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S E R M O N S

ON

V A R I O U S S U B J E C T S,

PREACHED AT THE

CHURCH IN BARTON SQUARE, SALEM, MASS.

BY HENRY COLMAN.

(Unitarian.)

BOSTON.

LILLY, WAIT AND COMPANY.

1833.

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FREEMAN AND SOLLES

*To the Independent Congregational Society in Salem
Mass.*

THESE Sermons, composed for their benefit and received by their candor and kindness, are inscribed with the grateful respect and unabated affection of their former Pastor,

THE AUTHOR.

April, 1833.

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SERMON I.

NATURE AND REVELATION.

ROMANS i. 20, 21.

FOR THE INVISIBLE THINGS OF HIM FROM THE CREATION OF THE WORLD ARE CLEARLY SEEN, BEING UNDERSTOOD BY THE THINGS THAT ARE MADE, EVEN HIS ETERNAL POWER AND GODHEAD; SO THAT THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE, BECAUSE THAT WHEN THEY KNEW GOD, THEY GLORIFIED HIM NOT AS GOD, NEITHER WERE THANKFUL, BUT BECAME VAIN IN THEIR IMAGINATION AND THEIR FOOLISH HEART WAS DARKENED.

THERE are great difficulties connected with the sublime truth that there is a God; but we become involved in much greater, when we attempt to believe that there is no God. In my humble apprehension, the difficulties lie not so much in the simple fact, that a God exists, as in conceiving how he exists; and arise out of the imperfection of the human faculties. To deny his existence, however, because of our imperfect conceptions of the divine nature, is as unreasonable, as to deny our own existence because we cannot explain how life is communicated, sustained, or extinguished; a solution of which, obvious as the facts are to our

observation and consciousness, no skill nor learning nor philosophy has been able even to conjecture.

No sound and reflecting mind can for a moment doubt the existence of a God. Nature every where proclaims him. The creation determines the being of the Creator; and the countless new existences, which are every where and constantly springing into life, demonstrate his active agency and power. The invisible things of Him are understood by the things that are made. But the want which most oppresses the human mind is to know more of the divine nature and character; to learn something on which it may securely repose its trust and hopes. Man lives, but life is not the fruit of his own will or power. It is a gift imparted by some one else. That must be God in whom all things had their origin. Man's life is sustained from day to day, but not by his own pleasure. All that he can do is to exercise some humble instrumentality in supplying the outward means of sustenance. His life ceases at the will of another. Who is this invisible Being on whom he is thus absolutely dependent for every effort of the body and every exercise of the mind; for what he is; for all he has; for life, for death? Who is this great Being with whom he stands connected in this intimate relation of life and dependence? In a word, who is God, from whom all things proceeded, by whom all are sustained, to whom all are subject? The want of this knowledge is that, which rests more heavily than any other upon the human heart; the desire of this knowledge is that, which, more than any other, burns in the thoughtful mind.

As Christians we have two resources; nature and revelation. Here we may learn something. Here we learn all that we can at present know. My intention

is to say something of what they teach ; to speak of the relation, which the one bears to the other ; and in some respects to compare them together.

I. That we may go to nature to learn something of God is so clearly the dictate of reason as scarcely to require an illustration. The most obvious of all relations with which we are acquainted is that of cause and effect. Where an effect presents itself, as matter of course we inquire for the cause ; and whether or not successful in our inquiries we feel no doubt of the existence of such cause. The universe, the sensible world, is an effect ; it has obviously been formed. Design, contrivance, adaptations as numerous as the diversified objects in nature, are every where apparent ; and demonstrate the existence and agency of a power without and wholly independent of themselves. We are to judge of a cause by the effect, of the artist by his works, of the Creator by the creature. The scriptures, every where reasonable and natural, conform to these dictates of common sense ; and call upon men to learn the attributes of God in the ever-beaming lessons of the visible creation.

A divine teacher expressly commands us to study God in his works. Consider, says he, the flowers of the field ; reflect how they grow. Who clothed them with such matchless beauty and splendor ? Who caused the minute seed of the plant to germinate ; to rise out of the ground at its appointed season ; and to advance and expand in all the glories of its maturity ? Who gave its appointed form and separated all those beautiful productions into distinct classes and kinds ? Who contrived all its minute vessels and imparted motion at the proper season to those subtle and mys-

terious circulations, by which its existence is sustained, and its growth promoted; by which it gathers its proper food from the earth and air, and performs also its part in purifying the atmosphere for the respiration of other beings which have life. How were formed its roots, its leaves, its petals; and how is it so contrived that what it imbibes from the earth and air should be received in exactly the amount required, and sent out in exactly the form required; and so separated, diffused, and directed, that every particle should know its place and office; and that one should go to the formation of the roots, another of the stems, another of the leaves; and that the coloring should be thrown in, in exactly that measure and place and combination, which should produce in the most minute as well as the largest productions of nature the greatest variety and the highest forms of beauty. Read, then, says a divine teacher, in the flowers of the field, the perfections of the Creator; in their growth and expansion, in their beautiful coloring, in their variegated tints, in their delicious fragrance, in their soft and folded leaves, in their multiplied purposes of utility, and in the wonderful provision for the continuance of their kind.

Mark, likewise, the birds of the air. What numbers and what an infinite variety of animated existences crowd every part of nature. How complicated and beautiful is their formation! Pluck a single feather from the smallest bird that flies; look at its form, its design, its fitness for that design, at the curious and exquisite finish given to every part of it; and it presents a combination of wonders to the mode of whose structure no human skill or conception can approach. Look at the little animated and ethereal being to whom it belongs, whose variegated dress infinitely surpasses the magnificence

of courts and kings; remark the beautiful structure given to him, that he may float in his native element: at the gossamer wings, which sustain and direct his flight; at the curiously formed instrument, which enables him to gather from the deep recesses of the honied flower the exact nourishment which he needs for his support, which is there provided for him, where he knows he is to seek it, and which he draws in with so gentle a touch as not to wound the delicate bosom of his benefactor; look at the bright and sparkling eye, which though so minute takes in so wide a prospect; at the beautiful plumage, which reflects such a dazzling brilliancy and coloring; and at the animation and ecstasy, with which, after his temperate repast is finished, he darts aloft into the air and pours out his notes of grateful joy. The birds of the air then utter loud and affecting lessons of religion to man. In their gay and buoyant flights, in their gratuitous support, in their brilliant clothing, in the happiness which beams forth in all their movements, behold and adore the wonderful power which formed, and the beneficence which provides for those who otherwise could exercise no care and have no power to provide for themselves.

So likewise is every other object and part of creation instructive. Day unto day uttereth speech concerning God. The earth with all its varied inhabitants and its innumerable and multiform productions, the broad heavens, stretching their beautiful arch over our heads, with all the sparkling worlds that float in the clear expanse, the ever changing skies, the grateful alternation of day and night, the curious operations, which are ever going on with invariable uniformity, the changes of the moon, the flowing of the tides, the revolutions of the seasons, all are instructive. These

and ten thousand other teachings are the teachings to which our Saviour required of his disciples that they should feelingly and habitually attend ; and the man who sees none of these lessons, and who can go out into any part of the diversified and glowing creation in which God has placed him, and not acknowledge the existence and be awed by the conscious presence of a Deity, can lay small claims to the proper attributes of a reasonable and moral being.

Nature teaches then most fully and plainly the existence of God. Any man, who will examine a single part or object of animated or organised existence, and then can doubt or deny the being of an intelligent Creator, it would seem, must be incapable of apprehending the most simple truth. Where contrivance exists, the adaptation of means to an end, and that end accomplished by those means, what farther proof can we require of intelligence and design ; and how can we look at the fabric of the universe or at the new creations which are hourly starting into life in the presence of our senses, and deny the existence of a Creator.

Nature teaches not less fully and emphatically the providence of God. How this providence is exerted, is a problem beyond the power of human sagacity to solve. But every operation in nature, and the abundant and gratuitous supply every where made to satisfy the wants of all living creatures, bespeak an intelligent, universal, and never ceasing care.

Nature proclaims every where the infinite perfection of the Deity. Survey what part of nature we will, from a grain of sand to a world, from a glittering diamond to a star, from the humblest instinct to the brightest intellect, we are compelled to the conclusion that the Creator must be perfect in all his attributes. In con-

templating the works of creation, the human mind finds it impossible to conceive of any effect to which the divine power is not adequate. All power and all intelligence and all wisdom must centre, in an infinite measure, in the inexhaustible source of all wisdom, all intelligence and all power to other beings.

Nature may be said, with scarcely less force, to teach the individuality and unity of the Deity. Separate from the absolute impossibility of conceiving of the contemporaneous existence of two or more infinite Beings, there is a singleness and unity of design extending through the whole of the creation, which prove it to be framed by the counsel and power of one mind.

Such are some of the plain and loud teachings of nature; given to all men; and read by all men, who have intelligence to perceive and hearts to feel their power. We may go therefore to nature, we must go to nature to learn much of God; and let us be grateful that from nature we can gather so much to illustrate the divine attributes and providence; to assure us of the dignity of our nature; and to encourage and elevate our piety.

II. But we are not left to nature alone. Beyond all this man feels the want of instruction, which nature cannot supply. Do what we can to learn the character of the Creator from his works, there remains a vastness, an indefiniteness, an incomprehensibleness, which overwhelm the most powerful mind. In the infinite goodness of that Being, who perceived what must be the most oppressive want of the human heart, revelation has been superadded. The instructions of nature are upon a vast scale. Those of revelation are of a familiar character. Nature teaches us that the universe was

formed and is governed by a Being of infinite perfection. Revelation assures us that great and incomprehensible as this Being is, he is nevertheless the immediate protector, benefactor, friend and father of all and each one of his creatures; always observant of their necessities; accessible to their prayers; and provident of their welfare. Thus revelation confirms the teachings and supplies what was needed in the lessons of nature.

Revelation teaches us, in the next place, the true worship of God. Here nature gave no aid to man. As it revealed nothing of the personal character of the Deity, it left man ignorant of the homage, which he should pay him. The homage, which the Pagans rendered to their imaginary deities, corresponded to the character which they assigned to them; and was frivolous, licentious, cruel, and inhuman, as they deemed pleasing and congenial to the gods, to whom it was offered. Christianity inculcates a moral and intellectual homage and a virtuous obedience; the homage of the affections, the sacrifice of gratitude, confidence, love, reverence, and joy; and the service of moral duty, obedience to the divine will, and justice and kindness to man. The change which in this respect revelation has made in the condition of mankind is immense, and its beneficial influence upon their morals and happiness cannot be too highly appreciated.

Revelation has partially disclosed the divine purposes in relation to the great ends of human existence. It is from revelation that we derive the great lesson of man's immortality. The external and sensible circumstances attending the death of man afford in themselves no encouragement to the expectation of another life. I admit that there are strong arguments for the expectation of a future life, independent of the teachings of

revelation; but all that nature suggests in this case is insufficient to inspire any strong hope, and far from affording any ground of assurance. But where nature was silent, or spake only in broken whispers, revelation is explicit and eloquent. Where man sat in the dark shadows of fear and despair, revelation has poured its day-spring from on high, and given a sure foundation on which he may rest his faith and hopes.

III. Such are some of the prominent teachings of nature and revelation. Let us further speak of them in comparison with each other.

Some men choose to go to nature alone for their religion. They maintain that it is sufficient, and disdain the aid of revelation. We admit that in some respects the teachings of nature have the advantage over those of revelation. All written language is changeable and to a certain extent equivocal. In the progress of time words often acquire different significations from those in which they were first used. The signification of words depends upon the sense in which they, who use, apply them; this of course must be expected to vary with different individuals. The signification of words depends likewise upon many circumstances of time, place, and custom, which must be first known in order to determine the sense of the writing. The evidence of a written revelation is in a great measure of a moral character; it is probable, presumptive, circumstantial, historical; and therefore it must be expected to affect very differently different minds. This has always been the fact. The instructions of nature are of a different character. They rest upon facts; sensible facts; constantly recurring; always open to observation; which may be verified and examined by

the mind of a child; and in respect to which only one conclusion can be made.

But admitting all this, are the teachings of nature sufficient without the aid of divine revelation? Let facts answer. Nature indeed is a grand and magnificent school of instruction; but, as we have said, there is a vastness connected with all its teachings, which, while it convinces, overwhelms the mind. The being and providence of God are demonstrated in the creation. But what a boundless universe surrounds us; and what conceptions can we frame, what approach even can we make to any clear or satisfactory idea of the eternity of God's duration, the exercise of his creative power, or the operations of his constant and universal providence. Yet these facts are as obvious and as well established as the fact of his existence. How imperfect likewise must be any notions which we can form of the almighty power, the unutterable skill, the infinite wisdom, or in a word, the absolute perfection of the Deity. For such beings as we are to attempt to comprehend them would be as vain as to attempt to measure the ocean with a thread, or to describe the tracks of the planets with a pencil, or to span the heavens with our fingers.

But we have said, let facts answer. Let the pure disciples of nature show us what nature alone, when she alone spake to man, was able to accomplish. Here and there in the heathen world, in the long line of centuries, some distinguished mind beamed forth, like a beacon-light upon the ocean's shore in a dark night, serving only to render the surrounding obscurity more dense and palpable. Here and there some master spirit arose, who learnt from nature alone something of the perfections of God; but the boldest and brightest

of these ancient sages, Socrates himself, was put to death as an atoning sacrifice, and himself was ready to conform, to the miserable superstitions of his countrymen. As to the rest of men in ancient and present times where they are left to nature alone, they are left to an ignorance as gross, to an idolatry as disgusting, to a superstition as debasing and terrific as can be portrayed; and demonstrate that in such a condition there are wants of the human mind, which are great and afflictive, and which revelation alone can supply. Whether education, the general improvement of the human mind, would of itself have effected the emancipation of the human race from this darkness and debasement, and have made the great truths of natural religion accessible and apparent to all, it is not easy to determine, and will not now be discussed; but what education might or might not have done, revelation by its own divine power at once effected. It became the interpreter of nature, and showed men where they might learn some of the greatest and most momentous truths of religion. Wherever revelation extended its pure and heavenly light, polytheism, superstition, and idolatry fled away as the mists of night before the rising sun.

Others again go to the scriptures and to them alone, for what they would know of God and religion. The sacred scriptures are indeed a vast storehouse of religious instruction, and full of wisdom, consolation, and hope. But the scriptures themselves are not so plain as to place even their most enlightened student beyond the reach of misapprehension, error, and imperfect and partial conceptions. I will yield to no man living in a just respect for the scriptures; but the only true respect for them is to receive them exactly in the character

which belongs to them. The scriptures are, in many particulars, far from being a plain book. If they were so, would such an endless diversity of opinion have prevailed in the religious world in regard to their meaning; and so many lives have been consumed and such a variety of learning have been required, and such piles of commentaries have been employed, to interpret them? The obscurity which prevails in them, however, is not designed; but incidental to the manner in which they were composed, and have been presented to men in different ages and differently circumstanced. Surely the obscurity was not designed. No books in existence are more artless, or more free from even a suspicion of a design to throw a mist over the perceptions or impose upon the understandings of mankind. With the writers themselves there could have been no obscurity either in conception or expression. But when men in general speak of the plainness of revelation one would suppose that a system of theology and ethics was drawn up in it in such a simple, exact, perspicuous, and unobjectionable form that there was neither room nor occasion left for any further inquiry or any doubtful construction. The scriptures are composed of the writings of men of different places, conditions, and centuries; in some cases illuminated and directed by a divine teaching; in others, requiring in the mere statement of facts no other teaching than their own knowledge and observation; and consisting of various prophetic, historical, moral and devotional treatises; all suited to instruct men in relation to the most important subjects; all bearing upon them, in a certain sense, the stamp of a divine authority; and all adapted to enlighten the human mind in regard to God, and to human duty and happiness; but at the same time so composed as to

require study, reflection, comparison, and various knowledge, fully to understand them and to gather from them those principles of faith and those precepts of duty which are to form the grounds of our consolation and hope, and the great rules of human conduct.

IV. We say that the scriptures and nature should go together. They both came from God. Both are his revelations. We are not to exalt one at the expense of the other. We are to use both in our searches after truth and to make them, where it is possible, the interpreters of each other. We are to advise and encourage men to study their religion in both. Nature teaches by facts addressed to the senses; revelation by precepts addressed to the understanding. Coming from God, in their instructions upon the same subject they must harmonise with each other, for truth is always consistent and always agrees with itself; and in both cases we must exercise our own reason in judging of what each of them or both of them teach.

It is folly to speak of renouncing reason in matters of religion. What is reason but understanding, and what would a man be without understanding; and to what faculty are either the instructions of nature or of revelation addressed but to the human understanding? Learn your religion, therefore, from nature and revelation; their teachings must agree; and let that, which is clear in the one, explain what is obscure, or doubtful, or liable to misconception in the other.

Had men done this, the crude, frivolous, inconsistent, debasing sentiments, which are so prevalent in theology, would long since have been banished, and given place to better, nobler, truer sentiments. When men, for example, call upon us to believe that the earth is

under the curse of God, let us point them to the fertility, the beauty, the glory of his works, and the infinite and kind provision which he has made, and is constantly making, for the welfare and happiness of all his creatures, and demand of them if they would have us insult his goodness by such unworthy conceptions of him.

When they tell us that man is a depraved being, brought into the world only a mass of corruption, from whose touch every virtuous being would be at once disposed to shrink back with abhorrence, let us point to man as he is often seen, elevated by a consciousness of his own power and dignity, illuminated by intelligence and wisdom, and adorned with virtue, and then ask if God has not made him but a little lower than the angels; or let us show them man presiding over the whole of God's earthly creation, and inquire if it would be possible to reconcile it with the goodness of God, that if man was as bad as is represented, and made so by nature, God would ever have subjected the rest of his animal creation to his power.

When we are told that God is a partial Being, having his favorites on earth, caring for them only and dooming the rest only to perdition; and when further we are told that the God of Christians, the infinite, the supreme, the everlasting Father came to this earth and here tabernacled in the form of man, to be insulted and abused, and at last put to death by his own creatures, let us bid them look at the universe around them in its infinite glory and magnificence, and observe the countless worlds and systems, that are suspended in the heavens, among which this earth is but an atom; and then ask them if such miserable and low conceptions are in any degree compatible with the sublime and

eloquent teachings of nature concerning the greatness and glory and goodness of the Creator.

The study of the Deity is as immense as his own nature. Man's knowledge in this great science scarcely deserves the name of knowledge. In his highest advances he hardly approaches the borders of that inaccessible light and glory, which surround the divine presence. Let him seek to know what he can, and to fill the humble measure of his capacity. Above all, however, nature, reason, and revelation teach him to dismiss from his conceptions of God every thing that is low, limited, and unworthy. Gathering up with an intense interest whatever may serve to increase his knowledge, wherever and whenever it may be found, he will find every advance in this sublime science so much added to the power of his virtue and the sources of his happiness. Let him with humble prayers and efforts continually press onwards and upwards in the delightful hope of reaching at last a higher condition of observation in the works of God; and in the nearness of his presence, drinking in the communications of divine truth, unmixed with error, from the great fountain itself of all wisdom and all truth.

SERMON II.

CHRISTIANITY AS TAUGHT IN THE GOSPELS.

LUKE i. 1—4.

FORASMUCH AS MANY HAVE TAKEN IN HAND TO SET FORTH IN ORDER A DECLARATION OF THOSE THINGS, WHICH ARE MOST SURELY BELIEVED AMONG US, EVEN AS THEY DELIVERED THEM UNTO US, WHICH FROM THE BEGINNING WERE EYE-WITNESSES, AND MINISTERS OF THE WORD; IT SEEMED GOOD TO ME ALSO, HAVING HAD PERFECT UNDERSTANDING OF ALL THINGS FROM THE VERY FIRST, TO WRITE UNTO THEE IN ORDER, MOST EXCELLENT THEOPHILUS, THAT THOU MIGHTEST KNOW THE CERTAINTY OF THOSE THINGS WHEREIN THOU HAST BEEN INSTRUCTED.

WHERE shall we go to learn what Christianity is? This is a most interesting and important inquiry, as every person of sound judgment will admit; and it will be my endeavor to give to it a full and distinct answer. The general subject of religion is often spoken of as plain and universally intelligible; and yet as taught by some persons it is involved in great obscurity. Difficulties in some cases so multiply around us that we are obliged either to reject the whole, or sit down before the subject in despair of understanding it. Thus

men are led to entertain unfounded and undeserved prejudices against religion. They see the Christian world rent into parties; they hear their continual disputings about religion, which commonly end as they begin, excepting that where, as is natural, a man is obliged to contend for a possession, he values it the more, in proportion to the difficulty he has had in maintaining it, and clings to it with a pertinacity corresponding to the efforts, which are made to wrest it from him; and they conclude that as the friends of religion are not themselves agreed as to what it is, it is useless for them to attempt to understand it. Other minds, oppressed with an excessive anxiety and timidity, are made wretched, by the obscurity which hangs over the subject, and the difficulties which they meet with in whatever direction they attempt to penetrate it. To some persons it furnishes an apology for the indifference, with which their own want of judgment or candor induces them to regard it. These, then, are reasons, and many others might be urged, which render our inquiries into the subject of religion most important and imperative.

Where then, we repeat the question, shall we go to learn what Christianity is? Shall we apply to this or that sect? Here are innumerable different and conflicting parties, no two of whom, would give you the same reply. Shall we go to this or that book? Here are piles upon piles of commentaries, discourses, catechisms, and creeds, which are sufficient to strike the inquirer with dismay at their number and confusion. Shall we apply to this or that individual? You may often ask the most gifted, and yet find yourself at a loss; for the most gifted as well as the most confident are often, in truth, ignorant of its first principles; have

learnt it in some other school than that of the great Teacher, who alone can claim a just right to explain it; have viewed it under the influence of their own strong prejudices and prepossessions; have often rather imagined what it might be than honestly inquired what it is; have sometimes mistaken what it is from its very simplicity, and have chosen to give it the form of a complicated scheme or system, thinking and perhaps very honestly, that the more mysterious it is rendered, the stronger claims it is likely to have upon the reverence of mankind. There is always with many men, a strong propensity in favor of what is marvellous and mysterious in religion; they prefer in religion what is unintelligible and inexplicable, provided it is not wholly incomprehensible; the more difficulty attends their faith, so much the more meritorious they deem it; and many systems of philosophy and religion have kept their hold upon the public faith and reverence, solely from the obscure, and undefined form in which they have presented themselves. All of us are apprised to what innumerable optical delusions we are liable. How differently from what they are do objects appear to us, in the partial light of evening or the darkness of the night; what shapes and figures is the imagination prone to give them; and what terror, solicitude and anxious awe do they excite, of which nothing would be felt, could they be seen in their proper dimensions and under the broad light of day. To mistakes and deceptions not less gross and extravagant is our intellectual vision liable; and forms as strange and monstrous rise before the mind as it were at pleasure, when quitting the plain light of reason and common sense, we yield ourselves to the workings of a powerful and heated imagination.

It may savor of presumption, after these remarks, to undertake to say how you may be certain to find what true Christianity is. We pretend to no exemption from the fallibility, which necessarily belongs to all human judgment; but inquiry is the road to truth; and we trust we shall never render ourselves obnoxious to just censure, if while we duly respect the judgment of others, we suggest to those, who are perfectly competent to determine their propriety, certain principles of judgment and inquiry, which may lead to the knowledge that we seek.

If you desire then to learn what Christianity is, go to the New Testament, the proper records of this religion, and learn it from the words and character of the great Teacher himself. Who can so well understand it? Who above him has authority to teach it? Who is so well qualified to explain it as its author, Jesus himself?

Let us briefly consider some of the claims, which this book has to our respect and confidence as teaching us what Christianity is; and what objections and difficulties are connected with it as an authority.

We will first then take the character of this authority from the remarkable preface, which St. Luke has prefixed to his gospel, and which I have recited as my text. Having had, he says, a perfect understanding of all things from the very first, he thinks it proper to give an historical and digested account of them, in order that the certainty of them might be known. Here, then, the object of his writing is distinctly announced; the manner in which he proposes to execute that object; and the authority, that of his own personal knowledge, on which he grounds the statement of facts, which he undertakes to detail.

Before I proceed farther I propose to remark upon a topic incidentally and in many respects materially connected with the subject we have in view. The sacred scriptures, denominated the Bible or Book, are not one book, written by one individual at one time and for one particular object or purpose; but they are a collection of different books, by different authors, on various subjects and written at different times, and some of them at intervals of whole centuries from others. The Old Testament is an entirely distinct work from the New Testament. The Old Testament is in many respects as the New Testament a revelation from God. It contains several remarkable prophecies relating to the fortunes of the Jewish nation and the coming of the Messiah; and the writers of the New Testament quote the Old Testament writings and refer to them frequently as we might expect Jews writing for the benefit of Jews would do; but it is a great mistake to look upon the Old Testament writings as Christian scriptures, or to go to them to learn what the Gospel is. The one contains the religion of Jesus; the other the religion of Moses. There are many points of resemblance between them. The moral features of their religion are of course the same; for the great principles of moral duty are in their nature unchangeable; but in many respects the two religions are totally different; and we can with no more propriety go to the Old Testament to learn what the Gospel is, than we should go to it to find out what our duty is in the ritual and Levitical law. The Old Testament writings are Jewish scriptures; the New Testament writings are Christian scriptures. The Jews, in this respect, are far more consistent than Christians. The Jews refuse to receive the Gospel because they see that it

at once and utterly abrogates their law ; whereas the Christians cling to the Old Testament scriptures as authority in their religion notwithstanding this abrogation and the difference of the one religion from the other. The Mosaic religion was a religion designed for a particular people under peculiar circumstances and for peculiar purposes. The Christian religion is a universal religion, designed for all mankind, and the great and universal purposes of religion and morals.

The collection of writings, which goes under the name of the New Testament, is a most extraordinary volume. When we take into view its peculiar character, its great antiquity established beyond a doubt, the vigilance with which it has been preserved, and the confidence and veneration with which among all denominations of Christians it has always been regarded, its existence but upon the supposition of its authenticity, and the truth of those facts which it records, is as great a miracle as any which its history presents. The New Testament is not, however, one book, though it relates exclusively to one subject ; and is of a much less varied and miscellaneous character than the Old Testament.

The New Testament is composed in the first place of four gospels, as they are termed, which are no other than the distinct and separate accounts, which four individuals, who profess to have been the immediate witnesses of the facts and discourses which they record, undertook to give of what was memorable in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, a person whom they intimately knew ; with whom they were familiarly associated ; who claimed the authority of a messenger from God ; and who, by his manner of life, the extraordinary character of his doctrines, the striking predictions which he ut-

tered, the fulfilment of some of which they witnessed, and the miraculous works which he performed, addressed without disguise or collusion to the judgment of their own senses, fully and to their entire satisfaction, substantiated these high claims. Impressed as they themselves must have been with them, it was altogether natural that they should be desirous of recording these facts and of communicating them to others. This they have done. Though the writers of the three first gospels, from many remarkable verbal coincidences, evidently drew some of their accounts from a common historical document, to which they had access, yet in many respects they differ so much in the manner of their statements and in some minor circumstances, that they are obviously to be regarded as so many independent records and witnesses to the same great facts. These writings are so entirely free from all art or embellishment, and so wholly devoid of all attempts to force conviction, to obviate difficulties and objections, which might occur, or to produce effect with the reader, that every candid judge will acknowledge, that they write like men who are to be believed because it is most evident that they themselves believed what they wrote ; and composed their narrations under a perfect conviction of the truth of the facts, which they have recorded. These narratives are followed by a history of the travels and preaching of the individuals, who were commissioned by Jesus to go into other countries, and declare the principles and doctrines which he had taught them and the extraordinary facts of his life and history. The many examples of time, place, and circumstances, which are here recorded, the facts particularly stated, many of which are of such a nature that it would never have occurred to the writer of a false

history to have invented them, besides the total absence of all reasonable motives to do so, have placed upon these writings the indubitable marks of truth.

Let us look now at the motives and circumstances which led to these writings, especially the historical writings, to which we have referred, as they are detailed in the preface to St. Luke's gospel. Many, he says, have undertaken to give an account of those things, which were most surely believed among them, those extraordinary events connected with the history of Jesus, the most extraordinary being that ever appeared on the earth. It was natural that these events should excite universal attention and the deepest interest. It was as natural that accounts of them should be multiplied and circulated. Those who were not themselves the immediate actors and spectators in them recorded the accounts, which they received from such as were eye and ear witness of these occurrences. St. Luke himself had a perfect knowledge of the whole history from the beginning; as I understand it, was a personal witness of most of what he recorded, and addressed his narrative to a particular friend, whom he calls Theophilus, in order to assure him of the certainty of those great facts. Under what circumstances could a history present itself with more strong characteristics of truth or having juster claims upon our belief. The circumstances under which it was written and the opportunities of the writer for ascertaining the facts, which it records, were as favorable as possible to its authenticity; and the design of its composition, to give certain information to a distinguished individual of the facts which it relates, was adapted to produce care and exactness in the statement. The other gospels have equal claims to credit as this of St. Luke, and no con-

ceivable motive can be suggested, why the writers should have attempted the slightest imposition.

Such then is the general form under which the writings of the New Testament have come down to us. These are the documents to which as Christians we are to apply to learn our religion; and these we maintain are sufficient in teaching its character. As Christians our religion is to be learnt from the New Testament. Some may assume to have found clearer teachings, or may presume to condense the instructions of the New Testament into a form, which in their vanity they may deem better suited to the apprehensions of mankind; or which may answer the purpose of acquiring for them an authority over the minds of others; and so may attempt to force their elaborate systems and well framed creeds upon their acceptance; but the reflecting Christian, who values the freedom of his own understanding, will be satisfied to draw his religion from the New Testament, which, as it contains the very discourses of Jesus, must have an authority paramount to every other teaching; and as it is addressed to common men, such as we meet with every day, such men are capable of judging of it for themselves.

Now it was to be expected that in writings produced under such circumstances there might be apparent or, it may be, real contradictions in some parts of them; or rather that there might be some minor disagreements among them in their particular statements of facts. The writers of the historical parts of the New Testament, of the four gospels for example, do not profess to have received their knowledge of the facts which they record by divine inspiration, a pretension which, with some minds, would have lessened their credibility; but they undertake only to state facts and circumstances of

which they were personally cognisant. Call now four witnesses upon the stand, and let them, without hearing each other's testimony, for in respect to the writers of the three first gospels there are grounds to believe that neither of them saw the writings of the other, let them, I say, under such circumstances, give their testimony as to any particular facts, of which they were the personal witnesses; if you found among them a perfect and literal agreement, you would say they had conspired to give the same testimony. If, on the other hand, you found that they agreed only in the general and material facts, with just so much variation in the circumstances of their testimony as to satisfy you that there could have been no concert or collusion among them, and at the same time such an agreement in the great facts as to convince you that they were giving a true account of what they themselves believed, you would unhesitatingly render to their testimony that confidence which in these circumstances you would see that it deserved.

In the next place, from the nature of these writings and the circumstances under which they were produced, you would naturally expect to find some difficulties and obscurities, passages which you could not explain, and others to which perhaps you could attach no satisfactory meaning. Many of the accounts of these interesting events, which were then in circulation, are without doubt lost. Four only remain, but these are ample in establishing the most important facts, and communicating the most important doctrines. They are evidently, it must be admitted likewise, imperfect accounts. Whether our blessed Saviour's ministry lasted as it is supposed by some three years, or, as in the opinion of others, only one year, the whole time was evidently filled up

in the most active and beneficent course of labor and instruction. It is obvious, under these circumstances, that the gospels can contain only partial and deficient histories of what he did and said.

Another circumstance in respect to these writings deserves attention, and in order to do them justice is most important to be kept in view. The art of printing was not then known, and the rapid multiplication and extension of books by means of it had not entered into the most excursive imagination. The writers of these books never seem to be writing for a distant posterity; and it would not have suggested itself to their imagination that these writings would presently be collected into one volume, cherished with a sacred devotion, and at last transmitted through generations and centuries, as the only authentic records of the introduction, character, and planting of this religion. They wrote for the time, for the occasion, for their immediate contemporaries. This was the case with the Evangelists; or else they would at least in some solitary instance have undertaken some explanation of expressions and allusions, which they must otherwise have foreseen, would have been unintelligible to men of other countries, and other times; and this was most certainly the case with the epistles, as we design on some other occasion to consider, all of which have particular and direct reference to local facts and circumstances, which existed at that time in the communities to which they were addressed, and could have existed no where else.

There is likewise, it is most plain, a great deal in these writings, which is temporary and local. This is clearly the fact with much that relates to the Jewish commonwealth; to the sects, which existed among them; to the political condition of this people under the Roman

government; and to the awful and affecting destiny, which hung over, and at last descended upon them with the violence of a tempest. There is likewise much that is obscure from allusions to customs prevalent at those times, of which we have in some instances none, in others an imperfect knowledge. There were feelings, prejudices, opinions, local and national, matters of education and fashion, of which we have no very just conception. In such writings some and a considerable degree of obscurity, and many difficulties of explanation were to be looked for by persons placed as we are in an entirely different condition of society and religion and improvement from what existed at that time. These circumstances may naturally be supposed to render the explanation of these writings in some respects difficult; but as far as they can be understood they serve in an eminent degree to prove their genuineness and authenticity by showing that the writers were familiar with circumstances which were known to exist at that time; and like honest men familiarly referred to them, taking it for granted that those for whom they wrote were as well acquainted with them as they themselves. These facts, far from lessening the credibility of these writings, confirm it.

Such, then, in a general view, is the character of the writings from which we are to learn our religion. The manner in which it is taught is not direct, systematical, methodical, scholastic. These writings in no respect whatever lay claims to the character of literary productions. They are the writings not of scholars but of plain men; not of men whose lives were devoted to philosophy or science, or any of the elegant arts, but of men in the humble and active walks of life; who could have had no concert with each other; and to

whom it could hardly have occurred, that their writings would descend to future generations, as the authority to which men should appeal for the proofs and character of their religion. The manner in which our religion is taught is on the other hand altogether indirect, circumstantial, and incidental; and it has pleased God to transmit the knowledge of this his most merciful plan, for the instruction, amendment, consolation, and everlasting happiness of mankind, in such form as must, the more it is considered, the more commend itself to the belief and confidence of fair and intelligent minds, because it presents itself without art, and comes in the simple, natural, and unadorned attire of truth.

If any man were called upon to say what he should most desire in order to understand Christianity, to learn what are the design and character of this religion, his answer would doubtless be, that he could have been with Jesus; have lived at the same time; have been associated with him; have heard him speak, and have seen him act. This indeed would have been a most distinguished and enviable privilege. But this of course could have been the fortunate lot of comparatively few persons of the countless millions to whom this religion was to impart its blessings. Next to this would have been the advantage of knowing those who knew him, and of hearing from their lips, what they heard from his. This privilege, too, from its nature, must have been very limited. Now it differs little from this that we have the written and recorded testimony and statement of what he did and taught, of those who listened to his teaching and were associated with him in his whole course. Such was the condition of these historians of his life; and these circumstances stamp the highest value upon their accounts and testimony.

Here then is the place to which we are to apply to learn what Christianity is. Here we taste the waters in their purity at the fountain head, and before they became turbid and adulterated by the corruptions of those, who in after times have disturbed and poisoned them. Here you may drink in the golden streams of light in direct rays from this great sun of righteousness, without their being intercepted by any cloud of ignorance or refracted and distorted through a colored and obscure medium. Here then we are to apply to learn what Christianity is. I speak now particularly of the gospels. What aid may be derived from the Epistles will be matter of separate discussion. The discourses of Jesus, with the exceptions which we have already suggested, are remarkable for their simplicity and directness. They are almost wholly practical; and the true spirit and character of the religion is exemplified and illustrated by his life. If ever his teaching is obscure or imperfect, there his example comes in; and this is an exhibition by which no understanding is too humble or limited to be instructed and guided.

