty of an inoffensive Life: a Duty, which, if experience did not prove the contrary, one should imagine there could be no Need of using many Words to recommend: as it appears impossible to reflect on wilful Transgressions of it, and the Mischiefs they cause, without Horror. It is true, Sufferings of all Kinds are now so common in the World, that, unless it be when we ourselves, or they who are dear to us, undergo them, they are apt to make but little Impression upon us: and we can pronounce that melancholy Variety of dreadful Words, which the Miseries of Mankind have introduced into Language, almost without Concern. But would we only recollect a while; consult our own Memories, for they can generally inform us too well; or learn from such Accounts, if there be Occasion, as it is easy to procure; what those Feelings are, which the Terms, Grief, Anxiety, Pain, Anguish, Dejection, Despair, and more of the same sort, were framed to express: surely we should have a strong Conviction, that for a human Creature

to inflict any of these on one of his Brethren, without Necessity and without Authority, merely for some trifling Provocation, or poor worldly Advantage, to gratify some base Appetite, or perhaps only to indulge a silly Whim, is most frightful Wickedness. For, terrible Evils as they are in themselves, being exposed to them unjustly aggravates them so, as to make often the severest Part of their Torment. Then to think too of such Things, as done to each other by short-lived helpless Wretches, that are subject, to unavoidable Burdens, heavier than they know how to bear: to think of these, deliberately doubling and trebling their mutual Sorrows: in direct Contradiction, to the Exigency of their own Circumstances, which loudly require of them Forbearance, Compassion, Beneficence; to the Dictates of their own Consciences, which reproach them for every harsh Action or Expression they are guilty of; and to his known Will and positive Commands, from whom they have received all that they enjoy, and on whom it depends, whether they shall be everlastingly happy or miserable: it is so amazing, that no Tongue can set forth, no Heart conceive sufficiently, the Sinfulness or

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the Folly of such Conduct. His great Design is the Good of his Creation. He requires us not to obstruct it, but contribute to it. This is the principal Mark of Gratitude, which our bounteous Benefactor desires of us: the principal Duty, which our Lawgiver and Judge enjoins us. We, at all Adventures, resolve to disregard him whenever we please; and boldly pursue our worldly Interests, our sensual Appetites, our ill-natured Passions, our wayward Humours, our wildest Fancies, right or wrong, let who will be the worse for it. What Notion can a Man have of himself, who acts thus: what Notion of his Maker, to hope it can ever end well? We are accustomed to it indeed; and therefore may be tempted to look on it as a slight Matter. But our Maker will determine at last, not according to the Prejudices of Men, but the Truth of Things. We are disposed to entertain very favourable Opinions of our own Behaviour: and even when we see it to be wrong, if we are of low Degree, we hope to be passed over as inconsiderable; if of high, to be treated hereafter with some peculiar Tenderness and Deference. But *God is no Respecter of Persons*^w: the meanest is not

^w Acts x. 34.

beneath his Notice ; the greatest is not above his Power ; the Difference between them is as Nothing in his Eyes ; and both shall be punished or rewarded according to their Deeds. May he therefore grant us all to take immediately the only Method of shunning his Wrath, and securing his Favour, by considering our Ways impartially, for else we may believe Things to be allowable, nay commendable, which are highly criminal : by holding fast our Integrity, so far as we have hitherto preserved it : by *ceasing to do Evil and learning to do well*, in whatever Respects we are faulty or deficient : by Faith in his Mercy for Pardon, and his Grace for Strength, through the Merits and Mediation of our blessed Redeemer : to whom, &c.

S E R M O N XIII.

2 SAM. xii. 13.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy Sin: thou shalt not die.

IN holy Scripture, not only the great and good Actions of pious Persons are written for our Learning^a, that we may admire, and, as far as we are concerned, imitate them; but their chief Transgressions also are recorded, for a Caution to be on our Guard, and a Direction, if, like them, we have done amiss, like them, to repent and reform. Amongst all the Instances of this Kind, there is none more fruitful of Instruction, than that well-known History of *David's* being seduced from a religious Course of Life to most dreadful Wickedness, and continuing regardless of his Guilt, till the Prophet *Nathan* at Length having awakened him to a Sense of it, by a

^a Rom. xv. 4.

home Application of the parallel Case of the poor Man and the Ewe Lamb, brought him to the Confession, and administered to him the Comfort expressed in the Text.

There are many Circumstances in this Narration, which may and ought to remind us of Truths, in which we are too nearly interested. But the principal of them will be comprehended, if we learn from it the following Points of Doctrine.

I. That, without continual Care, the best of Men may be led into the worst of Crimes.

II. That we are all very apt to overlook our own Faults, and yet to be extremely quicksighted and severe in Relation to those of others.

III. That as soon as ever we are, by any Means, made sensible of our Offences, we should acknowledge them with due Penitence.

IV. That, on doing this, the greatest Sins will be forgiven us. Yet,

V. That Sins, even after they are forgiven, produce frequently such lamentable Consequences, that, on this Account, amongst others, Innocence is greatly preferable to the truest Repentance.

I. That without continual Care the best of Men may be led into the worst of Crimes.

David,

David, we are told in holy Writ, was a Man after God's own Heart^b: who did that which was right in the Eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any Thing that he commanded him, all the Days of his Life, save only in the Matter of Uriah the Hittite^c. Such high Expressions are never to be interpreted of any mere Man in the utmost Rigour: but the lowest Meaning must be, that he was, on the Whole, to a very high Degree, innocent of known deliberate Sin; and exemplary for Piety and Virtue, to the Age he lived in: when even they, who in some Things were favoured with Revelations from above, were in others, being left to their own Reason, less enlightened than common Christians are now, and therefore intitled to a more favourable Judgment. But independently on this Consideration, *David's Eminence in Goodness appears from many excellent Actions, related throughout the Book of Samuel: and the Psalms, written by him, are everlasting Instances of his fervent Devotion, his reverent Esteem of God's Law, his Watchfulness over his own Spirit.* Nay, indeed, there is one Instance in which he appears to have been scrupulous even to an Extremity of Delicacy: when *his Heart smote him, that he had cut*

^b 1 Sam. xiii. 14. ^c Acts xiii. 22.^c 1 Kings xv. 5.

off the Skirt of Saul's Garment^d. Suppose, now, the Prophet *Nathan* had foretold concerning such a Man as this, that in a little Time he would commit the capital Sin of Adultery; and, when the Scheme which he had framed to hide it was frustrated, would calmly contrive to murder by Treachery the Man whom he had injured, intrust others with his Purpose, execute it by their Means, and triumphantly take his Wife home to himself: who could possibly have believed the Prediction; or how could *David* have received the most respectful Warning against such Enormities, but with contempt or Indignation? Yet so it was: even this good Man, even when grown old in Religion, was guilty of Deeds, which many habitual Sinners, though prompted by youthful Passion, and unrestrained by the Fear of God, would still have abhorred.

And if this was the Case of *David*, then *let him that thinketh he standeth, take Heed lest he fall*^e. Few, it may be doubted, have the same Warmth of right Resolution; but all have the same deceitful Nature: and therefore we must all be continually attentive; or we know not into what Abominations we may be drawn.

^d 1 Sam. xxiv. 5.

^e 1 Cor. x. 12.

Every Man hath within him the Principles of every bad Action, that the worst Man ever did. And though in some they are languid, and seem scarce alive; yet, if fostered by Indulgence, they will soon grow to incredible Strength: nay, if only left to themselves, will in Seasons favourable to them, shoot up, and over-run the Heart, with such surprising Quickness, that all the good Seed shall be choaked on a sudden by Tares, which we never imagined had been within us. And what increases the Danger is, that each of us hath some wrong Inclination or other, it is well if not several, beyond the rest natural to us, and the Growth of the Soil. These, therefore, we must be especially diligent to keep under, and weed out the least Fibres of them that we can perceive: else we shall find them *Roots of Bitterness*, continually *springing up to trouble and defile us*^f. Then, besides all our inward Weaknesses, the World about us is thick set round with Snares, differently formed: some provoking us to immoderate Passion, or envious Malignity; some alluring us with forbidden Pleasures, or softening us into Supineness and Indolence, or *overcharging our Hearts with the Cares of this Life*^g,

^f Heb. xii. 15.^g Luke xxi. 34.

or bribing us with Hopes of unlawful Gain to do ill, or terrifying us with a Prospect of Sufferings for doing well. Delusive Suggestions, indeed, every one of them: but of specious Appearance, unless we examine them thoroughly, unless we look beyond them. And as more or fewer of these Temptations are almost constantly, and often suddenly, attacking us, to which the Wicked one will not fail to super-add his own secret Insinuations, as far as ever he is permitted; the Hazard of our Situation is very evident, and our Watchfulness ought surely to be in Proportion to it.

Not that, with all this, we have the least Cause to be disheartened, but only on our Guard. He that imagines himself to be safe, never is so: but they, who keep in their Minds a Sense of their Danger, and pray for, and trust in, Help from God, will always be able to avoid or go through it. Temptation hath no Power, the great Tempter himself hath no Power, but that of using Persuasion. Forced we cannot be, so long as we are true to ourselves. Our own Consent must be our own giving: and without it, the rest is Nothing. For then only, in Effect, St. James tells us^h, *is every Man tempted, when he is drawn away*

^h James i. 14.

of his own Lust and inticed. That we are liable to Sin, therefore, ought to be no Discouragement, and can be no Justification, to us: for, by the Assistance of Heaven, though not else, we may escape it if we will: and that Assistance is expressly promised to our Endeavours and our Prayers. *Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you: draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*¹. But to the strictest Vigilance it must be a powerful Incitement, to consider, how often we, how often Persons much better than we, have merely through Want of Vigilance, been guilty of such Transgressions as could never have been suspected. But, indeed, when once we allow ourselves to go wrong, we can neither know nor guess how far we shall go.

David at first violated only the Rules of Decency, which he might easily have observed, and have turned away his Eyes from an improper Object. This, which doubtless he was willing to think a very pardonable Gratification of Nothing worse than Curiosity, carried him on far beyond his first Intention, to the heinous Crime of Adultery. There, undoubtedly, he designed to stop, and keep what had passed secret from all the

¹ James iv. 7, 8.

World. But Virtue hath Ground to stand upon ; Vice hath not : and, if we give Way at all, the Tendency downward increases every Moment. Sometimes the treacherous Pleasantness of the Path invites us to stray a little farther, though we are sensible it descends to the Gates of Hell. Sometimes the Consciousness, that we are guilty already, tempts us to fancy it immaterial how much more we become so : without reflecting, that by every Sin which we add, we diminish the Hope of Retreat, and augment the Weight of our Condemnation. Sometimes again, as in the Case before us, one Act of Wickedness requires another, or many more, to cover it : and they, whom no Fear of God, or Shame of doing Evil, could awe sufficiently, have yet such a preposterous Fear of Men, and Shame of being found out, that, to avoid a Discovery, they will commit still worse Evil, and then be discovered at last. Thus did *David*. After he had tried in vain to conceal his Adultery from *Uriah* by an Artifice, which the gallant Soldier, without knowing it, disappointed from a Principle of Honour ; he was driven to the most horrible of all Wickedness, Murder ; and a Murder too, accompanied with the heaviest Aggravations : deliberately planned, brought

brought about by Treachery, in which also he involved the General at least, if not many others of the Army, as his Instruments: and made the poor Man himself, as if he had not been injured and deceived enough before, the Bearer of those Letters, which doomed him to die, innocent of all Misbehaviour, of all Imputation of Misbehaviour, and valiantly fighting for his Sovereign, by whom he was betrayed and assassinated.

In this dreadful Manner was one, who had been till then of an excellent Character, hurried on, from a single, and seemingly slight, Indulgence, into the Depth of the grossest and most shocking Villanies. And in the like Manner may any one, if he is not upon his Guard against *the Deceitfulness of Sin^k*, be hurried unawares to his final Destruction. That Sin, indeed, with which *David* began, is peculiarly insinuating and pernicious. The lower Degrees of Immodesty lead on imperceptibly to the most unlawful Familiarities. These intangle Persons in a Variety of Difficulties, that reduce them to do the basest and cruellest Things that can be. And particularly as Unchastity induced *David* to Treachery and Murder, so there hath

^k Heb. iii. 13.

been in all Times more Treachery, and more Murder, of Rivals, of poor innocent Children, of one another, of themselves, occasioned by it, than perhaps by any other Transgression whatever.

But all others have, in their several Proportions, the Tendency of sinking us into deeper Guilt. Lesser Instances of Dishonesty lead, often by slow, but usually sure, Steps, to the more enormous and capital Crimes of that Sort. Lesser Instances of undue Parsimony grow insensibly into the meanest and most sordid Avarice: lesser Instances of Greediness of Gain, into the most hard-hearted Rapaciousness. And on the other Hand, little Negligences in their Affairs, little Affectations of living above their Ability, little Pieces of expensive Vanity and Extravagance, are the direct Road to those confirmed Habits of Carelessness and Prodigality, by which People foolishly and wickedly ruin themselves and their Families, and too commonly others besides their own. After the same Manner, slight Expressions, in Words or Behaviour, of Contempt or Ill-humour, easily swell into the fiercest Contention, the bitterest Resentment, the most rancorous Hatred. And, to specify no more Particulars, mere indolent

 Omissions

Omissions of religious Duties, public or private, leave our Sentiments of Piety to languish and decay, till we become utterly unmindful of our eternal Interest : and, it may be, at last, profane Scoffers and Blasphemers against God. Always, therefore, beware of small Sins. Great ones carry something in them, that startles and alarms: but these, insinuating themselves more gently, gain Admittance more readily ; and so, as the Son of *Sirach* wisely observes, *He that contemneth little Things, shall fall by little and little*¹.