If we would learn then what Christianity is, let us study it in the life and teachings of Jesus himself, as you have them from those who sat at his feet, and had their ears delighted and their hearts melted with the heavenly tones of his voice. What men have made of this divine religion is one thing; what you will find it in the gospels may be very different. Our Saviour had scarcely left the earth before men began to corrupt it. The Judaizing Christians, as they were called, that is, the half converted disciples of Moses, wished to engraft upon it their ritual forms and to press the observance of these rites upon others. The letters of the apostles show this most clearly, since there are numer-

ous and direct references in some of the epistles to this fact. The philosophic Christians sought to mix up with the Christian doctrines their own wild and romantic speculations. The Pagan idolaters on their part strove to obtain from it a dispensation and allowance for their own miserable superstitions. In succeeding ages the tide of corruption set still more strongly into the Christian Church until it overwhelmed almost every vestige of its true character and under the abused name of the gospel brought in the superstitions and mummeries of Paganism and called this Christianity; but not a lineament of its divine countenance was to be recognised in this glittering mass of corruption.

The glorious Reformation succeeded but imperfectly in restoring Christianity to its true character, purity, and dignity. Political ambition, the love of power, ignorance, and superstition, pride and folly, subtlety and conceit still and often throw their shadows over it; and present it in an aspect in which its humble, simple, holy, benevolent character can scarcely be traced. Let us, my friends, disdaining all attempts to impede inquiry, and shuddering at the gross corruptions which have been heaped upon it, look for it only in the teachings and life of its great author, as they are presented to us by those who with a faithful pencil, which every benevolent heart will say must be true to nature, have sketched the divine original in its glory and beauty.

Let us here examine and judge for ourselves what Christianity is as it was taught by Jesus himself. Whatever proposes itself to us as a part of this divine religion let us try by this infallible test. In all that mainly concerns our duty and comfort there is a noble simplicity running through the gospels, so that the humblest understanding can scarcely be at a loss for

its most important counsels. Let us maintain the proper character of New Testament Christians; and in the teachings of Jesus we shall find every thing to encourage our reformation from sin; to arm us against vicious temptation; to aid and stimulate our virtue; to afford us consolation in trouble; to impart to the sinking bosom hope in death; and to bring us to render homage and fealty to Jesus as “one who spake as never man spake, and whom God hath sent into the world, that the world through him might have life.”

S E R M O N I I I .

CHRISTIANITY AS TAUGHT IN THE EPISTLES .

2 TIMOTHY i. 1, 2.

PAUL, AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST BY THE WILL OF GOD ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE OF LIFE WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS. TO TIMOTHY, MY DEARLY BELOVED SON, GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, AND CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

It was the subject of our inquiry on a former occasion, where we might best apply to learn what Christianity is. The four gospels we considered as the highest and best authority ; for they narrate the very words and actions of Jesus as they were recorded by his intimate friends and companions, from a natural desire to preserve what they had reason to think so important, and what was of course to them in the highest degree interesting ; and they have here transmitted them to us in that unpretending and artless manner, which is characteristic of truth, and which justly commends them to our respect and confidence.

Besides the four gospels or biographical histories of Jesus, there are what are called the Epistles or the

letters of his Apostles; letters of individuals, some of whom composed a part of the family of Jesus, and others, who claimed to have received an authority and commission from him to aid in the propagation of his religion. All these letters relate to Christianity; to its designs and character as they understood them and to its success and extension. They inform us what these persons thought of it, and felt in regard to it; and constitute a mass of incidental testimony in its favor, which, for the best reasons, has always been considered of great weight and consequence.

My present intention is in a brief discourse to follow up the inquiry made on a former occasion, in respect to the gospels, and consider how far and with what reason we may look to the Epistles to learn the character of our religion. Of the highest authority, and above every thing else, we may look to the words of Jesus. What is to be put in competition with what he said and did? Who is so competent to teach the gospel as its great and divine author? Next to the words of Jesus, we may, with great propriety, appeal to what those persons themselves, who were immediately associated with him in daily intercourse, and more than this had a direct authority and commission from him to teach the gospel, understood this gospel to be. This we have in the apostolical epistles. Peter, James, and John were the immediate, and in some respects, as every reader of the gospels knows, the particular and favorite disciples of Jesus. Jude was the brother of James. Paul, of whose letters we have much the largest number, was converted to Christianity by a miraculous interposition of divine providence, which he has fully detailed; received an immediate charge from Jesus himself, to engage in the propagation of his

religion, and from being a violent and sanguinary persecutor of the early Christians, became an heroic and devoted leader and martyr in its cause. All these individuals, therefore, enjoyed singular advantages for understanding their religion. Their sentiments are fully developed in their letters.

Of the kinds of historical documents, to which we are accustomed to refer, perhaps none are so likely to give a true and faithful picture of events, and of the designs and sentiments of the persons concerned in them, as their private letters written at the time, on particular occasions, existing at the time, and with the familiarity by which that species of writing is commonly characterised. History is a more grave and deliberate species of composition. It is usually written some time after the events which it records, and often by persons, who were not immediately concerned in them. It is generally composed with a reference to public opinion and to the judgment of posterity. This circumstance is rarely without its influence upon the writer, who is seldom impartial, and is often strongly tempted to repress, or enlarge upon, to omit or to give such a coloring to his facts, as may be conformed to the obscure or distorted medium through which he sees them; or that he may present them under an aspect in which he desires that others should see them. This is not so with letters, and especially private letters, or letters addressed to individuals. These are written upon the occasion, and prompted by the feelings and impressions of the time. They are not written with any view to publication, and are commonly designed for those only to whom they are addressed. The writer, under such circumstances, is unshackled, and is likely to give you his honest im-

pressions and feelings. He reveals without disguise or restraint his feelings and character. You are as it were admitted within ; and there permitted to watch the workings of his own mind.

Some of the most interesting biographies, which have been given to the world, are made up in a great measure of the private letters of the individuals, whose lives are written, arranged in the order of time, and with here and there a connecting link or note to explain any incidental circumstances, which may throw light upon the letter or its subject. Let us suppose any one desirous to obtain an exact knowledge of the American Revolution, of the events which led to it, the views and designs of its great actors, and the circumstances which at last sprung the mine, and produced the great explosion ; next to learning it from the lips of those, who were concerned in it, and intimately associated with all its counsels, where would he be so likely to obtain the information which he desired, as if he could come at them from the private letters of the individual leaders themselves, written at the time, and under all the excitement, of the occasion.

The apostolical epistles have all these analogous circumstances to recommend them as authentic documents, connected with the history, designs and true character of Christianity ; but they have others also, which, with those, who have properly examined their character, give them higher claims to our confidence. First, they are most of them, properly speaking, private letters. We do not mean by this confidential letters ; but they were written to particular individuals, or particular communities, designed expressly for them, and referring to particular circumstances and facts connected with those individuals and communities. In these

respects most of them are as much private letters as any which can be found. If we except the epistle to the Hebrews, of which the authorship is undetermined, but which is generally ascribed to St. Paul, of the other epistles which bear his name, nine of them were addressed to particular communities, established in different places, which Paul himself had visited, and four of them to particular individuals, with whose names they are superscribed. Let us look only at the letter to Timothy, whose direction is placed at the head of my discourse. It was addressed to Timothy, who, as we learn from the history of the apostles, was the son of a converted Jewess. Paul found him at Lystra; he became strongly attached to him, and procured him as a companion of his journies. It refers particularly to the piety of his mother, and his grandmother, mentioning them by name; and to Timothy's early religious education. It alludes to the apostle's own imprisonment at Rome, where he was dragged a second time before the Emperor Nero. It speaks in commendation of the family of Onesiphorus who had been very kind to him, and who, when he was in Rome, anxiously sought for him, and succored him. It mentions likewise the names of two individuals, Hymeneus and Philetus, against whom Paul admonishes Timothy as the corrupters of Christianity. It alludes to his own particular situation as in the daily expectation of suffering death, under that monster of cruelty, who then sat upon the imperial throne. It speaks of the departure of some who had been associated with him; Demas through avarice; Crescens and Titus on a visit to other provinces. It contains many friendly salutations to individuals, to whom he desired to be remembered. It mentions the sickness of a

friend Trophimus, whom he had left at Miletum ; and lastly it speaks of his cloak, and papers and books which he had left at Troas, which he desired that Timothy would bring with him when he should come to see him. All these circumstances demonstrate that this is a private letter ; and as such it is most valuable, as letting us at once into the private history and the honest views, feelings and purposes of the writer. The epistle to Philemon is a letter as strictly private, and addressed to him with a view of conciliating his favor towards a runaway slave, Onesimus, who under Paul's ministry had become a convert to Christianity, and now desired to return to his master. I have not time on such an occasion as this, to go over the other epistles ; but even with respect to those which are called general, such as the letters of Peter, James, and one of John, they had in some measure a particular direction. Of the second and third of John, one is addressed to a female friend, and the other to his well beloved Gaius. This will be found to be the general character of these epistles ; they were written by individuals, who were prominently engaged in the events connected with the introduction and establishment of Christianity ; and they were at the same time so far private and personal, that in reading them you may feel confident there is no disguise or artifice about them ; they are unstudied ; they are disinterested ; they were not written with any view to publication. The apostles could not have thought that they would be read beyond those to whom they were immediately addressed. The art of printing, as we remarked before, was then not known, and not even imagined ; and the multiplication of manuscripts was an affair of great labor and infrequency.

These letters then are not an artful and elaborate statement, or apology drawn up with a view of commending and enforcing upon others any particular system or scheme; but they are the plain effusions of honest men, writing without any reference to posterity; poured out upon a subject of which their hearts were full; to which their lives were devoted; and expressive of their anxiety to communicate to others the impressions which rested upon their own minds, and a generous concern for the honor and interest of the religion which they professed. Under what circumstances then could we more certainly look for an honest avowal of the truth, and a sincere expression of their sentiments, than in a case like this.

There is a higher character in which the Christian believer looks upon these writings. They are the letters, though private in their nature, not of private individuals, but of individuals placed in peculiar circumstances and possessing extraordinary endowments. The apostles were inspired by God, and these are their letters. Christianity is a miraculous dispensation. Jesus Christ was a miraculous messenger. I cannot separate from his history the miracles which he is said to have performed. If I should renounce my faith in his miracles, I could not save his character from the charge of imposture. The establishment and extension of Christianity under the circumstances in which it was introduced and the difficulties with which it had to contend, if we suppose it accomplished without the miraculous interposition of divine providence, seems wholly unaccountable on the common principles by which human affairs are moved and directed, and as great a miracle in itself as any recorded in the New Testament. The apostles had the power of perform-

ing miracles in confirmation of their divine authority ; of speaking in foreign languages, that they might communicate their religion to others ; and they professed to teach under a divine inspiration. If it were not so they were either deceived themselves or they attempted to deceive others. But you may read their letters and consider their history and certainly men were never more in the possession of their reason ; and no possible motive can be suggested why they should wish to impose on others. It does not lay within my present design to discuss this point. They claimed constantly to be divinely taught and commissioned. We admit their claim. These writings then, which we call the apostolic epistles are the writings of inspired men. But here permit me to make a distinction in which I hope I shall not be misunderstood. A writing then is not necessarily inspired because its author is inspired ; nor because we suppose that some parts of a writing are dictated by a divine inspiration does it therefore follow that every other part of the same writing is inspired. The apostle himself makes this distinction in his first epistle to the Corinthians, 7th chapter. I speak this by permission, not by commandment. In another place ; I command, yet not I, but the Lord. In another place, in the same chapter, he says to the rest speak I, not the Lord. When the apostle declares he delivers any thing under a divine command or impulse, we cannot doubt his truth and authority ;—but we hesitate to admit what is commonly called the plenary inspiration of the sacred scriptures, which holds that every sentence, injunction and word was the dictate of a divine impulse. We should consider it absurd and derogatory to suppose for example that in the epistle before us the direction to Timothy to bring his cloak, books and parchments was

the offspring of a divine inspiration. An intelligent and considerate mind will find no difficulty in understanding this distinction. We do not look upon every part of the apostolic epistles as inspired; but we look upon them as the letters of inspired men, of men supernaturally endowed and divinely commissioned for the establishment and propagation of this religion. We appeal to them therefore with high confidence and reverence.

Such is the general character of these epistles. They are the writings of men, who in these private letters open to you their minds; without any view to posterity or to other persons, than those whom they addressed; utter their own views, sentiments, understanding and designs in regard to this religion, in the simplicity of their hearts; in the full confidence of truth and uprightness; from the most disinterested motives. They were the contemporaries, the associates, the intimate friends of Jesus; persons, whom he commissioned and whom God endowed with a divine power for the establishment and propagation of this religion. If we regard them only as private letters they are most interesting; but when we look upon them as historical documents, how could we have those upon whose authenticity and truth more reliance could be placed. They are faithful pictures of the times and persons and views and circumstances connected with the introduction, character and establishment of christianity, taken at the time and sketched by those privileged individuals, who alone were capable of giving a faithful delineation, without any thought on their part that they were drawing for any other persons or times than those to whom these delineations were immediately sent. In a word they are like other incidental and occasional private letters;

and relating as they do to the most important events and interests, in which men can ever be concerned, they will be regarded as invaluable and most instructive documents. Putting these indeed in connexion with the particular biographies of Jesus by four of his immediate companions, in which some of his discourses and conversations are fully detailed, we may confidently expect from them to learn the true character of this religion; and we must perceive at once how strongly in this incidental way the evidence of Christianity is confirmed.

The incidental manner in which both the doctrines and the history of Christianity are detailed, if so it can be called, or rather are given in the gospels and epistles, is most remarkable, and must forcibly impress a candid and reflecting mind.

Had there been any design to impose upon the credulity of the public mind, had any set of men conspired to force a religion or a system of belief or observance upon mankind, they would have proceeded, as in such cases men always have done, in a formal and methodical manner. They would have drawn up their system; they would have detailed their facts with precision. They would have taken care to explain what might seem inexplicable and to defend what might be impeached or opposed. You would have seen throughout the indications of an anxious concern for success. But how entirely different is the form in which this religion is given to us. Here are four independent but very brief and simple records of some things which Jesus said and did, drawn up by certain persons, who knew him intimately, who entirely confided in him, and who felt as naturally they would feel, a deep concern in the events which they relate, and which were con-

nected with so extraordinary a character and mission as that of Jesus Christ. Here likewise are some of the private letters of distinguished individuals, who took an important concern in these events ; who were instructed by Jesus himself ; who here communicate their honest views and impressions ; and who exposed and sacrificed their lives in behalf of this religion.

What an admirable provision is here seen to secure this religion against cavil. Under such circumstances who can have a suspicion of imposture ? and how could we better arrive at the knowledge of the true character of this religion than by being thus incidentally and fully put in possession of the whole of its private as well as its public history. Next to the discourses of Jesus we may then successfully appeal to the letters of his companions and apostles to learn the character of our religion. We must not, however, overlook the true nature of these writings. They are not universal, but local ; nor designed for all times and places, but for the particular times and places and persons, when and where they were written, and to whom they are addressed. We must remember that much of what they contain can have no meaning to us, other than as it confirms their genuineness and truth. But after all the indirect instruction which they communicate, and which is not on that account the less important or valuable, is ample in connexion with the gospels in explaining the true character of Christianity. They are full of moral counsel and of heavenly instruction. They are wholly disinterested and have no selfish designs. They abound in the purest morality, and the most enlightened and enlarged sentiments of God and of providence. They are rich in consolation for the afflicted ; and as St. Paul in this epistle to Timothy expresses it,

they bring us to Jesus, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. What a heavenly boon! What celestial tidings! May God open our hearts to receive them; and as he that hath given us this hope is pure, may we also be pure in all manner of conversation.

SERMON IV.

DIRECTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES.

ACTS viii. 30, 31.

AND PHILIP RAN THITHER TO HIM AND HEARD HIM READ THE
PROPHET ESAIAS, AND SAID UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU
READEST? AND HE SAID, HOW CAN I, EXCEPT SOME MAN SHOULD
GUIDE ME?

A principal officer in the court of an African sovereign, a Jew by birth or by conversion, on his return from Jerusalem, where he had been to celebrate one of the great festivals of his religion, is met by Philip, an apostle of our Lord. As he was riding leisurely along in his chariot over a sandy desert he was intently reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was the great prophet of the Jews and always regarded by them with the deepest interest and reverence; and so also by the Christians, who have styled him the Evangelical prophet, and by both Jews and Christians, because he was understood more explicitly and fully than in any other parts of the sacred scriptures to foretel the advent of the Messiah. That part of the prophecy with which he was occupied had an

immediate reference to the Messiah ; but to a Messiah suffering and dying, “ led as a sheep to the slaughter.” This circumstance more than any thing else, so contrary to all the notions which prevailed among the Jews relative to the splendor, magnificence and perpetuity of their Messiah’s reign, confounded him, and made the prophecy of difficult explanation. At his request Philip undertook to resolve his difficulties, and to show him its appropriate application to the character and history of Jesus of Nazareth. This exposition poured upon his mind a flood of light ; and perceiving the fitness of its application, he became a joyful convert to Christianity and was baptized into this holy faith. It is a remarkable instance of the force of truth upon an honest and inquisitive mind, and as such deserves our respect. But it suggests other reflections connected with the proper understanding of the scriptures which claim attention.

The scriptures here referred to, in which this nobleman was reading, were the scriptures of the Old Testament, and the prophecy of Isaiah. Every reflecting mind must admit that there are many difficulties in understanding the writings of the Old Testament and especially the prophetic parts of it. The prophecy of Isaiah is in the highest and boldest style of Eastern poetry. Poetry is the language of the imagination. It is a style of painting designed not for the senses but for the mind. It abounds with figures of language, with allegories, metaphors, and hyperbole. All this renders it, though more forcible in expression, yet more difficult of explanation. It refers to what is future ; it cannot therefore in many cases be explained except by the event. The New Testament is not without its difficulties. With the exception of the book of Revelation, which is sup-

posed to be prophetic, these difficulties are not the same as those of the prophetic parts of the Old Testament; but they are such as were to be expected in writings of so high antiquity and produced under the circumstances in which they were given to the world. Some have supposed that many of the predictions of the prophets were uttered, without any correct perception on their part of the events, to which they were applicable. This does not appear probable; on the other hand it is reasonable to suppose that they perfectly understood the language which they uttered and clearly saw its application and force. So also of other parts of the scriptures. It is not reasonable to suppose that any obscurities which exist in them could have been designed; nor that they proceed from any want of understanding on the part of the particular authors of the different books. But the obscurities and difficulties arise from other sources, distinct from the books themselves; and among other causes may be traced to the natural and inherent imperfection of language, to our ignorance of local customs, opinions, modes of thought and of action, events and circumstances existing at the time, and in the places, and among the people, with whom these writings had their origin.

We shall not now pursue the inquiry into the sources of these obscurities. Every person, who reads the Scriptures with a serious desire to understand them, feels these difficulties; and when he is inquired of as the eunuch was, if he understands what he reads, he is often compelled to reply with him, how shall I, unless some man should guide me? I shall not presume to offer any infallible direction to such an inquirer. None such, other than a divine illumination, could be found. But I shall briefly animadvert upon certain directions,

which are sometimes given, with a view to examine their propriety and correctness.

I. We are told, by some persons, with great confidence, that the most obvious sense of the scriptures is always the true sense.

This supposes, in the first place, what is plainly impossible, that the most obvious sense would be the same to all persons; whereas scarcely any thing can be more various than the apprehensions and judgments of different men in relation even to the most common subjects. Their perceptions are different; some men seeing a subject much more distinctly than others; some comprehending it much more fully than others. The knowledge and information of different men are very different; this must greatly affect their judgment. Then, too, men are prone to judge of things and to interpret them according to their own prejudices and preconceived opinions. Take an intelligent individual from each of the prominent sects of the present day, and demand the judgment of each of the obvious meaning of any of the doubtful or difficult parts of the scriptures; and though equally honest in their views, can there be a question that their expositions would be very different from each other? To tell men, therefore, to take the scriptures always in their most obvious sense, as the true sense is virtually telling them to take their own opinions of the sense of scripture as the true sense, which must clearly lead to as many different interpretations as there are different sects in christendom.

Again the most obvious sense of a writing may naturally be supposed to be the literal sense. We have reason to suppose in general that where it is designed to communicate knowledge, language will be used in its

most direct and ordinary acceptation. But a great part of the Scriptures is in the language of figure, and abounding with graphic delineations and poetical imagery. The Roman Catholic christians contend for the literal and obvious sense of our Saviour's declaration to his disciples at the institution of the Supper, when he said, This bread is my body and this wine is my blood; and consequently they believe that the consecrated elements of bread and wine used at the celebration of the Lord's Supper are actually converted into the flesh and blood of Christ. But who, excepting the members of their own sect, are inclined to adopt the literal sense of this passage and acquiesce in conclusions so preposterous. This is one among many instances in which the literal and obvious sense of a passage would lead to conclusions equally absurd. But the fact of the use of figurative language requires us to reject the obvious and literal sense; figurative language implies a language which is not to be understood literally; but which is adopted wholly by way of analogy comparison, or embellishment. These remarks apply not to the Scriptures merely but to books and writings of every description. If mankind were possessed of what has been so long a desideratum in the literary world, a philosophical language, in which the words employed would admit of only one sense, and which would express fully and exactly what they were designed to express, there would of course be much less liability to misapprehension. But how different is the fact, since there is scarcely a word in the language which is not susceptible of different significations; and since so much depends upon its selection, its combination, and the particular feelings or circumstances under which it is adopted by the person using it. In fine, a rule which

requires us to adopt the obvious sense of the Scriptures as always the true sense, however rigidly applied, would not save us from all the variety of interpretations, which now exists.

II. We are admonished, in the next place, in the interpretation of the scriptures to beware of our reason and not to exalt reason above revelation.

What, let us ask in this case, is human reason? It is sagacity, intelligence, judgment. To what faculties in man is the revelation of the scriptures addressed but to his sagacity and intelligence? What would be the use of a revelation to him without this sagacity and intelligence? To whom is this Revelation addressed but to rational beings? To what faculties does it make its appeal but to human reason? What renders man capable of receiving a revelation and the brute creation incapable of receiving it, but the possession of reason in the former and the want of it in the latter. How then is it to be understood, how otherwise can it be understood, but in the exercise of our reason and understanding? To demand of us to discard the use of reason in the study of revelation would be like requiring us to see with our eyes closed and to hear with our ears stopped. There is no other way of coming at the knowledge of revelation but in the full and free exercise of our understandings; and the more enlightened, the more free, and the more faithful is the exercise of our own sagacity and judgment, so much the more likely are we to arrive at the truth, whether we seek for it in nature or revelation.

But it is said that we wish to exalt human reason above revelation by subjecting it in any case to our own judgment; and that being once convinced of its divine

inspiration or communication, we must receive what it teaches without hesitation or doubt. In the first place however we must be satisfied of its divine inspiration and origin; yet how is this to be done but by a reasonable and intelligent examination of the proofs on which it rests its claims to be so received; and in the next place how are we to know what it teaches, but in the exercise of our own understandings? It is nothing but absurdity and sophistry by which some men undertake to argue against the use of reason in religion. Reason must be the judge and the interpreter of revelation. In respect to any of those teachings which come to us as the lessons of revelation, we have a right, nay it is the duty of intelligent men to inquire, is this possible, is it probable, is it credible, is it reasonable? and with respect to those persons, who are most clamorous against the use of reason in religion, their real fear is that you will use your own reason instead of theirs. We may believe many things, which we do not fully comprehend; we may receive many things purely as matters of faith, in relation to subjects to which human knowledge does not extend; and resting upon authority which we deem competent to establish them; but before we can do this we must first be satisfied by our reason that they are things in their nature possible and credible; and that the authority on which they rest is competent to teach them.

III. The third position, which is often insisted upon in proof of the plainness of the scriptures, is that God in giving a revelation to mankind would give them one that they could understand; and therefore the scriptures must be universally plain and intelligible. This reasoning is fallacious and is chargeable with the presumption of setting up human judgment as the standard of the divine conduct.

We do most certainly admit that mankind can be accountable only for a revelation, which is given to them, and for one which they can understand ; but in what form it shall be communicated, whether by the immediate inspiration of every individual, or by a written revelation to which he may have access, whether in the works of nature or the teaching of events, whether by extraordinary signs or by written language, whether incidentally or directly, whether by figures of speech or by language of the most simple kind, by what language and at what time and place and under what circumstances, God should give this revelation, are matters which of necessity and propriety rest wholly with himself. We are not to take upon ourselves in such circumstances to be the judges of what the divine conduct ought to be ; and we might as well presume to say that God should at once have communicated this revelation to all nations and to every individual without discrimination, as that he should have made it so plain that every individual should at once have understood it.

Let us reflect a moment how a written revelation should have been made in order to have been intelligible to every individual. It must have been given in the language of every individual of every nation ; or it must have been accompanied by an infallible translation or interpretation ; and have been given in a language so direct as never to admit of more than one sense, and that sense so clear as to be incapable of being misunderstood ; it must then have been presented to every mind under precisely the same circumstances ; and then it would have been necessary that every individual mind should have been so constituted as to see it in precisely the same and in no other light. But this would have required that language itself and men

themselves should have been altogether differently constituted from what they now are. Man, under such circumstances, must have been made a comparatively perfect being, incapable of any corruption, error, mistake, or vice; and then revelation itself would have been unnecessary to him.

The whole of this reasoning, however, concerning the necessity of the universal plainness of revelation goes upon the supposition that the knowledge of revelation is indispensable to the salvation or future happiness of every man. This cannot be admitted; first, because it would impute to God, the righteous judge of the earth, the most obvious injustice in condemning a large portion of mankind, all the heathen world, and all to whom the Scriptures have not been given, to the severest penalty for not possessing advantages, which he has himself withheld from them, and which it was not possible for them to obtain. Secondly, it would be making all men and to the same extent accountable, whereas nothing can be more various than the different natural talents, characters, advantages, and capacities of men. But in truth no man's present or future happiness can depend, excepting incidentally, upon any knowledge he may possess, or any belief he may entertain. I hope not to be misunderstood. Man is a moral being. His happiness therefore in this and every condition of his existence is connected with his moral character. Here his happiness must rest for its basis and security. If his moral principles, affections, sentiments and conduct be pure and virtuous, his happiness is certain; but without this no knowledge nor belief whatever can make it so. His knowledge, his belief may furnish aids, counsel, and motives to virtue, and so far avail to his true happiness; but it must essentially depend upon his

moral condition and character. This constitutes the moral retribution, which we are to expect; and men may be trained to virtue and piety under any and every form of religion, with small or larger capacities, under great or very partial and imperfect advantages of faith or knowledge.

Shall we be understood to say that Revelation confers no benefits? Certainly not; it confers the highest benefits, but as it respects the attainment of God's favor, in regard to our future happiness or salvation, the unavoidable want of its advantages can never operate to the prejudice of any. It furnishes extraordinary aids and it may be rendered most instrumental to human virtue; it devolves upon those, who possess it, a corresponding responsibility; but it does not render the favor of God less attainable by those from whom it has pleased him that its advantages should be withheld.

It most essentially behooves us, favored as we are with this divine light, to understand what we read. The scriptures contain the history of God's providential dealings with mankind; of his requisitions from them; of his ultimate purposes in respect to them. All these things are most important and consolatory; adapted to elevate man's views, to ennoble his affections; to stimulate him to virtue, beneficence and improvement. But their teachings are not direct, connected, systematical; they are incidental, indirect, and from the circumstances under which these communications were made, necessarily, in some respects, difficult and obscure.

IV. Such are a few plain directions to guide you in the study of the divine word and in the pursuit of religious knowledge. It is to the writings of the New

Testament, that as Christians we are to apply to learn the true character of our religion. With the aid of the best lights that we can obtain and with minds open to the reception of truth, let us seek in them, under the divine blessing, the great principles of human duty and the secure foundation of human hopes. This is that teachable spirit that God will guide in the judgment of what is true and good.

Had men studied the New Testament as they should have done, the Christian world would have been saved from innumerable disputes and strifes, by which it has been distracted and dishonored.

Men go to the New Testament and insist upon finding a meaning for every thing which they read. They see it divided into chapters and verses, an arbitrary division of modern date, and look for a doctrine in every verse. They read much which cannot, but by the most forced construction, have any reference to the state of Christianity at the present time, and yet they apply it literally and exactly. They contend like gladiators about letters and particles and words, as though the writers of the New Testament were scholars by profession, and observed a scrupulous accuracy of language. I entertain the highest reverence for the sacred writings and upon them rest those hopes, which I would not part with for worlds. But I must be allowed to read the scriptures for myself; and in order to understand writings of this description, I learn that they are to be considered not in detached and insulated passages but in their general bearing and connexion; that passages which are strictly local can have only an indirect and, perhaps in many cases, no application to the present times and circumstances; that there are some things, which from the antiquity and nature of

these writings must be unintelligible, and therefore it is vain to seek a meaning ; that God can never have left the salvation and future happiness of any man to depend upon the doubtful interpretation of any passage in a book written in a language which has ceased to be spoken, and which, if I must receive it, I must receive upon the authority of men, I mean those through whose hands the scriptures have passed and who now hold themselves up as its infallible interpreters, who have no other means of arriving at certainty in the case than myself. The way to understand such writings is to read them with a view to their general tenor and scope ; weighing, as far as they can be ascertained, all the circumstances of the case, the character and condition of the writers themselves and those to whom they are addressed, and resting in those great conclusions to which, under such circumstances, we may be led. As in other cases, we are to resolve what is obscure by what is plain in them ; to reconcile what seems inconsistent, believing, if we find inconsistencies, they arise from our ignorance and not from the writer, for no sensible writer will ever contradict himself ; and judging of their true meaning by our own reason and common sense ; otherwise how are we to understand them at all ?

Pursuing our inquiries with these views we shall find that they contain every thing which is profitable for doctrine, consolation, reproof of sin, and instruction in righteousness. I lay my hand upon the New Testament as the word of God. I bow before its affecting instructions as before the teachings of the All-wise and the bursting forth of light from the throne of the divine glory.

I learn that the great principles of religion as Jesus has taught them are few and simple, but most commanding and important. I cannot hesitate to confess

with the prophet that God has shown man what is good. In the instructions of Jesus when he gathered the anxious crowds around him, I see none of those mystical, ill-digested, and repulsive speculations, which are engendered in the minds of men, heated by pride and clouded by bigotry, and which belong to the barbarous theology of a disputing and rude age. But the light which shines around me, in the resplendent teachings of Jesus, is clear, and leaves me at no loss as to my duty. The persuasions and practical lessons of virtue, as they fall from his lips in the tenderest tones of kindness, touch my soul; his heavenly consolations comfort me under every adversity; his glorious revelations inspire me with holy desires, and aspirations, which find no resting place but in Heaven.

I learn from the prophet to ask what does the Lord require of me but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God; and I am taught by Jesus that if I would enter into life I must keep the commandments; and that whoever does the will of his Father in Heaven the same stands to him in the relation of a brother. I see at once that the great ends of the religion of Jesus are to make men holy, benevolent, useful and pious; to assure them of God's protecting care, his constant aid, and his universal providence; to teach the immeasurable importance of moral conduct; and raising the veil which hides the future from our sight to give us a glimpse of heaven and immortality.

Holding our own conclusions in modesty, humility and charity, let us have no fear that we shall be condemned for any involuntary or unavoidable error; for any deficiency of knowledge or belief, which we had not the capacity or the means of escaping; nor doubt at all that while we faithfully use the light we have

and conform to those great laws of duty and happiness which nature, experience, and revelation plainly teach and confirm, that we shall secure the favor of that impartial and holy Being, who reckons with his servants according to the talents, which he has given them.

The precepts of Jesus, and the letters of his apostles, every where confirm them, inculcate an unspotted purity, a universal benevolence, and an entire devotion and resignation of every thing to God. If we are at a loss for the application or extent of any of these precepts and principles, we have it in the perfect example of Jesus, an example in human nature showing the practicableness of his precepts, and encouraging men by his triumphs.

The life of Jesus can leave no one at doubt or uncertainty as to his duty. It furnishes the rule and the application. If a man would know what is good he has only to follow Jesus, as, in their artless, unadorned, but affecting and eloquent manner, the humble historians of his life have presented his character to mankind. It is an example of benevolence, purity, usefulness, and piety, which no conceptions of the human mind have ever surpassed. It is surrounded with a halo of moral glory. The disciple, who humbly learns of him, shall find rest to his soul. The sincere imitation of Jesus is in itself worth infinitely more than the combined wit of all the brightest geniuses that ever shone on earth, and the united subtlety and wisdom and science of all the theologians and philosophers of ancient and modern times.

SERMON V.

THE PROOF OF CHRISTIANITY INDEPENDENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

ACTS i. 8.

YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME, BOTH IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDEA, AND IN SAMARIA, AND UNTO THE UTMOST PART OF THE EARTH.

EVERY serious mind must feel greatly concerned whether Christianity is true or not. If a man feels no interest in the great questions about which Christianity is concerned, if to him it is not and has never been matter of most serious consideration, whether God has made any direct communications with his creatures or not, whether Jesus of Nazareth is or is not the medium of such communications, whether the sacred scriptures contain or not a correct account of them, and whether we may or may not there find grounds for expecting a future life, we have great reason to distrust the soundness of his moral judgment.

There is a great diversity in the original constitution of different minds, and in the faculties with which

they are endowed. There is as great a diversity in their education and training, and the influences of situation, society, and nameless circumstances, to which the judgment is exposed, are as various as can be conceived. Different minds will of course see things under different aspects; the same evidence will often produce on different minds a different impression; and in some cases, a different impression on the same mind, when considered at different times. Whatever confidence therefore we may feel in our own conclusions, we must not prematurely condemn those persons whose opinions differ from ours even in respect to subjects, which seem most plain; but must leave it to that Being, who is the searcher of hearts, and who alone thoroughly understands the human mind, every principle of character and every spring of human action, to determine the merit of any man's faith or the criminality of his unbelief. Reflection must convince us, that the judgments, which we are prone to form and confidently pronounce in many cases, may be very different from that which he forms and by which we must ultimately abide. But with regard to those who can treat the subject of religion with disrespect, or regard its momentous truths with indifference or levity, accompanied as they are by evidence, which, to say the least, has satisfied many of the most inquisitive, the wisest and the purest minds that have ever lived, we may with reason think them deficient in understanding, or discretion, or the common principles of moral rectitude. Every inquiry therefore, connected with the great truths of religion will always be pursued with seriousness and interest by intelligent and candid minds, be the results of such inquiry with such persons what they may.

The principal evidence of the truth of Christianity is the writings of the New Testament. If we admit these writings to be authentic, that is, the productions of the individuals, whose names they bear; and genuine, that is, containing a true statement of the facts, which they relate, there is of course an end to the discussion, and the great question is affirmatively decided. In a single discourse, having in view a different object than to prove the genuineness and authenticity of these writings, it is impossible for me to offer any thing more than a few cursory remarks on these points.

These writings then purport to be the production of the individuals, whose names they bear; they have been ascribed to them ever since they have been known; they have never been ascribed to any other persons; they rest therefore upon the same evidence that the genuineness of other ancient or modern writings rest. We have the same reasons for believing that the histories which bear the names of Matthew, Mark and Luke, are their productions, and the letters, which bear the name of Paul are his, as we have for believing that the histories ascribed to Cæsar and Tacitus, and the letters purporting to be the letters of Cicero and Pliny are theirs. To deny this without any proof of the contrary, which no man pretends to adduce, would be to violate the first principle of historical credibility and to render all history uncertain.

Next, these writings have all the appearance of being authentic, that is, a true statement of facts. They refer to particular times and dates, places and persons, and to existing customs and local facts, which perfectly correspond with what we learn from other independent histories of the same period, concerning

the times and places, to which they refer; and with facts, which these other, profane histories as they are called by way of distinction, record. There is another proof of their authenticity, which has always impressed my own mind with great force. I would confidently appeal then to any candid and intelligent man, accustomed to weigh evidence and to attend to the manner of oral or historical testimony, to say, whether in the perusal of the gospels or the epistles, he could ever raise a doubt in his own mind, that the authors of these writings themselves fully believed the facts, which they record. It is I believe impossible; and the entire absence of all art on the part of these writers is a striking circumstance. They put down, without hesitation, what makes against themselves as well as what makes in their favor. They never attempt any apology for their own conduct; or any part of the conduct of Jesus, though they were aware it subjected him to much censure at the time, and probably would do so afterwards with many by whom these accounts should be read. They never offer any explanation of any thing, which he said or did which seemed obscure or mysterious; or which, if not so to themselves, a little reflection must have convinced them would appear obscure to others. In fine they were illiterate men and not writers by profession; they seem never to have thought for a moment that they were writing for posterity; they could not have entertained the most remote conception of the future extension and condition of their religion, humble, unpatronised, and contemned as it then was; and like other honest and serious men, they record as many others at that period they tell us had undertaken to do, a plain and unvarnished account of facts of a most extraordinary nature, of which they

themselves were witnesses ; of which therefore they had a perfect conviction ; and in which, extraordinary and amazing as they were, they felt that profound concern, which such occurrences were adapted to produce.

I have only a single consideration farther to suggest in regard to this subject. The existence of these writings is itself a most extraordinary fact. That they are of as great antiquity as they profess to be is established by ample external and independent proof. That they have been universally and always deemed sacred by christians is a fact likewise beyond all question. With respect to the gospels there is little doubt that John had seen the gospels of the other three evangelists ; but with respect to the other three, there are many circumstances, which forbid the supposition that either of them was acquainted with the writings of the other ; though the many examples of exact verbal agreement among them give reason to believe that they all drew a part of their accounts from some common document or record, which was at that time in circulation. We have then four particular histories, none of which could have been formed in concert with the others ; we have also another distinct history, the Acts of the Apostles ; and then we have a considerable number of separate and long letters, written by different individuals, and addressed to different persons or communities ; and yet all these letters incidentally and directly, without disguise or reservation acknowledge and refer to the same great facts and principles ; and are all in fact directed to one prominent and extraordinary end. There is internal evidence sufficient to prove that these writings are not a forgery. Even in view of the simple circumstances of which I have now taken notice, to suppose

them forged would be to maintain almost as extraordinary a miracle as any which they record. If they were a forgery we should have a right to ask how they could ever have been received as they have been? If it be said that the age was so ignorant as to be easily imposed on, we can only answer, that if there was a sufficient sagacity to invent such an imposition, there certainly was enough to have at once detected and exposed it. But who can conceive of an imposition being undertaken by so many different individuals of the character of which these authors evidently were; and put together at such different times, in such different places, and in such disjointed parts, and yet all fitting each other as admirably and exactly as the multiform parts of a dissected map.

But if it be said that these writings are a forgery, we have a right to ask, what was the object of such an imposition? To suppose that all this was the work of one or two persons is to suppose what is in itself absolutely impossible. It was not difficult to form the idea of establishing a new religion; but it never would have entered into the conceptions of any mind to have framed the plan of so many writings of so different and remarkable a character; or to have conceived the plan of establishing a religion under circumstances so unlikely and utterly unpromising, if the religion were not true. To suppose that there was a conspiracy of several individuals in this imposition, leaves us at liberty to demand what could have been the object of such a combination? Certainly not any selfish object. The persons who invented this scheme had nothing to gain by it for themselves; they knew indeed that they had every thing to lose, and in fact did lose every thing. But look at these writings themselves; learn their

object from them. You may say of them what you please; you may call them, if you will, obscure, uncouth, uninteresting, mystical; but you will not deny that a great part of them is intelligible and practical; and of this part that the sole end is to persuade men to be good, to afford them consolation in trouble and hope in death; in a word the great ends of these writings are to promote the strictest purity and integrity of life, a universal charity and toleration, and the most exalted piety that was ever taught to man, or that the human soul is capable of conceiving and cherishing. If then we deny the authenticity of the New Testament writings, we are obliged to maintain the most extravagant and absurd supposition, that these men conspired at the expense to themselves of every thing valuable in life, to invent and utter what they knew to be false and to commit fraud, only that they might persuade men to be good. Who will not revolt from a conclusion so absurd and monstrous? It must follow, then, if these writings are not a forgery, they are a true history; and the very fact of their existence, currency and universal reception, and the estimation in which they have always been held are evidences of their truth; for in what motive could they have originated, or how could they have gained such an authority, if they were not founded in truth.

There are difficulties attending them, we readily admit. St. Peter himself says of St. Paul's epistles that there are in them many things hard to be understood. St. Paul's controversial writings in particular are in many parts obscure, and so are other parts of the New Testament. But this obscurity may be as rationally ascribed to our ignorance of the existing opinions, customs, manners, feelings, prevalent disputes,

religious rites, which then prevailed, as to any other cause; certainly as much as to any intrinsic obscurity in the subjects treated of or in the manner of treating them. We admit too that there are some apparent contradictions or discrepancies in the historical parts of these writings. Yet there are none which are very material; none which may not be accounted for in some measure in the simple fact that these writings have passed through the hands of many different transcribers; indeed there are no variations greater than what were to be expected from the accounts of four distinct and independent witnesses, who, without concert or design, should now or at any time undertake to give, according to their own honest impressions, an account of so many extraordinary events and so many extraordinary discourses as they have to record; and these variations in their testimony, far from impeaching its correctness, renders it more credible, as it proves the entire absence of all design or collusion.

From this imperfect and partial statement of the argument it is plain how far the truth of Christianity is connected with the genuineness and authenticity of these sacred documents. If these are proved, and the proof of them to most minds must be irresistible and carry with it the force of demonstration, the truth of Christianity is established upon an immovable foundation. But we often hear persons who have not given much attention to the subject, and who, it is evident, are not more anxious to find Christianity true than to persuade themselves that it is unfounded, speak lightly of these writings and of the proof which is drawn from them. Now it seems to me that entirely independent of these scriptures there is irrefragable proof of the truth of Christianity; and if these records were blotted

from existence, the great facts which they relate, the great facts of the history of Jesus, such for example as his extraordinary death, and his still more extraordinary resurrection, could be established beyond all contradiction; and if these were once proved, much of course connected with them would follow with equal certainty. I will state these grounds as briefly and perspicuously as I am able and then leave them to your own reflections.

The great facts of the Christian history are of course independent of the record of these facts. Jesus appeared, asserted his claims, wrought miracles, preached, suffered, died, rose from the dead, long before the history of these events was composed. Lardner, the most competent of all judges in this case, supposes that the first gospel, that of Matthew, was written about the year of our Lord 64, that is more than thirty years after his death. Others, however, assign to it an earlier date. The facts recorded in this history it is obvious are altogether independent of this record; and would not have been the less certain, if no record of them had ever been transmitted to posterity.

There were indeed and have remained standing and perpetual memorials of these principal facts with which, if these records had not existed, no doubt we should have been familiar.

Before these writings existed there was a congregation of persons, since called the church, who had associated themselves in the name of Jesus and bound themselves by an oath to conform to his religious instructions. Some of these are expressly addressed in these writings; and recognised as already and for some time established. These writings recognised their existence as a body of converts to the religion of Jesus,

and instructed and exhorted them as such. That such a body of men existed at the earliest period claimed for them, that they suffered every species of indignity and persecution, and cheerfully went to the most excruciating death, rather than renounce their allegiance to Jesus, may be proved by ample testimony from profane writers. How is this fact to be accounted for; what could have induced or have held together such an association under such circumstances, but an entire conviction or knowledge of the great facts of the Christian history.

Secondly there has been observed by Christians from the very earliest period a rite called the Lord's supper, in commemoration of the death of Jesus. It has been observed always with this view, and no other motive has ever been assigned for it. We have the testimony of an early heathen writer to its universal observance among christians; and it will be observed in respect to the gospels that they give no explanation of it and no exhortation to its observance but only an account of its institution and origin; and where it is mentioned in the epistles it is mentioned with the design of correcting some false views that were entertained of it and some abuses which had crept into its observance; but it is there incidentally and most clearly recognised as of long standing. In the rite itself, also, it will be observed, that there is no analogy or resemblance between the action prescribed and the event commemorated; in eating bread and drinking wine there is nothing that would remind any one of the death of a benefactor, unless such an idea was inculcated and arbitrarily associated with the service. How then is it to be explained that this rite should have been thus early instituted, thus universally and perpetually observed,

its obligation universally acknowledged, and the purpose of it always understood to be the commemoration of the death of Jesus, though in the rite itself there was nothing to remind one any more of the death of an individual than of the coronation of a sovereign ; unless it arose from a knowledge of the fact of Jesus' tragical death, and a conviction that this great event was of a most important and memorable character.

I shall advert to one fact more ; and that is the religious observance of the first day of the week among christians in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus ; and for that reason, from the earliest record of it, called the Lord's day.

This institution too is easily traced to the period assigned for the death of Jesus by evidence entirely extrinsic to the writings of the New Testament. Indeed it is quite remarkable that the scriptures of the New Testament give no injunction whatever either on the part of Jesus or his apostles for the observance of this day ; and only incidentally allude to the fact that the disciples were accustomed to assemble on that day for religious worship and for the participation of the Lord's supper ; and that the obligation to its observance rests entirely for its authority upon the practice of the primitive Christians. Further it is to be remembered that the great majority of the early converts were Jews, and trained therefore from their infancy to the strictest observance of the Jewish Sabbath, which was the seventh day of the week ; that Jesus himself, being a Jew, also strictly conformed to the Mosaic law in this respect. Yet these and all the other converts to Christianity from the earliest period, united in the religious observance of the Lord's Day ; and have, with scarcely an exception in the Christian world, continued its observance, and

always expressly in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the morning of that day. This observance, as we have remarked, depends not at all upon the New Testament scriptures ; that is, there are no injunctions there recorded ; its observance is only alluded to as a matter of established custom. How then, we may well ask, could such an observance ever have been begun and established, among such persons, and for the purpose of commemorating the resurrection of Jesus, and so have been continued and universally extended in the Christian church unless from a firm knowledge and conviction on the part of those, who had the means of determining, and were as deeply interested as possible to ascertain, the fact, because they made every possible sacrifice and staked their lives upon its truth, that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead took place on that day ; and from its immense and unutterable importance demanded this specific commemoration.

Other facts might be appealed to and other external evidence of the truth of Christianity, wholly independent of the writings of the New Testament, might be adduced ; but I think the early establishment of a Christian congregation, associated and accustomed to meet and recognise each other as such, the observance of the Lord's supper in commemoration of the death of Jesus and of the first day of the week in memory of his resurrection, all which facts are entirely independent of the scriptures of the New Testament, unitedly compose an argument in support of the principal facts of Christianity of very great weight. They may not impress all minds equally ; but I am at a loss to know how they are with any show of reason to be accounted for but on the presumption of the truth of these facts.

Let us apply the case to our own times and ask how any such institutions could now, for the first time, by the most obscure people in the community, be established among us, without any truth or reason or motive ; and by mere arbitrary appointment.

The power of no government on earth could institute such observances, render them universal and expressly and avowedly design them in commemoration of certain important historical facts, if those facts never had an existence. If it would be difficult among us, it would have been still more difficult among the Jews, since it required them to oppose all the strongest prejudices of education and all the strong influences of rank and power, and obliged them to do it at the hazard of their lives. Apply the case to the general observance of our own national anniversary ; and can any of us be so ignorant of human nature as to imagine that such an observance, even without any obstacles in the way, could ever have taken place, unless it rested upon the facts which it professes to commemorate.

I submit the subject to your consideration, fearing that I may not have succeeded in presenting it in that strong light, which belongs to it. Your own good judgment will supply my deficiencies. You must feel that whatever is connected with the truth of our religion is of infinite moment. Unbelief is perhaps less current than it has been at sometimes. Yet the fairest minds are not always free from doubts, which may partially cloud their hopes and lessen their consolations, and withdraw in some degree the grounds of their virtue. May it please God to give us more light ; to increase our faith, and cause it to rest on the most enlightened and firm conviction. May he engraft it likewise in our affections ; and while it illuminates our reason and

fixes its throne in our souls, it will not fail to exhibit its benign and heavenly fruits in our lives ; and prepare us for that blessed world, where in God's light we shall see light.

SERMON VI.

HUMAN NATURE.

GENESIS ii. 7.

THE LORD GOD FORMED MAN OF THE DUST OF THE GROUND AND BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS THE BREATH OF LIFE; AND MAN BECAME A LIVING SOUL.

THIS simple statement announces the most important fact to which the mind can revert; or which is comprehended in all history; I mean of course to us. The creation of the material universe, the formation of this earth, a small but an integral part of this magnificent and immense system; the countless formations which constitute and adorn the vegetable creation; the innumerable tribes of living existences, which people the earth, the air, the sea, acting and congregating wherever there is space to move and air to respire, and every where in their own proper sphere and with their own proper capacities, rioting in the gratuitous and rich bounty of nature; the origin of all this life. the fountain, whence all this bounty flows; the mighty power, which, though unseen, sustains all this being,

kindles all this happiness, pours out from its inexhaustible fulness all these riches ; the infinite agent, which creates and sustains all things ; measures the ocean in the hollow of his hand ; weighs the mountains in scales ; counts the atoms which form the universe, spreads through all extent, endures through all time, controls and directs every power in nature ; all these are subjects of contemplation, which absorb the highest faculties of the human soul ; and in their unfathomable vastness are destined to occupy its contemplations and inquiries to the utmost, as long as the power of inquiring and thinking remains ; and the human mind remains at a point short of absolute infinitude.

But the creation of the human race is the fact, which most concerns ourselves. We belong to this class of existences. We are descended in the uninterrupted line of succession from the first human pair, whom God planted upon the earth. We share in their nature, capacities, condition, destiny, and in all their attributes ; and we trace back our origin to the events of that hour, whose history is detailed in the text. This is the hour, when God saw fit to give life to man ; to people the earth, which he had formed with this new tribe of animals ; differing from all others, to whom he has given existence ; endued with extraordinary capacities, occupying peculiar relations to the earth itself, and to other beings, who inhabit it ; having peculiar powers, and therefore peculiar duties ; destined to labor, to enjoy, to suffer, to endure, as we have seen, a long period of time ; and how much longer than the race has already existed we have no means even of conjecture ; but like other animals, though individuals and generations pass rapidly away, endued with the power of continuing and multiplying the species to an indefinite extent and period.

As the text details a fact, of all others the most important to man, so every thing connected with it, every fact involved in it, every inquiry suggested by it, becomes important. Man in his nature, relations, duties, history, and destiny, is the proper study of man; and while other subjects are interesting and useful as matters of philosophical investigation, while every subject deserves attention and knowledge of every kind is valuable, this which so mainly concerns ourselves, demands our most inquisitive regard. Man, however, is a vast subject, which a hundred discourses would not exhaust; all that I shall attempt in a single discourse must be very little; and will be much rather to furnish to reflecting minds hints for thinking and inquiry, than to give even the rude outlines of what may be termed a system of human nature.

What then is man, thus springing into existence from the hands of the great Creator; and animated by the breath of his mouth? What is man, as a moral being? To this question, which involves the most important considerations, I shall give the best answer I am able. All agree that man is a moral being; by which we mean, without entering into any subtle distinctions, that he is capable of perceiving a difference in actions, of discerning right and wrong, and endued with the power of choosing and performing the one and disliking and avoiding the other. This however is the only point in which there is a universal agreement. Men from this immediately begin to differ, and start off in opposite and diverging directions.

As I understand it, for in stating the sentiments of others this is a just and necessary qualification, the opinion of a large part of mankind is, that in consequence of the defection or sin of the progenitors of

the human race, an alteration immediately took place in the nature of their posterity, a corrupt entailment was fixed upon them, and their moral constitution became totally depraved, bent wholly upon evil, and indisposed to any good. Such notions are an insult to the Creator; a libel upon human nature; and have no just foundation either in observation or the scriptures. The only basis, upon which such opinions rest, is some perverted passages of the scriptures, which the ingenuity or subtlety of some men, well intentioned, we have no doubt, but mere mystifiers and scheme-makers in theology, have wrested from their proper connexion to support the ill-formed progeny of their own imaginations. Of this perversion I will give one example; and that shall be of a passage, which is often triumphantly quoted in defence of this doctrine of total depravity.

In the sixth chapter of Genesis it is said, that God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually; and it repented the Lord that he made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart; and he said I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. This is one passage on which theologians confidently rest their doctrine of a corrupt nature and of total depravity. But what can be more absurd!

We admit that the language is strong and bold; but every one must see that it is the language of hyperbole, and not to be received as literally exact; for at the time that it spoke of every man as utterly corrupt, and God as determined to destroy the human race by

a flood, in this same account it speaks of his providing for the safety of the patriarch Noah and his families, because he was a just and a good man. We are to understand it therefore not as implying a universal and total corruption in the strict and absolute sense of the terms, but a great and general depravity.

But receiving it in the most literal sense, what has it to do with man's nature; or what has it to do with any other persons than those to whom it immediately applied? It says nothing of man's nature; but it speaks of men's having corrupted themselves upon the earth.* If it applies to the corruption of the nature of man, it must apply in the same manner to the nature of the brute animals, the reptile tribe, and the birds of the air, for they are equally included in the sentence of condemnation.

But you will observe, in the next place, that it is matter purely of history. It relates to times and persons before the flood, to the men of that period. What has it to do then with men of the present day or of any other time, unless we choose to maintain the absurdity and dishonor the scriptures by representing them as a history of events and circumstances, which were to occur, and of persons who were to live, centuries after the time of its being written?

But we have a better answer in our own knowledge and experience. If men are so corrupt by nature, how comes it that there is any virtue in the world; how does it happen, for example, that in the nearest relations of human life, there is any such thing as natural affection, parental attachment, filial duty, sympathy, kindness, truth, or any vestige of what is good? "How does it happen," as an intelligent writer re-

*V. 12.

marks, "that there is any such thing as natural conscience; that men suffer pain and shame when they do wrong; and that they cannot be brought to any gross depravity by a sudden plunge, but by a long and gradual progress, in which they have to contend always with many struggles and revoltings of their own hearts."

But what a dishonor to God are such doctrines as these; to charge upon him the giving of a corrupt nature to man, by which they could do nothing else than to drink in iniquity like water; and having been brought into the world by his appointment were to go on corrupting themselves; corrupting others; and pouring out this bitter and unmixed stream of crime and misery for ages and ages, over myriads and myriads of human beings, who were to come into the world only to convey its wretched and tremendous influences farther on and farther on in the progress of time; and spread its terrific desolations over a still wider and wider extent. Let such impious suggestions be rejected. They are revolting to every sentiment of enlightened piety.

A second theory of human nature supposes that all men come into the world in a state of unsoiled purity; neither inclined to vice or virtue, to good or evil; but are to be formed wholly under the influence of external circumstances; and to become what education and training may make them. It is a part of this theory to suppose that all men are by nature alike; that virtue is equally easy to all men; and hence that all men are equally responsible.

There is a third opinion, formed by benevolent minds, which supposes men to come into the world, with all their dispositions inclined to good; and that, if they were not by some foreign influences corrupted

or perverted, they would never do wrong. I shall not stay to expose what I deem the errors of these theories of human nature. They are theories; they are not facts; they are in many respects contradicted by facts and experience. They have a mixture of truth; they have much in them that is plausible; for this is in a certain degree true of the grossest errors, which ever clouded the human mind, otherwise they never would have been received by any.

Human nature is not to be studied in any mere theory whatever. The proper means of arriving at truth in the case is to study ourselves. The books in which to learn what human nature is are in our own hearts and consciences and history. Unlock these folded leaves; pore intently, and as far as you can, impartially upon these pages; and there you may best learn what human nature is. Study men as you meet with them from day to day; read their history; observe their actions; regard them in various situations; under various excitements, and the diversified influences, which operate upon them; and seek to learn what human nature is by a thorough and dispassionate observation and knowledge of your own mind and heart, your own character and conduct.

It may be deemed presumptuous after the remarks which I have already made, that I should pursue this subject farther; but candid and liberal minds are disposed to inquiry; and by such minds my observations will be duly and candidly regarded.

Man is formed, say the scriptures, in the image of God; that is, man is by nature a moral being. A capacity of distinguishing between right and wrong, virtue and vice; the faculty of conscience by which he receives pleasure from the one, and pain and shame

from the other, constitute him, as we suppose, a moral being. Without this he could not be so denominated; he is capable of sentiments and acts of religion, benevolence, justice, and duty; and all his sentiments and actions, his animal powers, his intellectual powers, his appetites, desires, passions, and affections are all the subjects of moral restraint and exercise. As far as he possesses the power of self-government and self-restraint, of exerting and directing his powers, and of forming his character, and no farther than he has this power, is he responsible.

There is a wide difference in the natural constitutions of men. Nothing is more contradicted by facts, than the position, which represents all men as in any respect equal or alike. The faculties, sentiments, and propensities, which constitute man a moral being, are combined and compounded in an infinite variety of forms. In their original moral constitution men greatly differ. They are alike only in the great principle, that their individual moral responsibility is in proportion to their individual moral power. The great truth that there are original differences in their moral power is established by one fact, which we shall all admit. We are accustomed to make a distinction between the intellectual and moral powers of men. There is a difference. We all agree that among men there is every possible diversity of intellectual talent or power; but we are reluctant to admit a difference in their moral ability. But is it not obvious that to a certain extent a difference in their intellectual must itself create a difference in their moral powers; since clearer intellectual perceptions of what is right and wrong will of themselves enable us to discover stronger motives and impulses to practise the one and to reject the other.

In regard to their original constitution, their mental and their animal powers, their faculties, aptitudes, propensities and susceptibilities, there is in men every conceivable diversity. In some men the intellectual greatly predominate over the animal ; in other cases it is the reverse, and the animal propensities, weigh down the soul. In a healthy and well-formed mind these faculties and sentiments are well balanced and proportioned ; but there are examples of malformation or extraordinary deficiency, amounting, in some cases of excess, to obvious disease or insanity. Excepting in such cases of decided disease or deficiency, men are ordinarily capable of discerning and performing what is right. They may easily learn the limits of physical indulgence ; and may almost as early and easily discover the limits of moral duty and restraint. The original tendency of all the faculties and propensities is to excess. Virtue or vice cannot be predicated of any of them when we enter into the world. They are all designed for good ; and in their proper and just exercise are good and useful. But, from their natural tendency to excess, and from the excitements continually presented to them, they are ever liable to go wrong. Vice consists in voluntarily permitting them to go wrong ; to destroy the balance of power ; to grant improper indulgences and to allow the animal to gain the supremacy over the intellectual and moral powers. Virtue consists in the just exercise, restraint and regulation of them all ; in using them according to their designed objects ; and in bringing them all into subjection to the dictates of conscience and religion. Virtue therefore may be said to be so far natural to us as that we are constituted for its attainment ; as it is the legitimate, healthy and proper exercise of our powers

and sentiments; but it is to be learnt and formed by self-government and restraint, by education and training.

If this be in any just measure a true account of human nature, then as the original powers of different men essentially differ, their trials and duties are different; and their responsibilities differ. The great principles of moral duty prevail every where; they are infallible; they admit of no abatement. Man must regulate his passions and appetites, applying them only to proper objects, and under proper limitations. Man must be as kind and useful as he can be; avoiding doing any harm or giving any pain or imparting any evil to others; and doing as much good as he can, and promoting their true happiness by every means in his power. Man must regard himself as the creature of God, and bound rigidly and always to conform to the laws of his constitution. By whatever means he may arrive at a knowledge of the will of the Supreme Being, whether in reason or conscience, in experience or observation, or by a special and authenticated revelation, that will must form the rule of his life; and a conformity to that will, to the obvious principles of his nature, will be ever coincident with his improvement and happiness. As far as he obeys it he will be happy; as he violates it he will be miserable.

Man's character is of necessity greatly under the influence of external circumstances; but rarely to such an extent as to absolve him from all moral responsibility. His earliest impressions must, to a certain degree, be derived from others. A serious responsibility devolves upon each of us, therefore, in respect to the influence, which we exercise either by our choice or neglect over the virtue of other men.

Responsibility is ever in proportion to power. As there are original constitutional differences with men, so likewise their external circumstances are infinitely various; their advantages are different; their means of usefulness, their trials and exposures are different. Every man is bound to be as good as he can be, and to do all the good which he can do; the highest and most gifted can do no more than this. Avoidable sins, failures springing from neglect, indulgence, determined malice or vice admit of no excuse. Under all the conditions of human frailty, it may be our consolation that the ultimate adjustment and decision of character rests with that omniscient Creator, who perfectly understands our nature and condition, our weaknesses and trials, as well as our powers and faculties and means of virtue and usefulness.

Every man, except in anomalous cases of disease, fatuity, idiocy or derangement, is capable of virtue and vice. He must exert this power to the utmost in seeking the one, and shunning the other.

As man's moral faculties are exerted, he finds a new power continually developing itself; that is the power of improvement. It is the great law of our nature that exercise promotes advancement; as he exerts his talents for doing good they become enlarged; the higher he rises in virtue, the higher he can rise. Whether men can reach perfection in this life, is a question which has often been agitated. At best it can be only a comparative perfection. Man can never reach a state beyond which he can advance no farther; like the traveller in an Alpine region, as he attains one summit another and another seems rising continually before him, where he sees the sun pouring out a richer splendor, and his ambition is ever stimulated to mount upwards.

That man can never reach a height in this world from which he cannot fall, is painfully certain. Human history is too full of instructive lessons on this subject, where along the path of man's progress, we see so many dreadful wrecks and fallen monuments far upwards in the ascent. That man can never reach a height in this world, where he will not feel in some measure oppressed with the consciousness of weakness, frailty, and the ordinary accompaniments of his mortal nature, is equally certain. But the virtues of some men seem like almost a divine perfection, compared with the humble attainments of others, and prompt to the most powerful efforts.

Such efforts God will aid and crown with success. Human nature is his work. It proceeded from his wisdom and benevolence. It is as he made it. Let us adore the Creator in this most glorious of his productions. What a moment was that described in the text ; when man first proceeded from the hands of his divine Former, fashioned by his skill and animated by the breath of his mouth ! How much is comprehended in the simple statement, man became a living soul ! What a moment was that when God saw this last and noblest of his works on earth finished ; perceived the first pulsation stirring at the heart, the first blush mantling in the cheek, the first beam darting from the eye, the first thought gently ruffling the mind ; and man standing erect in the virgin purity of his nature, and looking round upon the new creation of God in all its freshness, glory, and splendor ! What an hour pregnant with results to that omniscient eye, which could take in at one glance the whole course of human destiny on earth, and mark the gathering families and nations, in all their lengthened and complicated histories,

which to him were as though they were then born; and trace out every individual's life and history, as though every word were "conned" and "rote" before him in all his emotions, purposes, joys, sorrows, sufferings, and labors, with all their countless influences, connexions, and relations with others, spreading in their innumerable and tangled ramifications like a vast net over the immense space of years, and centuries during which they were destined to possess the earth.

But how much higher, how much wider prospect than any thing which human destiny on earth could present, was opened before that omniscient eye, to which the future is as the present, as it contemplated man's immortal nature, and the interminable progress of the human soul beyond these narrow bounds of earth and time. What a moment was that when man became a living soul; an intellectual being rises out of the dust; an immortal mind is born into the world to preside over this lower creation; and the inspiration of the Almighty gives him understanding. The human mind emanates from the divine intelligence; the image of the divine glory is stamped upon this noblest of God's earthly works. Look through all nature, and what gift of the Creator is so brilliant as the human mind. How subtle, yet how wonderful in its operations; how diversified in its talents; how bold in its conceptions; how mighty in its effects. Surveying places far beyond the reach of human sense; controlling events over which physical force is impotent; erecting monuments upon which the revolutions of time effect no change; measuring the material universe in its bold calculations; penetrating even into the presence-chamber of the divine glory; and presuming to scan the perfections of that great Being, who reigns in his own glory undivided and su-

preme throughout the universe. More than this ; higher than all this ; moral in its nature ; capable of an assimilation in its character and progress to that Being who is purity itself and goodness itself ; clothed with the attributes of the divine immortality ; destined to live, to think, to feel, to act, to go onwards and upwards, when every thing earthly and sensible shall perish ; and now, while yet on earth, by the dictates of reason, by the power of conscience, and by all the eloquence of religious faith, exhorted to fix its eye heavenward ; to expand its powers ; and to plume itself for an eternal flight.

Such is man ; such was the birth of that hour, when the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground ; and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and man became a living soul. Again I call upon you to adore the Creator in this most glorious of his productions ; and as rational, moral, and immortal beings, reverence the nature which God has given you. Let us contemplate it, as it is sometimes seen, radiating with the splendors of a heavenly purity and elevation. At its degradation, we can look only with shame, and shuddering, and terror. Let the bright examples, which are sometimes presented, stimulate our ambition and strengthen our virtuous efforts. The great end of Christianity is to redeem human nature from its degradation, and elevate it to the highest point to which it is capable of ascending.

All perfection, save that which belongs to God, is comparative, not absolute perfection. The perfection, which belongs to our nature on earth may be reached on earth. Heaven grant that it may be reached by us. This, this indeed may be every thing here : But then it is nothing to what awaits us hereafter. The immor-

tal mind, which even in its earthly prison swells with desires and aspirations absolutely boundless, will break from its confinement. This little spark, which here burns often so dimly and always feebly, will burst into a flame; and gathering strength in its ascent will rise higher and higher until it mingles with those pure flames, which burn with unquenchable splendor before the throne of God. The spacious heavens are open before it. There at last it will find its native country and its eternal home. Let us thank God then that he has given us existence, that he has made us men. Let us seek to prove ourselves worthy of the inspiration which has imparted understanding and infused into the human soul the breath of immortal life.

SERMON VII.

HOW FAR OUR PERSUASIONS AND CON-
VICTIONS MAY BE RELIED UPON.

PROVERBS xxiii. 7.

FOR AS HE THINKETH IN HIS HEART SO IS HE.

Few passages of scripture are more frequently quoted than the one just read, and no one is more frequently improperly applied. In their loose speculations men are prone to believe that what they think is right must be right, at least for them; that the conviction or persuasion of their own minds is always a safe rule of conduct; and that they are justified in following it out to any extremity. They think it enough to be, as they term it, sincere; not duly considering, that men are as sincere in what is criminal as in what is virtuous; in error, superstition, folly and violence, as in that which is true, and wise, and good. There are no extravagancies more wild, no outrages more violent, no crimes more enormous than some which have been perpetrated under the pretension of sincerity.

There are, however, few of the notions or establish-

ed maxims prevailing among men but what have some foundation in truth, however otherwise erroneous they may be ; as there are few crimes for which those who commit them have not some apology to offer, or do not find some excuse in their own minds ; as it is true, likewise of the most extraordinary phenomena in nature, or rather the most extraordinary sensible delusions under which men have labored, that they may be traced to some natural cause ; they are not pure and unmixed falsehood and deception ; but have some foundation in fact or truth. So it is with the text ; as a man thinketh in his heart so is he ; there is a sense in which this is to be received without qualification ; but this should only render us more solicitous to understand the abuses to which it is liable, or to which the folly or depravity of men have subjected it.

I. To take the strong persuasions of our own minds as a rule of conduct would be to establish a very unsettled rule. Men are far from being agreed. The convictions and persuasions of different men in relation to the same subjects are oftentimes as different as the talents, character and circumstances of the individuals themselves. They differ in different countries and different periods of the world ; and the same individual at different times will be found in relation to the same subjects at variance with himself ; and all this without any just charge of insincerity or want of entire self-confidence. What in one country has been deemed immoral has in other countries been sanctioned and encouraged. What we ourselves have in some cases approved and practised, at another time we have seen occasion to regret and condemn. There have been countries in which theft has been regarded as a virtue ; falsehood

and treachery justified; persecution and intolerance practised and commended. There are countries in which polygamy is legalised, and human sacrifices are offered up in the name of religion. There are Christian countries in which offensive war and slavery are maintained, encouraged, and practised, not only without compunction but with that complacency and approbation, which evince a conviction of their rectitude. The history of St. Paul in its application to this case, is familiar to us. His honest avowal, when summoned to answer for his conduct, was, that in the midst of his persecutions of the unoffending and defenceless Christians, when breathing out only threatening and slaughter against the disciples, and haling men and women to prison and to death; he believed with himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and that by these bloody outrages and atrocities he was only doing God service. By such pleas as these, under pretences as ill-founded, and yet entirely sincere, the most dreadful acts, which have stained the history of mankind, have been perpetrated.

Let us look, likewise, at the variety of forms among ourselves, which the profession of religion assumes. The varieties of religious opinion are almost infinite. The different forms, under which religion is professed, are as various. The sects among us characterized by different names, opinions, ceremonies, persuasions and practices are innumerable. They each believe that there is but one right way; one right way of belief; of worship; of serving God; and so of entering into eternal life. In the profession of true Christianity they include themselves and their own party; and they exclude all others. These are selfish, narrow, uncharitable views. Yet we have no reason to impute a want

of sincerity to any of them. Most of them act sincerely because they conform to their professed principles; are prompt to make expensive sacrifices in support of them; and cling to them under every trial with a pertinacity, which neither menace, nor loss, nor persecution, nor suffering, nor death itself can subdue. Under such circumstances what can be more unsettled and capricious, than a rule either of faith or conduct deduced from the current convictions of men, though established on a strength of persuasion as determined as any thing which appertains to the human mind and heart can be.

This diversity of persuasion is not surprising. Men have originally different capacities. Their attainments and education are as different. They are exposed to various external influences from the situation in which they are placed; from the society in which they live; from prevalent customs; from established prejudices; from the influence of private interests; from the excitement of passion; and from causes so subtle, mixed, and variously modified and compounded, that it is impossible to trace their operation or measure their power. All these circumstances contribute to produce that great diversity of opinion and persuasion, which exists and has always existed in relation to subjects not absolutely demonstrable.

II. As individual persuasion or conviction furnishes no certain rule of conduct, neither does it, when it becomes general, nay universal, in a community. Numbers may err; whole sects, whole parties may err; the largest communities may be involved in the same mistakes and act under the same erroneous convictions. We admit that two minds are not so liable to fall into a false conclusion as one; and so perhaps

of larger numbers. The mistakes of the one are likely to be exposed or corrected by the clearer discernment of the other. In the multitude of counsellors there is safety, because when different minds concentrate their powers of observation to one point, they illuminate every part of it. Yet the security against error in this case is not so certain as we might without reflection suppose. The same high authority, founded in a just knowledge of human nature, cautions us not to follow a multitude to do evil, because the wise man well knew, that multitudes are likely to join in the same evil. Men similarly situated, exposed to similar influences, having common interests, are liable to be moved by the same impulses, to see subjects in the same light; and to be hurried on to the same conclusions. It is difficult in such cases to separate ourselves from the crowd. It requires no small heroism and self-possession to resist the tide of popular opinion, especially when its waves are rolled onward by the strong gales of popular feeling. The mere effect of sympathy, which is a kind of moral electricity, is powerful in communities; and powerful in proportion to the extent to which it operates, in moulding those, who are attracted within its influence, into the prevalent sentiments, opinions, and feelings. Most men, from want of the capacity or opportunity of inquiry, rely for their opinions upon the authority of others. Many from an accustomed inactivity of mind, from pure indolence, will take their opinions upon trust. There are many who slide into the opinions of other men from indifference to the truth. There are those who dread the reproach, and odium and inconvenience of dissenting from established opinions. Public sentiment is a despotic tyrant; and does not readily ac-

quiesce in any distrust of his infallibility. Even in communities which are eminently liberal, and sometimes among sects, who pride themselves upon their liberality, there is much bigotry and intolerance. The pride of opinion is one of the strongest sentiments, which ever sway the human heart. It seldom allows of compromise or indulgence on any subject, but least of all on subjects of religion; and here it is tenacious of its conclusions in proportion to the difficulty and obscurity of the subjects to which they relate. It brandishes its sceptre and hurls its anathemas over all, who are so unfortunate as to question or demur to its authority. Where, as in our privileged and happy country, it can inflict no physical harm, it operates by a silent and subtle agency; poisons the sources of public confidence; renders a man an object of distrust among his neighbors; impairs his usefulness; and destroys his character, though it is compelled to leave that, which is in many cases less valuable, his life.