II. The next Point to be observed from this Part of Scripture-history is, that Men are very apt to overlook their own Misdemeanors, and yet to be extremely quick-fighted and severe in Relation to those of others.

The Facts which *David* had committed were the plainest, the most palpable, the most crying Sins that could be : Nothing, one should think, to excuse them ; Nothing to disguise them ; no Name but their own to call them by : Adultery, Falsehood, Murder. From the first to the last there must have intervened some considerable Space of Time, with a great deal of Thought upon the Subject : yet no Re-

¹ Ecclus xix. 1,

flexion

flexion that deterred him from prosecuting his wicked Schemes. Even after the Murder, many Months appear to have passed before *Nathan* was sent to him: still *David* had not recollect'd himself, but seemed to go on in perfect Tranquillity. Nay, which is more astonishing than the rest, when the Prophet had contrived a Story on Purpose to convict him of his Guilt, representing the first Part of it so exactly, that Nothing, which was not the same under different Names, could be liker, it never once brought it, so far as appears, to his Memory. Yet all this while he had not, in the least Degree, lost the Sense of what was right and wrong in general. So far from it, that he was moved with the most vehement Abhorrence of the rich Man's barbarous Injustice and Oppression, in taking away his poor Neighbour's Lamb from him, when he had Plenty of his own. And *David's Anger was greatly kindled against the Man: and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the Man, that hath done this Thing, shall surely die: and he shall restore the Lamb fourfold, because he did this Thing, and because he had no Pity.* And *Nathan said to David, Thou art the Man.*

How surprizing a Blow must this be ! In the Midst of his Wrath, when, forgetful of his own Iniquity, he had not only adjudged a Person, much less culpable, to pay the legal Penalty of a quadruple Restitution, but, from excessive Detestation of his Crime, indeed a hateful once, had even, contrary to Law, pronounced Sentence of Death upon him ; then to be told, *Thou art the Man !* Let us often think of this Case : and as often remember, that, with equal Truth, though God forbid it should be in an equal Measure, the same Thing holds concerning every one of us. We all know our Duty, or easily may : we are all abundantly ready at seeing and censuring what others do amiss : and yet we all continue, more or less, to do amiss ourselves, without regarding it. The main Precepts of Life, such as we are most apt to fail in, are partly obvious to Reason, partly taught with sufficient Clearness by Revelation. And though, for Want of cultivating their own Understandings, or hearkening to God's Word, some wicked Actions, plausibly disguised, may be esteemed, by too many, allowable, or even laudable ; yet the Mask is not hard to pull off ; and the more heinous Sort, indeed the higher Degrees of all, have a Deformity almost

almost incapable of being hidden. Let all the Sophistry in the World recommend, let all the Powers upon Earth enjoin, Irreligion, Cruelty, Fraud, promiscuous Lewdness : it will, notwithstanding, be altogether impossible, either to make the Practice of them tolerable to Society, or to change in all the inward Abhorrence of them, which Mankind in general are led by Nature to entertain. It is true, where Iniquity of any Kind is once publicly practised and allowed, human Minds are apt to be strangely blinded in Relation to it, especially if they have no Revelation from above to direct them. And even though the Bulk of a Nation be more enlightened and more virtuous, yet, in some Persons, on some Occasions, natural Sentiments may be weakened or depraved, by early wrong Notions and immoral Habits ; as in others common Understanding is impaired, or lost, by bodily Disorders. It may also in Cases of Intricacy be doubted, whether such an Action deserves such a Name ; while yet, if it doth, it is allowed to be bad. But still the Majority even of Heathens, and surely then of Christians, do or may, for the most Part, as clearly discern what is blameable and commendable, as what is crooked and straight. Let this be tried in a Transaction

of

of any distant Age or Country, or in a feigned Piece of History, such as the Prophet invented for *David*; and, unless they suspect it to be designed as a Parallel for themselves, they will very seldom fail, if they consider at all, of passing a righteous Sentence. Let it be tried in the Conduct of an Acquaintance or Contemporary; the principal Danger will be, of a Sentence too rigorous. For if the Sin, brought in Question before us, be one to which we have no Inclination, we shall be sure to censure it without the least Mercy. And though it be one of which we have been guilty, provided our Guilt be unknown or forgotten, we can usually declare against it as harshly, as the most innocent Person alive. Or how moderate soever the Consciousness of our own past Behaviour might otherwise dispose us to be: yet if once we come to be Sufferers ourselves by the same Kind of Sins, which we have formerly indulged, and perhaps often made others suffer by them, then we can be immoderately loud in our Complaints of what formerly we fancied, or pretended, had little or no Hurt in it. Nay, without any such Provocation, few Things are commoner, than to hear People condemn their own Faults in those around them: and, some-

times possibly to blind the World, but very frequently because they are blind to themselves, vehemently proclaiming against Vices, to which, if all that know them are not strangely mistaken, they are most notoriously addicted. Not uncommonly, indeed, this is the true Reason of such Invectives. One Man's Pride or Selfishness stands in the Way of another, just as proud, or as selfish: and he hath no Patience to see any one else do what he wants to do without Controll.

Now these Instances prove we are convinced, that all Sorts of Sins are wrong: only we err in the Application of our Conviction. No one's Failings escape us, but our own: and of them the most glaring escape us. Self-love persuades us to think favourably of our Conduct in general: a secret Suspicion which we labour to stifle, restrains us from examining much into Particulars: what we are strongly disposed to do, we think we must, for the sake of inward Peace, endeavour to believe harmless or excusable: this puts us on seeking out for real or imaginary Differences of Circumstances, which, we flatter ourselves, make that either innocent, or nearly so, in us, which in others ought not to be born. Then, in some Things, the Bounds

between

between lawful and unlawful are hard to be exactly determined. Now unfair Minds lay hold on these Difficulties with inexpressible Eagerness : and chusing, not, as they should, the safer Side, but that, to which the Bias within attracts them, proceed, under the Cover of such Doubts, to the most undoubted Wickedness : as if, because it is not easy to say precisely, at what Moment of the Evening Light ends and Darkness begins, therefore Midnight could not be distinguished from Noon-day. Thus, because it cannot be ascertained, just how much every one ought to give in Charity, too many will give Nothing, or next to Nothing. Because the Price of Labour, and of the Commodities produced by it, have no absolute Standard ; they will to the utmost oppress the Poor in their Wages, or the Valuation of what they bring to sell ; and nevertheless make the most unconscionable Demands on those, who come to buy of them. Because no one can settle to a Nicety, what Sobriety and Temperance permit, and no more : therefore Men will *feed themselves without Fear^m*, and *tarry long at the Wineⁿ*, make *their Belly their God, and glory in their*

^m Jude 12.

ⁿ Prov. xxiii. 30.

Shame. Because it cannot be exactly decided, how much Time is the most that we may allowably spend in Recreation and Amusement: therefore Multitudes will consume almost the Whole of their Days in Trifling and Levity and Folly, instead of applying to the proper Business of Life, in order to give their Account with Joy to him, who shall judge the Quick and the Dead^p.

These and the like Things they will, some of them, defend and palliate with wonderful Acuteness; designed partly to excuse them to others, but chiefly to deceive and pacify themselves. Not that they ever attain either of these Ends. For their Neighbours, after all, just as plainly perceive their Faults, as they perceive those of their Neighbours. And it is but a half Deceit, that they put upon their own Souls. Every now and then they see through it, whether they will or will not; see a very threatening Prospect before them: and, though they do shut their Eyes, and slumber again, and tell themselves all is Peace; yet this Dream of Security is but a very disturbed one: Nothing like the clear and joyful Perception, that he hath, whose Conscience is

• Phil. iii. 19.

^p Heb. xiii. 17. 1 Pet. iv. 5.

thoroughly awake, and assures him of his own Innocence, or true Repentance, and Interest in the Pardon, which his Redeemer hath purchased. But in however strong *Delusion*⁹ God may permit them to remain at present: how can they be sure, but ere long Remorse may seize them, an Adversary expose them, a Friend rebuke them: one Way or other, the Case of *David*, who doubtless thought he was exceedingly safe, become theirs; and some Voice proclaim aloud to them, what they are afraid of whispering to themselves, *Thou art the Man!* Though indeed, could we effectually impose on all the World, and our own Minds too; could this Imposition last to our Life's End, and not vanish at the Approach of Death, which commonly represents to the guilty their past Conduct in a very new and tremendous Light; what could we get by it, but more certain and exquisite Misery?

Therefore one of the happiest Things imaginable is, being made sensible of our Sins in Time: and the first Step to that is, reflecting how liable we are, both to commit them and to overlook them. If such a one as *David* could fall into such Transgressions as he did, and con-

tinue in them so long, and forget them so entirely: into how many gross ones, into how many more speciously coloured over, may we have fallen in the Course of our Lives, negligent as we are ! And how possible is it, unless we have faithfully searched our Hearts, that we may be thoughtlessly going on to a future State, and some of us near it, under heavy Loads of complicated Guilt ! Surely Self-inspection then is absolutely necessary : and if we set about the Work honestly, it is by no Means difficult. What passes within our Breasts is not far from us : what hath passed there formerly may, in general, be recollect-ed : and what we are usually forced to take much Pains to hide from ourselves, we may, if we will, soon lay open. Let us each, therefore, consider seriously, as Persons whose Interest lies in discovering, not concealing : Is there no *Way of Wickedness in me*¹, no Blot upon my Conduct and Character ? No Fail-ing, that I should reproach my Neighbour for; none that my Enemy or Ill-wisher, at least if he knew all, as I do, and God doth, could reproach me for ? Are there not, indeed, seve-ral Things of this Kind, and how many, and what are they ? For it is my Concern to

¹ Psal. cxxxix. 24.

know them all; and to think, what the End of all will be. Such an Inquiry as this would call off our Attention from the too pleasing Employment of judging those around us, to a more important Trial within. We should see, that if they have Faults, so have we likewise great ones, though it may be of different Kinds: and which are worse upon the Whole, is for God alone to determine. Our common Guilt acquits neither before him, excuses neither for the mutual Injuries they do, authorizes neither to disregard the Censure of the World: but this Effect the Sense, how blame-worthy we all are, should certainly have: it should restrain even the best of us from reproving with Haughtiness, and punishing with Severity: it should incline the more obnoxious to be singularly gentle and mild in Relation to Offenders: and it should instruct us every one to think and act with great Charity towards others, and employ our Zeal chiefly, where there will seldom be Danger of Excess, in correcting and reforming ourselves. But this would bring me to the third Head: to which I must not proceed at present: and shall therefore conclude with begging you to observe, concerning what you have heard already, that

you will never become either duly sensible of your sinful Dispositions and actual Transgressions, or able to amend what you do find of them, unless you are first excited, and then assisted, by the Grace of our blessed Saviour, *without whom we can do Nothing*². Therefore, whenever Duties of any Kind are pressed upon you, always remember, whether you are told it or not, that you must pray as well as endeavour: pray in his Name, and *through Faith in his Blood*¹, *who of God is made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption*³: fully assured, that, weak as we are in ourselves, *we can do all Things through Christ, which strengtheneth us*⁴: to whom, therefore, &c.

¹ John xv. 5.² Rom. iii. 25.³ Cor. i. 30.⁴ Phil. iv. 13.

S E R M O N X I V.

2 S A M. xii. 13.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord: and Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy Sin, thou shalt not die.

FROM that Portion of Scripture, in which these Words are contained, I lately recommended to your serious Notice the following Points of Doctrine.

- I. That without continual Care, the best of Men may be led into the worst of Crimes.
- II. That we are all very apt to overlook our own Faults, and yet to be extremely quick-sighted and severe in Relation to those of others.
- III. That as soon as ever we are, by any Means, made sensible of our Offences, we should acknowledge them with due Penitence.
- IV. That, on doing this, the greatest Sins will be forgiven us. Yet,

V. That Sins, even after they are forgiven, produce frequently such lamentable Consequences, that on this Account, amongst others, Innocence is greatly preferable to the truest Repentance.

On the two first of these I have already dis-
coursed: and proceed now to the

III. That as soon as we are, by any Means, made sensible of our Offences, we ought to ac-
knowledge them with due Penitence.