In truth we are not to regard public opinion and sentiment, however unanimous, as a more proper rule of conduct than individual persuasion or conviction. Whatever argument we may derive from the authority of numbers in favor of any truth or practice, we must not deem it conclusive. History abounds with examples of remarkable and palpable delusions, operating for a length of time upon whole communities, and leading to the most disastrous and criminal results. The number of individuals in any community, who honestly and boldly inquire for themselves, settle their opinions on intelligent and reasonable grounds, and in opposition to the obstacles and perils which lie in the way, courageously assert, vindicate and maintain the opinions to which they are brought, are and always

must remain small ; and in the same proportion therefore will communities of men be exposed to be operated upon by ignorance, prejudice, fashion, and private interest ; and to be led astray and enthralled by various impositions and delusions.

III. I proceed to remark in the third place on the importance of distinguishing carefully between mere opinions and facts ; between what we believe things to be and what they are. The two things may coincide, but this is not always nor necessarily the case. Our opinions and belief may entirely correspond with the truth in the case ; or they may but partially correspond with it ; or they may be wholly at variance with it. Our belief will in no case make or alter the facts about which it is concerned. A man kept imprisoned in a dark room may easily persuade himself that the sun has not risen ; but what he thinks will not affect at all the rising or the setting sun. When the shore is left dry by the receding waters, you may persuade yourself that the ebbing tide will not return. There may be those, who like the courtiers of the king, will seek their own interest or gratify their own folly in trying to convince you of this. But no strength of persuasion, to which you can bring your mind, can affect the result. Put your chair upon the forsaken beach, and as the ripple of its returning waves begins to steal around your feet, see if it will hearken to your bidding any more than to the royal mandate. Now the facts, which are proposed to your religious belief, are not what you choose to think or believe they are. You may say that you do not believe that God has ever made a revelation to mankind. Will this persuasion of yours, let it be as strong as the consciousness of your own existence, affect the great fact itself ; make it true or false ; or in

the slightest degree alter it. You may boldly aver that you do not believe that such a person as Jesus Christ appeared in the world. Believe so if you will; let the whole community submit to your dictation; let there not be found one solitary dissentient. This will not alter the case. The fact is entirely independent of what you, any other man, or all men think of it. It rests upon other evidence than your persuasion of its truth or falsehood.

IV. These remarks apply not only to matters of pure historical fact, but likewise to principles of a moral nature, to sentiments wholly theological and doctrinal. In respect to what is called theology from the abstruse and infinite nature of the subject, the narrowness of human comprehension, and the imperfection of human language, there is much which is obscure, debatable, and very partially disclosed. Many truths, of which we are persuaded, rest only upon a balance of probabilities; and we admit some things to be true, not because we fully apprehend them, or see their connexion, or can bring forward the proofs of them, but simply because we do not see how it can be otherwise. But this is by no means the case with all nor with the most momentous truths of religion. The existence of God, the providence of God, the moral government of God are demonstrable and demonstrated truths; proclaimed daily in the revolutions of light and darkness; written on the face of the budding and teeming earth; and engraved, as on a scroll, in characters of light and glory, upon the starry heavens.

It is so likewise with many of the great principles of moral duty and obligation. The obligations of truth, honor, equity, and charity, and of obedience

and resignation to God admit of no debate. It is a corrupt state of the passions and affections, which prompts or even allows us to question them. If the voice of reason is not sufficient, if what we term natural conscience does not speak plainly enough on this subject, if we do not see their correspondence to the fitness of things and to the obvious laws of our moral nature, if they find not a cordial response in the spontaneous movements of the human heart; yet are they inscribed on the pages of the gospel in characters which admit neither of misapprehension, erasure or perversion; and so luminous, radiating with such a splendid and ever burning light; that nothing but the wilful closing of our eyes can prevent our seeing them.

Here then no persuasion of our own minds alone can be trusted as any certain test of truth or rectitude. In the application of these great principles we may sometimes have difficulties, in which we must be guided solely by a sound discretion united with uprightness of intention; but in general the application of these principles is as simple as the principles themselves; and no private notions of our own, no persuasion of others, however extensive and positive, should induce, or can excuse or justify any exception, perversion, or abatement of them. It is not here with a man as he thinks it is, simply because he so thinks. No private guesses of our own, no caprices of the imagination, no questions of expediency, no dread of consequences, no influence of authority, no firmness of persuasion can justify a departure from the great rules of equity, truth, honor, and kindness in our intercourse with our fellow men; and no pretence of doubt or unbelief or persuasion of our own minds can ever excuse a distrust of the great facts of religion, which rest upon evidence; and some

of them upon demonstration. In respect to those truths, which, with minds who will think, are susceptible of demonstration, unbelief or unconcern admits of no excuse; and in regard to others, where the evidence is not demonstrative but probable, yet having such a strength of probability as almost to amount to a moral certainty, here we are to inquire for the truth, not in our own conjectures, and in the caprices of our own minds, but in the faithful, sober and intelligent examination of the evidence on which these facts rest for support.

V. Such are the grounds, which we deem sufficient to disprove the conclusion often deduced from the text, and in support of which the text is often triumphantly quoted, that sincerity is the great test of virtue; that if a man believes he is right or thinks he is right, he for that reason is right. Such a doctrine would sanction any and every error in belief, and any and every error or wrong in conduct; for there are few errors so extravagant, but there have been found those who have honestly believed them; few crimes in the history of human depravity so atrocious and enormous, as to surpass many which have been perpetrated under as firm a persuasion of duty as has ever rested upon the human mind.

It is not, therefore, in cases thus plain that mere honesty of intention or belief will excuse or avail us against the just charge of error or crime. In our judicial tribunals, and under the supremacy of common law, which has been so often proudly pronounced the essence and concentration of practical wisdom, the absence of ill intention or even the well established plea of good intentions avails nothing to save us from the

penalties of a violated statute. Why in cases as plain should they avail us at the bar of conscience, or at a far higher than an earthly tribunal.

Men must indeed in every case be finally decided by the sober judgment of their own minds. In matters where they have the capacity of decision, they are not to trust to authority, nor transfer the care of their consciences to others. In capricious or ill-founded persuasions, or in mere honesty of intentions, they are not to look for an excuse or apology for indifference, neglect, private inclinations or corrupt affections, which may lead them to call error by the abused name of truth, and to dignify crime by any title of virtue. It is only in cases, where the truth is obscure, the evidence doubtful, the capacity of discerning the truth small, the prejudices of education and the influences of external circumstances upon the mind not only hurtful, but wholly involuntary, and to any means within the power of their subjects absolutely invincible; it is only in cases, where the duty is difficult, not plainly defined, the near borders of right and wrong scarcely distinguishable, that honesty of intention can avail to our excuse, and we may feel acquitted, though we may be led into error; but this can only avail us, where no pains have been wanting to learn our duty; and where faithful, anxious inquiry, and the use of all the means within our reach, aided by humble prayer to God for light and guidance, have not proved sufficient to save us from mistake and wrong.

Human nature is imperfect. Such cases of error and wrong are not uncommon. This should teach us charity and forbearance; for we are liable to the same errors with others. We can plead no exemption from that frailty, which belongs to our constitution. Man's vision

is limited; hemmed in by a narrow horizon; obscured by every passing cloud; and extending only to the surface of objects. To many of the subjects of speculative theology he applies his inquiries, as the astronomer raises his eyes to the heavens. The splendor of the nearest objects dazzles him. He cannot look at the sun because of the very light itself. The distance of other objects, their immensity utterly confounds him. Yet amidst the infinite and grand conceptions which gather upon his mind, he perceives with mathematical certainty some of the most important truths, plainly depicted and evolved; truths which he deduces with entire confidence, and in spite of all their vastness and sublimity applies to the practical and humble purposes of life. May it be so to us with the great truths of religion, not more perfectly explained and developed, yet not less certainly established; and as capable of being applied to the practical ends of duty and happiness.

Let us gather them as we can from the voice of nature and the teachings of divine revelation. Above all let us seek to mould our tempers and lives under their constant influence. Happy for us if our hearts do not condemn us. Wilful and avoidable error, wilful and avoidable wrong should find no apology in our own consciences, as they can find none with God. But errors into which we fall because of the darkness with which we are surrounded, wrongs which we commit through an ignorance, which we cannot cure; or misapprehensions into which we are led against our desires and efforts, will find indulgence and forbearance with the gracious Father of our spirits, who alone is capable of discerning all the operations of the human mind, and weighing all the influences which bear upon it; and who demands of his children on earth nothing beyond their power.

S E R M O N V I I I .

THE MORAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD.

HEBREWS xi. 6.

HE THAT COMETH UNTO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS; AND THAT HE IS A REWARDER OF THEM THAT DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM.

THE two most important truths which were ever addressed to the human mind, are here announced. The first respects the existence of God; the second his moral government. The latter will now be the subject of our consideration.

By the moral government of God, we understand that he has given to man laws for the regulation of his conduct; that man is thus rendered accountable to him; that he has prescribed duties under certain rewards for obedience, and certain penalties for neglect; and that his compensations and retributions will be exact and just; he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; he will pass on every man a righteous judgment for his deeds; so that virtue will never go unrewarded, nor vice unpunished. Such is the simple form of this

doctrine. Let us advert to some arguments, which prove the fact of God's exercising such a government, and the influence, which a conviction of this may be expected to have upon man's views and conduct.

I. What first, then, are the proofs of God's moral government?

1. Man's own nature proves it; he finds arguments within himself, which can neither be refuted nor evaded. One of the earliest distinctions of which the human mind is capable, when it has reached any degree of maturity, is a distinction of right and wrong in actions. The moral sense in man is as distinct as any other faculty of his nature; and is as appropriate to man as his erect gait or the intellectual powers, by which he is distinguished. He is endued, likewise with conscience, that property of the mind, which compels him to reflect upon his conduct; and which occasions him pain, and shame, and regret, when he acts in opposition to his judgment of his duty; and on the other hand approves his conduct, and makes him satisfied and happy, when he follows his convictions of what is right.

His moral nature, while it renders him capable of discerning a moral distinction in actions, renders him capable of moral improvement. He is as susceptible of moral as of intellectual culture. The height of moral attainment, to which human nature is capable of ascending has not been determined; but in the moral acquisitions of different individuals we may find as various grades of excellence, as in any personal or mental qualities.

Are we to suppose that this moral nature, these moral faculties have been given to man without design? that their bestowment is accidental and fortuitous? Are

not the moral faculties of man as much designed for use, as the ear was designed to hear, or the eye to see? Is man capable of a distinction in actions, and is he not bound to observe such distinction; does he discern a moral law, to which his conscience urges him to render obedience, and can he doubt that he is bound to live by that law? Under these circumstances, can he avoid feeling that he is an accountable being; and accountable to the Author of his nature; who made him and has written his law upon his conscience. The existence of a law implies a law-giver; and the possession of a moral power implies a responsibility for its use to the Being who bestowed it.

2. We see here daily and hourly proofs of the moral government of the world. We admit that society often exhibits examples of an apparently prosperous vice; and likewise of a depressed and suffering virtue; that to our view the condition of men here does not always correspond to their deserts; men seem often to escape with impunity the just consequences of their vices; yet after all these exceptions, and we may make the most of them, it cannot be rationally doubted that virtue has even in this life greatly the advantage over vice. The question is not to be determined by particular and extraordinary instances; but from a survey of the ordinary course of human life. This will lead to the conclusion that virtue seldom fails of its due reward; and vice of its just penalties.

In the common course of events, vice is destructive to health, and tends to shorten life; it abridges or perverts the intellectual powers; it produces shame and alarm; it degrades men; it exposes them to various penalties in all civilized and indeed uncivilized communities, for society cannot exist without some protec-

tion of this nature against the vices of men; and it renders them wretched and infamous. The tendency of virtue is directly the reverse of this. It is favorable to health and long life. It inspires self-confidence and peace of mind. It leads to honor and success. It attracts and secures confidence; and in every condition of society it obtains universal esteem and approbation. Can we demand stronger indications that man is the subject of a moral government, and that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him?

If the moral retributions of the present state appear incomplete, yet we cannot doubt that as far as they seem just they are designed by the divine providence; and while among other arguments drawn from the nature and condition of man, they lead us to look forward to a future life; they suggest and confirm the belief that in that future life the moral government of God will be completely developed, and men enter upon a condition of exact recompense. Such are some of the prominent arguments, which reason and nature suggest to prove the moral government of God. Man is a moral being; as such, an accountable being. He is the subject of a law, but what is a law without sanctions to enforce its observance? What is a law without a lawgiver, to whom the subject of that law is responsible?

3. But if reason or nature are on this subject wanting in proofs, revelation supplies such deficiency.

One of the great objects of divine revelation was to make known a future life; and every view, which it gives of what that life shall be, presents it as a condition of moral retribution. God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil. God shall render to every man according to

his deeds. Numerous familiar passages confirm the same truth. If any one can read the New Testament and doubt the doctrine of a future retribution, he must give to language a meaning different from its direct and obvious intention. If the plain language of the New Testament does not make a future state of rewards and punishments certain, in my humble apprehension it makes nothing certain. What that retribution shall be, its extent, its place, its time, its character, reason gives little ground to conjecture, and revelation affords but few hints, and those partial, obscure, and imperfect. The great fact is plainly stated, and that Being, who knows man thoroughly and judges him most truly, effects his purposes in the wisest and best manner.

II. We advert in the second place to the moral influences of this great sentiment.

That this influence must be powerful every reflecting mind will admit. Let a man feel himself absolved from all law; let him look upon his actions as indifferent; let him extinguish the power of conscience; let him banish the idea of a great moral governor; let him feel that he is not accountable for his actions; let him believe that death is the end of him; that there is no future life; or if there be a future life, that his condition there will have no respect to his conduct here; that it shall be the same whether in this life he has done well or ill; and it would seem difficult to conceive what security you have upon his virtue.

Let us take the case of civil society as it exists among ourselves. How could a community subsist, by what means could public order and peace be maintained; what is to restrain men from the commission of crimes, but established laws; but of what efficacy would laws

themselves prove destitute of all sanctions and penalties by which they may be enforced. Let men once understand that no laws exist for the punishment of crimes; or be made certain that the penalties will be remitted; and do as badly as they may they will escape with impunity; and the fatal consequences may be easily anticipated. Society, so far from being peaceful and secure, could not be held together. Vice would pour in like a flood, and every thing valuable in social life be overwhelmed.

Why will not the fear of punishment in a future life, with men who believe in a future life, operate as powerfully to restrain them from sin, as the fear of punishment in this life? It may be said that the penalties of the civil law are not sufficient to deter men from vice. That they are to a considerable degree effectual cannot be doubted. Extraordinary cases of profligacy or moral blindness, in which men do wrong even with a persuasion that they must suffer the penalties of such wrong, sometimes occur, but they are rare. Men, we believe, would seldom do any wrong, which would expose them to the penalties of the civil laws, were it not for the expectation that they shall escape being detected, or, if convicted, elude the punishment. The expectation of concealment, or the hope of pardon; the frequent instances in which bad men for a long time escape detection, and the frequent instances in which the punishment is remitted, these are the circumstances which ordinarily embolden men to do wrong. Let them be made certain that their crimes will be detected and exposed; and that, if detected and exposed, they can indulge no hope of escape or pardon; and the amount of vice would be greatly, and to an incalculable extent, diminished.

If men were firmly persuaded of the moral govern-

ment of God, and of the righteous retributions of a future life, if they felt themselves in every situation, and for every action accountable to him, if they were convinced that no wrong action could escape his notice nor in the end go unpunished, the effect upon human conduct would be most powerful; it would operate constantly and with great effect in restraining men from sin. On the other hand, where all idea of a moral government and future retribution are removed, you remove the strongest barriers against vice and leave man, without any efficient principle of conduct, to follow the impulse of his ungoverned appetites and passions.

It is hardly necessary to add that a sentiment of God's moral government, and a future state of rewards and punishments, may be expected to operate, where no other principle can be effectual, and where indeed no other principle can reach. Vice is not confined to the overt act. Much wrong may be done, where detection by man may be certainly eluded; and great corruption of mind may exist, bad passions bear sway, evil principles and inclinations pollute the mind; and yet the external deportment be comparatively blameless. Human laws take cognizance only of the external acts of men; or if they judge of the intentions, they infer them only from the external conduct. The love of duty, the moral beauty and fitness of actions, are sentiments, which can have influence only upon minds highly cultivated and established in virtue. Without a sentiment of religious duty and moral accountability to God, in respect to many of the actions of men, in regard to much of human conduct, in regard to the thoughts, and principles, and affections of the heart, in regard in truth to the whole internal character, you leave man destitute of any principle, which is effectual in restraining him from vice.

If the fear of punishment may operate as a preventative or restraint against vice, the desire of reward may be equally effectual as a stimulus to virtue. The doctrine of the moral government of God combines both these sentiments. It teaches us to look up to him, not merely as the avenger of guilt, but as the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. The rewards and honors of virtue would never have been proposed as motives to virtue, if it were not proper to regard them. Religion calls upon us to observe that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness and her paths peace; and presses upon us, by a patient continuance in well doing to seek for glory and honor and immortality. If it be said that we practise virtue from motives of selfishness, we cannot be said to be less selfish in the practice of vice. But there is this most essential difference in the case; that while in the practice of virtue we are advancing our own satisfaction and honor and happiness, we are in an almost equal degree advancing the honor and peace of those with whom we are connected; and on the contrary, while we are practising vice and seeking our own gratification in criminal indulgences, we are heaping evil and oftentimes an irreparable evil upon those, who are the victims or the associates of our vices. Men may love and practise virtue for its own sake; or they may love and practise it because the will of God demands it; but a regard to our own personal comfort and honor, and our future reward and happiness may be cultivated without blame, indeed may be commendably cherished in aid of the higher principles of religious duty.

To a virtuous mind it must afford a powerful stimulus to duty and perseverance; and prove under every adversity, to which his duty may expose him, a source of adequate consolation, that God is the rewarder of

them that diligently seek him. Our duty here brings with it severe trials. Good men are often required, that they may preserve their integrity and perform their obligations ; to make many sacrifices ; to practise a severe self-denial ; to forego opportunities and prospects of gain or pleasure or advancement, which are captivating, and which it requires a strong effort to relinquish. The good man under such circumstances will find a support in the assurance that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

He may lift up his head without alarm though surrounded with difficulties and troubles. Though persecuted he need never feel himself forsaken ; though cast down he need not despair. The path of integrity is the path of safety ; virtue may be oppressed but it will finally triumph over every obstacle. His pilgrimage may lie through a wilderness crowded with toils and dangers ; but his path will terminate in that promised land, where his labors will be compensated and his best hopes accomplished.

There is a higher sentiment than this, with which the doctrine of the moral government of God inspires the good man's bosom. Every feeling and virtuous mind has experienced the pleasure, the generous and noble pleasure, which it derives from the approbation of those whom we respect and love. The dutiful child has often found the approbation of a father or a dear mother, whom he cherished and revered, among the sweetest satisfactions, that ever was poured into his soul. We have all felt that the approbation of the wise and good, of those whom we esteem and honor and confide in, is above all price, and has been more than a compensation for arduous labors, and severe privations. The good man, persuaded that God is the

rewarder of them that diligently seek him, feels in the same manner, that the approbation of his heavenly Father, the wisest, holiest and best of Beings, is a boon of infinite value, and the highest good to which the human soul can aspire. Upon minds sensible to any of the motives to virtue such considerations cannot fail of a favorable effect.

Next to the persuasion of the existence of God, no moral or religious sentiment can be more effectual as a restraint from vice, or as a powerful stimulus to virtue, than that of the moral government of God. It is necessarily associated with the conviction of our own moral accountableness; the one necessarily implies the other. May God aid us to cherish these principles in their full power. They will be present to our rescue in the dangerous hour of temptation; they will sustain us under every struggle to which our duty may call; and they will lead us to acquiesce in the apparent imperfect retributions of the present state under the conviction, that every thing will be set right at last; vice will not go unpunished; as we have reason to hope under his almighty, wise, and benevolent government, when the correctives of his providence, shall have accomplished their designed purpose, vice itself will be extinguished in the works of God, and the triumphs of virtue be complete and eternal.

S E R M O N I X .

MAN'S PERSONAL ACCOUNTABLENESS.

C L O S E O F T H E Y E A R .

L U K E xvi. 4.

G I V E A N A C C O U N T O F T H Y S T E W A R D S H I P .

UNDER the parable of a master, reckoning with his servants, and demanding an account of the management of the trust, committed to them, our Savior designed to remind his hearers of their own moral accountability to God. I need not dwell upon the parable, which is familiar. My concern is with the truth, which it inculcates; in which we have a deep interest; and than which none can more properly occupy our attention at the close of the year.

The fact of God's exercising a moral government over mankind does not admit of a rational doubt. We are the subjects of this government. We are accountable beings; accountable to God. We are accountable for our time and talents; for every endowment and faculty; all the opportunities and means of good afforded us; for what we do, and what we neglect to do;

for our conduct, habits, affections, words, temper, feelings, intentions, thoughts; in fine, for every thing with which we have any connexion or concern. This responsibility cannot be evaded. It is not a matter that we may take up or lay down at our pleasure. It is an attribute and condition of our moral nature, of which we can no more divest ourselves than we can divest ourselves of that nature. Every one must admit that it is a most serious condition of our being. It may be painful to think of it. Yet if it were far more painful than it is, it is important to understand and feel it. It may be deemed unkind, a disheartening of human efforts, a damper of human joy, to press it upon our consideration. It would be a greater unkindness, it would be a treacherous infidelity to the virtue and best interests of our fellow men, to omit it. It may create alarm. With some men, my friends, it happens they have heard the great truths of religion so often, without attention, that they have become indifferent to them through familiarity; as if their familiarity could lessen their importance. But there are minds, susceptible minds, in whom it may produce alarm, anxiety, terror. Yet in the prospect of a future retribution the virtuous man will find no occasion for alarm but for consolation; as it respects the negligent, the frivolous, the thoughtless, the vicious they have reason to be alarmed; the apprehension, which it may excite, though painful may be salutary. Some will say, God is so merciful that he will not cause his children to suffer hereafter. God indeed is merciful; he is inexpressibly kind; he is love itself. But we cannot make such an inference from any thing we see here; men suffer here daily and hourly and always for their follies, imprudences, neglects and sins; it certainly is not inconsistent with the divine

mercy that they thus suffer, because the suffering in such case comes by the immediate appointment of God. Why then should it be considered inconsistent with the divine mercy that men should suffer hereafter? Is the physician unkind because he subjects his patient to nauseous and distressing prescriptions? Is the parent unkind because he inflicts upon his child a wholesome, though it may be a severe discipline?

But let us define more exactly and as well as we can what we mean by the moral responsibility of man; what we are to understand, when it is said we must give an account to God. Let us dismiss, then, from our thoughts every thing in this matter, which in the scriptures may be deemed figurative, scenical, addressed to the imagination; and let us take the most simple statement of this great truth. Every thought and action is seen by God; and all that man purposes or performs will be followed by just consequences, by pain or pleasure, by disgrace or honor, by privation or privilege, according as it is evil or good, wrong or right. The good will be honored and happy in proportion to their goodness; the wicked will become infamous and wretched just in proportion to their wickedness.

Imagine, if you will, and yet it requires no effort of the imagination, a bad man arraigned at the bar of an earthly tribunal and there compelled to confess and expose his guilt; to see his follies and crimes detected and proclaimed; and to have the penalties of the law awarded to him. How often, even with those to whom such scenes are familiar, if you look round upon the crowd, will you see the eye of many a spectator flooded with tears, and if you could read their feelings, many hearts ready to burst with anguish at this spectacle of human weakness, and folly, and guilt, and wretched-

ness, and degradation. What then must the miserable criminal himself suffer ! But there is a far deeper misery than this to be endured. When the wretched convict is withdrawn from the crowd, the imposing parade of the trial is over ; its doubts and uncertainty, upon which this unhappy man rested his last hopes, are decided ; he is separated from the society of men, other than those in the same condemnation with himself ; and looking back upon the height of innocence and honor on which he once stood, he is left to the bitterness of his own thoughts and sees around him the inconsolable horrors of the situation, into which he has plunged himself. Yet this is reaping only the natural fruits of his vices ; what he was admonished of again and again ; what he had reason to expect must follow as the just consequences of his conduct. Such a reflection certainly will not mitigate his anguish. All this too he suffers under the administration of laws, which it will not be denied, are as indulgent and merciful as is compatible with the prisoner's own good and the well-being of the state. Let us carry our views forward, my friends, into a future life ; and suppose men entering at death upon a state of moral retribution. Let us suppose that there the follies and vices of men are detected and exposed ; and make them as wretched as they can make them. Let us suppose that there with more exact views of the nature and consequences of his conduct, and with an increased moral sensibility, a bad man is compelled to compare what he is with what he might have been ; what he has done, with what he ought to have done ; to look up to the height to which he might have ascended and the heaven, which he might have entered, from which his guilt has debarred him ; and it will not be difficult to imagine the mortification, regret, despair,

and wretchedness, in which he has involved himself. This is the picture of a bad man entering upon a just retribution ; not a picture of the imagination, a mere fiction ; for the scriptures portray it in more affecting colors. Some may say it is an extravagant representation ; yet it would not be an extravagant representation of what men suffer here ; and why should it be deemed an exaggeration in regard to a future life ? Others, when such a picture is held up before them, will immediately defeat its moral influence, by going into fierce and idle disputes, whether the sufferings of bad men in a future state are material or eternal. This is only an evasion of the great truth itself of man's moral accountability. The sufferings of folly and vice are dreadful here. Why should they not be much more dreadful in a state, where character must be more accurately determined and retribution of course far more exact. This is what the scriptures teach us they will be. If there is any truth in the scriptures they will be. This is what the scriptures call man's giving an account of his stewardship : when men must answer more directly for the life they have led here ; when every good deed will be rewarded and every bad deed punished.

There are certain points of difference between the retributions of a future and those of a present state, to which it may be useful to advert. The just retributions of the civil law are often evaded ; the testimony is incomplete, and the guilty escape. There can there be neither escape nor evasion, since there is an omniscient witness, from whom nothing is concealed. The retributions of the present state apply only to the external actions of men ; there, man must give account of his internal as well as his external character ; thoughts, which have never been uttered ; purposes of guilt, which

have never been executed ; vices, which have been nourished and cherished only in the darkness and secrecy of a man's own bosom, will be then disclosed and yield their bitter fruits. The retributions of the present state are not always exact ; they are arbitrary ; they are necessarily fixed by general laws ; and consequently cannot be particularly adapted to the different shades and combinations of guilt, which in various characters, are infinitely diversified. There, they will be exact ; suited to every character ; not arbitrary, but so much the natural result of a man's own follies and vices, that they are inseparable from them and exactly proportioned to them. They follow as inevitably as any effect follows its cause.

I am aware of the virtual incredulity with which this subject is regarded even by many who profess to believe in a future retribution ; an incredulity arising with such persons wholly from a neglect to examine the subject and settle their views upon it. They say they believe it ; yet they practically deny it. The certainty of a future retribution is explicitly asserted in the scriptures ; the expectation of it is confirmed by reason, by conscience, by the whole course of human life. Whether you believe it or not, its truth and certainty cannot be affected by your opinion. Let us go back however to an objection at which we have already hinted. It is incompatible with the divine benevolence, say some, that men should suffer in a future life. Yet it is not inconsistent with the divine benevolence that men should suffer ; because God is benevolent, and men are seen to suffer and often most dreadfully here. Then, it is said again, that the representations of the future sufferings of the wicked are exaggerated and highly colored. In what they will consist we know not ;

but it is difficult for the imagination to surpass the boldness of the language which a divine teacher has employed, when he speaks of a worm at the heart which never dies, and a fire burning in the conscience, which can never be quenched. But suppose they may not even exceed the sufferings which human tribunals deem it proper to award to those who fall under their judgment ; nor those in which we see the guilty here often involve themselves ; the infamy and sorrow, under which the profligate here are often overwhelmed by their vices ; would any man of sober reflection doubt that they are sufficient to excite his most anxious solicitude and alarm ? It is said, likewise, that let them be what they may, they must have an end ; they are not eternal. You say that you cannot believe God would have ever brought any creature into existence with a view to render him eternally miserable. Your heart revolts at the sentiment. The language of the scriptures, which appears to look this way, you think admits of an interpretation more consistent in your view with the divine benevolence. It may be true, however, whether we believe it or not. Our opinions will not decide the question. But difficult as we may find it to conceive of an eternity of future punishment in its most absolute sense, what limits shall we affix to it ? Suppose your views on this subject should be true. Because it is less than eternal, on that account and for that reason may we contemplate it without alarm ? The ordinary period of human life is nothing to eternity ; it is not so much, difficult as we may find it, to grasp the conception, as a drop to the ocean, as an atom to the world. A century is nothing to eternity ; a thousand centuries are nothing to eternity. But a term of suffering, corresponding even to the shortest of these periods, the

mortification, regret, dishonor, disability, privation, and misery, which vice must bring with it in a future world, endured even for any term like this, will any one say that for such suffering all the combined pleasures of the most prosperous vice, concentrated in one sparkling cup, afford any equivalent? But the truth is our imaginations can affix no limits to the future sufferings of bad men. There is one view in which they may properly be considered as eternal. While the human soul is conscious of what it might have been and what it has lost, it must suffer. The more susceptible, tender, and penitent it becomes, the more it must feel the ingratitude and baseness of vice. The more quickened and enlightened the conscience is rendered, the more pungent must be the anguish of conscious folly and guilt; and so, for ought I see, it must continue until God is pleased by his almighty power to put a stop to this suffering; and restore this degraded being to the rank from which he has fallen, and to the conscious joy of his renovation. When this may take place, or whether it will ever take place, must rest wholly with God to determine. But if this is to be the case with the wicked and incorrigible, if these are to be the consequences of our sins if unrepented of and unreformed, how many will exclaim at once, annihilation is preferable to all this suffering; I had rather perish than that this should befall me; let my name be blotted out from the book of the living; let me be at once extinguished. But it is not, my friends, as we choose.

Many a time, when men have found themselves here involved in the miserable consequences of their folly and sins, they have poured out the vain wish that they could die at once; or the still vainer wish that they had never been born. Often the unhappy convict has presumptuously anticipated the awful sentence of the

law and thrown back upon God a life which he had dishonored and abused. Here the analogy ceases ; death is one thing, annihilation is another. Men may kill themselves ; but death is not the end of a man ; it is only the commencement of another life ; to extinguish our existence, to say that we will cease to be, is not in our power. The power of annihilating, as the power of creating, belongs only to one Being. Death removes man from our sight ; but in God's sight men never die. The existence remains ; what properly constitutes the man, all that makes up the moral being, the capacity of action, perception, intelligence, suffering, enjoyment, remains ; and when these earthly incumbrances have fallen and the immortal spirit has burst from its earthly abode, must put on new freshness, vigor, expansion, sensibility. We exist at the pleasure of God, not at our own pleasure. He has made man in his own image ; and destined the human soul to share in the sublime attribute of his own eternity.

Such then is the condition of our being. We are responsible to God. We must give an account of our stewardship. We must meet the due reward of our deeds. Our present temper, feelings, actions, character, are of an importance which no language can exaggerate. They extend themselves into a future world and the consequences, which must follow them are immense. We are admonished of the rapid progress of time. With respect to most of us a large part of our lives is gone and the term of our earthly probation is drawing near its close. A year is not an inconsiderable portion of life. The experienced mariner makes a frequent observation of the course and progress of his voyage. The prudent merchant will often examine his accounts and the result of his trade. The wise man will weigh well the great objects of life ; and will faithfully inquire

how nearly he approaches their accomplishment. He will often reflect how much one portion of life affects another portion, and he will not lose sight of the connexion between this world, and that which is to come. It is obviously one great object of divine revelation to teach us that our conduct in this life is to decide our condition in the life which is to succeed the present. Can the imagination conceive a truth of greater moment than this?

While as yet then we have our destiny within our own power, and it may not be too late to retrieve errors, which we may have committed, to make restitution for injuries which we have inflicted, to reform what in our temper and conduct we cannot but condemn, let us by humble penitence seek the forgiveness of God; and by wise counsels and virtuous deeds lay the foundation of future satisfaction and joy.

The expiring year, has summoned many to their last account. How many of these would have given worlds, had it rested with them, for the time which has been granted to us. Let the lapse of time then induce us to propose to ourselves, and to be satisfied with no other than a direct and explicit answer to this simple but solemn question, whether the condition of our moral character, and the course of our lives are such as we can hereafter look back upon with entire satisfaction; such as are consistent with our religious and christian obligations; such as will permit us to give up our account not only without shame and alarm but with a reasonable confidence in the divine favor? Happy is the man, who, in such a survey, is not compelled to condemn himself; and who, in the unhesitating approbation of his own conscience, may anticipate the favorable decision of that infallible judge, who is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things.

SERMON X.

OCCASIONS OF SELF-DECEPTION.

PSALM xix. 12.

WHO CAN UNDERSTAND HIS ERRORS?

THAT we are prone to form a wrong judgment of ourselves, no one will doubt. Mankind are almost universally disposed to entertain a more favorable opinion of themselves than is just. They think more of their good than their bad deeds; more of their virtues than their sins. They overrate their virtues; they excuse or forget their sins. It is preferable, we admit, to err on one side rather than the other. It is more likely to rouse his efforts, to waken and stimulate his vigilance that a man should think too humbly rather than too highly of himself. It would be better that he should do neither; both are faults; both may be injurious to the character. It is our duty to think soberly of ourselves. It is most desirable that we should form a true judgment; value our virtues at a true rate; however we may be anxious to pass with the world,

endeavor to pass for no more than we are worth with ourselves ; strive in short to think and feel and judge of ourselves, as we have reason most seriously to think, that God, the searcher of hearts, whose estimate of human character is infallible, himself judges of us.

I. Such a judgment is not an ordinary nor easy attainment. Few men arrive at it. There are obstacles in the way of its attainment.

The Psalmist, when he exclaims in the text, who can understand his errors, felt the difficulty of this acquisition ; and this is what is implied in the text. When he exclaims, who can understand his errors, or as, in another translation, who can tell how oft he offendeth, he did not mean to represent the knowledge of ourselves as an impossible attainment ; but that it was extremely difficult, and perhaps as rare as it was difficult.

This every one must admit, who properly considers the facts in the case. Few persons judge of themselves justly. Few persons know themselves. Few persons understand their errors. The Psalmist himself affords a memorable example of this self-ignorance and deception. He had been guilty of two of the greatest crimes, adultery and murder. He had invaded the domestic sanctuary of a poor and humble family with a view to corrupt its purity. When he could not accomplish his diabolical purposes by other means, he procured the death of the husband of that household ; and filled to overflowing the measure of his iniquity. *The prophet, sent by God, to reprove him for his crimes, under a parabolical representation, portrayed his guilt

* 1 Samuel, xii. 7.

in a most affecting manner. He spoke of a rich man's oppression of his poor neighbor; and his plunder of his best property. The rich man forbore to take of his own flock and his own herd, which crowded his pastures and stalls; but from the poor man, who had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished with as much tenderness as a child; which grew up together with him and his children; which did eat of his own meat and drank of his own cup; "which lay in his bosom and was unto him as a daughter," and this every kind parent knows is saying all that can be said, this lamb the rich man forcibly took away from his neighbor to kill and to dress for the man that had visited him. It was, by no comparison, so aggravated a case of cruelty and crime as that with which the king himself at that moment stood chargeable. Yet his conscience seems to have been not at all alarmed, until the prophet himself applied it; and told him, when he had declared that the man who had done this thing should surely die, and thus had pronounced sentence on himself, that he himself was the man. He then felt his guilt most deeply, as the fifty-first Psalm composed on that occasion fully proves; but it was not until then. So difficult is it for men to know themselves; to form a faithful judgment of themselves; to apply to themselves the same rules by which they judge of the characters of other men. Self-knowledge indeed is rare; self-deception is common.

II. Let us inquire, in the next place, why it is so? I shall refer to a few of the occasions of this self-deception; and shall rather leave them to your own reflections than to enlarge upon them.

I. First, men are blinded by their self-love. The affec-

tions have always a great influence over the judgment ; now no affections are stronger than those, which we have for ourselves. Our interest and happiness are materially concerned in thinking well of ourselves. This operates as a bribe to our consciences, to pronounce a verdict in our favor. This prompts us likewise to invent many excuses and palliations of our criminal actions, which would be inadmissible, if we were not ourselves parties in the case. This often prevents our examining ourselves with severity ; we hastily make up a favorable judgment ; and we are, in our own case, always disposed to suppose the best, where the worst does not most obviously appear. Self-love is in most persons one of the strongest sentiments ; and as men, when struggling for existence will grasp at any thing to save themselves, so in respect to their good opinion of themselves, they will seize upon the slightest pretences ; they will rest upon reasons the most fallacious and insubstantial, if only they can preserve their self-complacency, and avoid the mortifying reproaches of their own hearts.

2. In the next place we are accustomed to judge of ourselves by a false standard ; or at least a defective measure of duty.

We are too much inclined to take public opinion for our rule. We measure our duty by what that demands of us. This must differ in different communities. In some it must in many things be a corrupting rule ; but in the best cases it is an imperfect rule ; sanctioning many things, which religion does not sanction ; omitting to require many things, which that demands. Public opinion, however intelligent and acute, can reach only the external conduct ; and a man may render to it an unimpeachable conformity, he may be all which that

demands, yet his heart not be right with God, but the seat of affections and passions, which are irreligious and criminal. To be a Christian in the sight of men, may not be difficult; but it may be a very different matter in the sight of an intelligent and sensible conscience, and in the judgment of God.

3. Again we are too apt to measure our duty by the characters of other men. Many are satisfied with this comparative goodness. They are content if they do not fall below the attainments of other men. They look upon their merit with peculiar elation and complacency, when they think they excel others; and they regard the claims of duty as satisfied, if they stand upon the same level of moral worth. This tends to blind us to the real defects of our character. One man's attainments, character, performances can never be a rule for another, unless in a case where their abilities, opportunities, advantages, temptations, and trials are precisely the same; but how unlikely are such cases to be found; and, if we suppose them to exist, how are they to be ascertained. It is impossible to do it. The attainments of others therefore are not a rule for us; and their deficiencies or sins afford no excuse for those, with which we ourselves are chargeable.

4. Another cause of self-deception, and the false judgment, which we are liable to form of ourselves is the shortness and treachery of our memories. We forget at one time what we were at another. Who, says the Psalmist, can understand his errors? Who can tell how oft he offendeth? Who can recollect the innumerable instances of deficiency in duty, of unwarrantable excitement of his passions, of evil desires, of criminal thoughts, feelings, purposes and words, with which he stands chargeable. Great crimes are not easily forgot-

ten, especially where they have been notorious, and we feel that others have not forgotten them; yet after a lapse of time, and in the tumult and hurry of business or pleasure, even these may escape our recollection. Still more likely is it to be the case with the innumerable little offences, which crowd every man's history. They are like traces in the sand, which every returning wave obliterates. Yet it is obvious in order thoroughly to understand ourselves, to form a just judgment of our characters, that our view should embrace a considerable portion, and as far as possible, the whole of our lives; and not be limited to the passing day, or month or year. Many things may be forgotten by us; but nothing is forgotten with God; and sins, which are unrepented of and injuries for which we have made no restitution, where restitution has been practicable, must in the day of trial show themselves to our confusion and sorrow.

5. The difficulty of knowing ourselves and the occasions of self-deception are to be found likewise in the remote and concealed origin of many of our actions. In the sight of God, and in the judgment of an enlightened and impartial conscience, the character of our actions must be determined by the motives from which they proceed. There is a great, an infinite variety of motives by which mankind are governed, and sometimes they are much mixed and diversified. Motives are not always to be deemed bad, because they are not the best possible; and a man may lawfully yield to motives of an inferior character, provided they are in themselves innocent and worthy, when he may not be sensible to those of the highest grade. No action whatever, be it ever so specious or even brilliant in its appearance, or ever so much applauded by mankind,

can be passed in the decision of an honest conscience to the credit of our virtue, the motives of which are bad and purely selfish ; and as Christians, we should not be satisfied with ourselves, until our hearts are brought completely under the influence of the highest motives by which men can be governed, for such truly our religion prescribes to us.

But the investigation of the motives and springs of our conduct is often a difficult affair ; and one in which we are liable to be greatly deceived. Sometimes they are of so mixed a character that it is scarcely possible to judge of them with strict justness ; sometimes they lie so deeply concealed, their origin is so remote, that they completely elude our search. Often we miscall our motives ; we mistake the impulses of passion for the dictates of conscience ; obstinacy of temper we call principle of duty ; and the mere phantasies of the imagination are taken for the leadings of divine providence. Not unfrequently, when in the heat of our own personal resentments we invoke fire from heaven to consume those, who are opposed to us, we are vainly imagining ourselves moved only by a pious zeal for our Master's cause ; and when glowing with the spirit of bigotry and persecution, and wasting and vexing and making havoc of God's family, we wrap ourselves up in the complacency of an imaginary devotion to our religion, and regard a course of cruelty and injustice as doing God service.

What a strange and flexible guide is that which men call conscience ; often leading to the most opposite results ; and courses of conduct, which do not admit of being reconciled to each other ; often pleaded in justification of the most criminal actions ; often a lure to attract or control weak minds, whose passions

are too strong for their judgment; often playing upon our imagination, infirmities, and fears. We greatly err; it is not conscience that does all this. The natural feelings of the human heart are in favor of virtue, truth, kindness, moral beauty. The intelligent and unbiased judgment of the human mind would always approve what is right and useful and proper towards man and God. But what men call conscience is too often nothing but their perverted will, their caprice, their feverish excitements, their deluded imaginations, their inflamed passions. Men are constantly liable to mistake the motives, which govern them; and so call their actions by a wrong name. They take credit for that which is unworthy of them; they look upon their covetousness only as a dutiful frugality; their insatiate avarice only as making a just provision for their heirs; their splendid beneficence is only a disguised and miserable selfishness; their party spirit they call zeal for religion; their exuberant vanity and spiritual pride are swelling the folds and thrusting themselves out at the corners of the sackcloth robes of their humility; and their ostentatious devotion, is little else than a pharisaical exultation that they fast twice in the week and pay tithes of all that they possess; and an impious boasting before God that they are better than other men, because they are not perhaps polluted with the gross crimes by which the characters of some men are degraded.

6. I mention in the next place the nature of habit as one of the great causes of self-deception.

We are obliged often in discussing subjects of a moral nature to refer to this great principle of our constitution. Habit has always so material a connexion with a man's character, that we cannot be too deeply impressed with

its power. How habit operates to deceive us in regard to our characters, it will not be difficult to show. What is habitual becomes for that reason familiar and easy. This is obvious in regard to our physical constitution. Particular modes of acting and speaking, particular gestures, gait, movements, manners, which might have been at the first unnatural and painful, are by practice rendered easy; and so far natural that it would be painful and difficult to alter them. We become familiar with them; we cease to think of them; and we perform or experience them a thousand times in a day without a consciousness of the fact. It is the same with the moral constitution. The influence of habit over the mind and heart is not less, its operations with the moral character are in no respect dissimilar from their operations on the physical character. Men acquire habits of thinking, speaking, feeling, temper, passion, and action, habits of criminal indulgence and injurious conduct, which are practised every day, without a consciousness at the time that they are doing wrong. They have become familiar; and therefore they cease to give them pain; they are accustomed to them and do not discern their deformity. They are done but not observed; and they make no impression on the memory, because it is the same as if they did not come to our knowledge; and therefore, in the estimation of ourselves, are not likely to be considered as they should be.

That they have become habitual does not lessen their criminality; it much rather increases it. Does it excuse a man who is accustomed to the wanton and wicked habit of profane swearing, or the degrading and corrupt practice of indecent conversation, for him to say that he has got the habit of doing it? Would our courts of justice admit it in extenuation of a criminal, for example,

that he should plead he had got the habit of taking what did not belong to him? I think not. The same may be said of any vices of the temper as well of the tongue; vices of the imagination and the affections as well as of the life.

There is another effect of habit in this case to which I shall barely allude but which deserves our consideration. Habit then changes the character of many things; or rather it changes our opinion of them and our feelings in respect to them, which is much more a subject of just alarm. What is at first an object of aversion habit will at last render not only agreeable but desirable. This needs no illustration. It is true in a certain sense of what is moral as well as of what is physical. Many things, which, before our moral feelings became corrupted, we regarded with a just abhorrence, habit will at last lead us to view with complacency; we shall extenuate them, we shall apologise for them; and do this so often that we shall at last lose sight entirely of their criminality. It is possible in some cases to pass through so great a transformation as to deem them meritorious; but if we cannot proceed as far as this, yet though we may still view the conduct as wrong, we shall look upon it either as so much the effect of nature or the result of circumstances, which we imagine we could not control, as to feel not only excused but justified in its practice. Such may be the dangerous and fatal influence of vicious habit.

7. I add, in the last place, as one of the principal occasions of self-deception and a false judgment of ourselves, that we live too much in the opinions of other men. We think too much of the judgment which they form of us, without reflecting how poorly qualified any other man than himself is to judge of a man's own char-

acter. When other men speak ill of us, we are usually disposed to complain of their injustice; often it is gross injustice and cruelty; and we choose to ascribe it to some miserable motives of envy or resentment. Very often it springs wholly from such motives and yet it is all true; but because we see that the motive which prompted the declaration, is wrong, we doubt or deny the truths, which make against us. Because no good is intended for us, though all at our own expense, we determine that no good shall be done to us. We do not choose to be healed if the medicine is to be administered by the hand of an enemy. But we are much more in danger of the flattery of the world; not thinking that poison can be given in a golden cup and even by the hands of a friend; and that the opiate which soothes our pains may bring over us the sleep of death. When men speak well of us we are too much inclined to drink in with excessive and grateful credulity what they say. We think they know us better than we know ourselves; or at least that we may be satisfied with their judgment.

When buoyed and inflated by the flattery of other men, who may be honest but mistaken, or dishonest and design to deceive us, having some selfish purposes to answer; or wanton and thoughtless and willing to flatter us because they see it gives us pleasure, and would take advantage of a folly and weakness from which even great minds are as seldom exempt as others, we are always in danger of losing sight of our true character. But it is in vain; it is worse than in vain. Why should we wish to deceive ourselves? or why should we be so willingly deceived in a matter the importance of which, as no imagination can measure, no language can exaggerate?

III. If there is any truth in nature, in experience, in divine providence, in God's moral government, in religion, then our moral character is every thing. What we are must determine what we shall be. We are here on trial—not for the comparatively small boon of a life, which a few revolving suns or a few grains of sand may measure, but for an existence to be measured only by God's own eternity. It is of an importance which cannot be expressed that our judgment of ourselves should be according to strict truth. The multiplied and continually operating causes and occasions of self-deception should put us always on our guard. The good opinion of the world is worth something; but the honest and impartial approbation of our own hearts is of infinitely more value. We shall soon be placed beyond the hurt of men's calumny and where the heart would sicken at the perfume of their flattery. If our hearts condemn us not, then may we have confidence towards God; and his favor is better than life. It rests with us by the strictest purity and virtue, and by that only, to approve ourselves in his sight. May that be our felicity. The proudest distinctions of earthly honor are as vain and evanescent as the changing hues of an evening sky; but the wreath of glory, which at the pleasure of God shall be worn at the resurrection of the just, is the wreath of his own immortality.

SERMON XI.

THE PERMANENCY OF THE MORAL LAW.

LUKE xvi. 26, 27.

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS WERE UNTIL JOHN ; SINCE THAT TIME THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PREACHED AND EVERY MAN PRESSETH INTO IT. AND IT IS EASIER FOR HEAVEN AND EARTH TO PASS THAN ONE TITTLE OF THE LAW TO FAIL.

THIS is a passage of grave import ; and the solemnity with which it is uttered demands for it peculiar attention. I will endeavor to explain it and point out its application.

Our first inquiry is, What is meant in the passage by the law and the prophets ? Let us seek an explanation from the Savior himself. The general opinion is that he refers here to the ritual or ceremonial law of Moses. But this construction is of questionable propriety. The law of Moses was to be abrogated. It was designed for a particular purpose. It was to cease when that purpose should be accomplished. It was adapted to the condition of a particular people under peculiar

circumstances. It should give way, when those circumstances should be altered and the people themselves dispersed as outcasts through the world, as our Savior himself predicted would take place before even the men of that generation should have passed away ; a prediction exemplified with an extraordinary exactness in the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of the Roman empire. This ceremonial law was to cease, as our Savior had more than once intimated ; and especially in his discourse with the woman of Samaria at the well of Jacob, when to the inquiry, whether men ought to worship in Jerusalem, or on the mount where they stood, whether at Mount Zion or Mount Moriah, which had been so long matter of dispute between the Jews and Samaritans, his reply was, that the time was coming and indeed had arrived, when neither in that mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, should men worship the Father ; but the acceptable worship should be the homage of the heart and life ; a homage which might be rendered in any form, at any time, and in any place. The ritual law of Moses could not therefore be the law to which he referred, when he said, speaking of its stability, that heaven and earth should pass away sooner than one jot or one tittle of the law should fail. But in order to discover what he intended by the law and the prophets let us refer to another passage, where we may seek its intent with some certainty. Our Savior on one occasion cited with great emphasis the two great commandments of the law. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord ; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength ; this is the first and great commandment ; and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these

two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Here then is the explanation. The law which should not pass away sooner than even the material universe should fail, was the moral law, the great law of human duty, the obligations of supreme love and duty to God, and of universal and entire benevolence to mankind. This is the law which had been preached until John announced the immediate coming of the kingdom of heaven or the gospel dispensation. This was the law of moral duty coeval with the nature of man ; and taught to the Israelites by Moses and the prophets as the great rule of human duty and conduct. Our Savior, so far from abrogating this great law of natural reason, of eternal morality, confirmed its authority and declared its everlasting permanency.

Let us now look at the text and seek with this explanation to understand its particular connexion and intent. The law and the prophets were until John ; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one jot or one tittle of the law to fail. The great law of human duty, the fundamental principles of all true morality and virtue, of supreme duty to God and entire benevolence to mankind were inculcated by Moses and the prophets until the coming of John, the Baptist. When he announced the kingdom of God, or the introduction of the gospel dispensation, every man was pressing into it. A great excitement was produced by his extraordinary appearance and preaching ; and crowded multitudes from all parts of the country gathered round him. John the Baptist was a severe preacher. There was no softening of the great principles of human duty with him. He made no compromise with vice, nor indolence, with

the corrupt appetites or the vain desires of men. He demanded of men to repent; and to bring forth the fruits that would prove the sincerity of their repentance; and he enforced his admonitions and counsels by the solemn assurance of a just retribution, when the floor should be thoroughly cleansed; the chaff separated from the wheat; when the true grain should be stored in the garner and the refuse consumed with an unquenchable fire. Our Savior confirmed these solemn teachings and enforced them by the highest and gravest sanctions. Men were looking for some abatement in the moral law. They were hoping for easier terms of acceptance with God. Our Savior gave no encouragement to such idle expectations. He taught men if they would enter into life they must keep the commandments; that the righteous would be saved; but the wicked go away into everlasting punishment; that in a word moral virtue and that alone must be the foundation of safety, happiness, and acceptance with God; and this law and principle was eternal, founded in the character of God, in the nature of man, in all the arrangements and appointments of the moral world, and to endure when even the material heavens and earth should pass away.

The whole of our Savior's preaching was of this character and no other. You may read the New Testament from one end to the other, and, unless by a forced construction, you will find no other doctrine than this, that moral goodness is to be the source and foundation of human happiness. This is the great law of man's nature; this is what he was made for; and to this all his moral powers in their proper and healthy exercise are adapted. Man was as much formed for virtue as the ear was formed for hearing, or the eye for seeing. As in our physical constitution the neglect or abuse or mis-

application of any of our physical powers, abstinence or excess, indolence, confinement, indulgence, repletion, or any disregard of the simple and plain laws of diet and regimen, which nature suggests, never fails to be followed by disorder, suffering, inability, injury, sickness or the shortening of life, so likewise in regard to man's moral constitution, the full possession of his powers, the proper exercise and application of them, the discharge of his duties, the elevation of his nature, the enlargement of his talents, and the consequent peace, self-satisfaction, usefulness and happiness, which he may expect from them and for which God evidently designed him, all depend upon the observance of the laws of moral duty and virtue, prescribed to him by reason and conscience; and enforced by the teachings and motives and sanctions of experience and religion. You cannot alter this constitution of man's nature. You cannot abate of this law one tittle. Heaven and earth may pass away, but this law of our being will endure while that being shall endure. This religion is as old and it will last as long as the creation.

Let us compare the state of feeling on this subject which existed at the time of our Savior, as far as we can learn it, with that which exists at present. When the kingdom of God was preached all men pressed into it. The extraordinary appearance of John the Baptist and the authoritative manner of his preaching, the character and miracles of our Savior, his teachings, precepts denunciations, and predictions, joined to the universal expectation of the coming of their great Messiah, all tended to arrest general attention, and to excite a strong and universal interest. Men pressed around John and Jesus to know what they must do to be saved and to have eternal life. Some boasted of their descent from

the patriarch Abraham, and relied upon this as a ground of security and favor. Others upon an extraordinary external sanctity, and the most rigid conformity to the ritual of the Mosaic law, tything even mint and anise and cummin to render all just tribute to the temple. Others multiplied the forms of external observance by an adherence to the traditions of the elders, the additions made to the Mosaic law by the folly, superstition, hypocrisy, or mistaken casuistry of those learned or corrupt men, who undertook to expound it. But all this was vain. Our Savior condemned all such grounds of reliance as false and frivolous. He made no artificial conditions. He rested the whole of man's safety and happiness, where God from the-creation had placed them, upon human virtue, upon morality, upon piety to God, and justice and benevolence to man ; for to the most solemn question, which was ever proposed to him, he returned the most momentous answer, that ever fell upon the human ear. When the young ruler demanded what he must do to inherit eternal life, his ever memorable reply was, keep the commandments. This is the only answer that ever can be given as long as man remains what he is. When it may please God to alter the nature of man, then the conditions of his happiness may be altered ; but as long as he continues a man with such faculties and capacities, such relations and endowments as now belong to him, his honor and happiness can arise only from a conformity to his nature and constitution.

What is happiness ? Is it an arbitrary or capricious gift, that one may bestow or withhold from another at pleasure ? Far from it. We cannot be made happy without our own consent ; and we can secure our own happiness with or without the consent of others. Men

can inflict pain upon us, but pain is not always misery ; they can debar or withhold from us many things, which are requisite to make our external condition comfortable ; but men have been happy when racked with pain ; when made desolate by poverty and bereavement ; and have sung songs of triumph and exultation in the midst of the flames of martyrdom, and in bold defiance of the threats of their relentless persecutors. No external success or advantage can soothe the tortures of an accusing conscience ; and a conscience at peace with man and God may defy the malice of the wicked. Happiness is an affair of the mind, of the affections, of the principles, the dispositions, the moral character. The happiness of brute animals is sensual and immediate. As far as we can understand their nature they gather no pleasure from reflection on the past, from any present contemplations, from any prospective view. To eat, to drink, to sleep, to move, and the common instinctive attachments to their young, comprehend their circle of pleasures. When these wants are satisfied, exempt from fear and care, their cup is full. Man is partly a sensible, but he is mainly an intellectual and moral being. His animal is wholly secondary and subservient to his rational nature. This makes him a man ; this stamps on him the bright image of God. Here he feels the elevated consciousness of the dignity, and this teaches him how to measure the transcendent value of the immortality of his nature. An intellectual and moral being, his true and proper happiness must be intellectual and moral. Now this in the very nature of things can never be matter of arbitrary appointment. You cannot make such a being happy, otherwise than as he has laid the foundation for it in his own character. What would be the use of spreading the fairest pros-

pect and pouring a flood of the purest of Heaven's light before the eye that is closed or cankered by jaundice. It sees nothing, or it gives to every object which passes over it the coloring of its own diseased medium. What would be the use of pouring out the sweetest sounds upon the ear, if it be closed, or the parts of the organ deranged? What pleasure can be derived from the richest viands to the taste that is utterly vitiated and embittered? The analogy applies to the mind and soul of man. How can we do wrong if our moral sensibility is not destroyed and not feel the stings of conscience? How can we contemplate the misery and mischief which our vices or follies occasion to ourselves and others; how can we reflect upon their depravity and ingratitude, and not feel regret and shame and sorrow? The existence of a moral sense, of conscience, implies this. This is its proper exercise. On the other hand the consciousness of integrity, of benevolent feelings and useful actions, of moral progress, moral elevation, of performed duty, of resemblance to God, all these are sure sources of comfort and felicity; and bring with them as matter of course, as connected with their nature, peace, satisfaction, pleasure, delight; they constitute the essential materials of felicity and confer at the same time in their very exercise the power of extending them infinitely and almost at our will. Neither therefore the law of Moses, the counsels and teachings of the prophets, the ministry of John, nor the far higher ministry of the blessed Savior, make any difference in the conditions of human happiness; and never can make any as long as man is a moral being, and the world is governed by the holiest of beings, whose administration is based on the eternal foundations of truth, justice, equity, and benevolence. The great

principle of his government, the law of our constitution as he has made us, is, that moral goodness and happiness should be inseparable ; that a good man will not fail to be happy ; a bad man to be miserable ; and though this law of moral retribution may seem to us in some cases imperfectly applied, yet in the great result it will be found absolute and triumphant throughout his universe ; a law holy and just as his own divine nature, and which cannot be abrogated until man's nature and the divine nature is changed.

The gospel makes no difference in this great principle. It establishes no other. It makes no abatement to this. To have established another principle, to have compromised this principle in the smallest degree, would have been to have thrown every thing in the moral world into confusion, as much as to disturb the principle of gravitation would disorder the material universe. It would be to withdraw the most powerful motives and all the great sanctions to virtue ; and to render the whole government of the world a matter of mere favoritism and caprice.

When men therefore pretend and teach that right speculative opinions or faith are to save them ; or that they are to be saved by any external forms or observances whatever ; or that their salvation or future happiness is to be matter of arbitrary bestowment or choice on the part of the Supreme Being ; or that they are to be saved through the imputed merits of the Savior, great as those merits may be and holy as that blessed Savior is ; or that mere works of justice or charity are to save them ; or that they are to be saved by some sudden operation of the divine spirit in changing their nature, you may dismiss all such conceits and pretensions as vain and frivolous, having no foundation in the

gospel, and utterly at war with its whole tenor, with the great principles of reason and conscience, with the nature which God has given us, with his own character and government.

Men may be glad to find some easier or shorter way of being happy than by performing their duty ; living piously and virtuously ; conforming most rigidly to the laws of their nature ; but there is none ; they will search for any other in vain. This is a law which allows of neither compromise nor abatement — and heaven and earth shall pass away before one tittle of it shall fail. It is our duty to be thankful to God that he has submitted our present and future happiness to our own choice even upon such terms as these. While every aberration from these laws will not fail sooner or later to bring with it its own proper evil and punishment, we no sooner and no longer conform to them than we reap their advantages ; for the practice of virtue, the consciousness of integrity, the exercise of benevolence fill the soul with peace and joy, elevate us with a sense of the dignity of our nature, expand our powers ; open new means of usefulness and new springs of pleasure ; and unfold the prospect of a never-ending progress in holiness and felicity.

Should it be asked then, if the gospel in these respects makes no difference, what are its advantages ? we answer, the greatest ; because it more clearly defines the duty of man ; gives increased sanction to these great laws of human conduct, and these principles of the divine government ; encourages the frail and sinful with the promise of God's pardon and acceptance, if they will return to their duty ; assures them of God's aid and succor in every virtuous effort and struggle ; proclaims the extension of these great principles to a future state

of existence ; and reveals to man the immortality of his nature and the eternal and ever increasing rewards of virtue and piety.

These are the infinite blessings of the gospel ; and these are views of it which alone are suited to its high character. Were it, what some men would make of it, a mere system of divine partiality and favoritism, designed by some new and extraordinary conditions, conditions not moral in their character but even dispensing, to a certain degree, with the obligations of moral duty, and infringing the great principles of moral right, and designed only for the benefit of those few, to whom it has as yet been extended, and operating to the prejudice of those who, without any fault of their own, have been left without its light, we might reasonably question its origin in the source of all goodness, truth and justice, with that gracious and holy Being with whom there is no respect of persons. But this is not its character, and regarding it as most fully confirming the great principles of our moral nature and developing more clearly the equitable and infallible laws of the divine government ; and thus by fear and love, by threatenings and persuasions, by all the motives drawn from time and eternity by which moral beings can be expected to be influenced, seeking to persuade and assist men to be as good as they should be and so as happy as God can make them, we regard it as worthy of the benevolent Being from whom it came, and claiming our highest gratitude and confidence. This we say it demands most fully, if, for no other reason, that it establishes beyond all reasonable debate and controversy, that first and greatest of all moral laws, that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil ; glory,

honor and peace to every man that worketh good ; and there is no respect of persons with God ; in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.

SERMON XII.

CONSISTENCY OF CHARACTER.

PROVERBS iv. 26, 27.

PONDER THE PATH OF THY FEET, AND LET ALL THY WAYS BE ESTABLISHED. TURN NOT TO THE RIGHT HAND NOR TO THE LEFT; REMOVE THY FOOT FROM EVIL.

OF the various attributes which ennoble the character, perhaps none has more just claims to respect than what is termed consistency, the quality recommended in the text. It is rare in proportion to its value. What is this consistency of character of which we speak? The text enjoins upon us to ponder the path of our feet; to let all our ways be established; to turn not to the right hand nor to the left. Reflect upon the course of life, which you pursue; examine your actions; weigh them well in their nature, influences and probable results; soberly and intelligently determine the principles by which your life should be governed. Having ascertained your duty, pursue it. Having fixed the principles which should regulate your conduct, adhere to

them; and let your whole character be consistent with them. Be certain to live as you believe. Every art and occupation has its rules and principles. The mechanic or artisan must conform to those which belong to his trade. The navigator, who traverses the pathless ocean, must be guided by the established principles of that science, without whose aid he will attempt in vain to ascertain his course, to proceed in safety, or to reach with success his destined port. The tiller of the earth, if he would find a reward for his toil, must observe the times and seasons, and conform to the established laws of nature. The man, who would have physical or mental health, must follow those counsels of wisdom and safety, which nature inculcates and experience confirms. In regard to every thing valuable, there are certain conditions determined and prescribed, with which we must comply, if we would be successful. All these analogies apply to the moral character. Here as much as any where, there must be a conformity to established principles. A reasonable and moral being certainly ought not to be the creature of mere impulses and caprices; and driven about continually by the innumerable fluctuations to which he may be exposed. He should not be the sport of his passions or imagination, or the many external influences by which he may be assailed. He should have an object; that object should be defined; the means of its accomplishment should be determined; these means must be steadily exerted; and his whole conduct conformed to them, that he may effect his purpose. Such, in the abstract, is consistency of character.

This is a rare quality. Men form various plans and often fail in their execution. They make fair promises and break them. They profess good resolutions and

pile them up one upon another, and there is the end of them. The energy of the mind seems exhausted in the conception of the resolution; and no strength is left for its performance. It must be admitted that few men live in just consistency with their principles.

We are Christians. We believe that God has sent Jesus Christ into the world to teach men their duty, and reveal a future existence and a final retribution. He has explained to us how this world is related to another; how the future depends on the present; and of how little moment is every thing which belongs exclusively to this world, compared with what belongs to another. Now if we look at the actual influence of such principles upon those, who assume to be Christians, we may ask, is it what it should be? in many cases is it any thing? in what we call the best cases, is it not transient, fluctuating, and partial? Ought we to expect of men, who have a firm confidence of a future life, infinitely better than the present, that they should feel a dread and a painful apprehension of leaving this? Is it to be expected of men persuaded of a future retribution and believing themselves responsible to God for every action and duty, and that in this present life they are laying up for themselves stores of future honor or degradation, happiness or misery, is it to be expected of such men, that they should indulge themselves in the grossest follies and habits of crime; and this too apparently without compunction or alarm? Let a man examine the high and holy principles of the gospel, its injunctions to integrity and purity, its counsels and precepts of equity, benevolence, and disinterestedness; let him observe what it teaches of piety to God, of obedience and resignation to the divine will, of reliance upon his providence and joy in his government; and then

ask himself whether if he did not know the facts, he would think to find among the professors of this religion so much worldliness and selfishness, so much injustice and unkindness, so much formality of worship and insensibility to the goodness of God ; in a word, so much of practical atheism. It is often stated that when Christians, rather those, who are bred up under Christian institutions and are called Christians, visit heathen countries, actuated and exclusively absorbed by a spirit of traffic and a sordid love of gain, an impartial observer would scarcely suspect that they have any religion ; and the poor benighted children of paganism with great reason demand of those, who would convert them to Christianity, if these are your Christians what are we to gain by such conversion ? This indeed is a painful, but I leave it to you to judge, whether it is a discolored picture, of that inconsistency of character, to which we have alluded.

What can be more unjustifiable than that inconsistency of character which we have described ! God has given man understanding and revealed to him his duty and happiness. Let him exercise his understanding in discerning and applying the truths, which relate directly to his character and involve the great interests of his existence. These truths, we repeat it, are not changeable like human feelings and passions. They keep their places like the fixed stars to guide man over the troubled sea of human life. One would think from the conduct of some men that nothing is determined. But death is as certain as life. The existence of God is as certain as the existence of the world ; the providence of God is as certain as the course of nature ; and the moral government of God is as determined as the moral constitution of man. The truths

of revelation, many of which are only the echo, and the divine confirmation of the dictates of our own reason, if they rest not upon the same demonstrative evidence upon which those great truths are founded, to which we have just referred, are confirmed by proofs of a presumptive character, far stronger than that on which we are accustomed with confidence to stake the highest interests of this world. We believe these principles; and when we are once upon reasonable grounds convinced of their authority, reality, and power, let us govern our lives by them; let us be seeking not their evidence but their application; and hold them not in that imperfect, doubtful, fluctuating form, which we do not upon reflection ourselves admit belongs to them; which must defeat their proper influences upon our character; and render them hardly more efficient to our virtue and consolation than atheism itself. It is not a case in which a reasonable mind can justify itself in remaining undecided.

Look again at the inconsistency of man's conduct in respect to present objects, and in relation to what is future; in what belongs to this world and in what belongs to the next. The objects of this world absorb his attention, affections, purposes, and passions. He is buried in them soul and body. He pursues them with an intense interest. The security of his possessions, the farther acquisitions of wealth, where even there is an accumulation beyond his immediate or possible wants, fame, advancement, power, popularity, success even in the humblest competition, pleasure in any form and purchased at any peril, a name, a title, a ribband, a feather; these are the glittering bubbles after which men chase; these are the painted clouds which they stretch out their arms to grasp until

they drop off; these are the objects, which set the world in motion; which kindle an insatiate ambition; which fill the soul with an avarice continually preying upon the springs and drinking up the fountains of life. These are the objects to which men give their days and nights, rise with the dawn and wear themselves down in sleepless vigils; submit to years of the most painful training; deny themselves ease and rest and food and peace; traverse the perilous ocean; penetrate the deep recesses of the earth; mount the most dangerous heights; sleep on the edge of the icy chasm, from whose depths no sound ascends; walk amidst the ashes of the slumbering volcano; penetrate the regions of disease and death; shrink from no peril; acknowledge no fatigue; reluct at no sacrifice. All this men will do that they may add to piles of wealth, which are already far beyond their needs or use; that they may reach an eminence where they cannot stand with quiet or safety; that they may acquire a name of which they themselves perhaps shall never hear any thing, and which, brilliant as it may now seem, will soon be eclipsed in the competitions of other men equally daring and vain; or they will go on and do all this without reward, nay without the hope of reward, other than what they reap in the excitement, which hurries them forward, and in their self-complacency and pride.

Yet how little do the objects of another world weigh with them compared with these. Is it that nothing is valuable but what is immediate and present? is nothing certain except what we see and feel and hear and know from our intimate experience? Every thing connected with a future life is of necessity matter of faith to man in his present state, as much as the progress of time, the advance of age and the consummation of death are

matter of faith to the young, just entering upon the untrodden race of life ; and remember, it is no more so. Those, who believe the gospel, can have as little doubt of a future existence and retribution, as they have that as time goes on they must go on with it ; the sun with us must reach its meridian if he has not already passed it ; this decline is as certain as his ascent ; and the most protracted life, must have its close, as the longest day in summer, though not a cloud rests upon the horizon, will have its sun-setting and night. If then we choose to live as though our term on earth were to have no end, and the day of life find no decline, are we not chargeable with a gross inconsistency ?

What our duty is it is not difficult to determine. To success in any undertaking, the object at which we aim must be defined ; and the means of its accomplishment applied. Human life is not a series of accidents, where the fortunes of men are thrown into the wheel promiscuously ; and mere chance is to determine how the blanks and prizes shall fall. The events of man's external condition, holding such a variety of relations as he does to the world in which God has placed him, he cannot command ; but the best blessings of his existence are within his reach, if he will be true to himself. As a rational and a moral being, and what higher character can he sustain, man should know his power and feel his responsibility. The whole of his duty would be discharged, the whole of his interest provided for, if he would be consistent ; and maintain through his whole life an accordance with those acknowledged truths, which reason and experience teach ; which conscience with its loudest voice enforces ; and which religion confirms by its most solemn sanctions.

I admit that the application of our religious principles

to our lives constitutes the great task of religion. When this is fully done all may be said to be accomplished. It is not that imperfection in duty, which appertains even to those who have made the highest moral attainments, of which we now speak. As long as man remains on earth, the subject of many frailties and limitations, it must be that he will fall short of his duty and discover in himself great and humbling inconsistencies. But it is that grosser inconsistency, which so generally prevails; in which men keep to no constant path; are ever fluctuating between light and darkness, good and evil; seem to have no fixed rules of conduct; have no object before them; and would find it difficult to say whether they have any religious principles and hopes or not; and still more what these principles and hopes are. This is the condition of character which is too prevalent; and which prevents all moral improvement. Men cannot be serious in religion, when they are unsettled in its primary elements; and you may plant your seeds upon a rock with equal hopes of a return as you may expect success, moral success and the fruits of religion, in a mind, where there is wanting some established sentiments of religion.

The truly wise man will ponder the path of his feet. His duty embraces three important points, distinct but allied; and all having reference to his acceptance with God, on whose favor his happiness wholly rests; the renunciation of sin; the maintenance of his virtue; and the constant and progressive improvement of his character. He will spare no labor to subdue every thing within him that he knows to be wrong; to maintain his innocence amidst the temptations of the world; and to be gradually advancing in the moral improvement of himself, in the strengthening and elevating of his virtue,

benevolence, and piety. In this course he will turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. He will suffer himself to be drawn aside neither by business nor pleasure, neither by the frivolous nor corrupting influences of the world, by the folly of skepticism nor the madness of atheism.