David, it seems, till the Prophet came to put him on considering his Ways, had not done it to any good Purpose, ever since the Adultery and Murder which he had committed; though a very little Thought had been sufficient, and it is amazing, that he could avoid thinking enough, to shew him his Guilt. Had he continued insensible of it, not all his past Piety could have preserved him from future Damnation. For the Threatening which God commanded the Prophet *Ezekiel* to pronounce, ever hath been, and will be, without Exception, the Rule of his Proceeding. *Son of Man, say unto the Children of thy People, When I say to the righteous, that he shall surely live: if he trust to his own Righteousness, and commit Iniquity, all his Righteousness*

teousness shall not be remembered^a. In his Trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his Sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die^b. But, though it was not consistent with infinite Justice, Holiness and Wisdom, to accept *David*, whilst in this Condition: yet it was perfectly suitable to infinite Goodness to awaken him out of it. Accordingly, *Nathan* was sent to him with a divine Commission for that Purpose: who having first endeavoured, without Success, to execute it in a gentler and more respectful Way, that of insinuating Admonition, applied his Parable at last in the plainest Words; nor was content with telling him directly, *Thou art the Man*, but undoubtedly finding it requisite, followed even this Home-charge yet farther, by laying the Particulars of his Guilt, with its heavy Aggravations, before his Eyes. And here *David's* Example begins to be as useful for our Imitation, as it had been before for our Warning. Struck to the very Heart with the Sense of so many and heinous Iniquities, crowding in at once upon his Mind; and abhorring himself for being able, first to commit, and then to overlook them; he cries out, *I have sinned against the Lord.* Few Words,

^a Ezek. xxxiii. 12, 13.^b Ezek. xviii. 24.

indeed,

indeed; but greatly expressive; and the more, for being few. Astonishment, Confusion, Terror, might well stop the Utterance of more for the present, and for no small Time. Afterwards his Sorrow obtained the Relief of free Vent: and his penitent Psalms, especially the fifty-first, composed, as the Title informs us, on this very Occasion, express, most pathetically, the Depth of his Humiliation, and the Earnestness of his Intreaties for Pardon, even after he had been assured of it: for still the Consciousness, that he was unworthy to receive it, would prompt him to beg it continually. *Have Mercy upon me, O God, according to thy Loving-kindness: according to the Multitude of thy tender Mercies blot out my Transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine Iniquity: and cleanse me from my Sin. For I acknowledge my Transgressions: and my Sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this Evil in thy Sight.* As if he had said, great as my Crime is against my Fellow-creatures, it is Nothing, compared with that against my Creator. However secure I may be against their Resentment, it yields me no Comfort, while I continue an Object of his Wrath. You may read over

bookm ^c Psal. li. 1, 2, 3, 4.

the rest in private: the same Spirit breathes from the Beginning to the End. Now, the King might easily have given the Prophet a very different Reception: have denied the Fact, driven him from his Presence, confined him as a Madman, punished him as a false Accuser: or might have broke off the Discourse as soon as it grew painful, pleaded urgent Affairs, and told him as *Felix did Paul*, even when he trembled under his Preaching, *Go thy Way for this Time: when I have a convenient Season, I will call for thee*^d: a Season which he determined should never come. Nay, truly, according to modern Modes of Thinking, he might have frankly owned the Whole: treated the Adultery as a Trifle, especially in a Person of any Rank; and perhaps the Murder too, as an undesirable Consequence indeed, but an unavoidable one, of *Uriah's* absurd Behaviour. For Sinners have numberless Arts to fence against the Reproaches of others, and to pacify themselves. But *David* had now too affecting a Conviction of the Horrors of the State in which he had lived so long, once to think of adding to it fresh Offences: and therefore, without the least Anger at the Prophet, without the least Excuse for his own Conduct,

^d Acts xxiv. 25.

without

without the least Delay, he humbly confesses,
I have sinned against the Lord.

Let all of us then, who like *David* have sinned, in whatever Instance it be, greater or less, repent like *David* too: and, instead of perversely defending ourselves by the bad Part of his Example, resolve immediately to reform ourselves according to the good. Better were it also, that our Amendment should be accomplished by our own private Reflexions on what we have done amiss: for this would manifest a greater Sensibility of Heart, and Strength of good Purpose, than if foreign Aid appear to be wanting. But the Case before us plainly shews that we have sometimes absolute Need of other Monitors, besides that within. For if a Man, of so much Piety and Discernment as *David* had, was so long without thinking, and perhaps, left to himself, would never have thought effectually, of such flagrant Crimes as his were: how highly necessary is some Remeinbrancer to the Generality of Persons, who are so desirous to impose upon themselves, and in the many Points of Conduct, where that worst Kind of Delusion is so easily practised! As therefore God appointed his Prophets formerly by occasional and extraordinary Commissions, he hath

now

now given the Ministers of his Word a standing and constant one, to *shew his People their Transgression, and the House of Jacob their Sins*. We have not, as they had often, the Cases of single Persons revealed to us, and given us in Charge: nor need we now, when the Returns of public Instruction and Exhortation, comprehending all Cases, are so frequent. We are not sent to this or that Sinner by Name: and it is but seldom, that we dare trust ourselves to undertake voluntarily a Matter of such Delicacy, as separate Reproof or Examination; where false Reports and Opinions, Prejudices and Passions, may so probably occasion us to mistake, or be mistaken; and Circumstances without Number may produce Harm from our Attempt, instead of Good. From this Place, therefore, we direct our Warnings to you all in general: and deceive not yourselves, and injure not us, by suspecting us at any Time of such Wickedness and Folly, as to think of pointing from hence at any one in particular. We leave it intirely to your own Consciences to tell each of you in your Turn, when your own Guilt is touched, *Thou art the Man.* We hope they tell you so faithfully, when we little imagine

• Isaiah lviii. 1.

there is Need of it: and the Intent of the Ministry committed to us, is, that they should. *For the Word of God, intrusted with us, unworthy as we are, is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a Discerner of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart*^f. It is to him you lie open, and not to us, when you hear your Bosom-Sins described. It is from knowing, chiefly by the Study of the holy Scriptures, what Mankind are, that we speak, not from Information what such or such a Man is, when you fancy we hint at the Failings of your Neighbours. Use not therefore the Preaching of the Gospel, either for a Matter of Reproach to them, or of Accusation against us: but solely in Subservience to its important Design, the Reformation of yourselves. Whenever the Picture of Deformity, which we draw, is not your own; thank God for it, and forbear to consider, whom it may resemble. Whenever it is your own, in Whole or in Part, which the Witness within your Breasts will, if permitted, and perhaps though forbidden, plainly signify to you; embrace the Conviction meekly and

^f Heb. iv. 12.

sincerely:

sincerely: stand not against it, fly not from it; but search the Wound to the Bottom, and let Repentance have its perfect Work^s.

Indeed, let the Person, that makes you known to yourselves, be ever so little authorized to do it, still you are indispensably concerned to take Notice of it. If he profess himself a Friend, he hath given you the truest and boldest Proof of his Friendship, that can be. If he be a mere Acquaintance, or a Stranger, but appear to admonish you with good Intention; you ought to esteem him for it as long as you live. And were you to believe him ever so much your Enemy, never let that provoke you to become your own: think only, if he speaks Truth, and submit to it; amend, and disappoint him. Strive not to make yourselves easy in what you feel is wrong, but quit it. Strive not to colour over and palliate Matters: for this is deceiving no one, but your own Souls. If you are hitherto undiscovered by the World, leaving off is by far the likeliest Way to be secure: if others know your Faults, all you have remaining is to let them know your Penitence too. On this, whoever hath any Sense, either of Religion or Humanity,

* James i. 4.

will treat you tenderly. But whatever Shame may attend acknowledging Errors and changing wrong Courses, it is only Part of what they have deserved ; and we had much better be ashamed in this Life, than the next. Sooner or later, every Sinner must repent : and the single Question is, whether it shall be hereafter, when Grief will serve only for an Ingredient in our Misery ; or now, while it may intirely prevent the Danger, and be followed immediately by Comfort and Joy. Surely this Case is much too clear to admit of Doubt. And therefore let us all zealously pursue the Advice given to Job : *If Iniquity be in thine Hand, put it far away, and let not Wickedness dwell in thy Tabernacle. For then shalt thou lift up thy Face without Spot : yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear^b.* No sooner had David said, with due Contrition of Heart, *I have sinned against the Lord,* but Nathan revived him with that Assurance, *The Lord also hath put away thy Sin, thou shalt not die :* which is the Ground-work of the Observation to be made from the Text,

IV. That if we repent as we ought, the greatest Sins will be forgiven us.

^b Job xi. 14, 15.

This indeed our own Reason cannot promise, with any Certainty at all. God we know is good. Man is frail. And hence we have Cause to hope, that his Goodness will extend to the Pardon of our Frailties. But then, in Proportion as we go beyond Frailties, to gross, deliberate, wilful, habitual Transgressions, this Hope diminishes continually : till at Length it becomes exceedingly doubtful ; and especially to those, whose inward Peace depends the most upon not doubting, whether the Holiness of God's Nature, and the Honour of his universal Government will suffer him to pardon some Offenders at all, however penitent ; whether any, without previous Correction ; (who knows what, or how long ?) and whether he will bestow future Happiness, for a greater Time or a less, even where he may inflict no future Punishment. Still, in the Midst of these Perplexities, be they ever so inextricable, Repentance, including the Amendment for which Men have Strength, is not only their Duty, but their Wisdom too : because Insensibility of old Sins, and Addition of new ones, will make their Condition, bad as it may be, daily worse : and so far as any Thing of their own doing can better it, Reformation must. But Knowledge

of thus much only, though it affords very proper Direction, suggests little Comfort at the same Time, or Spirit to follow Direction. And therefore every Manifestation of his Pleasure, which God hath made to Man from the Beginning, hath always carried in it some Encouragement to trust in his Mercy, beyond the Motives which our unassisted Faculties were able to furnish. Yet the Pardon of such Sins, attended with such Aggravations, as *David's* were, had not, even in his Days, by any Means been expressly promised. And therefore this Declaration of the Prophet must not only relieve him, in the Agony of his Guilt, from the dreadfulest Apprehensions that can be conceived; on which Account, we may presume, it was made to him so instantly: but must also diffuse Consolation among Multitudes, through that and the following Ages, which could not fail to be acquainted with so extraordinary a Case; and must incline all true Penitents to believe, that theirs also, whatever it was, would, on like Terms, obtain Favour. But still it is easy to mistake in arguing from one Case to another, especially our own: besides that particular Instances do not amount to general Assurances. And though such Assurances were

given in the latter Part of the *Jewish* Revelation, chiefly by the Prophet *Ezekiel*¹: yet it might not be clear to every one, whether they related to another Life, or only to the present: nor was this Revelation received, or known almost, in any Nation, excepting that one. The unlimited Gospel-promises therefore of Forgiveness and Grace, proclaimed to all the World, have made a Change, unspeakably happy, in the Condition of Mankind.

And now, as we are strangely apt to apply every Thing wrong, too many, instead of the Extreme of Despondency, run into that of profane Boldness: and are very near looking upon Sin, as Nothing to be dreaded; and Remission of Sin, as Nothing to be thankful for. At least the Certainty of it, they conceive, they could easily have discovered of themselves: and therefore have little Obligation to *Christ*, the Publisher of a Truth so obvious. Nor is it a Wonder, if they, who think slightly of Transgression, think slightly of Pardon also: taking one to be a Trifle, they must take the other to be a Matter of Course. But whoever considers in earnest, what it is to have disobeyed the Commands, and contradicted the wise and good

¹ Ezek. xviii. 21, 22, 23. xxxiii. 14, 15, 16.

Purposes of the Almighty ; to have injured his Creatures, our own Brethren ; to have perverted the Nature he hath given us ; to have disqualified ourselves from doing and being what he made us for ; and to have been guilty of all this, in Spite of the Expostulations of our Consciences and our Friends, and of his express Threatenings of Hell-fire : far from entertaining presumptuous Imaginations of Safety, from any Thing he can know by his own Wisdom, or perform by his own Strength, will earnestly long for Instruction and Help from above ; and feel the most affectionate Gratitude to him, who hath not only revealed, but procured Peace for us, at the Price of his Blood : offering up his Life on the Cross, Son of God as he was : so great was the Difficulty, to make it consistent with Justice and Holiness to exercise Mercy !

Indeed, after all that hath been done to assure us it shall be exercised, there are some, of Minds more tenderly sensible than ordinary, who, after committing great Offences, or, perhaps, only such as to them appear very great, experience the utmost Reluctance, either to be reconciled to themselves, or persuaded that God will be reconciled to them. And hence not a few

few of them plunge desperately into whatever Folly or Sin will drive away their Uneasiness for the present; while others go on in the most punctual Practice of Piety, but enjoy scarce any Satisfaction from it, overwhelming themselves, on every Occasion and none, with groundless Terrors. The pernicious Impatience of the former proceeds, in great Measure, from a very absurd and criminal Pride, which ought to be humbled by the prudent Severity of just Reproof. But the meek Dejection of the latter calls for the tenderest Compassion and the kindest Encouragement; yet, perhaps, intermixed, now and then, with some Degree of gentle Chiding. To such therefore it must be said; your Grief and Fear prove, that your Heart is not hardened, but but sincerely desirous to serve and please God: the good Works, which he enables you to perform so regularly, prove your Faith and Repentance: the Imperfections, which you bewail, all his Children have, not you alone. *Why then are you cast down, and your Soul disquieted within you^k?* How ill soever you may think of yourselves; though God requires you not in the least to think worse than the Truth, and would have you judge calmly of your spiritual

^k Ps. xlvi. 5.