Of Christians above all men, we may demand that they should live in conformity with their religion. The true dignity of a man and a christian consists in lofty and generous purposes, in holy principles of conduct, in a blameless purity of life, activity in doing good, self-government, and an inflexible and pious performance of duty. Now what are some of the great and characteristic principles of the gospel to which we are thus called upon to conform. Let us for a moment advert to them.

Its first great lesson reminds us that man is the creature of God, an object of his providence, and a subject of his government; as much as any man is the subject of the civil government under which he lives; or as any child is the object of a parent's care and love. Its second great principle is that this life was given as a state of preparation for another life. The third great lesson of religion is that all our efforts and attainments and acquisitions here, I speak of course of those of a moral nature, have reference to a future life and will be continued there; none of them will be without an influence upon our future condition. The fourth great lesson of religion respects the certainty of a future state. It does not permit us to indulge a doubt respecting it; it assures us that all the purposes of death will be accomplished here; and that the life to come will be without interruption or end. The last great lesson of religion is that the future life will introduce the good man into a

condition of endless improvement in knowledge, in virtue, in the capacity of doing good, in a resemblance to God; and in the pure and divine felicity, which all this must bring with it. These are the solemn lessons taught by the authority, sealed by the death, and confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let the Christian be consistent, and true to his religion; and what can give a higher tone, a wider comprehension, a nobler dignity to his mind and life.

The moral effects of the religion upon its early converts, upon those who for the first time heard such doctrines from the lips of Jesus, are pictured in the boldest language. It was said of them that they were "born again;" that they were "created anew;" that they were "raised from the dead." Let us imagine a man, with all the capacities appertaining to this noblest work of God, born and cradled in the caverns of the earth; and there passing the first years of his life, without having ever seen the light of heaven. I will admit, if you please, that the place of his residence was one of those beautiful and brilliant mines, which naturalists love to describe, as supported by bold and glittering arches, knowing no night, but an unceasing day, studded with countless gems, and reflecting from every point the splendid rays of the ever-burning lamps, which fall upon them. Imagine such an individual now for the first time brought upon the surface of the earth just as the dawn was streaking above the horizon on some clear morning of summer; and permitted to witness, as the light advanced, the waking up of creation and the veil of night gently removed from off her. His emotions I leave to your imagination. I have not words to express them; I am incapable of doing justice to the subject.

Yet I will say in sober truth, that this change bears

a feeble analogy to that through which an intelligent mind and a susceptible heart must pass, if now, for the first time, the doctrines of the gospel poured their light upon it; and it had now to make the transition from views which rested wholly upon the earth, and hopes which never passed beyond it, to the conceptions of God, the sentiment of his paternal providence, of the connexion of this world with another, of the immortal destination of the human soul, and the prospect of interminable and uninterrupted advancement in divine knowledge and moral goodness as unfolded in this blessed book, which is now shedding its heavenly light into so many dark places of the earth, and bearing its divine consolations into so many broken and trembling hearts.

To Christians, what a sublime morality is presented; what noble services are enjoined; what a course of duty, usefulness, self-sacrifice, active beneficence, moral progress and elevation is prescribed. But who fulfils it? who comes up to this high standard? who is indeed a consistent Christian? This I cannot say. Many who wear that honored name are at an almost infinite distance from it. But because men have never reached this height, is it to be inferred that they never will reach it? because they have not attained, should they not aspire to it? Let us pray God, my friends, to enable us to become what the gospel requires.

No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. To the Christian altar let none bring a divided sacrifice. No man need aspire to excellence, who does not give his soul to the object of his pursuit. No man need presume to be a Christian, in the true and lofty sense of that appellation,

who does not frame his resolves and come to his object in the spirit of entire self-devotion.

If we think to make the profession conditionally ; if we are inclined to perform some duties, but claim a dispensation from others ; if we think we can practise upon the rules of the gospel at one time and safely omit them at other times ; if we are prepared to make some sacrifices yet reluct at others, which are equally matter of duty ; if we think, with respect to some gratifications inconsistent with the rules of the gospel, that we will allow them for the present, but at a future time we will forego them ; yes ! after the appetite has been worn out by indulgence or wearied with satiety ; if farther, when we resolve that we will be Christians, we are still looking back with a longing interest to objects that are incompatible with our duty, and disposed to embrace the first opportunity of returning to them, though we vainly imagine it shall be only for once and only for a moment, and we flatter ourselves that we are determined immediately to come back to our duty, we have not that spirit of self-devotion, which they must have who would be what the gospel demands.

It is the want of a spirit of self-devotion, a serious, hearty, entire resolution of piety, which is the principal cause of the inconsistency, the imperfect and equivocal virtue and goodness, which marks the character of many christians and presents an effectual bar to all distinguished moral improvement. They set out with the best intentions ; they desire, they resolve, they pray that they may be christians. But when some arduous duty is imposed on them, when some difficult sacrifice is demanded of them, when they are called upon to relinquish some darling pursuit, or to resign some beloved object, because it interferes with their Christian

duty or improvement; when especially they find that they can never reach the bright goal, that is before them; do what they will, there is more to be done; gain what they will, more is to be sought; advance as high as they will, other heights are to be attempted; then their courage and virtue fail them; they content themselves with inferior attainments; and remain that sort of mixed, frail, imperfect character, which is far from the claims of the gospel.

The first step in the road of Christian duty is a deliberate resolution of virtue. It should be our unqualified purpose to avoid what we believe the gospel forbids; to perform what that enjoins; to be what that requires. Our Christian duty is to be our first object, and every thing is to be made to bend to that. Under every trial, in every emergency, we are to resort to the teachings and example of Jesus, to learn what he requires, and what he himself was; and this to resolve that we will do and be according to the extent of our imperfect power. This is the spirit of self-devotion, with which now as much as in the beginning, they who would be Christians are required to devote themselves to the gospel. The requisition is wholly reasonable. The greatest good that earth or heaven contains is proffered to us. Why should not the conditions conform to its importance? May our hearts, Christians, respond entirely to this requisition. In the nearest relations of life are we ever satisfied with a divided, a partial, a wavering, a conditional attachment? Why then in the most sacred of all relations should we admit it? This self-devotion will render our duty easy, and the trials, which God imposes on us, light. Imperfect and frail beings, we shall remain at a humble distance from that perfection which the gospel presents to our aims. **But**

resting on this foundation, the best influences of religion will be recognised in our hearts and lives ; and we shall be animated with the consciousness of sincerity and the delightful conviction of an ever-advancing improvement.

Happy, thrice happy, is the Christian, whose character is thus in accordance with his principles and obligations ; and who, in the entire conformity of his whole life to the great principle that while the end of his being is happiness, happiness must be founded upon and flow entirely from moral goodness, manifests the highest wisdom ; and exhibits a beautiful and perfect consistency with the dictates of his own nature, the invariable lessons of experience, the emphatical teachings of conscience, and the whole end and aim of divine revelation.

S E R M O N X I I I .

DISCOURAGEMENTS IN DOING GOOD.

LUKE vi. 35.

DO GOOD, AND LEND, HOPING FOR NOTHING AGAIN; AND YOUR REWARD SHALL BE GREAT, AND YE SHALL BE THE CHILDREN OF THE HIGHEST: FOR HE IS KIND UNTO THE UNTHANKFUL AND THE EVIL.

BENEFICENCE is one of the first duties of religion. Christianity is altogether adapted to render men kind and useful to each other. One of the great questions, which will be put to us at the day of trial, will be what good have we done; what hungry have we fed, what naked have we clothed, what distressed have we visited; and above all the duty is urged upon us by the example of **Jesus**, who went about doing good.

But under the best circumstances the duty has many discouragements. It is not always easy. It costs time, labor, study, and care. It is never finished. When you have done all you can there is more that may be effected. It is one of the great ends of human existence. Benevolence, sympathy, all the kind affections, which belong to our nature; our mutual wants

and relations urge it upon us, as an object for which we ought to live, and which more than any other is worth living for.

I have alluded to the discouragements, which attend the service. I propose to speak of some of these discouragements, and inquire in what light they are to be viewed.

There are many opportunities for good presented to every man, woman, and child in the common intercourse of life. You may make others happier and better, and you will do much for the comfort, pleasure, and improvement of social life, by good manners, by kind words, by a carefulness not to give unnecessary offence; and by innumerable little attentions to their quiet or pleasure, the occasions for which are constantly occurring. You may do much good by acts of relief to the necessitous; by visits to the sick; by the simple and unaffected expression of your sympathy with the afflicted; by the protection of your neighbor's property; by your care of his reputation; by your complacency in his honor, and your joy in his lawful success and prosperity. These things may seem small; do not on that account disdain them. They may bring you neither honor nor applause; they may procure for you no marked advantage. They may pass off without notice, and in no respect distinguish you from the general crowd. What of all this! You will enjoy the cheering satisfaction of having done what you could; and you may feel also that these humble, small, but constant services are, in the aggregate, a greater tribute to the common stock of human comfort and happiness, than many of those extraordinary services, which are every where celebrated. Let us feel then no discouragement because the services which we can render, are only small; human life is

made up of small events; and what we do every day is of far more importance than what we do only on great occasions.

We find a discouragement to our useful efforts in the little we are able to accomplish. Human actions are all of them important; their effects are extensive and lasting beyond our knowledge, and even far beyond our imagination. No man can tell how many may be affected by what he says or does; what a conflagration a single spark may kindle; and what extensive consequences may follow from a single and perhaps an indifferent word or action. The actions of some men, distinguished in society, are often immediate and striking in their results; and may be traced in their various influences and ramifications to a great extent. This happens, however, to few individuals, who are either very singularly gifted or singularly circumstanced; and even in these cases, the sphere of their operation is limited and small, compared with the great mass to be operated upon. Let us take the case of our own great Washington; how much did he accomplish for public liberty and order and for the welfare of his country. Admit that his labors have been for his own country all that they could be, and that their effects have extended to other continents and are there kindling in the bosoms of thousands, nay of millions, a passion for liberty, and contributing to extend the blessings of freedom throughout the world. Yet millions and millions of the human family know nothing of this; can know nothing of it; derive no benefit from what he has done; and have never heard his name. Take an infinitely higher example, the labors of Jesus Christ himself. Look at a religion clothed with a divine authority; established by the most wonderful displays of the

divine power ; and operating and exerting its influence, through a period of more than eighteen centuries. As yet scarcely a quarter of the inhabitants of the globe are even nominally Christian ; and when from this number you separate those, who hold only to false or corrupt forms of Christianity, having nothing of it but the name, and professing a religion as different from true Christianity as Paganism itself, you will be mortified to perceive to what a comparatively small number its true spirit, doctrines, and character have been extended. If individuals thus distinguished for their powers and opportunities of good, for the wisdom and benevolence of their enterprises, and for the heroism, self-devotion, magnanimity, and disinterestedness, with which they have applied themselves to these objects ; if even the blessed Savior himself by a divine religion has as yet effected no more, how little can any others do ? The few great discoveries which are most universal in their character and the influence of which upon the condition of mankind have been more extensive than any other in the history of the world, such as the invention of the plough, the invention of letters, the discovery of the magnet, and the art of printing, though so long familiar to us, and of the great effects of which we are accustomed to speak as almost miraculous, have not, even after the lapse of centuries, extended themselves to one half of the inhabitants of this globe, the circumnavigation of which is accomplished in the space of a few months.

Of the countless multitudes who have preceded us upon the earth, few are remembered to have ever lived ; and of many who have been most active, and whose exploits excited among their contemporaries universal admiration and astonishment, not a vestige remains ;

the successive generations of men, rolling onwards like the waves of the sea, have obliterated every trace of them. Many of the proud conquerors of the world are known only in history ; cities and empires, which they erected, are not to be found on the map of nations ; the great works, which they sought to accomplish and the changes, which they vainly supposed themselves to have effected in the condition of society, have in their turn given place to other and other changes, and are lost in the eternal vicissitudes of human affairs.

If those who occupy the commanding stations in society, who sway nations and continents at their pleasure, can accomplish so little, how much less can they bring to pass, who move in its humbler conditions and act with very limited powers. Great changes in the condition of a community are never suddenly nor easily affected. Sometimes when a whole people are by an extraordinary excitement urged in a new direction, the reaction is often proportionately powerful and things are carried back beyond their original condition. This is often exemplified in cases of religious excitement. It has not unfrequently happened in some peculiar conjuncture of circumstances, and under the influence of some extraordinarily gifted individual that whole communities have been moved, like the ocean in a storm, from their very depths by a powerful revival ; which usually has its flood and its ebbing, and after it subsides not unfrequently leaves more irreligion, coldness, infidelity, and too often profligacy, than it found at the beginning. Changes of a permanent character are effected only after a length of time ; years and centuries are requisite to accomplish them. What is gained at one time is frequently lost at another. The progress of society is gradual ; and depends upon circumstances which are

entirely above the voluntary control or agency of any individual or any combination of individuals. We often speak, and with truth, of great effects springing from slight causes. In the history of courts and nations the fate of an empire may depend upon the utterance of a word or the color of a ribbon; but then we do not with any propriety refer the great events in human history to the operation of any single cause whatever; it is only one link in an immense chain; each has its part and occupies its place, but the effects produced result from the combined power and tension of the whole. But how few of the causes, which unite to produce any of the great events of life, can any single individual command or put in operation. Even in the best cases, what one man can do is comparatively little; it may be much to him; it may occupy all his time and powers; it may be important as a part of something else; as a connecting and essential link, without which the rest would become inoperative; but alone it is inefficient. When an individual then, alone can accomplish so little, and when in order to any distinguished success so many things must combine in respect to which he has no control, it is not surprising that men should feel discouraged from attempting any good.

We find a discouragement to our benevolent exertions and useful enterprises in the difficulty or impossibility of ascertaining what good we have effected. In the little offices of benevolence, in the humble services of kindness which we render to each other, and which make up the true happiness of social life, the kindness is certain; the pleasure, or relief, or consolation which we impart is acknowledged; or if not directly apparent and positive, we know how much suffering would be occasioned, or how much inconvenience or evil would arise

from a failure in these duties. Evil prevented is the same as good promoted. But I speak of those higher services to the community to which the ambition of an enlarged mind naturally aspires. I refer particularly to services, which we seek to render to the great cause of truth or piety, to public order and liberty, to good morals and to the general welfare and happiness. In these cases it is almost impossible for any individual to know what he has done, or to be certain that he has done any thing. Public welfare, public order, the morals of the community or what we call public virtue, the great cause of religion, are all complex and widely extended subjects, combining an infinite diversity of circumstances and interests, and to be advanced and carried on by innumerable contributions and by the labors of various hands. Can the man who casts his grain into the common heap expect to pick it out again from the mingled mass? And can he who empties his handful of water into the ocean, though he may feel that to the actual amount which he has poured in it has increased the whole, either discern or gather up again or follow or recognise in the great reservoir his own contributions? Moral good is of far more difficult estimate than physical improvements. The latter are obvious and sensible. Let a man do what he can or will to improve the little spot of this earth which he occupies, and which for a time the institutions of society permit him to call his own. He can enrich, cultivate, and embellish it. All this we see; we perceive it ourselves; and can clearly mark it out to others. Standing in the midst of this humble creation of our own labor and skill, we may say, these vallies we filled, these hills we made low, these crooked paths we straitened, these rough places we smoothed; these forests sprung from the

seeds which we deposited ; these green fields have been fertilized by our care ; these gay flowers are the offspring of our planting ; and in the survey of this beautiful scene, though it be but a cot in a vast wilderness, some secluded nook in the bosom of umbrageous forests, and frowning mountains, we may feel a grateful complacency that God has permitted us to perform this humble service for the general happiness in beautifying and rendering more productive this portion of his creation. But very different from these are the results of the efforts of the benevolent to enrich, to cultivate, to adorn any portion of God's intellectual or moral creation. What we do here is not to be estimated by any sensible measure. How much of truth and knowledge we may have poured into any human mind ; how much of piety and devotion we may have succeeded in kindling in any human heart ; what we have done even by our best efforts in arresting the progress of vice, in repairing its fearful injuries, in shaking the pillars of its empire ; what we may have effected in strengthening the good resolutions of men and establishing the influence of good principles over their minds and conduct ; what we have contributed to the advancement of truth, for the maintenance of justice, for the spread of liberty, for the support of order ; how much we have actually done towards drying up the sources of human misery and opening to the anxious inquiries of men those fountains of happiness, where they may drink its waters in their purity and fulness ; or in the midst of the brightest picture of social virtue and happiness, which our imagination might present to know what we have done in respect to it ; this is difficult ; in most cases to any considerable extent it is impossible. It may happen that when we think we have done most, we have accomplished no-

thing ; and it may also happen that our labors may none of them be in vain but yet may be operating their effects so silently, or so gradually, that we cannot follow out a single effort to its proper result, nor witness the germination of a single seed, nor live long enough to gather the fruit from a single tree of our own planting. All this from the necessity of the case tends to discourage us ; most of us are anxious for our wages as soon as our work is done ; we wish for quick returns ; we have not the courage and patience to wait the result of those long adventures, where “ hope deferred makes the heart sick.”

We find in the next place a great discouragement to our benevolent efforts in the uncertainty of the value or good of those benefactions, which we actually confer. We may ask with the doubting author of the book of Ecclesiastes, who knows what is good for a man in this life ? What we consider as the best blessings of life sometimes prove only a curse to others and to ourselves. There is no earthly good or blessing which is not liable to perversion or abuse, and there are those, who will pervert and abuse them, when they have the opportunity.

We may illustrate this by many prominent examples and in respect to many things whose intrinsic value cannot be doubted. The relief of the poor is a Christian duty. We cannot be excused for the neglect of it. In all Christian countries a public provision is made for them. Among ourselves a certain and ample provision is made ; none are so abject as to be allowed to perish in our streets. Whatever their deserts may be they are secure of a home, of food, of clothing, of kind and necessary attentions under sickness or decay. This certainly seems to be not otherwise than it should be ;

and yet can any one doubt that the effects of such a provision are oftentimes pernicious, and that it often operates as the means of the poverty which it would relieve, and as a premium upon indolence, wastefulness, improvidence, and vice ?

Let us look next at education. We feel that we can scarcely overvalue it. We are anxious to procure it for ourselves and our children at any expense and sacrifice. Yet can we say that it is an unmixed good ; does it always answer our expectations and confer as much benefit as we hoped ? Is it necessarily conducive to human virtue and promotive of good morals ? Not always, most certainly. In too many cases it renders men wholly discontented with a situation in life, which they can never hope to rise above ; it prevents their properly appreciating their advantages ; it disqualifies them for the common duties and labors of life ; it engenders self-conceit, pride, and a restless ambition ; it leads to skepticism and infidelity in regard to morals and religion ; and in too many cases it serves only to sharpen their cunning, and qualifies them to become more expert and adroit in vilany.

So it happens often with civilization. There are certainly a great many cases, in which the blessings of civilization have been extended to savage nations at a very serious expense of their innocence and comfort ; and has been followed by a fearful increase of crime, disease, and misery.

The introduction of Christianity itself, infinite as its value is, according to our Savior's own prediction, has been followed by a dreadful amount of imposture, profligacy, and cruelty, of domestic and public misery, of war, persecution, and bloodshed. Neither education, nor civilization, nor Christianity are answerable for

these results. They are the abuses of these blessings springing from the ignorance, or folly, or cupidity, or profligacy of mankind. Men here are dreadfully responsible. Yet if these blessings are susceptible of such abuses, and if from being instruments of good they are liable to be converted into such dreadful engines of evil; and if the history of their extension and application among men is full of such fearful lessons, here are presented indeed some most affecting discouragements to our benevolent desires, enterprises, and efforts.

How are we to view this subject and what is our duty in the case, are the remaining topics upon which I shall remark.

It is clearly our duty to do what positive and immediate good we can without hesitation. It is positive good, whenever we can make others better or happier; save them from doing wrong; relieve their actual sufferings; mitigate their pains; comfort them; console them. When we can do this innocently, without injustice to others and the neglect of our higher obligations to society, it is a duty, the neglect of which is unchristian and inhuman. Such duties bring their own reward with them. They may procure us no gratitude, nor applause. Let us not be anxious even that they should be known and acknowledged by the recipients of them, lest we diminish their value by inspiring a painful sense of obligation. Let us do them, hoping for nothing again; caring for no return. The consciousness of performed duty, the pleasure of conferring pleasure, the consolation of alleviating distress, the comfort which the benevolent bosom experiences in pouring solace and comfort into other hearts; and above all the assurance of God's complacency, the Father of us all, whose benevolence delights in seeing his children love each other and serve each

other ; is not this enough ? and is it not more than enough to make us thankful to God for the power, the privilege, the blessedness of exercising kindness, sympathy, and beneficence ?

In laboring at the great interests of the community it is true as we have remarked, that an individual, even under the most favored circumstances, can do very little. But is this a reason why he should do nothing ? There is but one Being in the universe who can do much ; and compared with what he can do or does, the beneficent labors of even the highest of created beings, or of all of them united, is little, is nothing. Let us suppose, that it was your happiness like the bright polar star, to guide the weary and weather-beaten wanderers on life's dark ocean to the port of rest and safety. What a noble and holy ministry ! But what is this compared with the beneficent influences of the meridian sun, shedding his brightness, and pouring out life and joy over a world. Look at the sun himself ; the glowing image of God's beneficence, calling the vegetable world into existence, animating and cheering and supplying all the multitudinous and multiform living existences, which people the earth, enriching and adorning it with countless forms of elegance, utility, and happiness ; and doing this not for the earth alone, but for the countless worlds, which revolve around this glowing centre ; yet what is all this compared with the worlds and systems far beyond the reach of his radiance, or the ken of mortal vision, which by another and a far higher beneficence are animated, irradiated, and blessed ?

To finite minds things are great or small by comparison. To God nothing is great and nothing small. In the situation in which he is placed and with the powers which God has given him, let man do what he can ;

the loftiest agent of God's beneficence can do no more. The great sum of good is made up of individual contributions, as the earth itself is composed of atoms. Your contribution is wanted ; is demanded ; but nothing more is asked of you. It is true that when thrown into the common mass you may not be able to trace its progress or even to recognise again what you are pleased to call your own ; and others may not recognise it nor even be willing to admit that you have done any thing, nor to bestow upon you the poor reward of their applause. But remember that what you call your own is not an original possession ; it is a borrowed power ; the talents and means of good, which you have in common with others or above others, belong to God, and are only lent to be applied by you. You are dishonest and unfaithful if you allow them to be idle ; if you waste or misapply them. Suppose your beneficence gains you no applause nor fame. If applause or fame be the object of your conduct, do not call it by a wrong name ; it is pride, it is ambition, it is not charity. But what is human applause worth in these cases ? Where it is bestowed upon you abundantly for the good deeds you have performed, although you neither sought nor desired it, it will be very likely to corrupt the motives of the next good action to which you are prompted, and presently, when once familiar with the intoxicating draught, you will be unable or unwilling to work without it. Human nature has not strength to bear much flattery any more than to be entrusted with much power. But I repeat it, what is human applause worth ? You know how uncertain it is ; how false it often is. The tear of gratitude sparkling in the eyes of the widowed or sick, or friendless, who have heard in their desolate and darkened chambers the footsteps of your kindness

and the anxious breathings of your sympathy, are worth all the gems that ever sparkled in a regal diadem ; and the unuttered prayers of the broken hearted, whom your kindness has relieved, supplicating blessings upon the head of an unknown benefactor, are more grateful to the benevolent heart than the loudest notes ever poured from the trumpet of fame, and a brighter record before God than was ever inscribed on the glittering pages of the history of human ambition. Above all, my friends, is it not more than enough to satisfy us that no good action, however humble and secret, is unknown to God or unobserved by him ; nor by him will it ever be forgotten.

Let no skeptical opinions, no capricious doubts concerning the value of certain of the great goods and blessings of life, and none of the abuses to which they have been subjected by the folly or corruption of mankind, prevent our seeking their diffusion. The value is certain ; the abuses are only accidental. Education, civilization, religion, are among the greatest blessings of heaven. Whatever tends to elevate the human nature, and to give the intellectual and moral a supremacy over the animal nature ; whatever tends to refine the manners, to soften the boisterous passions of men, to promote the harmony of social intercourse, to restrain the selfishness of the human heart, to multiply and exalt the endearments and attachments of conjugal and domestic life, and to secure its purity and peace ; lastly that which teaches man his connexion with God, apprises him of the dignity and immortality of his nature ; gives him objects which are worth living for and suited to expand and elevate his intellectual and moral nature ; that which sustains him at the approach of death ; that which consoles him under its heart-rending be-

reavements—all this must be good ; good for all men ; and always good. The abuses to which education, civilization and religion have been subjected, should make us take our measures for their extension with the greater prudence ; should lead us to separate the specious from the substantial, the false from the true ; and should impress us with our own immediate and high responsibility to exhibit their proper application, use, and benefits in our own characters.

The providence of God in the government of the world is carried on by general laws, and these laws are founded in infinite wisdom and goodness. Their operation goes on continually. It cannot be stopped or controlled by any human power. We cannot doubt that the aim of all his institutions and arrangements is the highest happiness and good of his creatures. Means, and those very humble and limited, are all that belong to us. Results rest with him. Whatever clouds may overshadow our vision, all is clear in his sight. Partial evils under his guardian providence will operate to produce general good. Under no circumstances need we despair of his wise care and control. Faithful in the occupation of the humble talents committed to us, and endeavoring to act from the benevolent and disinterested motives of the gospel, we shall have the elevated consciousness of co-operating in the plans of his beneficence ; and be secure of the highest of all rewards in earth or heaven to which the human soul can aspire, the divine approbation.

SERMON XIV.*

PAUPERISM.

MARK xiv. 7.

FOR YE HAVE THE POOR WITH YOU ALWAYS, AND WHENSOEVER
YE WILL YE MAY DO THEM GOOD.

THE poor we have always with us. While man remains as he is and society retains its present form we may despair of any complete exception to this fact. Property is to a certain extent recognised even in those countries, where the fruits of human subsistence are of spontaneous growth as well as those where even the smallest acquisitions are made only by rigid frugality and severe toil. Wherever the institution of property exists poverty of course follows in its train ; property becomes an object of necessity or desire ; as it is acquired, or used, or desired, it becomes more and more the object of necessity and desire. Luxury and indulgence multiply human wants to an indefinite extent ; and to an indefinite extent increase the chances and occasions

* Preached at the Quarterly Charity Lecture, Boston, March, 1832.

of poverty. In proportion as luxury prevails in a community poverty increases. The standard of living, of success, of wealth, is raised ; fewer men can reach it ; the wants of men are increased and are more difficult to be supplied ; luxuries themselves are transformed into absolute necessities of life ; men become more needy and dependent ; and want and dependence constitute poverty, though there may not be an actual deficiency of the means of sustaining life ; of food, clothing, and shelter. Indeed the class of poor, who perhaps suffer most acutely and are therefore most entitled to commiseration, are not those, who, never having risen above the lowest condition of life, do not feel the want of comforts and indulgences of which they do not know the value ; but those, who having been brought up in competency, affluence, and luxury, and acquired all the susceptibilities, which such habits create, are reduced to the bare necessities of life ; feel the bitter cravings of countless artificial wants, to which they have been enured ; and are extremely sensitive to every cold blast that approaches them.

Poverty, we say, is an evil necessarily incidental, it would seem, to the present condition of society. The community presents an infinite diversity of condition of all shades and colors very strangely blended and intermingled. The miserable hovel rises under the walls of the palace, and the beggar in his abject wretchedness lies at the gate of the man who fares sumptuously every day.

We all agree that by nature men have equal rights. Placed on this earth by the Creator, they have a common claim upon the goods and advantages, which his bounty presents to their enjoyment. We admit likewise that the institution of property is wholly

artificial and conventional, the institution of society, and not of nature. We do not say that no such thing was designed by Divine Providence ; or that it is incompatible with, or opposed to, God's designs. We must allow, that even by nature some men are endowed with extraordinary gifts ; physical strength, intellectual ability, which belong properly and wholly to themselves ; which cannot be taken from them without violence ; which they cannot impart to others at their pleasure ; in which others cannot be admitted to participate ; but which at the same time, in the acquisition and enjoyment of the goods of life, give them in every form of society undeniable advantages and preferences over others, not so endowed by nature. Yet the right or power by which an individual appropriates to himself any larger portion of this world's goods than others have or can acquire, and is secured in their enjoyment and possession, is the institution of society ; the result of positive enactment or mutual compact, the right of law rather than of nature.

The distribution of property presents many curious examples and results. You may find innumerable instances of men, who do nothing yet have every thing ; of others, who do every thing and yet have nothing ; of men, who seem to have no claims upon society, reposing sullenly upon their uncounted thousands, neither consuming themselves nor imparting the smallest measure to others ; and others, virtuous and deserving, but scarcely possessing the means of preserving life, and without a spot where to lay their heads. You may see likewise large estates descending by entailment through successive generations to the most worthless, miserable, and profligate, who live only to abuse these extraordinary gifts, and to make their property the instrument of

their own degradation, and of corruption and ruin to others ; and others, whose lives are adorned with every virtue, and whose supreme desire it is to do good to their fellow men, but who are unable, even by the most anxious and laborious efforts, to acquire the means of making comfortable those whom God has placed upon their care. You see too every day the caprices of fortune, as we choose to call them. An hour enriches, or an hour may beggar a man. The blind selection of some number among thousands, the turning of a die, a storm, a flood, a gust of wind, a little concealed worm in the timbers of one of your floating palaces, may turn the golden flood of wealth into your lap ; or bury all your treasures in the deep. We call these the caprices of fortune, the results of chance. Yet in this world, in God's government there is no such thing as chance. Every thing proceeds by fixed laws, by determined principles, which we cannot suspend or alter any more than we can suspend or alter the great principles and laws of nature, the principle of gravitation for example, which is felt throughout the universe, controls the planet as it does the atom, calls back the comet in his most eccentric wanderings to his starting place, and keeps all worlds and systems in harmony.

The laws of society which regulate the disposition of property, must themselves be in unison with the laws of nature, or they would be wholly unavailing. The laws of society, as far as they can do it, determine the acquisition, security, and descent of property. The laws of nature cannot be amended ; it would be presumptuous to speak of it. The laws of society are susceptible of amendment ; and must be regulated by circumstances ; but those which are of a general character, the result of the wisdom and experience of ages,

exercised upon a subject, which of all others has been most interesting to mankind, it would be hazardous to touch without the gravest consideration. Wealth is oftentimes hoarded up and suffered to rust in the close coffers of its possessor ; it is often abused and squandered upon what is worthless or pernicious ; it is often entailed upon the effeminate, indolent, and profligate. This of course comes from the circumstance of a man's property being at his own disposal and from his being allowed to transmit it to his children. But these are the reasons which induced him to earn and accumulate ; and if you take from him the power of disposing of it and the right of securing its advantages to those for whose benefit even the most miserly parent feels more concern than for his own, you remove the greatest incitements to industry, enterprise, frugality, and good conduct.

Plans for equalizing the condition of all men, proposals for establishing a perfect community of goods, Agrarian laws, which should divide all the estates of the country equally among the citizens of the commonwealth, have been often started by fanciful and benevolent minds, who have been shocked with the oppressions and insolence of unbridled wealth, and the degradation and misery of unprotected poverty ; and urged forward by others, who being too indolent to labor, and too profligate and vicious to secure to themselves even the common advantages within their reach, and too malignant and rapacious not to hate all those above them, and desire to possess all that they can obtain by right or by wrong, have wished to see every thing thrown into a common heap, that by chance they might secure to themselves, in a general scramble by plunder, what they are unwilling to get by honest labor ; but it needs

no sagacity to perceive, that even if it were possible to make a general equalization of goods, it could not remain so one hour; and that indeed any condition or law by which property might be acquired or enjoyed without labor, enterprise, vigilance, care, and frugality, would remove the strongest motives to exertion, and prove in the highest measure prejudicial to individual and public virtue. Small communities have succeeded in some cases in establishing a community of goods; but these advantages, if there are any, are purchased at the surrender of all individual control in the disposal of your own earnings, and under such restrictions and limitations as are wholly incompatible with a sense of personal freedom and independence. In all such communities likewise labor is compulsory; and the motives to individual enterprise and effort are diminished. Such schemes, however, are utterly inapplicable to large and mixed communities; and it would seem as though human wisdom could devise in the present condition of mankind no better arrangement than prevails with us, where every man may acquire a freehold in the soil; where all encouragement is given to industry and frugality, because every man is protected in the enjoyment of his honest gains and in the right of disposing of his property according to his own pleasure; and where, on the other hand, society is protected against the locking up of large estates in particular families by long entailments, because the transmission of them by will is necessarily limited to a certain period.

Yet in spite of all the provisions of human sagacity and all the arrangements of divine providence, which were compatible with man's moral freedom, poverty will come; the poor we shall always have with us; and under these inevitable circumstances of our condition

let us thank God, for the power and opportunity of beneficence ; and that in proportion as poverty exists, there exists also within the reach of those, who will use them, the ability of mitigating or removing many of the evils which spring from it. If it has pleased God that we should always have the poor with us, it has likewise pleased him that whensoever we will we may do them good. Our duty in this case is most important. Let us seek to understand it ; and for this reason let us glance at some of the common causes of pauperism, that knowing the disease we may more easily discover the alleviations or the remedy.

I. 1. One of the great causes of poverty is vice. We would not by any means insinuate that a majority of the poor are vicious. Far from it ; in proportion to their numbers we believe that there is as much virtue among the poor as the rich. Of those however who become objects of public relief and the inmates of our pauper establishments, without a doubt a large proportion of them are brought there by their own or the vices of those upon whom they were dependent, and who dragged them down with themselves. This is a well ascertained fact ; and it is among the obvious retributions of divine providence that drunkenness, debauchery, idleness, and wilful improvidence, should in most cases in this world be followed by dreadful penalties, the loss of substance, incapacity of acquisition, ruin of credit, desertion of friends, discontent, recklessness, and despair ; and a degradation, infamy, and wretchedness, commensurate with the guilt, and aggravated by the bitter consciousness of just desert.

2. One of the next great causes of poverty is a want of faculty. The art of living or of procuring a livelihood

in such a community as ours is a considerable matter and requires a knowledge, judgment, and sagacity, of which a large portion of mankind are not possessed. They are ignorant ; they are simple. They are incapable of directing themselves ; and especially they lack judgment. They become inefficient. They are unable to make the proper use of the advantages which they have. They are wasteful of the means of subsistence and comfort, which are at any time in their possession. They have a certain recklessness and indifference towards the future, which forbids any thing like frugality. They are easily imposed on by the overreaching and cunning, and villainy of those harpies, who take every possible advantage of their simplicity and necessities ; and are ready always under some deceitful pretence to plunder them of any miserable pittance, which may be thrown in their way.

3. Aversion to labor is another great cause of poverty. Labor requires resolution, effort, and perseverance. These are therefore difficult ; and are not the effect of any sudden determination but of early and long continued practice and habit. In a community furnishing innumerable incitements and facilities to dissipation, and where pleasure constitutes the great pursuit of a large portion, labor comes naturally to be considered a hardship ; and false notions and improper education represent labor as degrading, and of course increase the general aversion to it. But the wise appointments of divine providence are fixed ; ordinarily the goods of life are to be acquired only at the price of labor. The original law is permanent ; and man must get his bread by the sweat of his brow. Idleness tends to poverty as well as to crime ; and much of the want, which exists among us, is to be traced immediately to an utter

indisposition to labor. In our happy country labor is always in demand, and seldom fails of its reward; much of the poverty which exists, therefore, is to be ascribed to idleness, negligence, and that ridiculous and contemptible pride, which makes us ashamed of honest work.