State, not under the Disability of a Fright: but whatever Opinion you may form of your own Deserts, forbear to entertain an injurious one of him. When he hath sent his blessed Son to make Atonement for you, when he hath told you in his holy Word, when he tells you by his Ministers every Day, that this Atonement reaches to the very worst of Cases, do not except your own in Contradiction to him: do not indulge Doubts and Scruples about what he hath plainly promised, in order to be miserable against his Will: but, together with the Sorrow of having offended, allow yourselves to feel the Joy of being restored to Favour. A wife and good Parent would wish to have his Child affected only in a moderate Manner with a Sense of his past Faults, when once he is returned to his Duty: and though still he hath the Weaknesses incident to his tender Age, doth not reject him for them, or desire he should sink under them; but strive against them with a clearing Belief, that he shall out-grow them, as he approaches to Maturity. Why will you not reflect then, that, *like as a Father pitith his own Children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear him?* For he knoweth whereof we are made; he remembereth that we are but Dust¹. It

It is extremely unhappy, that when Persons attend public Discourses on Religion, in which different Instructions, designed for as different Sorts of Auditors, must however be spoken to all Sorts promiscuously, each, for the most Part, applies to himself just what doth not belong to him, notwithstanding the best Care to prevent it. The bold Sinner confides most securely in what he hears of God's Mercy: while the low-spirited Penitent almost dies away at the Mention of his Justice. The first hath no Dread of the most wilful Sins; because the Nature of Man is frail: the last hath no Peace about the most excusable Deficiencies, because the Precepts of the Gospel are strict. We can only caution them, not to mistake thus: and beg they would have a more serious Regard, on the one Side, to their future Happiness; on the other, to their present Comfort. It grieves us to think of the Terrors, that we may sometimes occasion those to suffer, who have no Need to suffer any at all. But we must of Necessity give out the strongest Warnings against the greatest Danger: and run the Risque, if we cannot avoid it, of making a few good Persons uneasy without Cause, rather than leave many bad ones asleep in fatal Self-flattery. For indeed the Doctrine of Forgiveness, though in

itself the most ingenuous Motive to thankful Piety and Obedience, is too often most disingenuously perverted to encourage Transgression. Repentance, Men argue, is sure to obtain Pardon: and Pardon restores us to the State we were in before we did amiss. What Need have we then to scruple going a little Wrong, when the Method of setting all right again immediately is so plain before us? But, in Reality, true Repentance, a thorough Change of Temper and Purpose, manifested by a Course of suitable Conduct, will be found, neither a short, nor an easy Work; but one exceeding the Power of Man, without the Help of God. And not to say, how uncertain it is, whether God will give these artful Contrivers Time to repent effectually, what Prospect is there in the least, that they will have a Heart to do it? When once they have been so deliberately base and wicked, as to rebel against him for that very Reason, which ought, of all others, to have made them dutiful to him; where is the Likelihood, that they will ever become so honest and good, as to return and serve him faithfully? No Alteration requires a larger Share of his Grace to effect it: and no Sinners have

have less Ground to expect any Share of it, than these. But were it ever so probable, that even such Offenders might come to amend their Doings, yet there is an awful Observation, arising from the History before us, which remains to be insisted on,

V. That Wickedness, eyen after it is forsaken, and after it is forgiven, produces nevertheless very often Consequences so lamentable, that for this Cause, amongst others, Innocence is greatly preferable to the sincerest and completest Repentance, that ever was.

In the very same Breath, that *Nathan* tells *David*, *the Lord had put away his Sin*, he tells him also of a trying Affliction, and a very trying one it proved, that he should immediately undergo, on Account of that Sin. *Howbeit, because by this Deed thou hast given great Occasion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the Child, that is born unto thee, shall surely die^m.* Nor could the most fervent Intercessions of the Royal Penitent reverse the Decree. Nay, the threatening Prediction, which the Prophet made to him before his Repentance, that because *he had killed Uriah with the Sword, the Sword should not depart from his House*; and

^m 2 Sam. xii. 14.

as he had polluted his Wife, his own should be polluted in the Sight of the Sunⁿ, was permitted to befall him, notwithstanding his Repentance, with great Exactness. Nor doth there need much Reflexion upon what passes in the World to see, that Providence, to this Day, frequently suffers Events of a like Nature to happen : partly to complete the Humiliation of the Sinner, partly that others may *hear and fear*^o.

Sometimes no immediate Connexion between the Transgression and the Suffering is visible, that it may seem to be the Hand of God, rather than a natural Effect; though indeed, would Men consider, every Effect proceeds from his Hand : but commonly they are closely linked, to deter Men from committing Iniquity, by shewing them before-hand, what Fruits they must expect it to produce. Indeed, were only the Pain inseparable from Repentance, the Feeling of having done ill and deserved ill, to distinguish the Condition of him who returns to his Duty, from his who has always adhered to it; the Distinction would be very interesting and important. For how wide is the Difference between hating and approving ourselves : between thinking of God with Dread and Shame,

ⁿ 2 Sam. xii. 9—12.

^o Deut. xiii. 11.

and rejoicing in him as *our Trust from our Youth^p, and our Portion for ever^q!* But long after Peace is restored within, which yet will never be so restored to great Offenders, as not to leave Matter of melancholy Reflexion ; long after Penitents are at Ease with Respect to their future State ; afflicting Consequences, with Respect to the present, will flow from what they have done amiss. Often they have hurt themselves, alienated their Friends, lost their Time and Opportunities of doing well in the World, injured their Characters, their Fortunes, their Healths : often they have hurt others, set mischievous Examples, inticed, betrayed, oppressed, provoked those around them, and destroyed, perhaps, by short Follies, what the Endeavours of the rest of their Days will never be able to repair. These, indeed, are Considerations, under which they should not despond : but surely others ought to take Warning from them, and learn of how unspeakable Value it is, to *keep Innocency, and take Heed to the Thing that is right^r*, from the very first. Life was not intended to be led inconsistently ; one Part in doing Wrong, the other in being sorry for it. Uniform Obe-

^p Psal. lxxi. 5.^q Ib. lxxiii. 16.^r Ib. xxxvii. 38.

dience

dience is our Maker's Demand: and whoever departs from it wilfully, though he may return, will assuredly be made to *know and see*, one Way or other, that it is a *Thing evil and bitter*, *that he hath forsaken the Lord his God*. Let those then, who experience this in themselves, submit to it with Patience, and revere his Justice: let those, who see it in others, thankfully make Use of the Instruction it was graciously designed to give them; and let us all preserve a lively Sense upon our Souls, that *Evil pursueth Sinners, but to the righteous Good shall be repaid*.

• Jer. ii. 19.

† Prov. xiii. 21.

S E R M O N X V.

E P H. V. II.

And have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness: but rather reprove them.

IF the Practice of their Duty were general amongst Men, it would appear to all of us as we come forward into Life, notwithstanding our present Proneness to sinful Indulgences, extremely natural and easy. For as its Reasonableness always recommends it to our Understandings, and its Amiability to our Affections, when unbiased: so, in these Circumstances, the public Example of Goodness would engage our Imitation, the universal esteem of it excite our Ambition, and its beneficial Consequences plainly shew it to be our true present Interest. Allurements to unlawful Pleasures would then be comparatively few; Provocations to mutual Injuries none; Consciousness of right Behaviour would make Men pleased with themselves; reciprocal Acts of Justice and Kindness would make

make them happy in each other; and Experience, that their Being was a Blessing to them, would produce in their Souls affectionate Sentiments of reverential Gratitude to the bountiful Author of it. Such we should have found the World, if Sin had not entered into it: and such we might still in a good Measure bring it to be, if we would; if most of us did not, besides filling our own Lives with Guilt and Misery, contribute, by a Variety of wrong Behaviour, to render our Fellow-creatures also wicked and wretched. This we all see and feel to be the real State of Things: but how do we act upon it? We complain grievously of each other, for the Faults which we each of us go on to commit; we complain even of Providence, because the World is—only what we have made it; and alledge the Misconduct of our Neighbours for a Defence of our own, instead of trying to mend ourselves or them: whereas, evidently our Concern is, to *have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness, but rather reprove them;* to preserve our own Souls from the epidemic Distemper, and warn those around us of the Danger of being infected. But it is with the Security of our personal Innocence, that we are to begin: without

without which we shall seldom in earnest attempt, and scarce ever successfully prosecute, the Reformation of any one else: nor will the greatest Success in such Endeavours avail us, if, as our Apostle expresses it, *when we have preached to others, we ourselves are Cast-aways^a.*

The first and principal Consideration then is, how to avoid any *Fellowship with the unfruitful*, a gentle Term, which means pernicious, *Works of Darkness*. Now a main Point of Caution against all Sorts of Peril is to know, from whence chiefly we are to apprehend it. But who can say, from what Quarter our Virtue runs the greatest Risque, in a World so thick set round with various Temptations: where all Vices are so common, that it seems a Matter of Course, and almost of Necessity, to indulge one or another; and the Majority of the guilty is so large, that each considers himself, in some Degree, as safe in the Crowd even from divine Displeasure, *numbering himself amongst the Multitude of Sinners*, and not remembering that *Wrath will not tarry long^b*: where our Eyes and our Ears continually present to our Imaginations Crimes, of which else we should never have thought, and suggest easy Methods of attaining

^a 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^b Ecclus. vii. 16.

what

what we believed to be as impracticable, as we know it to be unlawful : where the Prosperity of ill Men so strongly prompts us to envy their Condition, imitate their Presumptuousness, and doubt of a superintending Power : where every natural Inclination that we have meets with something to inflame it beyond Bounds, or turn it aside from its proper Object : where Fear of Inconveniences threatening upright Conduct, and Hope of gaining Advantages by Deviations from it, work within us continually : where Injuries, real or fancied, are daily provoking us to injure or hate in Return ; and even Friendship and kind Affection, meeting too often with undeserving Objects, make us partial and unfair, subservient to the Purposes of the bad or injudicious, and criminally negligent of the Merits of the worthy ?

Here is already an alarming List of Dangers : and yet one Source of them remains unmentioned, so very fruitful, that probably it brings more of us to Ruin than all the rest : I mean, our strong Tendency to follow whatever Precedents are set us : which being the great Seducer of Mankind to *have Fellowship with one another in the unfruitful Works of Darkness,*

Darkness, I shall confine myself to the Consideration of it in the Sequel of this Discourse.

A Disposition to fall in with what we see others do is one of the earliest natural Principles that we exert : and in itself a very beneficial one. For by Means of it we learn, with Ease and Pleasure, a Multitude of Things necessary or serviceable in Life : conform readily to the Inclinations of those about us in a thousand Matters of Indifference, and from mutual Likeness become mutually agreeable. By the same Means also, were Patterns of Piety and Virtue more frequent, or we more attentive to them, we might be excited, as undoubtedly it was designed we should, to copy, and even rival, each other's laudable Qualities. But where Things are capable of contrary Uses, we generally make the worst of them : and in no Case more than this. The Example of Evil, in a corrupted World, is by much the oftenest in our View : which the weak and indolent imitate without Reflexion ; the good-humoured and pliable are drawn after them by the Desire of pleasing, though in wrong Ways ; the vain and ambitious by Fondness of excelling though in culpable Attainments ; and almost all by the Shame of Singularity and Dread of Ridicule :

till the Numbers of the faulty being thus become abundantly sufficient to keep one another in Countenance, Custom refuses to let its Authority be any longer examined, and sets up itself as the sole Rule of Conduct.

For, even when we seem to act the most entirely from Opinions and Dispositions of our own, these, upon Inquiry, will be frequently found to derive, if not their Original, at least a great Part of their Strength, from the Deference that we pay to the Notions and Practice of the World. Thus Men speak and think slightly of Religion, often without imagining they know any Objection of Weight against it: and yet how they can have the very lowest Degree of Belief in it, and not believe it to be an Affair of the utmost Importance, is quite inconceivable: but notwithstanding they treat it, without Scruple, as a slight Matter, because they see it commonly treated so. But this Degree of Depravity is not universal. We, perhaps, may blame those who do so, and with Marks of great Seriousness profess ourselves Christians: yet, it may be, are easy in transgressing, in a higher Degree or a lower, as Occasion offers, almost every Precept of Christianity, because others, who call themselves Christians also, do the same Thing.

Thing. We acknowledge that we are soon to leave this Earth, and give an Account to God of the Part which we have acted upon it: yet perceiving, that most People about us overlook these awful Truths, we can do so too, as absolutely, as if we had no Concern in them. And, to be a little more particular: what is it that makes us in our common Discourse so regardless of Equity and Humanity, so eager to speak Evil and propagate Scandal? Surely not always Malignity of Heart: and certainly very seldom any peculiar Knowledge of the Case, or Interest in it. But such is the reigning Turn of Conversation, which we are wicked and weak enough to adopt and promote, at the very Time that we inveigh bitterly against it, and suffer grievously by it. Again: how many are there who trifle away their Days, in thinking of and doing Nothing that tends to any one good Purpose, only because such Trifling is fashionable! How many affect Follies and Vices, to which, at the Bottom, they have little or no Liking, which are highly prejudicial, and will probably be fatal to them, merely because they are in Vogue: and for no wiser a Reason will persevere in them, when Nature cries aloud to have them left off! How many distress and undo

themselves and their Families, by imprudently vying with the Luxury and Expensiveness of those about them, nay, of those above them ! And, in general, from what is it else, than taking it on Trust from common Persuasion, that possessing the Things of this World is Happiness ; though we not only may observe the contrary in all whom we know, but feel it in ourselves ; that we pursue them through Sins and through Sufferings of all Kinds, and admire and detest one another on Account of them, at the Rate we do ? What, indeed, else could support the Absurdity of seeking our chief Good where plainly it is not, but that we all see one another do so, and will persuade ourselves, against the fullest evidence, that so universal an Attachment must be well grounded ?

But the Example of a small Part of Mankind is often sufficient to lead us into strange Errors. Where Party-zeal of any Kind prevails, into what monstrous opinions of Men and Things, what utter Disregard to all Truth and Justice, to public Spirit and Humanity, will Men run one after another ! Indeed they will do Things, when united in Bodies, which, taken singly, they would abhor : nay, will think they justify their own Behaviour completely, by alledging only, that it is the same with that of their Opposers,

Opposers, whom they condemn as the worst of Men. Sometimes a less Authority than this proves able to misguide us: and a blind Prepossession in favour of a few Persons, or a single one, shall seduce us into a very unjustifiable Imitation; and even make us, by the Meanness of it, contemptible, or, by carrying it too far, guilty, when what we meant to copy was commendable, or however innocent.

Without specifying more Instances, or enlarging on these, the Mischiefs of being injudiciously *conformed to this World^c* appear so considerable, as to make the Remedies which can be found for it extremely desirable. Now Remedies of Mischiefs vary with their Causes: which in this Case are numerous.

1. Some follow the Multitude to do Evil^a from mere Inconsiderateness: poor Creatures, greatly to be pitied, and yet severely reprobated. For, surely, enough depends on our chusing right in Life, to make us think about it: and there is Appearance enough of Errors in the common Practice, to give us no little Diffidence in a Matter of such Moment. But Mankind in general being thoughtless, each Individual, as he goes on with the rest, finding few or none different

^a Rom. xii, 2.