4. Luxury and extravagance are great sources of poverty. A large part of the community are living beyond their means. They cover their tables with a wasteful abundance; they trick themselves out in all sorts of expensive finery—they are ready to engage in every party of pleasure. Anticipating profits, which will never be realised, living wholly upon credit, emulating and often greatly surpassing in their wasteful and criminal expenditures the example of the most affluent, the consequences may in general be foreseen. They soon find themselves embarrassed; they plunge deeper into the most hazardous speculations, putting their neighbor's property at risk; they explode when at their greatest height; and then comes bankruptcy both of purse and character; and poverty reposes like an incubus upon the individual and his family and crushes him to the ground. Happy for him, if the early foresight of a result, which it requires little sagacity to predict, does not involve him in a much heavier calamity than poverty; I mean the guilt of cheating and fraud, the crime of concealing property, which does not belong to him; availing himself of some miserable evasion or trick; and setting his honest creditors at defiance.

This sort of luxury and extravagance is not confined to any class in society. Those who assume to be the highest, practise it; and their example is followed by the lowest; so that the fruits of labor are prodigally wasted and consumed in indulgences, excesses, and ex-

travagances, to which no man has the shadow of right, who cannot discharge his just debts; and in which a man is both mad and wicked to allow himself or those dependent on him, to the utter disregard of the future and of the ordinary accidents of life.

5. Another cause of poverty is the extortion, oppression and cruelty, which are often practised upon the necessitous and laborious. Their wages are often reduced to the lowest point; this applies especially to a large portion of female labor; and of these wages they are often defrauded. A great deal of labor which is rated at cash price is paid for by the employer in goods at an exorbitant advance. The purchase of the necessaries of life is made by the poor of necessity in small quantities, and on these an extravagant profit is charged; or they are induced to take them upon credit, when of course an advance, of which the buyer dares not complain, is put upon them. Enormous rents are charged to them; usurious interest is exacted from them; they soon become involved in debt and then they are afraid to complain lest a heavier oppression should fall upon them. They are often encouraged and inveigled into debt, so that the creditor may have them more completely in his power. Under these circumstances they become discouraged; they see themselves day by day more deeply involved; until at last, finding their condition inextricable, they are overwhelmed. Indeed one of the greatest curses to our community, and one of the most frequent occasions of poverty is beyond doubt the facility of procuring credit. Men are easily led to think that borrowed money is their own; to forget their debts; and to allow themselves in expenses which they would never think of incurring, if it were not that the day of payment is postponed.

6. Other causes of poverty may be found in misfortune, accident, sickness, friendlessness. No condition in life is secure against misfortune, which often lays waste all before it, and throws its victim naked upon the world. The laborious classes in life are more exposed to accidents than others; and wounds and dislocations and fractures prove a terrible and withering calamity to the industrious poor. Sickness finds its way into the hovel of the poor and reduces them to utter destitution. Exposure to cold and wet, dark, confined, poorly-ventilated, crowded dwellings, severity of toil, and sometimes a scantiness of food, where families are young and numerous and wholly dependent on the labors of the parent, invite disease; and stimulate its dreadful ravages. Many of the poor are utterly friendless. Many of our poor are foreigners; and in crowded cities live and suffer unknown and unnoticed; and experiencing none of those kind and sympathetic attentions, which in a sparse population in the country every neighbor and townsman is prompt to render to a suffering neighbor or townsman. Poverty comes in such cases in all its terrors; and the little money which may have been saved from his uncertain earnings, or which he may have brought with him from his distant home, being expended, he sinks down in unutterable despair; and discouragement prevents the exertions to repair his losses which he might otherwise make.

7. Another of the great causes of poverty to which I shall refer, is in our mutual connexion and dependence upon each other. Men who are wise and prudent for themselves are often ruined by others. The usages of society require men to be bound for each other. Good nature disposes us to listen to the importunities of those,

whom we should be glad to serve. Friendship requires us to encounter severe perils. Fraternal affection, parental ambition, solicitude, or pride, mere credulity often induce us to assume responsibilities, which our circumstances do not warrant; we put ourselves as it were, out of our own power, and are no longer masters of our condition. The failure of others involves us in its wide-spreading desolation; and in the midst of entire security, we find ourselves irretrievably ruined.

II. I might proceed to specify other causes and occasions of poverty, but the time does not allow me to proceed farther. Our next inquiry is, what good can we do to the poor; how are we to relieve them? This is a great subject; sufficient to occupy volumes. I can do no more than glance at some few considerations connected with it. The inquiry divides itself into two points; how shall we prevent the evil; and what can be done to remedy or alleviate it?

It is the part of wisdom to seek to prevent an evil; it is madness when this can be done and as far as it can be done to neglect the means of prevention in the hope of finding a remedy after the evil has actually arrived.

The existing poor laws of the state, and the public provision which prevails among us for the relief of the poor, are of doubtful utility. That they often operate as an encouragement to vice, indolence, improvidence, and neglect, is not matter of question. The insane, the idiotic, the deaf and dumb, the sick, the poor and friendless stranger, the maimed, the blind, the decayed widow, the unprotected orphan child, are proper objects of public charity, for whom there should be the most kind provision. The benevolent mind will delight in the privilege and opportunity of rendering such relief.

The vicious poor are indeed as much objects of pity, but any previous, determined provision for them, of which they may feel in any event secure, removes the strongest motives to restraint and good conduct; and when, besides all sense of character, all fear of want is gone, you have nothing to keep them back from the most degrading excesses. The vicious poor are not indeed equally guilty. The exposures and trials of some men are much greater than those of others. Children brought up from infancy in the corrupt atmosphere of vice and debauchery can hardly, without a miracle, escape the contagion. Intemperance is not unfrequently the consequence of misfortune, operating violently upon an undisciplined or too sensitive a mind, and driving men to it as a relief from despair. Yet it is difficult to make such discriminations as, if possible, would be no more than just; and it must be laid down as a general rule that to the vicious and profligate the almshouse should be a place of hard labor and scanty fare, a place of dread rather than security and supply, when their vices have rendered them only a loathsome scourge to the community. We say the poor have claims upon their fellow men; most certainly; admit the claims of the virtuous poor in their fullest extent; but what claims—what shadow of claim have the wasteful, the indolent, the intemperate, the profligate to the earnings of the sober and industrious?

1. One of the first means of lessening the amount of poverty, that which above all others deserves consideration, is the prevention of vice and crime; because it is vice, which gives its bitterness to poverty and spreading its poisonous influences, entails an unmingled curse upon the community. Be this then, the first object of your benevolent efforts. Labor with yourself; with

your own family and children and dependents, and with all to whom your influence extends. Cut off the innumerable facilities of vice. Do not yourself corrupt your neighbors, and do what you can, without an improper personal interference in their concerns, to prevent their corrupting themselves. Break up your tipping shops, your gambling houses, your places of low debauchery. You have made a noble effort in removing the facilities for intemperance from your public places on your holidays ; make another effort and purge your theatres of their abominations ; let those, who have the power, see that not a drop of spirituous liquor is sold within their walls ; this would be the first step towards a reformation and towards rendering the drama, under proper management, a source of rational and delightful entertainment. An intelligent traveller once informed me that in attending one of the theatres in Europe he found a large portion of the female part of the audience engaged in work, so that while they were enjoying the entertainment they were providing hosiery and gloves for their families. I do not stand here as the advocate of theatrical entertainments ; my private opinion is, as they are at present conducted, wholly against them ; but on this subject I leave it to every man to judge for himself ; but in a community distinguished for its high moral refinement, a place of such frequent and public resort ought to be one to which any respectable parent might safely carry his children without danger of offence to their modesty or contamination to their morals.

It would be vain to attempt to point out the various means by which you may do much to prevent the approaches of vice. Permit me, for example, to specify one that is little considered, by way of inducing you to

consider in what a variety of modes our private conduct may affect the morals and welfare of others. Look then at the consequences of your late hours in your parties of pleasure. What folly, what vanity, what a ridiculous and contemptible aping of foreign manners to begin your entertainments, when you should be retiring to your repose ! The consequences to the health of the participants is always hurtful. They are not the only nor the greatest sufferers. What a foe to all family order and quiet are such arrangements ! With singular inhumanity you compel those, who labor for you through the day, in spite of fatigue and sleepiness, to wait for you until the morning ; and you expose many of the attendants upon your pleasures to the chill midnight air and the storms of winter, and prevent their finding their repose until it is nearly time to resume the labors of the day ; and so compel them, as they feel, in defence of their own health, to resort to those stimulants and refreshments, which lay the foundation of the ruin of hundreds. The time will not allow me to go farther ; but let me repeat it, the first step towards preventing poverty, the most important of all others, is to prevent vice in any and every form.

2. The next great means of preventing and relieving poverty is to make life valuable to the poor ; to render character valuable ; and to inspire them with a proper self-respect. Take therefore a kind and benevolent interest in them. Never give them up in despair. Counsel them in their difficulties and assist them to earn a livelihood. It is infinitely better to put them in the way of earning for themselves, than to bestow upon them your benefactions without their care or labor. Never treat them with disdain, contumely, or insolence. Ought it not to satisfy you to be prosperous ; and is it not

misery enough to be poor and dependent without being insulted or abused? Never permit yourself to be angry with them but in cases of obvious or gross misconduct; and then remember it will avail little to their reformation. Never forget that poverty is as often the result of misfortune, incapacity, neglected education, circumstances over which the individual had no control, as of vice. Protect them in their rights. Do not oppress them. Pay them their just due; take no advantage of their necessities; and think of the baseness and shame of robbing them of a single cent. You can judge of the influence which the consciousness that you have friends, who take the kindest interest in your welfare, has upon your virtue and happiness; and you can judge something of what its influence would be upon those, who in their forlorn and abject condition, need every stimulant to exertion and every alleviation to their sorrows. Whatever tends to elevate their sense of character and to make reputation valuable to them, is of immense importance to their virtue. Education here has the greatest power. Our free schools, therefore, are the highest blessing; and a condition of society, in which every man by his own exertions may rise to a degree of power, influence, and wealth proportionate to his own efforts and deserts, would seem of all others most favorable to human virtue and improvement.

Savings Banks deserve every encouragement and have operated in the most powerful manner and in innumerable ways to stimulate industry, frugality and temperance; to lessen fear and anxiety; and to promote good morals by increasing the value of life and character. Sunday schools and infant schools are other most valuable institutions; and do most effectual service by bringing the rich and poor into more in-

timate connexion with each other; leading the one to take a benevolent interest in their fellow men and making the others happier and inducing them to feel that character is so much the more valuable from the benevolent interest which is taken in them. For the rich and those who are capable of giving instruction at home, and who are too indolent to attend to these important duties when others are so ready to perform them in their stead, their utility is of a more questionable character; but in respect to the poor and ignorant it does not remain to be established; and the question of their heterodoxy or orthodoxy, whether they are Catholic or Protestant, Episcopal or Congregational, is a question of no consideration, in comparison with the great matter of imparting a knowledge of the first principles of religion; and bringing out and stimulating that great sentiment of religious obligation and duty which is as natural and proper to the human mind as any sense or appetite, with which man is endued. It is of little consequence what religion a man has, compared with the question, whether he shall have some or none; and the great object is attained, when men are taught to fear God, to live virtuously, and to love their neighbor. A ministry for the poor in a large city has proved of the most essential benefit and deserves your hearty encouragement. In the hands of those benevolent and devoted men who have exercised it among you, it has been in the highest measure conducive to the relief of distress, to the alleviation of misery, to the reclaiming of the vicious, and in every respect to the improvement and elevation of the poor.

3. In the next place, seek to give the poor employment. It is far better to give them the labor and

pay them justly for it, than to give them the money without the employment. It is better for the rich to spend their money while they have it, in improving their estates, in giving honest occupation to the poor, than to hoard it up as matter of idolatrous worship, or of a confidence as foolish as it is criminal. On the subject of employment for the poor, permit me to remark, that much more attention should be given to the employment of the female poor, than the subject has yet received; and many of those effeminate and in-door occupations, into which men are so constantly to their shame, thrusting themselves, ought to be regarded as exclusively the concern of women, whose condition affords them but comparatively few opportunities of providing for themselves, and whose sex forbids their engaging in the most laborious and exposed occupations of life.

The best education, which can be given to the poor, as it is indeed the best, which can be given to any one, is that which will afford them the power of providing for themselves. We say they are poor as often from want of the faculty of getting a living as from any indisposition to labor. It seems a duty, therefore, where it is practicable, in respect to the poor, and especially those, who are dependent upon public charity or such as are barely able to force their way along, to cause them to be instructed in some useful employment or trade, that under their limited circumstances or the reverses of human condition they might always be secure of the means of comfortable support; and have a feeling of personal independence in their knowledge or skill in some useful art, which none of the ordinary changes of life can take from them. Besides this, we cannot overlook the advantages, which such an

education would afford, in furnishing constant occupation and generally strong inducements to labor.

4. Another great means of preventing or avoiding poverty is to induce the poor, and those persons whose circumstances are scanty or moderate, to cut off all wasteful expenditures. Limit your expenses to the absolute necessaries of life, if these are all that you can afford. Resolutely refuse to incur a debt, which you have not the certain means of discharging, or where the power of payment must depend upon many contingencies. There is scarcely a more sure precursor of poverty than the habit of contracting debts. It at first gently approaches us, as it were, playing with the extremities and gliding over the smaller limbs, until presently it enfolds us in its fatal grasp and holds us motionless. We are then sold into slavery; and despair of extricating ourselves deprives us of all power of exertion. Let those, who have an influence, seek to teach the poor to restrain their wants and desires; and show them, in their own example, how to acquire a true independence by owing no man any thing; and in limiting their desires to their actual power, by honorable exertion, frugality, and industry, of supplying their wants. It is folly and madness for persons in moderate circumstances, with families dependent on their exertions, and liable to the accidents of life, to emulate the extravagant expenditures of the affluent. It is dishonest to waste that, which is not our own; and expose the condition or property of another man to any risk, which he does not himself voluntarily incur. Bankruptcy has with many persons got to be considered a small affair and by no means disreputable. It was not so once, when our commercial character stood much higher than at present. There are many

cases, in which it is plainly the result of misfortune, of unexpected and wholly improbable changes in the commercial world, or of dishonesty and treachery in others, where, most certainly, we would not pass the slightest censure on the unfortunate; and where, as they save their integrity, they save their honor. But on the other hand, whenever it is the result of a weakness, which we ought to withstand, of extravagance, luxury, and prodigality, of any circumstances, against which, we had it in our power by common discretion to guard, and whenever in any measure it involves fraud, it is a crime, for which, neither the frequency of its occurrence, nor the shrewdness with which it is managed, affords even the coloring of an excuse.

5. In the next place, you who live in affluence, and occupy what are called the highest stations in the community, look to your own examples and indulgences, lest they are such as to corrupt and lay the foundation, or prove the occasion of extravagance, wastefulness, and poverty to others. What are called the luxuries of the rich furnish employment and support to the poor; industry and enterprise give you a right to expend their honest fruits in multiplying the conveniences and comforts, the embellishments and innocent enjoyments of life; but it becomes you in your indulgences of every kind, to avoid that which would tend to corrupt your neighbor; and especially, to exhibit such an example of temperate and moderate indulgence as shall discourage all foolish emulation, and such a beneficent use of wealth, as will make men thankful to God, that he has put the power of beneficence into your hands, rather than to repine at their own poverty and hate you for your prosperity.

III. Do what we will, however, and all we can, much poverty, in the present constitution of society, must remain, and much, which is not the result of vice, profligacy, idleness, and improvidence, but of circumstances which no human sagacity nor power can foresee, or control, or remove. Remember it is your duty to do all you can to alleviate its sufferings, by personal attentions, by bestowment of money, by your ready sympathy, and by every kindness you are able to exercise. Withhold not good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hands to do it. You are but the almoners and stewards of the divine bounty. Be it your great desire to render a permanent benefit to your fellow men ; but consider no service, which you can render, a small matter, and therefore to be disdained. Seize with eagerness every opportunity of doing good, and be thankful to God, when by so easy a charity as that of dispensing from your abundance, you can brighten even for an hour the dark chamber of poverty, or soften the couch of sickness and death, or dry up the orphan's tears, or make the widow's heart to sing for joy.

In all these duties, you have the highest motives to exertion, which can be addressed to reflecting and benevolent minds. Motives of interest press upon you. In seeking to remove the great causes of pauperism by promoting the virtue of the poor, you are directly ministering to the protection of your own property, the security of your own domestic peace, and the defence of your children's virtue. The poor are the inmates of your dwellings, the guardians of your property, the companions of your children, having in many cases a far greater influence over their characters than it is possible even for you to exert. How impor-

tant is it then, that you should seek to elevate their character and condition and to render what they should be those to whom such a sacred trust is committed.

Motives of justice press upon you. The labors of the poor are the foundation of your prosperity. They plough your fields; they navigate your ships; they minister to your pleasures; they serve your wants. You are as dependent upon the poor, as the poor upon you. It is but a fair measure of justice that they should share in the prosperity and abundance of which they themselves have been the source and occasion; and the poor laborer, who has toiled for you, and the sailor, who has encountered the perils of the sea and all the dangers of foreign climes for your advantage, should never be forgotten in the enjoyment of your pleasures and the distribution of your bounty.

Benevolence and religion urge innumerable motives upon you to remember the poor. Beneficence is one of the first of duties, as it is one of the highest privileges of your nature. The true enjoyment of wealth is found only in the beneficent use of it. Follow the great law of your religion and do to others as you would have others do to you. The caprices of fortune are most extraordinary. Its reverses may visit you. No skill nor care nor vigilance nor art can secure the uninterrupted possession of wealth or enable you to transmit it with any certainty to those who come after you. You or yours may require such aid as others now demand of you. The value of wealth is never certain, but as you make it certain by making it immediately useful. You yourself are a pensioner upon the divine bounty. You live upon God's goodness and unmerited kindness. Thank him continually that he has made you capable of beneficence; and, in your humble measure, copy his

infinite and unwearied bounty, which is poured out in unrestricted measure upon the evil and the unthankful, upon the just and the unjust. The most privileged of all duties is the duty of doing good; the best of all powers, the power of conferring happiness; the sweetest sentiment, which can possess the soul, the consciousness of having made others happy; and the highest and noblest purpose to which our talents can be applied and our lives devoted, that of relieving the sufferings, securing the virtue, and advancing the happiness and improvement of our fellow-men.

SERMON XV.

PARENTAL SOLICITUDE.

MATTHEW xx. 21, 22.

THEN CAME TO HIM THE MOTHER OF ZEBEDEE'S CHILDREN WITH HER SONS, WORSHIPPING HIM, AND DESIRING A CERTAIN THING OF HIM. AND HE SAID UNTO HER, WHAT WILT THOU? SHE SAITH UNTO HIM, GRANT THAT THESE MY TWO SONS MAY SIT, THE ONE ON THY RIGHT HAND, AND THE OTHER ON THE LEFT, IN THY KINGDOM.

WE have here, an example of strong parental solicitude; in this case, an imprudent and misguided solicitude; directed to attainments which were not desirable, and the possession of which would have contributed nothing to the virtue or happiness of their possessors; but must have endangered the former and perhaps proved the bane of the latter. This incident may afford an instructive lesson. Parental solicitude is one of the strongest sentiments of which the human heart is capable. Fully to understand its power you must be yourself a parent. We see it constantly displaying itself in the arduous but willing labors, in the painful yet cheer-

ful and unwearied watchings, in the great, disinterested, and heroic sacrifices of parents for their children ; labors as severe, watchings as anxious, sacrifices as sublime as ever a martyr offered at the shrine of religion, where he poured out his blood. You may see it in that wakeful attention, which you may always command when you speak with a virtuous parent of his children ; in that timidity, which startles at the breath of danger and hugs the infant to the breast, careless itself of every exposure and every peril ; in that assiduity, which never deserts the couch of the sick child, and feels no weariness, nor hunger, nor fatigue, nor pain, but that which springs from sympathy with the suffering object of its care ; in that self-devotion, which has often prompted men to give their own lives as the price of security to their offspring. If you are a parent you may feel it pouring itself out in the earliest supplications of the morning sacrifice ; and mingling with your last emotions when you lay your head upon your pillow. You may see it in the heaving bosom and the deep-drawn sigh when the child first quits the paternal roof to enter upon an untried scene of peril and duty ; in the silent rapture, that glistens in the eye, when this child returns wearing the wreath of honor, the prize of industry and genius and virtue ; you may see it in that bitter agony, which prostrates the broken-hearted parent, when he finds that all his labors are vain and all his hopes are blasted ; and the object of his affections and confidence is brought back the degraded victim of folly and vice. You may see it still more strongly in that fidelity, which clings to its unworthy object in his deepest degradation ; and goes out to receive with open arms the returning prodigal.

. A sentiment, which nature has made so strong, and

which may be so much improved by religion, demands our care. To extinguish it would be criminal ; to attempt to increase its strength is in general unnecessary ; to give it a wise direction is the object at which we should aim.

The responsibility of the parental character can hardly be overstated. The influence of parental counsels, parental opinions, parental authority, is great ; but the influence of parental character and example often surpasses the combined influence of all these. The principles are established, the temper formed, the outlines of the future character determined, the destiny in life in a great measure fixed oftentimes long before the child passes beyond the limits of parental guardianship and control. Many can trace their deepest sentiments of religion to the first lessons of maternal kindness ; and their strict principles of honor and duty to the commanding influence of a father's example of inflexible truth and uprightness ; and the most wanton follies and the most debasing vices, which have ever stained the characters of men, may often be followed up, as the stream to its source, to a weak indulgence or to a neglect of duty and discipline on the part of the parent, which admit of no apology. Under the influence however even of a high sentiment of responsibility, we may be led into mistakes ; and the most devoted solicitude for our children may be wasted upon unworthy objects, and take a pernicious and perhaps criminal direction. Let us glance at some of the mistakes, which are common ; and then speak of the course into which it ought to be turned.

1. Parental solicitude often appears in the form of excessive indulgence ; and in an undue concern for their ease, and the supply of the purely physical wants of our children.

This trait of the paternal character is too common to require that we do more than merely refer to it. The wants of nature are few and simple ; but by indulgence we may make them as numerous as we please. We may pervert entirely the wholesome taste of nature ; produce a disrelish for every thing plain and inartificial ; and create a host of factitious necessities and desires, which will be continually producing others ; desires and necessities, which ordinarily become more and more difficult of gratification. The great secret of contentment and independence is to have as few wants as possible ; and the parent, who, by an improper indulgence, creates in his children appetites and wants, where none would otherwise have existed, is responsible for much of the inevitable disappointment and wretchedness, which must attend that child through life.

Too great a solicitude likewise for the health of our children is commonly itself the direct instrument of the evil against which it was its object to guard. We may shelter them, so that the wind of heaven shall not visit them too roughly ; we may protect them from the chilliness of the morning air and the damps of evening ; we may fortify them as much as we will against the summer's heat and the winter's cold ; we may save them from fatigue by preventing them from exertion ; and from hunger, by filling them to repletion ; yet this is all against nature ; it is a misguided fondness ; it is only laying the foundation of constitutional infirmity, disease, and suffering ; of want and pitiable dependence. The human body and the human mind are to be braced and invigorated by exertion and exposure. The school of trial, hardship, necessity, poverty, above all things else, of self-dependence, the school in which men are not so much instructed as compelled to instruct

themselves, in which their own powers are of necessity brought out, and in which, not with a thousand superfluous facilities, but with only as much foreign aid as is indispensable to their encouragement or their right direction at setting out, men are obliged to feel their own way, is the school in which almost all truly great and eminently useful men have been formed ; and the rudest health and the firmest constitutions have been found with those whose couch has been hard, whose fare has been scanty ; who have earned their bread by labor before they were permitted to taste it ; and have been exposed to brave alike the burning heats of summer and the cold and storms of winter.

But these effects are not so much to be dreaded as the moral consequences of such solicitude and indulgence. Its almost inevitable effect is to render the objects of it extremely selfish ; to induce them to prefer their own gratification and their own ease to every thing else ; to feel that no attentions which can be paid to them are answerable to their claims ; to make them miserable under wants which cannot always, which in after life can seldom be gratified ; and to subject them to the perpetual corrosion of disappointment and chagrin ; of envy and jealousy. We may desire that our children should be spared all unnecessary suffering ; and that they should be made as happy as is consistent with a just regard to their character ; but it is a mistaken fondness, which desires to exempt them from pains, which are the salutary and seasonable admonitions and discipline of nature and duty, adapted to save them from far greater evils ; which would persuade them that physical inconvenience, or want, or pain are among the greatest evils, which man can suffer ; or that pleasure is to be pursued as the business

of life. The pursuit of pleasure as an object of life is one of the most corrupting in which the human heart can be engaged ; the great ends of life are virtue and usefulness, to be good ourselves and to do good to others ; and pleasure, if it come at all, must be looked for as the accompaniment and reward of virtuous acquisitions and useful exertions.

2. I proceed to remark, that our solicitude for our children is irrational and misguided, when it is aimed merely at accomplishments of a personal or intellectual nature ; and at such as promise them only success and splendor in this world.

It is not too much to say, that these are the great objects with many, perhaps with most parents ; and that the greater part of the education, which prevails in the community, has no higher aim than this. Polished manners contribute to purity of morals, and intellectual cultivation is to a certain extent conducive to virtue ; yet this is by no means the inevitable effect ; and it needs no argument to prove the duty of laboring most assiduously for the moral and religious education of those, whom God has committed to our charge. Intellectual eminence may be favorable to virtue, but moral attainments by no means of necessity correspond to acquisitions purely mental ; and distinguished personal accomplishments, though certainly not inconsistent with the most exalted virtue and piety, ordinarily tend to produce vanity and a frivolity of mind and a passion for display, than which few qualities are more unfriendly to active benevolence or exalted devotion.

We judge wrong, we grossly err, when we make the distinguished success of our children in life a principal, and especially, as it is with many, a sole object of pursuit. The attainment of these objects, be

the pursuit of them ever so ardent, is precarious. Let us do what we will we cannot command events; and distinguished wealth and genius and eminence, and success, in the nature of things, can fall only to the lot of a few. But let us suppose the great end attained, and these gifts in the possession of your children in all the splendor and abundance, in which they are ever possessed. Suppose your children as rich, as elevated, as honored, as much adorned with wit and beauty, with genius and grace, as any ever were; glittering in all the refined, and splendid accomplishments, which art can frame or wealth bestow; and floating through the fashionable world like some splendid meteor across the horizon, fixing all eyes with admiration and opening all mouths with applause of the grace, elegance, and brilliancy of their transit. Yet how many abatements are of necessity to be made from all these rich gifts. They cannot be acquired but with extreme peril to virtue; they cannot be possessed but at the price of the malignant envy and jealousy of many. If they are accompanied, as they seldom fail to be accompanied, with vanity and a strong passion for admiration, these are passions, which as yet were never satisfied, which render the heart callous with selfishness, and inflict upon their unhappy subjects continual chagrin and mortification. Besides this they tend to carry their possessors too much into the world; they are all formed for display; they can subsist on nothing but popular favor; they must glitter in the sunshine or they will not glitter at all. They are worth nothing in retirement; because in general they entirely unfit their possessors for the enjoyment of retirement, and render insipid those rational pleasures, which are to be found only in the calm retreats of private friendship and domestic affection. Then again the shortness of the sea-

son of such success is not to be overlooked in forming a just estimate of its value. What is more evanescent or more capricious than popular favor, even where it is most deserved? After the rareeshow has been seen a few times, it ceases to excite interest. When men have looked at it more than once, they begin to search for its defects and blemishes; and what is there human without its defects and blemishes? Nor can this course of fashion and splendor ever be occupied alone. The prize of public favor was never yet struggled for alone. A host of competitors start up around you; and before the shouts of public applause have died away upon your ear, you will find yourself forgotten; fresh acclamations, which sound to you much louder and heartier than those which hailed your passage, announce the popular triumph of some new, and as you, with extreme chagrin persuade yourself, some far less deserving favorite.

In the course of nature, which nothing can resist, the day of these triumphs is short, and always as precarious as possible. These brilliant objects soon pass their zenith and descend into their wane with a rapidity corresponding to the loftiness and splendor of their ascension; and they set to rise no more. What ravages, likewise, does disease make in the sources of all these splendid triumphs; and the corrosive tooth of time is constantly at work to upturn and lay waste their foundation. The season of them, indeed, is short. The glories of the brightest summer are soon followed by the frosts of winter; and though the variegated tints of autumn may be even far more beautiful than the plain green of spring, yet as prognostical of the dreariness and desolation which must immediately succeed, they inspire only sadness and regret. And what can all this suc-

cess avail against the ordinary vicissitudes of life ! What resources does this furnish us in the feebleness or solitude of old age, or when wasted by disease, or racked with pain, or broken down by disappointment, or bleeding under bereavements, or languishing on that bed, from which we are to rise no more ! Can the loftiest heaps of wealth then avail any thing to mitigate a single pang ? Has the noblest prize, which a mere worldly ambition ever yet won, at such an hour, any enchantment over us ? Can it then avail us any thing that we have distanced all competitors in the race of fame ; that we have drunk most deeply in the foaming and sparkling cup of dissipation ; that we have shone as stars of the first magnitude in the hemisphere of fashion ? Will it not rather appear to us then, as it appeared to a wise and experimental judge of these things in former times, that it is indeed vanity, and that an excessive devotion to any objects of mere worldly success and splendor, or any such pursuit of them as would retard our moral acquisitions, or put at hazard our virtue, is as irrational as it is criminal.

3. I come to speak next of parental solicitude in regard to the continuance of the lives of our children. It is the dictate of nature to desire and to be anxious that our children should live. It would be inhuman not to feel this sentiment and not to feel it strongly. But natural and virtuous as this sentiment is, it may be indulged to an excess ; and at the expense of that resignation and confidence, which we are bound to cherish in the providence of God. We must do what depends on us for their subsistence, health, relief and recovery in sickness, and their security from danger ; having done this we must unreservedly submit the disposal of them to God. The result of our best labors in respect to them is un-

certain. Their destiny in life is uncertain ; their character is uncertain. They may live to cheer and delight us ; to soothe us by their kindness ; to honor us by their virtues ; to brighten the dark hours of old age and adversity, and to smooth the pillow of death. Or it may be that they shall drag out a wretched existence of weakness, disease, privation, or suffering ; or they may be the victims of a darker and heart-withering calamity ; and live to display only the triumphs and degradation of vice ; and to rend our souls with an agony transcending any which we could suffer if called to weep over their early graves. In a case, therefore, where the event is so uncertain, and the future so little under our control, it is for us to leave no measure of precaution and prudence unattempted ; and having faithfully performed our duty, to endeavor to acquiesce, without complaint, distrust, or despair, in the unerring decisions of that Being, who holds the issues of life and death.

IV. We come next, to speak of the proper objects of parental solicitude. For these the wise and virtuous Christian can be at no loss ; but we cannot be too much impressed with their importance.

With respect to our children, then, moral character is every thing. Their innocence, virtue, piety, these are the objects to which the whole force of our affection, and interest in them should be directed. Every other good, which can be bestowed on them, which has no connexion with these, is of doubtful value. This good is real, permanent, unmixed, inestimable. What is the chief excellence of human nature ? It is moral virtue ; it is this by which man is allied to God. What is the chief end of man ? We answer in the words of the an-

cient standard, that "it is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." But the most acceptable homage which we can render him, and that, without which every other service is worse than vain, is the homage of virtuous obedience ; and an indispensable requisite to the enjoyment of his presence is moral purity. Of the value of virtue little need be said ; first because there is not one who hears me, who does not feel it ; and next because to urge some subjects, however slightly, would in a degree imply that it is possible to call their value or truth in question. Such is moral virtue. It is the only foundation of peace and happiness ; peace and happiness indeed cannot exist without it. It is the only adequate support and consolation, which can be found under the afflictions of life. It is the most powerful means of usefulness. It is the only ground of consolation and hope in death. To moral beings it must be the indispensable foundation of their happiness in every stage of their existence. Secure this to your children and take from them every other earthly good, yet they will remain rich indeed ; but without this every other blessing of life is comparatively worthless. I would appeal only to the unbiased test of the human heart in respect to it ; and could we obtain the honest sentiments of the most vicious parent, could we get from him an answer dictated by his true feelings and his sincere parental affection as to what he most desired for his children, he would answer, that nothing would make him happier, nothing would he deem so honorable, nothing would be so grateful to his self-love, as that his children should be distinguished for their virtue and piety. And if I inquire of those, who have seen their fairest opening prospects in regard to their children overclouded by death, what has been the support, which has most

effectually sustained them under afflictions so heavy, they would answer that the only application, which has soothed these wounds is the recollection of the innocence and rectitude and piety of the departed, and the hopes, inspired by such recollections, of their translation to a state of unmixed and advancing virtue.

Such indeed are the only proper objects of parental solicitude. Every system of education, which neglects them, is criminally deficient. Every personal or intellectual accomplishment, which is inconsistent with them, or which retards them, or which indeed does not contribute to them, is so far either criminal or worthless. Let these then be the high purposes to which your desires and labors continually tend. Watch over their innocence with a vigilance, which never tires nor sleeps

Teach them to be virtuous and pious above all things else by the power of a virtuous and pious example. Go before them yourselves in the path in which you desire they should walk. Satisfy them by your own temper and sentiments, your life and labors, that no other objects are so dear to your own heart. The influence of parental example in favor of virtue, when presented in an unaffected, unsuspecting, and unobtrusive form, is all-powerful. It will give an irresistible eloquence to your counsels; it will force your persuasions home to the hearts of your children; but the counsels of an angel must fall unheeded and in vain, when contradicted by the life. Precept and instruction may do much; but parental example, parental example has an immeasurably greater power.

Christian parents! It is a momentous trust which God has committed to you. The children, which he has given you, he commands you to educate for him. You are to seek to prepare them to pass through the

world so that they may surmount its trials and escape its pollutions. You are to fit them, as far as depends on you, for usefulness, so that they may work the work assigned them by doing good in the world to the extent of the abilities, with which God has entrusted them. They are immortal and accountable beings. Innocence, and virtue, and piety are the only qualifications for a better life. See that nothing is wanting to advance their moral and religious improvement. You must meet them in the presence of God; and there answer for the manner in which you have performed your duties. Unutterable must be your misery and confusion, if they then upbraid you as, by your neglect, improvidence, or vice, the instruments of their corruption and degradation and ruin; and inexpressible must be your felicity if then, when they recognise you in that solemn day of account, they point to you as those, who by fidelity and discretion, assiduous labors, faithful counsels, virtuous example, humble and devoted piety, guided them into the path of glory, and honor, and immortality.



SERMON XVI.

FILIAL PIETY.

1 TIMOTHY v. 4.

LET THEM LEARN FIRST TO SHOW PIETY AT HOME AND TO REQUITE THEIR PARENTS: FOR THAT IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE BEFORE GOD.

THE piety, here spoken of, is filial piety; the subject which I now intend to consider.

No relation can be more close or interesting than that which subsists between the parent and child. It is the appointment of God, and the duties, which arise out of it, are all of them duties of religion. Religion aims to strengthen all the charities of human life; to elevate them; and to render them more pure; sources of greater usefulness and superior satisfaction. The connexion between the parent and child is, like most of the relations of life, a connexion of mutual dependence. There are reciprocal ties and reciprocal duties. The strength of parental affection is proverbial. "Can a mother," says the prophet, "forget her sucking child?" an interrogatory which is equivalent to an affirmation, as though such a destitution of natural affection and such a desertion of maternal duties were

scarcely possible. No sentiment of which our nature is capable, is known to exist in a superior degree of ardency, self-devotion, and disinterestedness, than that to which parental affection is often known to rise. Filial affection, it is reasonable to conclude, should correspond to parental affection. We are made to love, and to be loved ; if parents are made to love their children, children are made to love their parents.

We will speak of the grounds on which the claims of the parent rest ; of the extent to which they reach ; and lastly, of the manner in which they are to be answered.