^b Exod. xxiii, 2.

from himself to compare with, is hardly sensible of his own being so. Yet would we, in Imagination, step out of the present Scene of Things for a while, consider ourselves as mere Spectators, and view the Course of them as they pass before us, how amazing would the Sight be ! The plain and only Way to Happiness, through the faithful Cultivation of Piety and Virtue, almost unanimously neglected : Nations and Ages treading, in mutual implicit Reliance, Paths leading to Destruction : the less faulty surprizingly apt to be dissipated in a Hurry of Amusements, or plod on in worldly Business without higher Attentions : the rest, by irregular Passions, and unlawful Pursuits, making themselves and their Neighbours as wretched at present as they well can, and at the same Time providing for unspeakably greater Misery hereafter : every Generation reminded, every single Person seeing, on one Occasion or another, in how wrong a Course they are ; yet shutting their Eyes again, and going forward blindfold : none almost taking Warning by the Fate of his Predecessors ; but each leaving, in his Turn, an useless Admonition of his own to such as come in his Stead. *This their Way is their Folly : yet their Posterity*

rity approve their Sayings^{*}. And shall we be of the Number of those who act thus: or rather assert our Right to judge for ourselves, where it concerns us so nearly? Such is the Usage of the World: but is it the Dictate of Conscience, is it the Road to Happiness? The Multitude, *blind Leaders of the blind*^f, have they Reason, have they Scripture, have they the final Event of Things, to justify them? If not, let us chuse a safer Guidance; and apply the real Rule of Life to direct our Steps: ask ourselves often, what we are doing, and what it tends to? Stop short wherever we discern Ground for Suspicion; beware of plausible Pleas, for they often colour over the worst Actions; beware of indiscreet Compliances, for they border nearly upon criminal ones; and ever remember the Son of Sirach's Advice: *Go not in a Way, wherein thou mayest fall. Be not confident in a plain Way*^g. But above all let us beware of ourselves: and recollecting, as we have but too much Cause, our natural Supineness, and Forgetfulness of the Cautions that we so often receive, *give the more earnest Heed to the Things which we have*

^e Psal. xlix. 13. ^f Matth. xv. 14. ^g Ecclus xxxii. 21, 22.

heard, lest at any Time we let them slip^b; and set our Hearts unto the Words of God's Law, for it is not a vain Thing for us, because it is our Life^c.

2. Others there are, not absolutely thoughtless about their Conduct, but distrustful of their own Judgment: born down by so great an Authority, as the Practice of all Mankind appears to be, against Seriousness in Religion and Strictness in Virtue. But, universal as this Practice may seem, there are many Exceptions from it amongst all Ranks, and some, God be praised, in the highest, of exemplary Christians, who, *in the Midst of a crooked and perverse Generation, shine as Lights in the World^d*. But were the Apostacy more general than it is, yet being the Effect of mere Inconsiderateness or ungoverned Passions, what Weight can there be in the most perfect Agreement of Persons thus influenced? Or if still the Multitude together look formidable, separate them; and consider singly, of whom the Whole is composed. The much larger Part will be acknowledged at first Sight to be such, as we should be ashamed once to think of taking for our Directors, in a Point of any Consequence. And for the rest: the rich and great are rather peculiarly exposed to

^a Heb. ii. 1.

^b Deut. xxxii. 46, 47.

^c Phil. ii. 15.

Temptation,

Temptation, and, of Course, to fall, than qualified to discover and relish those momentous Truths and Rules of Life, which Humility and Retirement into ourselves best dispose us to receive. The learned and knowing are liable to be misled into wrong Judgments by the Vanity of judging differently from common Men; nor do they always act agreeably to what they inwardly think. And the reputed wise and able very frequently have never considered in earnest what the true Wisdom of Life is, but only busied themselves with a silly Cunning to attain what they have rashly and falsely taken for the End, at which they were to aim.

But further: this universal Consent, pleaded against observing the Precepts of Religion, is, when examined, no Consent at all. For as the Vices of Men are contrary to each other, and every vicious Temper is full of Inconsistencies within itself: no one immoral Course will ever be generally approved, nor almost any one immoral Person continue long of the same Opinion. The only Thing, in which we shall find them agree, is that, which they all by Turns own, that the Conduct of the virtuous is right; and their own, wrong. Here, therefore,

a pious

a pious and discreet Man will easily raise an intestine War amongst the Enemy : defend himself against one Side by the Authority of the other ; indeed against all Sides by the Authority of all : and in conclusion resolve, slighting and pitying a divided giddy Crowd, *in every good Work to trust his own Soul ; for this is the Keeping of the Commandments*¹.

3. Another strong Inducement to have Fellowship with the bad Customs of the World, is Desire of being esteemed by it. But do the vicious really esteem one another ? Do they not almost always hate or despise one another ? Or suppose that, for joining in their Sins and Absurdities, you were sure to receive their Applause as your Reward. Perhaps the whole Meaning of it is at the Bottom no more than this : they want to keep themselves in Countenance, being conscious that they have Occasion for it, by adding as many as they can to their Number ; and their good Opinion of you is thinking you weak enough to be drawn in for one. Or perhaps the Superiority, which your Innocence gives you over them, is painful to them ; and they would fain bring you down to their own Level. Or they have some interested

¹ Eccl^s xxxii, 23.

Design upon you, or they consider you as an Instrument fitted to amuse and entertain them; and so extol you, while they deride you. This, you see, is not being admired: it is being made a Tool. But were it otherwise: consider a little; what can such Admiration be worth? How long will it be likely to last? And what must the Consequences prove, now and to Eternity? Why then, instead of courting outward Regard from those, who inwardly condemn themselves, do you not chuse to be respected by the wise and good, to enjoy the Testimony of your own Conscience, and to secure the important Approbation of him, who hath said, *Them that honour me, I will honour: and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed^m*?

4. A further Motive, which yet more powerfully inclines too many to unlawful Compliances, is false Good-nature and Shame. They have so excessive a Flexibility of Temper, that they know not how to stand out against what the Practice of the World recommends, and especially what their Acquaintance invite and press them to, though they ever so clearly see the Impropriety of it, and have ever so firmly

^m 1 Sam. ii. 30.

resolved

resolved the contrary. Unhappy Creatures, betrayed by Dispositions, almost virtuous, into Vice! The truly good-natured Part, would they but reflect, is to lead others in the right Way, not to follow them in the wrong : the truly shameful Behaviour, not to be resolute, obstinate, if Tempters please to call it so, in consulting our present and future Welfare. *Beware of Evil*, saith the Son of Sirach, and be not ashamed, when it concerneth thy Soul. For there is a Shame, that bringeth Sin: and there is a Shame which is Glory and Grace. Accept no Person against thy Soul: and let not the Reverence of any Man cause thee to fall*. There is, that destroyeth his own Soul through Baseness, and by accepting of Persons, overthroweth himself*. But they, who have the Misfortune to be of this Make, should by no Means trust to their own most solemn Purposes, or even Vows. Their chief Safety is in Flight; in avoiding, to their utmost, such Company and such Things, though ever so agreeable, as may endanger their Innocence; and keeping at a Distance from Temptation, till they can bear it better. Thus they will escape at once the Uneasiness of resisting and the Hazard of yielding, and increase

* Ecclus iv. 20, 21, 22.

• Ecclus xx. 22.

their

their Strength gradually by a cautious Exercise of it: provided they rest not in human Means only, but, with Faith and Humility unfeigned, apply for and depend on the divine Assistance, promised through Jesus Christ; the Necessity of which for every Person, in every Case, we presume you always understand, and for that sole Reason we do not always express it.

5. With this inward Weakness is commonly joined an Apprehension of Difficulties from without: of public Dislike and Censure for condemning the public Taste by a different Conduct; or at least of much Ridicule, a Thing full as hard to be borne, for doing conscientiously what the World despises, and abstaining from what it doth without Scruple. But let not the Danger of Censure appear to any one so frightful. Indeed if Persons take absurd or indifferent Observances to be great Duties; if they are strict in the Performance of one Duty, and grossly negligent of others; or if to the Performance of many there be added, either a vain Desire of making their own Goodness remarkable, or the provoking Sin of Uncharitableness towards others, they must not expect very favourable Treatment. But an uniformly good Christian, without Superstition,

without Affectation, and without Soursness, which are surely none of them Virtues, may *live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World*^p, bad as it is, ever so long, without any great Danger, either of making himself Enemies, by doing no Harm and as much Good as he can, or of falling into Contempt, for acting only as every Man in his Heart knows he himself ought to act. But if ever this prove otherwise, instead of being *shaken in our Minds*^q by it, let us confier, how much more Censure we should incur and deserve by a vicious Life, to say Nothing of other Inconveniences: and above all, let us consider that infinitely more important Censure, which both we, and our Scorners, are shortly to undergo: and since, as St. Peter argues, they who *think it strange, that we run not with them to the same Excess of Riot, speaking Evil of us, shall give Account to him, that is ready to judge the Quick and the Dead*; let us arm ourselves with this Mind, that we live not our Time in the Flesh to the Lusts of Men, but to the Will of God^r.

As for the Ridicule, which ludicrous Scoffers love to throw upon Religion: we may avoid much of it by Prudence, and despise the rest.

^p Tit. ii. 12.

^q 2 Thess. ii. 2.

^r 1 Pet. iv. 1, 2, 4, 5.

with

with Ease. It falls heaviest on the Pretences to Piety made by the vicious; and we shall seldom be thought such, if we are not; or on the Reservedness and Formality of some, who are good. Now indeed it is never advisable to go the utmost Lengths of what may, strictly speaking, be just lawful; they adjoin so very closely on what is forbidden: yet there is a contrary Extreme, an immoderate Suspiciousness of innocent Compliances. And they, who indulge it, lay a heavier Burthen on themselves than they need, perhaps than they will support without sinking under it. But at least they rob their own Minds of that Serenity and Clearfulness, which they might and ought to have enjoyed: they disguise Religion under a gloomy uninviting Appearance, which is great Pity; and furnish the profane with a grievous Handle for exposing both them and it; till perhaps they at Length grow ashamed of their Profession, and make a sudden Exchange of their excessive Rigour for the worse Errors of Libertinism and Infidelity. Therefore, in a moderate Degree, on proper Occasions, let us not be backward to bear a Part in such Customs of the World, as we are sure we safely may: and let it, if possible, be a graceful one. On

the

the other Hand, whatever, though harmless in itself, may be a Snare to us, or by our Means to others, let us abstain from it indeed resolutely, but abstain with an easy Air and Manner: keep our Reasons to ourselves, rather than be eager to mention them: or mention them, if it may do Good, without exaggerating or insisting too vehemently upon any Thing; but so as may best convince Men of the Solidity of our Judgement, and Reasonableness of our Conduct. Behaving thus, we may well hope to become Objects, at least after a while, of Respect instead of Derision, to which no Part of genuine Piety is on any Account liable. And they, who set themselves to make a Jest of it, might without Difficulty, if the Seriousness of their Case, and sometimes Pity, sometimes just Indignation, did not prevent it, have that Weapon turned upon them, and be proved the most absurd of all human Beings. Their Scrupulousness of admitting the most indubitable Truths of Religion; and Readiness at the same Time to acquiesce in the wildest Imaginations, that are unfavourable to it: their Schemes of making themselves easy by counteracting the Dictates of their own Consciences; and happy by transgressing the Laws of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, enforced by almighty

almighty Power: their Delight in the Hopes of existing no longer than the Space of this transitory Life, and their Haste to ruin Health, Fortune and Reputation, all that can afford them Enjoyment, in the very Beginning of Life: their earnest Pursuits of what they frequently despise at the Time, and almost always nauseate soon after they have attained it; and the tormenting inward Conflicts, that they often experience, between two Passions, both of them perhaps foolish, and both pernicious, which shall be preferred: surely these Things, and above all their triumphing in the Wisdom of these Things, and insulting those who are stupid enough to follow the Rules of plain Reason, and the Directions of God himself from Heaven, as the best Guides to their present and future Well-being, might, without any great Effort, be so described, as to retort on their own Heads a double Share of the Contempt, which they are so liberal in throwing about them. But however unwilling or unfit a wise Man may be to *answer Fools according to their Folly*, at least he will see it to be unworthy of his Notice; and go on, unconcerned, through the impotent Attacks of it, in the steady Practice of *whatsoever Things*

* Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

are true and honest, whatsoever Things are lovely and of good Report^t; recollecting daily that awful and repeated Declaration of the holy Jesus, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my Words in this adulterous and sinful Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father with the holy Angels*^u. Then shall the righteous Man, as the Book of *Wisdom* beautifully expresses it, stand in great Boldness before the Face of such as made no Account of his Labours. And they, repenting and groaning for Anguish of Spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he, whom we had some Time in Derision, and a Proverb of Reproach. We Fools, accounted his Life Madness, and his End to be without Honour. How is he numbered among the Children of God, and his Lot is amongst the Saints! Therefore have we erred from the Way of Truth, and wearied ourselves in the Way of Wickedness and Destruction. What hath our Pride profited us, and what Good hath our Vaunting brought us? All those Things are passed away like a Shadow; and as the Dust that is blown away with the Wind. But the righteous live for evermore: their Reward also is with the Lord, and the Care of them is with the Most High^v.

^t Phil. iv. 8.

^u Mark viii. 38.

^v Wisd. v.

S E R M O N XVI.

E P H. V. II.

And have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness, but rather reprove them.

THE Prevalence of Impiety and Immorality in the World, hath not only made the original Duties of Mankind more difficult, by increasing the Temptations to transgress them, but added to their Number many new Obligations of great Importance, relating partly to the Concern of preserving ourselves, partly to the Charity of guarding others, from the general Infection. Our own Preservation is doubtless to be the first Object of our Attention, as we are primarily intrusted with, and answerable for, our own Persons, and have by Nature the strongest Solitude for our own Happiness. But Zeal for that of our Fellow-Creatures ought certainly to fill the second Place in our Breasts; and is a Duty much too little regarded, even by the good; considering

how indispensably both Religion and Humanity, and indeed our common Interest, require us to promote what is right and fit, and restrain each other from Sin and Ruin, by all such Methods as we properly can. For every one is by no Means qualified to use every Method: and therefore, without prudent Reflexion, many may both labour and suffer much, without any Prospect of its turning to Account; nay, may involve themselves in Guilt by immoderate Eagerness to reform their Neighbours. But, though all must consult their own Strength and Opportunities, and leave to those who are better able, and to the Providence of God, what they find themselves unequal to: there still remains to every one of us a proper Share of this great Work; and we ought to be faithfully diligent, within the Sphere of our Influence, be it larger or smaller, to discountenance Wickedness and encourage Piety and Virtue, by all those Ways, to which God, having adapted our Powers and Circumstances, hath consequently called us. And as these vary greatly, so the Apostle hath given Room in the Text for treating of them all, by mentioning the lowest Instance of due Care in this Respect, *having no Fellowship with*

the unfruitful Works of Darkness; and the highest, reproving them.

I. The first of these, barely not partaking in the bad Actions that others commit, may seem perhaps to be scarce doing any Thing for the opposite Cause. And yet, as the common Practice of Sin is the principal Plea in its Favour, it is of great Consequence to shew, that the Practice is not universal: that there are still Persons left, who fear God and love his Laws, who abhor an unworthy Deed, and despise a criminal Pleasure. The profligate, sensible that a virtuous Character is the superior one in Speculation, have Nothing left, but to question the Reality of it in Fact: and by reflecting very little, and conversing with such only, or chiefly, as are like themselves, they become by Degrees almost persuaded, that all Men are wicked, and cannot be otherwise. This Opinion extinguishes Modesty, as well as deadens Conscience: they triumph in their imaginary Discovery, degrading as it is to human Nature, and insult the Vanity of those who presume to think themselves moral Agents. It is lamentable to observe, how far they have succeeded in their monstrous Attempt to pervert the true Order of Things. While they *glory*

in their Shame^{*}, too many grow ashamed of what they ought to account their Glory: would wish to have their Performance of religious Duties, and the Regularity of their Lives, unknown or disbelieved, or ascribed to some other Motive than Principle; or, it may be, a few fashionable Sins imputed to them, to save their Reputations. By the Influence of such preposterous Bashfulness, they often become at Length what they desire to seem: at least they suffer others to fall, whom the Authority of their Example might have supported, and confirm the profane and vicious in their wrong Notions and Courses. Another Inducement, besides Cowardice, to this improper Conduct, is an Abhorrence of being thought ostentatious: which hath the more Weight, because in all Matters, and especially in Religion, whoever takes uncommon Pains to make a Shew, will be suspected of not having much Reality. But if Affectation on that Hand be a Fault, Affectation on the other is a greater; and the plain Rule of Behaviour lies between them: that every Christian go through his Christian Duty with Uprightness and Simplicity; neither desiring to bring the private

* Phil. iii. 19.

Parts of it into public View, nor labouring to make a Secret of his Faith and Practice in Cafes, where they would of Course be seen. A natural artless Procedure will as certainly vindicate itself, as dishonest Contrivances will be detected. And therefore let no one fear to be thought, or, when Occasion requires, to let all Mankind perceive that he is rightly thought, religious and conscientious. The Regulation of our Appetites and Passions, by Reason and good Sense, can never be a Ground of Contempt. *Doing Justice and loving Mercy*, is honoured throughout the Earth. And though it should be added of the same Person, who lives by these Rules, that he also walks humbly with his God^b: one doth not discern, why that should lessen the good Opinion pre-conceived of him; or how those who every Day with abject Servility are worshipping others, no better than themselves, for trifling Interests, can pretend to think it Meanness in him, that he honours and adores the Maker and Judge of all. Nay, let it be said further, that he adores him suitably to the Directions laid down in Scripture; and, conscious of his own Ignorance, Guilt, and Weakness, is willing thankfully to accept Instruction, Pardon, Assistance,

^b Mic. vi. 8.

and eternal Life, the free Gifts of his heavenly Father, on the Giver's Terms, through Faith in the Merits of *Jesus Christ*, and the Grace of the Holy Spirit; still who hath a Right to blame him, unless he can prove, which no one ever hath done or will, that this is not the Way to Happiness here and hereafter, and that any other is? A virtuous, a religious, a Christian Character then, as it always deserves, will generally command Respect: its Amiability, its Importance to public, to private Welfare, will be visible. And, in Proportion as Numbers appear possessed of it, the vicious will be awed into Silence, and the modester Part of them at least into outward Imitation, which may produce in Time, through God's Grace, inward Seriousness. But, however these may be affected, all the well-inclined will rejoice in the Protection, and improve by the Example, of such declared Friends. Almost every one may do some Good in this Way, and possibly far more than he imagines, merely by maintaining openly an uniform Tenour of pious and moral Behaviour, without taking any Pains to call the Attention of Mankind to it. But the rich, the noble, the powerful, the learned, the ingenious, the admired, those especially in whom several of these Advantages are united,

may, barely by manifesting themselves to be such as they ought, each of them singly reform or preserve Multitudes of their Inferiors; and a Number of them combined oppose and put to Flight the reigning Vices of the whole Age in which they live.

Hence it is, that our Saviour hath laid so great a Stress on the Duty of *confessing him before Men^c*; and exhorted his Disciples thus, *Ye are the Light of the World; let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father, which is in Heaven^d.* Hence also St. Paul, alluding probably to the Expressions of his Master, though not present when they were used, saith of those who are *blameless and harmless, the Sons of God, without Rebuke*, that they *shine in the Midst of others as Lights in the World, holding forth the Word of Life^e.*

II. After exhibiting a Pattern of Goodness in ourselves, our next Care should be to promote in a proper Manner, on all fit Occasions, the Esteem of whatever is good in others. The Generality attend not enough to moral Excellencies, and too often consider them in a wrong Point of View: by which Means they overlook, or sometimes conceive Prejudices

^c Matth. x. 32.

^d Matth. v. 14, 16.

^e Phil. ii. 15, 16.

against,

against, what they would else honour, and be proud to imitate. Therefore, whenever favourable Opportunities present themselves, they should be instantly seized ; and the Rightness, the Loveliness, the beneficial Fruits of each Virtue shewn to such as are not yet sufficiently sensible of them : the Ridicule, which hath been unjustly thrown on some Duties, taken off ; and the Misrepresentations, which have rendered them contemptible, rectified : the Plea of excessive Severity, urged against others, confuted ; and the real Difficulty of practising them proved to be eligible, by the Shortness of its Continuance, and the blessed Effects of overcoming it. At the same Time we should exemplify these Truths, whenever we can, in the Characters of the worthy : on whom we should be always endeavouring to turn the Eyes of our Acquaintance ; to place them and their Actions in an advantageous Light ; to vindicate them from Aspersions ; to convince as many as possible, how much more valuable, and conducive both to private and public Welfare, a religious and honest Principle is, than the most shining and envied Accomplishments, when separated from it. Accordingly it should be our Study to cherish and recommend such as are eminent for this Merit ; to support

support and prefer their Interests; to make them known and acceptable one to another; and forward amongst them a general Union, that above all Things would gain them Respect and Success. But,

III. Whilst we are thus labouring to encourage Virtue and Religion, we must be extremely cautious that we obstruct not our own Work, by favouring any Sort of Wickedness: that we never patronize, for the Sake of our own Gratification, what may probably tempt unguarded Innocence into Sin, or furnish the ill-inclined with the Means of committing it: that we contribute not to raise any bad or even suspicious Person to a Condition of doing Harm: that we protect not the guilty with our Interest or Power, nor varnish over their Faults from Considerations of private Interest or Friendship: but fairly suffer Truth to prevail, and Crimes to be detected, as they ought. For whatever particular good Purposes may seem, and perhaps but seem, to be served at present by the contrary Policy, they will never counterbalance the general Mischiefs arising from it. Further, we must not pay Court to, or delight in, the vicious, for the Sake of some Wit and Pleasantry, some superficial Agree-

ableness, that sets off their Vices: we must never even seem to look on either Villainy or Debauchery, as Objects of Mirth only; extol the entertaining Qualities of him, that ruins others by them; or the Abilities of the Man, that uses them to his Neighbour's Wrong. Else we shall teach those around us to esteem and emulate them: indeed we shall accustom ourselves to regard such Characters as accomplished and respectable, not as detestable; and come, at Length, instead of pitying, to despise and ridicule those who suffer by them: thus wickedly augmenting the Triumph of the one, and the Affliction of the other. *David* mentions it amongst the distinguishing Marks of him, who *shall abide in the Tabernacle of the Lord, and dwell in his holy Hill*, that *in his Eyes a vile Person is contemned; but he honoureth them, that fear the Lord*^f. And *St. Paul* seems to make it in some Sense a less Crime for a Man to live immorally himself, than to rejoice in others that live so: *who, knowing the Judgement of God, faith he, that they, which commit such Things, are worthy of Death, not only do the same, but have Pleasure in them that do them*^g. We have from Nature strong

^f Psal. xv. 1, 4.^g Rom. i. 32.

Appetites and Passions in our corrupted Frame, which tempt us so vehemently, and hurry us often so suddenly into some Sins, that perhaps we may not be altogether void of Excuse. But there is no original Principle within us, that leads us coolly and deliberately to approve them in others. This therefore can only proceed from a peculiar and wilful Depravation of Heart, equivalent to what might be produced by many repeated Acts of Transgression.

And here it must be observed, that voluntary Intimacy with the wicked is one Degree of shewing Countenance to them, and ought to be avoided. Sometimes, indeed, Nearness of Relation, Connexions in Busines, the Necessities of Affairs; at others, common Civility and Decency of Behaviour, which, though a weaker Tie, it may be very unadvisable to break through, oblige us to keep up Acquaintances of this Sort. And indeed what St. Paul observes of the Heathens of his Days, that if a Man would not *company with* the grossly wicked amongst them, *he must needs go out of the World^h*, is become too true even of the professed Christians of ours. Besides, a reasonable Prospect of reforming the faulty may

^h 1 Cor. v. 9, 10.

justify one, especially of known and confirmed Virtue, in conversing much with them, and being, what our Saviour was very truly, though maliciously, called, *a Friend of Publicans and Sinners*¹. But to affect, or even permit, beyond what such Reasons require, either Friendships or Familiarities with habitual Transgressors of the Laws of God, is on many Accounts unallowable. On our own Account we should resolve against it, for the Sake of our good Name: which, in a World so censorious, it is difficult enough to preserve, by the discreetest Behaviour, unsullied; and therefore we must not hope to escape, if by ill-chosen Company we give real Ground for a bad Opinion of us in some Degree; and too fair a Pretence for carrying it farther than probably we deserve. And yet how soon we may come, by such Imprudences, to deserve a much worse Opinion than we apprehend, cannot be foreseen: considering, how prone both to Imitation and to Wickedness the human Heart is, and how much this Propensity must be increased, when we place Crimes before it in so alluring a Light, as that of their being practised without any Scruple by our daily agreeable Associates. But were we ever

¹ Matth. xi. 19.

so secure in all Respects, there is a Dignity belonging to Piety and Virtue, which ought to be supported; and is betrayed, when we mix unnecessarily with the profligate and abandoned: whom besides we thus make easy and harden in their unlawful Courses; nay, give them also the public Credit of being regarded by us, and well with us; which may enable them to do we know not what Harm. Besides, by such undistinguishing Treatment of Men, we disqualify ourselves from shewing that Preference to the worthy, which is their Due; and lead others, more or less, to slight the Difference of Characters, and, in probable Consequence, the Notions of Right and Wrong. *That be far from thee, to do after this Manner;* as *Abraham speaks on another Occasion: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee*^{*}.

To such Degree then, as every one can, he ought to avoid the very Appearance of these improper Attachments: or, if he hath failed in Point of Precaution, must immediately think of the Means of disengaging himself. Sometimes a steady Adherence to our Duty is enough to effect it: and such Persons grow weary of an Acquaintance, whose Conduct re-

* Gen. xviii. 25.

proves them, and whose Ears are deaf to their Solicitations. But if that proves otherwise; and either the Scandalousness of their Lives, or imminent Danger of being at length perverted by them, requires a more speedy and abrupt Step to be taken, we shall do well, on some flagrant Occasion, to renounce all Commerce with them at once: which, at the same Time that it sets us free, may possibly make on them, by the Strength of the Shock, a salutary Impression. Where the Familiarity either cannot or ought not to be broken off, the Degree of it, however, may be so moderated, or such Exceptions to it contrived in particular Instances, that, paying strictly all due Regard to them, we may be known to disapprove what they do amiss: stand at a visible Distance from the Faults of those to whom we are nearest: and be, like our blessed Lord, *holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from Sinners*¹, though we preserve, when called to it, a Course of easy Demeanour in the Midst of them. In Proportion as our Situation will permit us to vary our Deportment from Time to Time, we may with-hold from them, when any Enormities of theirs demand it, the usual Frankness and Chearfulness

¹ Heb. vii. 26.

of our Conversation ; and restore it on the Prospect of their Amendment : we may also, and should, be watchful to express our Delight in every right Action they perform ; to signify inoffensively the Affliction we suffer when they misbehave ; and thus move their Good-nature, if any be left in them, to give us Pleasure, not Pain, while we so evidently wish them well. But still sometimes neither these nor the preceding Methods can be tried, at others they are sure or likely to prove ineffectual : and therefore

IV. We must have Recourse to that, which the Apostle specifies in the last Words of the Text, *reproving them*. Various Persons, indeed, on various Accounts, we cannot *reprove for their Works of Darkness* : either having no Access to them, or no Title to use that Freedom. Or at most, we can only convey oblique Reproof under some agreeable, or however inoffensive, Disguise ; or make a small Advance upon the Borders of plain Speech, observing well on which Side they are most accessible ; and watching for the Seasons, when good Dispositions either prevail or may be excited. Nor should we neglect any one of these honest Artifices ; for the skilful Application

of them may possibly enable us to gain Ground, by unperceived Degrees, on their inordinate Passions and bad Habits ; and thus carry them such Lengths towards Reformation, as we should in vain have attempted, had they at first perceived the Whole of our Design.

But, in many Cases, more direct and home Remonstrances to the faulty are necessary : which, therefore, such, as with Propriety can, are bound to make ; and, whatever Reluctance they may find to so painful a Work, must, as the Scripture directs, *in any wise rebuke their Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him* : for omitting it is in the same Place interpreted to be *hating him in their Heart*^m. Timely Admonition may stop him short just at the Entrance upon a wrong Course, and snatch him out of imminent Hazard unhurt. Even those, who are farther gone, may yet be recalled, by a lively Representation of their Guilt and Danger, of which, perhaps, they had a very inadequate, if any, Apprehension. But then we must be very careful, unless we would intirely lose all Influence, both at present and for the future, that we never bring a Charge without having incontestable Proof of its Truth ; that

^m Lev. xix. 17.

a genuine friendly Concern be evidently the Principle of all we say ; that we express more Sorrow than Anger, where Circumstances will allow it ; as they peculiarly do, where the Person blamed hurts himself more than any one else : that we use tender Expostulations by Choice ; and harsh Expressions, but above all, terrifying and threatening ones, only when Nothing else will prevent Ruin. For this is, doubtless, the Meaning of the Apostle's Rule : *of some have Compassion, making a Difference ; others save with Fear, pulling them out of the Fireⁿ.* And even where the strongest Marks of Disapprobation and Displeasure are needful, they should ever be shewn without Insult or Haughtiness, without the least Appearance of loving to reprimand, without exaggerating any Thing, or treating the Frailties of human Nature too severely : indeed with such Attention to acknowledge and point out whatever in the general Character of the Person concerned is valuable, or in the particular Circumstances of the Case excusable, as may reconcile him, if possible, to the Liberties taken with him, by the Conviction that they are taken unwillingly.

ⁿ Jude 22, 23.

Many other Precautions, for the better Success of this good Work, every one's Prudence will suggest to him, in the several Instances that come before him, according to the Nature of the Offence, the Temper of the Offender, and especially the Degree of Authority which the Reprover hath over him. Sometimes all Authority is best laid aside, and softened into mere Persuasion : sometimes a moderate Share of its Weight is wanted, to bear down a less complying Disposition : at others, its whole Force is little enough to fetter a stubborn Spirit. Here then we must each of us think and act for ourselves : but with this Consideration ever present to our Minds, that not only a total Neglect of this Duty, but a Neglect of discharging it in the most effectual Manner that is incumbent on us, will be imputed to us for Guilt ; as it was in the Case of *Eli* ; who having contented himself with gently blaming his Sons, for what he ought absolutely to have forbidden them, and deterred them from, *I will judge his House for ever*, said God, *for the Iniquity which he knoweth, because his Sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*.

When, therefore, mild Representations have small Effect, rougher Treatment must be used. And if the Offender grows hardened to private Remonstrances, it becomes needful to apply the severer Discipline of more open Censure. Possibly he may yet retain Sensibility enough to be moved by that: for which Reason our Saviour appoints, that we observe a Gradation: first, *tell our Brother his Faults between us and him alone*; then *take with us one or two more*; and, lastly, *tell it unto the Church^p*; let the whole Number of good Persons, with whom we are both of us connected, try their Interest with him. And if even that fail, and no Hope at all remain of him; yet By-standers at least will thus both be put on their Guard against suffering by him, and warned against imitating him. Therefore St. Paul directs: *them that sin*, doubtless meaning obstinately, *rebuke before all, that others also may fear*^q. Indeed were every one to be exposed for each Misbehaviour of which he is guilty, or even all such as he doth not immediately reform; this Procedure would be unchristian and inhuman: many good Persons would pass in common Esteem for very bad; and many blamable ones, but of whose Recovery there is Room for great Hope,

^p Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17. ^q 1 Tim. v. 20.

would be driven to Despair of regaining any Character, and lay aside the Thought of growing better. But there is no Need of being so tender about the Reputations of those, who are totally abandoned to Sin. On the contrary, it is of Importance to the World, that they should be known for what they are : and not enabled to pass themselves upon Mankind for worthy Characters, by receiving the same Regards with such in common Speech and Behaviour. *He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous, him shall the People curse, Nations shall abhor him. But, to them that rebuke him, shall be Delight, and a good Blessing shall come upon them*¹. There is frequently no other Weapon left against such Persons, but public Infamy. The Punishments of human Laws in Multitudes of Cases cannot reach them. Those of a future Life some have brought themselves to doubt : many to overlook. But to the Dislike and Abhorrence of Mankind few or none can be insensible : and every one that deserves it should be made to feel that he doth. Wickedness is the great Disturber of the World : the Bane of all Peace and Comfort, civil and domestic. Therefore

¹ Prov. xxiv. 24, 25.

every one hath a natural Right to stand up and declare against it: a Claim, that the Disgrace which belongs to it, be inflicted on it. And in this Cause good Men should act with Spirit; assume the Authority, in which their Character will support them; and not suffer Guilt, which is by Nature timorous and cowardly, to lift up its Head: they should unite in the common Concern of opposing its Progress; and, as the Prophet expresses it, *be valiant for the Truth upon the Earth*. A Zeal, shewn uniformly by the virtuous against Vice and that alone; kept free from all Mixture of personal Resentment or private Interest; appearing, by the Steps which it takes, not to proceed from Moroseness of Temper, but from Principle, and conducted by a moderate Share of Prudence, will easily rescue itself from wrong Interpretations, secure to itself Reverence from the World in general; and produce much Good, without proportionable Hazard or Difficulty.

It must, however, be confessed, that neither is every one qualified equally for such a Work; some, by Nature, being little capable of exerting themselves, or moving others, and some again of so warm Passions, that they must not

³ Jer. ix. 3.

allow them Scope, even in the best Cause : nor will the Situation and Connexions of every one always by any Means permit him to appear against ill Actions and ill People in the Manner that he could wish. Yet no one is left without the Means of doing somewhat towards it : and all that we are able to do, without neglecting other Obligations, is our Duty. Whoever can look with just the same Eye on Good and Bad, provided his own present Advantage be out of the Question, hath no Love of Religion, or Virtue in him. And whoever takes no Notice of the Difference will be shrewdly suspected of not seeing or not regarding it. The coolest Spectator of other wrong Things that are done thinks immediately, when any happen to effect himself, that all ought to interest themselves on his Behalf, indeed can hardly do it too much. And therefore, when Things are done, which affect the Happiness of others, the Welfare of Society, the Honour of our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier, we ought to interest ourselves for these. Perhaps we may object, that our Concern would be fruitless. And so, perhaps, was that of *David*, when he said, *Rivers of Waters run down mine Eyes, because Men keep not thy Law. My Zeal hath even consumed*

consumed me, because they forget thy Words^t. But certainly so was that of just Lot, who, dwelling among the Inhabitants of Sodom, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous Soul from Day to Day with their unlawful Deeds^u. Yet they are proposed as Objects, not of Blame, but Praise. And indeed uneasy Sentiments on such Occasions, however ineffectual otherwise, may improve us considerably, by reminding us, *that we are of God, and the World lieth in Wickedness^v*; provided we carefully restrain them, which itself will be a profitable inward Exercise, from running into Excess. Besides, whoever preserves this due Medium between Indifference and Vehemence, as he will be always prudently seeking Methods of reclaiming, or at least of checking the guilty, and consequently securing the innocent; so he will find more than anyone else can suggest to him: and though hated by the bad, or despised by the thoughtless, for this troublesome Activity, will be esteemed by many Fellow-labourers, many Converts whom he hath helped to make, many ready to fall, whom he hath seasonably stayed and strengthened. Or let him have ever so much Cause to say in

^t Psal. cxix. 136, 139.^u 2 Pet. ii. 8.^v 1 John v. 19.

378 S E R M O N XVI.

other Respects, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my Strength for nought: yet surely his Judgement is with the Lord, and his Work with his God^x.

^x Isaiah xl ix. 4.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVII.

L A M. iii. 40.

*Let us search and try our Ways, and turn again
to the Lord.*

THE gracious and wise Creator of all Things, as he hath made known to every Creature, by a secret Instinct, the Way of Life which belongs to its Frame and Condition: so to Man *he hath shewn*, both by his Affections and his Understanding, *what is good, and what he requires of him.* Yet having placed him in a State of Trial, in which these inward Principles might be perverted and mislead him, he hath graciously super-added external Manifestations of his Will for our surer and completer Guidance: thus making our Rule of Duty evident and obligatory in the highest Degree. No Course of Action is more plainly suited to the Nature of any Agent, than Religion and Virtue is to ours. For what can be more evidently natural, than for a reasonable Being to make Reason his govern-

governing Principle; for a social Being *to do justly, and love Mercy*; and for a created one *to walk humbly with his God*^a? Agreeably therefore to this peculiar Destination, which allots to us Employments worthy to fill up an eternal Existence, whereas inferior Animals arrive very soon, without contributing almost any Thing to it themselves, at the small Perfection of which they are capable, and there stop: Man is qualified, and, as Revelation fully assures us, designed, for endless Improvement in Goodness and Happiness, but such as shall depend on his own Care and Industry, excited and assisted by the Grace of God.

For this Purpose, together with an inward Perception of what is right and fit for us to do, and what is otherwise, we have also a Faculty of Self-Reflexion, which, presenting us to our own View, shews us, what we have been and are. The Exercise of this Faculty is expressed in the Text by *searching and trying our Ways*; and elsewhere by *examining and proving ourselves^b, and knowing the Thoughts of our Hearts^c*; which Phrases have their peculiar Import and Use. For as the Temper and State of our Hearts is the great Thing that we have to be

^a Mic. vi. 8. ^b 1 Cor. xi, 28. ^c Cor. xiii. 5. ^c Dan. ii. 30.
concerned

concerned about in Religion: so the Consideration of our Ways, or the Actions in which our Temper is exerted and shewn, must discover to us the Motives that influence it: just as, in the material Objects that surround us, we learn, from particular Facts and Appearances, the general Laws by which the Frame of Things is governed.

This Faculty of moral Reflexion, and the Self-Approbation or Dislike arising from it, which we commonly call by the Name of *Conscience*, is the Character that distinguishes Man from the Beings below him: it is the Principle that God hath endued with an evident Right to direct our Lives: and, according as we employ or disregard it, we shall advance or go back in real Religion.

The Seeds of every Virtue were planted in the Soul of Man originally, each in its due Order and Proportion, without any Mixture of Evil. Yet even then, for Want of due Cultivation by our first Parents, they were fatally blasted, instead of growing up to the Perfection for which they were designed. But now, when our inward Frame is so unhappily disordered and weakened by their Fall, Watchfulness over it is become unspeakab'y more necessary than it was

at

at first. And since, with a Nature thus prone to err, we are a considerable Time from our Birth before we reflect on our Actions at all ; and, after that, do it very imperfectly ; it cannot fail, but our own bad Inclinations, and the Customs of a bad World, must have led us all aside, more or less, from the right Path, before we knew distinctly which it was. Nor have we, many of us, it may be feared, made so early or so effectual an Use, as we might, of the Faculty of Self-Government, in that Season of warm and hasty Passions which quickly follows the first considerable Use of Reason. And, if not, we may be still surer of finding many Things within us that want Correction.

A great Part of those around us, we see, are quite wicked. And in the few that are seriously good, the most superficial Observer and most charitable Interpreter will discern a great Number of Faults and Imperfections unreformed. Since therefore Failures in Point of Duty are, from the Nature of the Thing, to be apprehended, and have in Fact happened to all the rest of the World : if we were not usually, by a most preposterous Kind of Negligence, less attentive to ourselves than to others, we should be likely to perceive the most Disorders in that

Breast,

Breast, with which we have the most Opportunities of being intimately acquainted. But, at least, there is Ground enough for us to examine, what our State really is : to *search and try our Ways*; that, if we have erred in any Thing, we may *turn again to the Lord*.

And though it is very apparent, that such a Resolution may have many good Consequences, and can have no bad ones, if executed in the Manner, which every Man's Reason, and the Word of God, will suggest to him : yet, for your further Encouragement and Direction, I shall lay before you particularly,

I. The Advantages that may arise from this Inquiry.

II. The chief Things requisite for performing it aright.

I. The Advantages that may arise from it.

A considerable Part of the wrong Conduct of Mankind proceeds, not so much from any strong Inclination to do amiss, as from being so unhappily thoughtless, that the slightest Motive is enough to determine their Choice any Way. We engage at first in this or that Sort of Behaviour, we scarce know why or how : then go on of Course in the Way we have set out in, without ever thinking whither it leads us; and

by Use grow fond of it, and zealous for it ; yet are too indolent all the while once to ask ourselves, perhaps, whether we are aiming at any Thing ; or, however, whether it be at what we ought ; or something of little Importance, if not hurtful or criminal. Now this Care, without Reflexion, is quite irrecoverable ; and a little Reflexion in Time would easily set all right. Nay, even where vehement Passions hurry Persons into Follies and Sins, it was for Want of this wholesome Discipline at first, that their Passions gained the Mastery ; and applying it steadily for some Time will be a sure Means, through God's Blessing, of reducing them again to Subjection. For there is no Possibility, either of viewing a bad Action, in a full Light, without Abhorrence, or of weighing its Consequences without Terror. Wickedness, therefore, always banishes Thought, and Piety and Virtue encourage it. A good Man, far from being driven to hide his inward Condition from himself, though he find many Things that want still to be amended, yet finds at the same Time so many, which, through the Aid of God's Holy Spirit, are already grown, and daily growing better, that he feels no Joy equal to that of his Heart telling him, what he is. But the

guilty

guilty Mind is driven by Fear and Shame to stifle the Voice of Nature and Conscience, that struggles in the Breast for Utterance. *Every one that doeth Evil, hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his Deeds should be reproved: but he that doeth Truth, cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God^a.* And therefore the Psalmist speaks of Self-amendment, as the immediate Fruit of Self-inspection. *I thought on my Ways, and turned my Feet unto thy Testimonies: I made Haste, and delayed not to keep thy Commandments^c.*

Nor doth it only excite in us good Resolutions, but furnishes Directions how to put them in Practice. Reflexion will shew us, and Nothing else can, by what Defect within, or what Opportunity without, each of our Faults got Ground in our Breasts: and which is the Way to root it out again. For Want of this Knowledge, Multitudes try in vain to correct the Disorders of their Hearts and Lives; and only here and there one recovers, as it were by Force of Constitution; whilst Numbers perish, who might have been preserved by a competent Acquaintance with the Method of Cure. For

^a John iii. 20, 21.

^c Psal. cxix. 59, 60.

every single Case requires to be in some Degree differently treated ; and must therefore, in Order to it, be particularly studied. Strong Resolutions indeed may sometimes do a great deal : but very often Strength, unassisted by Skill, wastes itself to no Purpose : and the bad Success of vehement Efforts ill-directed, leaves little Ability, and less Heart, for further Endeavours.

Another Use of searching frequently into our past Ways is to preserve ourselves from the secret Approach of future Dangers. The first Deviation from their Duty is in most Persons but small ; and its Progress, for some Time, gentle and unnoticed by themselves ; till they have insensibly gone such a Length, that they are tempted to despair of being able to return. And therefore attending to little Errors is the safest Method to prevent great ones. But even where we have yet been guilty of none, Observation will shew us many Tendencies that we have to Sin ; many weak and exposed Places in our Minds, unlikely to withstand the Assaults, that must be expected in such a World as this. And hence we shall be forewarned to avoid the Temptations that will endanger us ; to prepare ourselves for such, as we cannot avoid ; and

and strengthen our inward Frame with such Care, that it may be Proof against the various Accidents of Life.

'Till this is done in some good Degree, Reflexion, though always of the highest Use, will often be very unpleasing, by setting before our Eyes the disagreeable View of our Faults. But when we have tolerably well reformed and fortified our Minds, then the Exercise of it will grow delightful, every Day beyond other. And when once we can say to ourselves, on sure Grounds, that *we have fought the good Fight^f*, and gotten the Victory, and have only the scattered Remains of the Enemy left to pursue and destroy; how inexpressible will the Satisfaction be, to enjoy the Approbation of our own Hearts, and the Consciousness of God's Favour; to look back and see the Dangers, from which we are escaped; to feel within, that a Temper of Piety and Virtue is indeed the Happiness of Man; and experience the continual Increase of that Temper, continually diminishing our Burthens and Sorrows, and opening to us new Scenes of Enjoyment, to which we were Strangers before!

^f 2 Tim. iv. 7.

All these are general Advantages flowing from the Practice of Self-inspection. But in many Cases it hath a yet more especial good Influence. A distinct Knowledge of ourselves will greatly secure us from the ill Effects of Flattery, which would persuade us that we are what we feel we are not; and enable us to bear unjust Reproach, thinking it *a very small Thing that we should be judged of Man's Judgement,* when we can reflect with Comfort, that *he who judgeth us is the Lord^c.* Experience of our Infirmities will teach us Humility, and move us to Compassion and Forgiveness, according to the Apostle's Direction: *Brethren, if a Man be overtaken in a Fault, restore such an one in the Spirit of Meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted^b.* Experience where our Strength, as well as our Weakness lies, will shew us, how we are best able to serve God and our Fellow-creatures; what we may attempt, what will be too much for us. And strict Observation of our own Hearts will qualify us, beyond all Things, to give useful Cautions to others, and direct their Steps in the right Way.

^a 1 Cor. iv. 3.

^b Gal. vi. 1.

But,

But, in Order to receive these or any Benefits from Self-inquiry, there are

II. Some Rules to be observed for conducting it properly.

Of these the fundamental one is, that we consider it as a religious Duty; perform it as in the Presence of God; and earnestly beg him, to shew us in a true Light to ourselves. *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret Faultsⁱ. Try me, O God, and seek the Ground of my Heart: prove me, and examine my Thoughts. Look well, if there be any Way of Wickedness in me: and lead me in the Way everlasting^k.* A serious Regard to the most awful, and yet most gracious of Beings, will be a constant Preservative against all the Errors, however opposite, to which we are liable in this Matter.

Some are so very sensible before-hand of their own Condition in general, that they are afraid of examining into it particularly: or, if they do begin the Enquiry, they have not Courage to carry it on. For the more we reflect on our Faults, the more we must feel that Shame and Remorse, which God hath placed in our Minds, as he hath done the Sense of

ⁱ Psal. xix. 12.

^k Ib. cxxxix. 23, 24.

Pain in our Bodies, to restrain us from proceeding in what would destroy us. Now most Persons are willing to recover their bodily Health, how much soever they suffer in the Cure: but to regain a right State of Soul, on which all depends, they will bear Nothing. So, because their Condition is bad, they let it go on to be daily worse; rather than have the Uneasiness of thinking of it, to make it better. Yet neglecting to look into our worldly Affairs because we think them desperate, every one owns to be wrong: and must it not then be infinitely more so in our eternal Concerns, which can never be desperate; but from our refusing to look into them? As soon, therefore, as any one finds an Aversion to Self-inquiry beginning, he should instantly break through it, set about the Work, and never stop till he hath finished it. For then is the Season of Trial, that in all Likelihood may determine his State for ever after. The Aversion will increase, if we yield to it; and the Habit of Sin grow stronger: the next Effort will be still more uneasy, and consequently fainter, than the present; and all will end in a total Despair of becoming what we ought. Yet, at the same Time, we must reflect now and then, whether we

will

will or not: and may, even by transient Thoughts, undergo more Pain to no Purpose, than would have wrought a Cure. But should any Thing happen, as many may, to awaken us into a full and lasting View of our Condition, when perhaps we may be so far enslaved to Sin, as to practice it on, with our Eyes open to all its Horrors; this would be a dreadful Scene indeed. Or could we be so fatally successful, as to banish Thought intirely; it would only be losing the Sense of Part of our Misery, and with it, all Hope of Happiness.

Let us therefore neither be too tender, nor too proud, to bear inspecting our Hearts and Lives: and, that we may bear it well, let us learn to moderate, if we have Need, the Uneasiness which it may give us. For every Passion that we have may be raised so high, as to defeat its own End. And though we can dislike Nothing so justly, as our Faults; and very few dislike them near enough; yet if we dislike ourselves for them too much to have Patience to think of them, and mend them; that runs into a new Fault: and we should check ourselves for it, mildly indeed, but very carefully; considering well both our natural Frailty, and our Maker's Goodness: but especially the Promises

of Forgiveness and Grace, which he hath recorded for our Use in his holy Word: not in Order to reconcile us at all to Sin, but in a reasonable Degree to ourselves. And how mortifying soever a needful Examination may still prove, it is surely worth while to support the most painful Reflexions for the present, when it will secure us a Succession of pleasing and happy ones ever after; and verify that encouraging Account, which the Son of *Sirach* hath given of this whole Matter: *Wisdom exalteth her Children, and layeth hold of them that seek her. He that holdeth her fast shall inherit Glory: and wheresoever she enters, the Lord will bless.*—*At first she will walk with him by crooked Ways, and bring Fear and Dread upon him, and torment him with her Discipline; until she may trust his Soul, and try him by her Laws. Then will she return the strait Way unto him, and comfort him, and shew him her Secrets. But if he go wrong, she will forsake him, and give him over to his own Ruin.* Observe the Opportunity, and beware of Evil¹.

But most Persons are in the contrary Extreme to this over-great Sensibility; and by no Means apprehend sufficiently, what Spirit they

¹ Ecclus iv. 11—20.

*are of*ⁿ, or what Lives they have led. The Course of Behaviour to which we are inclined, especially if we have fallen into it early, and find others do not scruple it, we are very unwilling to suspect of any Thing wrong; very apt to stifle our Suspicions, if they rise; and to take it much amiss, if others intimate their Judgment of, what surely we ought to understand best, our own Conduct. Therefore, before we can at all depend on the good Opinion we may entertain of ourselves, we should ask our Hearts, and make them answer honestly: Have we searched our Ways at all? Have we searched the Whole of them? And have we done it with Impartiality and Diligence? Or winked a little, where we did not care to look; forgot a few Things, that we had no Pleasure in remembering; and coloured over what we found, without it, would appear disagreeable? A fond Affection, even to others, can make us wonderfully blind to their Defects: and much more may it in our own Case. So that, unless we have examined with great Accuracy, though *we know Nothing by ourselves, yet are we not thereby justified*ⁿ: and what we may call the Testimony of our Conscience, may be given so

ⁿ Luke ix. 55.ⁿ 1 Cor. iv. 4.

unfairly.

unfairly as to be of no Weight. *For if a Man think himself to be Something, when he is Nothing, he deceiveth himself.* But let every Man PROVE his own Work, and then shall he have Rejoicing in himself^o. Let us, therefore, carry always in our Minds the instructive Remark of Solomon, that *every Way of a Man is right in his own Eyes, but the Lord pondereth the Hearts^p.* And let us be careful so to ponder and judge our own Hearts now, that we may be able, through the Mercy procured for us by our blessed Redeemer, to stand his final Judgment hereafter.

Nor must we examine only into the weak and suspicious Parts of our Characters and Conduct; but those which procure us the most Applause from others and ourselves: for Want of which, even Vices, a little disguised, may pass upon us for great Virtues; and we may be doing, with intire Satisfaction, what we should abhor, if we understood it right. This is the Way to grow in Love with our Faults, instead of correcting them; and therefore we should often call to Mind that surprizing, but too common, Character of the Church of *Laodicea*; *Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with Goods, and have Need of Nothing: and knowest*

^o Gal. vi. 3, 4.

^p Prov. xxi. 2.

not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked^a.

Nor are these general Grounds of Caution the only ones ; but every Person will find, on Inquiry, particular Reasons for being watchful and distrustful of himself, in some Point or other; arising, perhaps, from unhappy Experience of Failures, at least from Conviction of the Dangers incident to his natural Disposition, Age, Employment, Company ; and, which is a Matter of no small Consideration, Rank in the World. For they above all, should be careful in searching their own Breasts, whose higher Condition subjects them most to Flattery, and removes them farthest from hearing Censure.

But though it is very uncommon for Persons to carry their Suspicions of themselves far enough, yet we may carry them too far ; especially if we examine ourselves, as it may be most People do, only or chiefly when we are under some strong Degree of Sorrow or Fear. For then we shall be apt not only to suffer groundless Uneasiness, by thinking much too ill of our present State, which is by no Means a Duty : but to despair, and lay aside the En-

^a Rev. iii. 17.

deavour of becoming better, which would be a destructive Error. The proper Time for Self-inspection, therefore, is, when we are in the calmest and evenest State of Mind, neither careless and presumptuous, nor terrified and desponding. And we should often repeat the Work, place ourselves and our Actions in different Points of View, and compare the Result of our several Observations, that one may rectify or confirm another. Nor will it be at all sufficient to see what we have been and are, without consulting the Word of God, as well as our Consciences, which may else misguide us, to learn what we ought to be. And though it would be an unhappy Weakness to affright or entangle ourselves, by imagining the Rule of our Duty stricter than it is; yet it may be a fatal Mistake to flatter ourselves, by imagining it less strict: and the plain Way is, first to judge of it reasonably and uprightly, then to try our Condition by it impartially and frequently. The more constant we are in doing this, the easier, the more beneficial, the more satisfactory, it will be: whereas long Intervals will only give Time for ill Habits to strengthen and multiply, till we shall have no Heart to attempt a Reformation of them.

And

And though the closest Attendance on this Duty may, at present, be far from producing all the good Fruit we could wish, it should never discourage us from proceeding in what we know to be necessary. Beginnings in almost every Thing are laborious and imperfect: and we make a slow Progress at first, even in what afterwards we come to excel in. The smallest Step we can take towards Self-amendment is advancing somewhat towards Happiness: and if our Zeal continue, our Difficulties will assuredly lessen, and our Proficiency grow quicker. For though *of ourselves we can do Nothing*^r; yet God giveth Power to the Faint; and to them that have no Might, he increaseth Strength. *They that wait on the Lord shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint*^s.

And as the worst of Men ought not to give up themselves as incapable of becoming good, nor those in the lowest Rank of Goodness to despair of becoming eminent in Time; so neither should those who are in the highest indulge too great a Complacency in their own Improvements; much less a Contempt of others, or an Imagination, which the great Apostle disclaims, *as though they had already*

^r John xv. 5. ^s Cor. iii. 5.

^s Is. xl. 29, 31.

attained,

attained, either were already perfect. But the common Duty of all, to express it in his following Words, is, *forgetting those Things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those Things which are before, to press towards the Mark, for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus*^t. Which that we may all obtain, he of his infinite Mercy grant, &c.

^t Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14.

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