I. The claims of the parent over the child rest, in the first place, on what may be strictly termed the ties of nature. The child stands in a relation to the parent, which cannot subsist between that child and any one else. The parent, under God, is the cause of his existence ; it is in the bosom of maternal tenderness and love, that he first finds repose and protection ; and thence he draws nourishment and the support of life. Nothing is more remarkable than the helplessness of human infancy ; its dependence on foreign aid is complete and absolute. To the parent, nature directs the child to look for the aid it requires, and without which it must perish ; and what but the unconquerable strength of parental affection, would ever induce those arduous labors and those wasting and painful watchings, which the weaknesses and wants of infancy and childhood render necessary. The parent holds to the child the relation of its natural supporter, protector, and guide ; who, regardless of every expense and hazard, labors in these duties in season and out of season, spends and is spent ; deems no personal sacrifices too costly, no

watching too severe, no exertion too painful, that it may rear, protect, serve, and make happy the offspring, whom God has cast upon his care. To the parent, the child looks for services, which no one else will render; to the parent, therefore, he owes a return, which no one else can claim.

2. The second ground on which a parent rests his claims upon his children, is that of kindness shown to them. The first impulses by which a parent is urged to the care, protection, relief, and nourishment of his infant offspring are purely instinctive; not the result of principle and consideration, nor the dictates of reason and conscience, but of an inferior character; the inclinations of our animal nature, which it would be a much greater effort to resist than to indulge; and which are found to exist in equal intensity in the brute, as in the rational creation. In the brute creation, these impulses expire as soon as the immediate purposes of them are answered; and when the young animal is competent to his own protection and the supply of his own wants, all natural affection ceases; the ties of consanguinity are no longer recognised, and the offspring, before the object of so much solicitude, is henceforth regarded with the same indifference as any other individual of the same tribe would be. It is not so with the human parent. If the affections with which he is first attracted towards his offspring are purely animal and instinctive, their character is soon changed, and they ripen into intelligent convictions of the understanding and warm sentiments of the heart. Where, indeed, shall we find a stronger, more active, disinterested, lasting kindness than that with which a virtuous and affectionate parent devotes himself to the interest, improvement, and welfare of his children. It would seem as though

no earthly object is so dear to his heart as these. To these he devotes his time, labor, care, health, property, and life. He is happy to share every thing with them; he is prompt to relinquish every thing to them. He is more tender of them than of himself; more solicitous for their reputation and success in life than for his own; identifying their interests perpetually with his own interests; laboring, watching, suffering, praying for them; feeling no pains so severely, as those which they suffer; deeming no losses so disastrous to himself as those, which fall on them; finding no tidings so grateful as those, which announce their success and honor; and no hours so bright as those, which are gilded by the reflected splendors of his children's prosperity. Such is parental kindness in its ordinary character; as we see and feel it every day; as it exists in the mind of a virtuous parent. No sentiment that ever stirs within the heart of man has greater strength; prompts to more laborious exertions, or more expensive sacrifices. Such is parental kindness, among all descriptions of men, who are virtuous; the rich and the poor, the enlightened and the ignorant. It may have in some a more wise and rational direction than in others; but it may be found existing among all in equal intensity. The claims, which such kindness makes upon us, correspond with its character; and are in proportion to its extent. The kindness is great, the claims are great; the kindness knows no remission, the claims know no remission; the kindness prompts to every generous sacrifice; and duty prompts to every grateful return. Since our parents feel that they cannot do too much for us; it is plain that we should feel that we can never do enough for them.

3. The next ground of parental claims, is that of

parental dependence. If the children in infancy and childhood are dependent on the parent for subsistence and protection, the parent becomes soon dependent on the child for his comfort and happiness. I wish it were possible to convey to the young a just or in any measure an adequate sentiment of this dependence on the part of the parent; but it would be a vain attempt until they themselves occupy the place of a parent. Separate from the satisfaction arising from the consciousness of having performed his duty, there is no earthly object so dear to him as the welfare of his children. His affections cling to them; his hopes rest upon them; he lives in them. No felicity is so sweet as that which their virtues impart, no disappointment so cutting, no mortification so bitter, no shame so humiliating, no agony so poignant as that which a virtuous parent suffers from the perversity and profligacy of children, who were the objects of his tenderest affection, and strongest confidence. God cannot have made parents so dependent on their children, without a correspondent obligation on the child, never to abuse, nor take advantage of this dependence; and when he places the peace and happiness of the parents at the disposal of the children, is it not an emphatical call of heaven upon them to hold this affecting trust most sacred; and to watch over and manage it under a profound sense of their responsibility?

II. Having glanced at some of the principal grounds on which the claims of parents over their children rest, let us in the second place inquire into the extent of these claims.

1. Since then in the first place they spring from nature, they are permanent and irrevocable. You cannot annul

these claims. They make a part of the constitution of things ; they are the appointments of divine providence and not therefore to be relinquished or observed at your pleasure. In the being whom you call your parent, you are always to recognise an object of strong interest; whom you are not at liberty to neglect when it is in your power to serve him. You are to look upon him as one with whom your connexion is most intimate and never to be dissolved ; whom you are not to forget, while you remember any one; whom God in some degree casts upon your care ; and to whose relief and subsistence, when there is need, it is your duty to contribute to the extent of your power, as it was his duty to provide for you, when your dependent condition demanded such services from him.

2. We add next that the claims of parents upon their children must be in some degree measured by the kindness which they have shown them. It cannot be that parental claims are in all cases equal ; and that the parent who deserts and the parent who devotes himself to the welfare of his children have equal demands upon us, and are to be held in equal affection and reverence. This is not our duty ; it is not practicable ; it would be a violation of the great principles of right and wrong ; and interfere with those just retributions, which the providence of God dispenses in this state. Parental neglect and profligacy may sometimes be so gross as almost to annul the claims of nature ; and to stifle the sentiments of filial affection and reverence. But in his deepest degradation do not forget that he is your parent ; let none of his unkindness efface from your grateful recollection any former tokens of his kindness. Suffer no emotions of resentment to kindle within you even under the bitterest provocation ; he has pierced your

soul with many an unutterable pang ; he has caused the tears of shame and confusion to scald your cheeks ; yet he is your parent ; wasted, infamous and miserable as he may have rendered himself, yet pity him and pray for him ; God may grant that to your prayers, which your labors attempted in vain ; and the filial piety, which never wavered, may at last obtain the most glorious and the richest of all triumphs, the return of the victim of folly and sin to the path of duty and peace.

But in ordinary cases it is reasonable that your gratitude to the parents who have loved and protected you, should bear some proportion to the kindness, which they have shown. This is the just reward of parental fidelity. Let none of their offices of love be overlooked and forgotten ; and if they have never been weary of serving you, never do you be deficient in love and service to them. In no case need you fear doing too much for your parents ; you have incurred a debt to them which you cannot accurately estimate, and which you can never entirely discharge. The obligations of gratitude cannot be fully cancelled ; and it is a mark of a generous mind never to forget them.

III. We come in the third place to inquire in what manner are these claims to be answered.

1. The first duty of children to their parents is obedience. In childhood and youth this must be absolute, except in cases where it would involve a violation of truth or of moral or religious duty. Their age and experience render them best able to judge for us, and claim our confidence ; and the high responsibility of the parental character justifies them in speaking with authority. In after life, as our own judgments become mature, and we are able to determine for ourselves the

course of duty, we must judge and act for ourselves ; but even here we should be reluctant to oppose the wishes and counsels of our parents without necessity and in matters of indifference ; and we should conform to their injunctions, when they choose to give them, as far as is compatible with duty and propriety.

2. The second prominent duty to our parents is that of courtesy. So much of the happiness of human life is made up of matters in themselves apparently trivial and unimportant, that this becomes a duty of serious and imperious obligation. Nothing can justify any want of courtesy towards them ; any want of due reverence, any pointed neglect, any impatience or fretfulness towards them, any unkind looks or words, any harsh remarks, any rude answers, any expressions even the most slight, of anger or resentment. It often happens, in the gradual progress of society, and especially in a country like ours, that the advantages of education, enjoyed by the parents of those who are distinguished for their intellectual attainments, have been small, and their education imperfect ; and that parents born in the lowest condition of poverty and obscurity, by their industry and enterprise and frugality having risen in the world and acquired wealth ; have been anxious to bestow upon their children an education which they had no means of attaining for themselves ; and have labored hard and denied themselves many a reasonable indulgence that their children should not be without advantages from the want of which they suffered. The good man, under these circumstances, possessing a mind worthy of the liberal education, which it has received, will never suffer his parents to be mortified by any consciousness of an inferiority, which he remarks to their disadvantage ; he will never feel ashamed, and will not

lead them to feel ashamed of their honest poverty, obscurity, and ignorance ; but will rather take pride in that sound discretion and that patient industry, which rose above all the disadvantages of their condition, and prompted to such noble sacrifices to obtain for their children, what it was too late to secure to themselves. Old age likewise is apt to become querulous, impatient, jealous, and fretful. It is the duty of filial piety to submit to all this with patience and in silence ; to offer the alleviations which it is in its power to render ; never to provoke resentment by opposition ; and to avoid increasing the rising storm by braving its fury. It will bear and forbear ; it will prevent evils by removing the excitements to them ; it will disarm severity by unruffled calmness and patience, and by redoubled courtesy. After all, my friends, in the most troublesome and fretful old age, it is scarcely possible that we should have more to bear in our parents than they had to suffer in us in the fretfulness, impatience, violence, and indiscretion of infancy and childhood.

3. The third duty, which we owe to them is to provide for them as far as their necessities require, and our power admits. In infancy and childhood they provided for us ; in old age and in their second childhood we are bound to provide for them. But suppose that they themselves were negligent and left us to suffer ; shall we therefore leave them to suffer, and instead of attempting to repair shall we only double the wrong ? As there are no circumstances, no darkness or extremity of vice or profligacy, that will justify a parent in utterly giving up a child, so there is no profligacy or vice that will justify a child in utterly giving up a parent. There may be circumstances in their condition or our condition, which may render it impossible for us

effectually to serve them ; but we must never forget the ties by which God has connected us together ; we must feel for each other and do always what we can ; and cold and unchristian must be that heart, which, when it has it in its power to bestow, can refuse shelter to a houseless, or bread to a famishing, or kindness to an abandoned and prodigal parent or child.

4. The last duty, of which I shall speak, of a child to a parent is that of doing what he can for his happiness. With a virtuous son this will always be a prominent object of desire and exertion. He will endeavor as far as possible to remove or keep from him every occasion of pain, and to multiply continually his sources of innocent gratification. We have already remarked the dependence of the father upon the child as far as his enjoyment is concerned. It is far greater than that of the child upon the parent can ever be. As the child advances into life, the parent of course falls into the decline of years ; and the decline of life to every one is a season of many infirmities, and sorrows, and trials ; of decay, which advances rapidly, of weaknesses, which are continually multiplying ; of losses the most severe, for the friends with whom we set out in life have one after another broken their hold, and left us forever ; and we find ourselves alone in the world. It is in such a season as this that the virtues of our children are to us a source of the purest and richest satisfaction ; their society becomes invaluable ; their assiduity, affection, kindness, are most soothing and refreshing ; alleviate the severest pangs of disease and infirmity, and cheer the dark and solitary evening of old age. Ye who have parents, feel grateful for the distinguished blessings, which God continues to you ; for the instructive lessons and salutary counsels

which he addresses to you in their history ; and since their happiness so much rests with you, never be wanting in works of love so useful and privileged.

Motives abound to a sensible and virtuous mind to prompt to the duties of filial piety. The apostle pronounces it good and acceptable before God. It is good and acceptable before God and man. No virtue, no moral attainment is more honorable, more interesting, more delightful. What youthful bosom has not glowed with admiration in reading the story of the Trojan hero bearing on his shoulders his aged father from the flames and perils of a pillaged and burning city ? What heart has not been deeply touched in contemplating the heroic affection of the Grecian daughter, nourishing with her own breast her starving father in prison ? Who can contemplate the filial piety of Joseph unmoved ? Where was ever a more sublime act of filial duty and affection than Jesus displayed when in the midst of his sufferings he commended, as a dying request, his afflicted mother to the care of his beloved disciple ?

Filial piety is indeed a most amiable virtue. The love of an earthly parent claims kindred with the love of our heavenly Father. Cultivate its temper ; perform its duties. Think much of your parents ; they have thought much of you ; feel much for them, they have felt much for you. Labor for them in affectionate and grateful requital of their devoted services. Never has human nature appeared more lovely than when it is seen forsaking all the amusements of youth and all the fascinations of the gay world, which it is well fitted to animate by its wit and adorn by its brilliancy, in order to render its patient, laborious, anxious, wasting, services at the couch of a dying father,

or in the dark chamber of a mother, whose heart, once full of tenderness and affection, is now steeled against her own flesh ; and over whose mind, once bright and cheerful, an impenetrable darkness has settled down. Spectacles like these, and they are no fictions of the imagination, show how closely the human is allied to the angelic nature. Blessed daughter, whom Heaven thus honors as the minister of its brightest consolations and as the representative of its tender mercy ! Happy father, who is thus permitted to sink into his last earthly repose on the unsullied bosom of filial affection and piety !—Parents ! be it your felicity to have children thus kind. Children ! be it your privilege to have parents, who know how to estimate such kindness.

SERMON XVII.

DOMESTIC LIFE.

PSALM lxxviii. 6.

GOD SETTETH THE SOLITARY IN FAMILIES.

MAN was made to live in society. He is as much a social as a moral or rational being. Of the various ties of our social nature none are more striking than those of natural affection ; and of the various forms of social connexion none is more interesting than that of domestic life. It is the appointment of God. God setteth the solitary in families ; and in the blessings which result from it, in the advantages which it supplies during the helplessness of infancy and the dependence of old age, in the aid which it gives to virtue, in the motives which it presents to exertion and improvement, and in the sources of consolation, and happiness, which it furnishes, there is no stronger example of the divine goodness. Indeed if there is in the wide and brilliant sphere of his beneficence, one spot brighter than the rest, where its rays are concentrated in their efful-

gence, if there is indeed any heaven on earth, you may find it in the bosom of an innocent, virtuous, and pious family.

Of the blessings of domestic life too much cannot be said. We pity those, who have no heart for them. There is a magic in the word home, which at once touches the feeling soul ; and comes to the imagination encircled with innumerable interesting associations. We must extinguish many of the best feelings of our nature before we can become indifferent to it. Let it be humble and obscure, let it even be dark with affliction and sickness, it is only rendered the more dear to a kind and generous heart. Let it be distinguished only by its poverty and peopled with various forms of dependence and wretchedness, it is the centre around which our thoughts and affections are prone to hover ; it is still the object to which our attachments cling until death loosens them, or profligacy or dissipation, or some unworthy or absorbing passion extinguishes within us every virtuous sentiment. The long-absent child comes back to it, with an eye that glistens afar off, and a heart whose quick pulsations are felt through his whole frame. The traveller, in the most distant regions, finds his thoughts and affections continually directed towards it as the faithful magnet to the pole ; and he, who falls amid the tumult of battle, or sinks in the waves of the ocean, or lies down to die under the inclemency of a foreign clime, finds the last emotions of his heart directed to the home, which he is leaving forever ; and the last objects that glimmer on his fading twilight are those, whom, in the bosom of his family, he called his own.

We must look upon domestic life then as the institution of God ; natural affection as a sentiment, which he himself has implanted in the human breast ; and it is for

us to inquire what are the purposes for which God designed this institution, and by what means these purposes may be accomplished.

1. The first object of natural affection and domestic attachment and connexions is to make provision for man's subsistence and aid. This requires no illustration. There is no more striking example of utter helplessness and dependence than human infancy. The human race could not subsist had there not been made in parental affection provision for years of feebleness, and wants, which of himself man has no power to supply. In parental affection, there is a provision the most abundant and beneficial ; a provision always ready, gratuitous, disinterested, cheerful ; and by this constitution that is accomplished, which human laws by the most numerous and severe pains or penalties could not effect. Parental affection is often far stronger than any attachment we feel to our own interests or our own lives ; and there is no severity of labor or suffering, through which it will not carry men.

But man's helplessness and dependence is not confined to the period of infancy and childhood. It lasts as long as life lasts ; and though at some seasons and under some circumstances more obvious and apparently greater than at others, yet always sufficient to induce us to keep the chain, by which we are fastened to each other, bright and unbroken.

We always need friends ; the co-operation, the counsel, the aid, the relief which others can afford us ; and where shall we look for them but among those with whom the ties of family connexion have associated us. Fraternal affection is almost as strong a bond of union as parental affection ; and a kind Providence has so ordained, that associations in domestic life, sharing in

the same employments, pleasures, and trials, and the habits of intimate intercourse to which they give rise, become the foundation of some of the strongest attachments in human society. We feel that there exists between us a tie of the most interesting character, when we acknowledge the same parents and the same home ; and that we have a right to look to those for kindness and sympathy, with whom we hold a relationship so near. Sickness and old age likewise bring with them seasons of weakness and dependence. What providence designed should be done for our children when they were helpless and wholly thrown upon our care, it designed that they should do for us, when in the progress of advancing years, we become dependent upon their sympathy and aid. Age is often a season of extreme dependence ; and in the decline of life, when the ravages of death have removed from us our earthly friends and contemporaries, we find the society of those, who feel an interest in us particularly valuable ; and who should feel that interest if not our children ; and as we perceive our own powers gradually sinking, we seem to be extending our lives and securing a kind of immortality on earth in those who have proceeded from us. It is then in the ties of domestic life that God has made provision for our support in infancy and childhood, when but for this provision man would often be left to perish ; to afford us friends, who should feel a strong interest for us, when we come into life and lend us their aid in its duties and their support under its trials ; and to train up those, who should stand fast by us in the decrepitude and solitude and feebleness of old age and by their affectionate assiduity brighten the evening of our decline ; alleviate our hours of sickness and decay ; and aid and comfort us in nature's last struggle.

2. In the second place, domestic life affords the best provision that could be made for human improvement ; I mean man's intellectual and moral improvement. It entrusts the care of the human mind and character, when it is most susceptible of impression, to those who feel the liveliest interest in their welfare, and who are most deeply concerned in every thing that befalls them. It is obvious what great advantages such a provision has over one which might leave them to the care of those who feel no particular affection for them, whose interest in them would be only casual or accidental, and whom it would not materially affect except as members of the community at large, whether the result should be well or ill. As there is on the one hand a strong parental affection to prompt to the cultivation of the minds and characters of our children, this kindness is usually met by a reciprocal kindness on their part ; and so parental influence is much increased ; they themselves early discovering the deep concern which their parents take in their character, and how much the happiness of their parents depends on what they, the children, become, are induced also by gratitude to endeavor to satisfy the anxious wishes of those, who love and labor for them. As the parents are impelled by affection to instruct their children and form their characters, children from gratitude, respect, and natural deference and kindness, are strongly disposed to receive instruction from them ; and thus parental influence becomes strengthened and acquires a commanding power.

Domestic life presents the best opportunity of observing and understanding the character. The parental relation in this respect affords peculiar advantages, and gives opportunities of access to the character, which could not otherwise be found. In the privacy and freedom of

domestic life the child opens his bosom, exhibits without disguise his natural propensities, the failings as well as the virtues of his mind and heart, and while it puts the observing parent in possession of the patient's case, it enables him to apply those remedies, which may be effectual for his correction and improvement.

In families men are best trained to the virtues of social life. Society is one great family. The virtues that are most conducive to the harmony and prosperity of domestic life are those which are most conducive to the harmony and prosperity of the great community, of social life in every form. The joint labors, which members of the same family are compelled to perform, the mutual sacrifices, which they are called on to make, the lessons of reciprocal and intimate dependence, which they are continually receiving, the sympathy in the sufferings and enjoyments of each other, which as matter of course, from the closeness of their mutual relation, must prevail among them, the common concern, which each has in the common welfare, all serve to prepare men for the duties and services of social life, and to form them to virtues on which the prosperity of the largest as well as the smallest communities depends.

3. In domestic life, God has made the richest provision for man's enjoyment. Man's purest pleasures are those which he finds at home. The pleasures of domestic life are all connected with the exercise of the kindest affections. In a virtuous family there is but one interest, and that is common to all; there is but one heart, which feels for all; and the joys and sorrows of each one are the common property of the whole. Love is the reigning sentiment; and their mutual intercourse is but the interchange of offices of kindness and sympathy. The pleasures, which we enjoy in the bosom

of our family, have a double value from being imparted and shared in common with those around us. The sympathy with which we enter into the sufferings of those whom we love is in its nature grateful and pleasing. The care of the sick and suffering, even when it is most arduous and laborious, is a privilege, and a source of grateful satisfaction, when prompted by affection. It is not easy to conceive of pleasures more pure and unalloyed than those, which a good man finds in the home, where benevolence, purity, and piety preside. Here are no conflicting, selfish nor exclusive interests to poison our enjoyments. Here envy, malignity, and corroding jealousy gain no admission. Here the mind, which is most severely strained by labor may unbend itself; here the heart, which has been often stung with the treachery and hypocrisy of the world, may open itself with a confidence, utterly free from suspicion. Here the prosperous, will find those who rejoice in his prosperity, and are anxious to increase it; and he, who suffers adversity, and is most deeply oppressed with sorrow and disappointment, finds those, who mingle their hearts in his affliction and lighten them by an unfeigned and entire sympathy. Here too are the delightful endearments of home; here are those whom we love and who we feel love us; here are those who will care for us when no one else cares for us; who will cling more closely to us, as the storm without rages the more violently, and will remain faithful when all others desert us. Here, in fine, the good man finds an alleviation for his severest sufferings: and an ample reward for all his cares and toils in administering to the wants or happiness of those whom he loves, and who receive his services with gratitude and affection; sources of the most rational and useful occupation opening

themselves to him, and pleasures and satisfactions, cheaply purchased but dearly valued, common and reciprocal, possessing and imparting, which bring with them no satiety nor fatigue, which a man may enjoy to the full with an innocent heart and reflect upon with satisfaction, and which are indeed as pure and constant as any thing earthly can be.

II. Such are the purposes for which domestic life is designed ; first for mutual support and aid ; next as the best means of human improvement and of fitting men for the duties of social life and of training them in those virtues, which may render them a blessing to the community ; and lastly as a source of the purest enjoyments. But none of the gifts of Providence are bestowed unconditionally. The blessings of heaven are made consequent upon our own proper dispositions and exertions. So it is with domestic life. It rests with us to make it what God designs it should be : and we proceed to inquire by what means its blessings may be realized.

I. We answer, in the first place, by disinterestedness. The members of the same family must look upon their interests as the same, regard nothing as their own in a sense in which it might not be freely appropriated to the uses of another, have no exclusive monopolies ; enter with a cordial and entire sympathy into the pleasures and sufferings of the rest ; regarding them as their own ; think little of themselves, and be studious and active to bring what they can to the common stock of enjoyment. Selfishness, a low-minded and grovelling selfishness, is the bane of social happiness ; and when it is permitted to intrude itself into our domestic intercourse, and we become anxious to appropriate what we can to our own personal gratification, and look upon the interests of

other members of the same family, as interfering with our own, and are unwilling to make any personal sacrifices for others, we become rapacious, envious, and jealous. Domestic happiness is incompatible with the prevalence of such a temper. But in proportion as kinder affections prevail, and we are mainly anxious to promote the common good, and render those about us happy, such is the beneficent constitution of divine providence, that we are making the most effectual provision for our own enjoyment.

We add next, as connected with this part of our subject, that domestic felicity greatly depends on avoiding improper partialities. In the treatment of those dependent on us or nearly connected with us, it would seem to be matter of propriety and equity, to make such distinctions as correspond with important differences of moral character. The distinctions of obedience or disobedience, of kindness or unkindness, of truth or insincerity, of purity or vice, are too important ever to be lost sight of in the intercourse of life. But arbitrary and capricious partialities in families, which are not warranted by any moral differences, but arise from mere whim, or from some personal and accidental qualities in the objects of such favor and prejudice, are unjust and become the sources of great and lasting misery. Parents have no right to indulge such preferences or aversions; and brothers and sisters should avoid them because they are always unfavorable and usually fatal to domestic peace. The members of the same family should regard each other as far as possible with equal kindness; and should be emulous of no distinctions among them, but that of zeal and effort to promote the happiness and improvement of every member of the common household.

3. Courtesy of manners becomes, in the next place, a duty of primary importance. Courtesy is a Christian duty. The apostle charges us to be courteous, and gentleness is ranked among the fruits of the spirit, that spirit of love which is the characteristic of the Christian temper. There is a more intimate connexion between our manners and temper than most persons are aware of. If mildness of temper leads to courtesy of manners, gentleness of manners conduces, not perhaps in an equal but in a very considerable degree, to kindness of temper. To learn to govern our words is one of the first steps towards the government of the temper : if, for example, we can refrain from any expression of our anger, we have done much towards suppressing the sentiment itself ; the fire which is kept concealed and smothered, and not exposed to the excitement of the external air, must of itself presently expire. The courtesies are of great importance to the harmony of social life ; gross familiarity destroys respect and degrades the sentiment of love ; and though too particular an attention to the artificial forms of polite life is in a degree incompatible perhaps with that open-hearted kindness, which is delightful in the intimacy of domestic society, though they are not to be wholly dispensed with even here, yet it should always be such as to preserve us from any hasty expressions of ill-humor, any fretful impatience, any unkind words, any rude and violent contradictions, any passionate railing, and any bitter satire which is liable to provoke resentment, and to inflict a wound in the bosoms of the tender-hearted, that is not soon healed. While therefore there is no necessity of introducing all the formality of artificial society into our domestic retreats ; we should cultivate that benevolence which will induce us to seek by every lawful means the happiness of those

with whom we are connected, and that true politeness, which is an evidence of great virtue, which will lead us to anticipate the smallest and unspoken wishes of those around us, to regard their harmless prejudices and infirmities, to avoid every thing, which might appear like neglect or slight, and by every innocent means in our power to make them easy and happy. It is especially the duty of the heads of families to exhibit this example of courtesy and kindness in their intercourse with each other; and in their conduct towards their children and dependents. These relations are most sacred, and their example is persuasive and powerful. It cannot be necessary to a man's patriarchal dignity that he should become either brutal or tyrannical; and why should those kind attentions and assiduities, which marked our early intercourse, be remitted after this solemn union is sealed, and the happiness of the one is put completely in the power of the other.

4. It is next essential to domestic happiness that we should cultivate attachment to home and the pleasures which it may be made to yield. Most of us must give much of our time to business and the duties of our respective professions; but it deserves the consideration of many, whether their attention to business is not much greater than their needs, and is not prompted more by an unreasonable avarice than by a reasonable anxiety to provide for those who are dependent on them. Many men seem never inclined to learn that enough is enough, and that beyond certain limits, which must be decided by the particular circumstances of every man's case, an accumulation of wealth is an evil not a good. We owe also much to society; and we are not at liberty to disengage or keep ourselves from many public ser-

vices, though they may never be requited, nor to shut ourselves up in our own homes to the exclusion of all friendly intercourse with our neighbors and those beyond the circle of our immediate connexions. Doubtless every man's chief concern should be in his own family. He should principally seek their good, while he does not desire to see it advanced at the expense of the good or happiness of others. This is not necessary. But he can labor for the public good most certainly by applying his talents where they will be most effectual; and where is this but in his own family; and when a man does all he can for the improvement and education of his own household, for preserving good discipline and order there; and for making his own home the abode of peace and happiness, who can do more for the general improvement, for the security of public order and peace, for the promotion of the common happiness; and why does he not deserve to be ranked among the benefactors of the community? A man should cultivate a taste for the pleasures of home. It may not be difficult to acquire it, insipid as these pleasures appear to some men; and it is invaluable both as it respects his virtue and enjoyment. Every man owes to his family what time he can spare from the necessary avocations of business; from the services which he owes to the public; from the recreations which are essential to his health, and from those attentions which are requisite to keep up a friendly intercourse with society. Beyond this his family have imperious claims upon him. Every member of a family, and especially every parent, should assiduously inquire what he can do for the improvement and comfort of that family. They should indulge in no pleasures, which they must enjoy alone, or from which their families are

necessarily excluded. They should avoid unnecessary engagements, which would carry them from home. The intercourse of the fashionable world is as heartless as it is splendid. It is in our domestic retreats we must look for true friends and true pleasures, and in the interchange of kind affections and services, in the multiplied avocations of domestic life, in studies and efforts to promote the welfare of those with whom we are connected, "in books and works and healthful play," we shall find resources of happiness which the most brilliant career of fashionable dissipation can never supply.

5. We add, in the last place, that the domestic connexion should be sanctified by piety and devotion. This is necessary to its perfect character, and that it may yield all the advantages of which it is capable. Piety animates us in all our duties; inspires a deeper feeling of our mutual obligations; calls into exercise the purest and kindest affections; and makes our union more dear by the hopes which it inspires of its restoration beyond the grave. Of all the bonds of connexion by which mankind are brought together, none are stronger than those of religion. To acknowledge the same faith, the same rules of duty, the same hopes, the same Savior and the same Father in heaven, must inspire mutual kindness and interest. This precious bond of union has been felt in all its strength by many who knew nothing of the religion of love, which Jesus taught. It is indeed no small matter of reproach to Christians, that while the ancient heathens had their sacred hearths and their household gods, and in the hut of the untutored savage, you will find an honorable place assigned and a constant service performed to the dumb idol, whom he worships, you may dwell in the houses of many good men, calling themselves Christians,

and enjoying the instructions of the gospel, and yet from week to week and month to month, observe no recognition of God, and discover no indications from which you could infer with certainty that they acknowledged any. I leave to your judgment, Christians, whether this neglect of family religion is to be excused; and whether the fear of the reproach of singularity, or diffidence in undertaking the service, which are much more the reasons for its disuse than any want of principle or seriousness or respect for religion, are sufficient to justify its utter omission.

To true domestic felicity the influence of religion is indispensable; and the union is never more happy, more interesting, more delightful than when it is consecrated and elevated by devotion and piety. Happy is that family circle where its authority prevails, its temper diffuses its mild influence, its principles form the only rules of conduct and duty, its consolations soothe the hours of affliction, and its heavenly hopes impart their splendid coloring to all their earthly enjoyments.

Such, my friends, are the blessings which the goodness of God has provided for us in our domestic relations. May it be your felicity to enjoy them in all their fulness; and when the ties of parental, filial, fraternal and conjugal affection are severed by death, through God's mercy may they be renewed and made perpetual, more close, more pure, more happy in a better world.

SERMON XVIII.

THE GREAT OBJECTS OF LIFE.

PSALMS xxxvii. 37.

MARK THE PERFECT MAN AND BEHOLD THE UPRIGHT; FOR
THE END OF THAT MAN IS PEACE.

THE proper conduct of life is of immense moment. Separate from all considerations of religion, can any reflecting man suppose that he was created and sent into this world, where he can do so much, and where so much is to be done, without some important end? There is much about human life that is inexplicable; man's formation, his condition on earth, his destiny constitute a problem, the solution of which human sagacity can scarcely be said to have approached. But we have ample proofs that man has many duties to perform and that he is accountable for the discharge of them. His moral agency and his moral responsibility are therefore determined characteristics of his nature, which involve the gravest considerations. In his physical nature there is no difference between man and the animals below him. In his formation, sustenance, liability to injury

and disease, his lower passions and appetites, his growth, decline, and death, he is like them. In intellectual power some of the inferior animals make a near approach to him. But in the capacity of moral sentiment, in the power of improvement, indefinite improvement, and in his passion for immortality, there is an immense difference. There is another circumstance of difference, connected with these peculiar faculties of a most important character; I mean the influence, which he exerts on the virtue, improvement, and happiness of others. The brute animals live to themselves. After the parental duties in rearing their offspring are discharged, there is no recognition of even the nearest ties of kindred. They exercise no influence other than that which is purely physical upon the character or condition of their companions or offspring; when they die they are forgotten by those who survive them, and leave no traces of their having lived. Here the difference between man and the lower animals is most remarkable; it is every thing. As the scripture expresses it, no man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself. Innumerable ties connect him to other beings; to his contemporaries and to the generations which shall come after him. His works live, though he dies. What he was may determine what many others, who never heard of him, will be. His labors or neglect, his attainments or deficiencies, his virtues or vices sow the seeds of good or evil, of happiness or misery, of honor or shame, whose fruits will be gathered by the men of other centuries. All these things indicate a high responsibility as resting upon man. It ceases to be matter of indifference, it becomes of the highest moment what he is, and how he lives.

The lessons of religion confirm the dictates of reason

and nature. They proclaim man's moral responsibility as the basis of all their precepts and teachings. They admonish us of the value of life and the immense importance of the proper conduct of life. The powers of usefulness, with which God has endued man, are to be faithfully applied to the purposes for which they were bestowed; and man's earthly existence is designed as a state of preparation for another life. Here he is to gather up the materials for future happiness; here he is to qualify himself for a condition of endless improvement. What is called the care of the soul, the working out of our salvation, the preparing of ourselves for heaven, can be nothing else than the proper discharge of the duties which belong to this state. God has placed us here. He has fitted us for our condition. He has given us powers adapted to the earth. Our duties therefore are here; and it is obviously reasonable that the upright discharge of the duties of the present state is a suitable preparation for the state which is to succeed this. Many persons would have us believe that true religion is of too ethereal a nature to concern itself with the common duties of life; that every thing, properly speaking earthly, is necessarily degrading to the human soul; and as, in their opinion, the happiness of heaven is to consist in mere pious contemplations or in exercises of devotion, in singing hymns, or shouting hallelujahs; therefore these exercises have a higher value in the sight of God than the common duties of life. I say nothing to depreciate the value of devotion. It is the noblest exercise of the human soul. It is the elevation of the mind in the contemplation of the sublime attributes of the greatest of beings, the sum and centre of all perfection. It is the expansion of the soul in gratitude, affection, confidence, and adoration towards Him to

whom all gratitude, affection, confidence, and adoration are due. But there is no more reason to suppose that it will form the sole business of the future any more than of the present life. Man, as far as appears here, was formed for an active rather than a contemplative existence; and devotion itself would be extinguished, all capacity for it must cease but for the performance of some of the humblest labors of life. The moral courage, which braves any danger, when duty calls; the pious resolution, which rises above every temptation; the fortitude, which bears without shrinking or complaint every trial, the resignation, which yields every thing to duty, the self-sacrifice, which generously devotes itself to relieve and make others happy, the patient, assiduous, habitual, conscientious, noiseless discharge of duty, which characterizes some men, who pass through the world almost unknown, are more difficult efforts, and more certain tests of religious obedience, than the highest exercises of mere devotion, which man can put forth on earth.

Why should we think the common duties and employments of life degrading? are they not natural? are they not necessary? Who determined that man should get his bread by the sweat of his brow? Who made us of the earth, earthy? Who has rendered the best exercises of the mind inseparably dependent on a well conditioned state of the body? Who has made food, clothing, and shelter necessary to us; and the labor as necessary by which they are to be obtained? Who has made the comforts, elegancies, refinements, and embellishments of life, all that distinguishes the civilized and enlightened from the barbarous and savage condition of mankind, attainable by our skill, enterprise, and labor; and thus furnished the most imperative incitements to this

skill, labor, and enterprise? Even the most severe devotion among us does not disdain these aids; but prefers to offer its sacrifices in an elegant, commodious, well warmed and carpeted temple to paying its homage kneeling on the bare earth under an inclement sky. Shall we say that any of the labors and duties, which God has made necessary, are degrading? We may indeed make them degrading. We may become so entirely absorbed in and engrossed by them, such mere earth worms, as to lose the consciousness of our intellectual and moral nature; and extinguish in ourselves all sense of religion and immortality. This is dreadful; this, however, is the abuse not the proper use of our nature. But the proper performance of these duties, this work of the world; as some disdainfully call it, the procurement of the means of subsistence and the comforts of life, the preservation of health, the supply of the wants of those, whom God has cast upon our care, the contributing all in our power to the refinement, embellishment and general welfare of the community by any extraordinary exertion or by the faithful discharge of the duties of the station or trade or profession, which we occupy, are as much acts of religious duty and service as any act of devotion in which we may engage; and may be as strictly performed in all good conscience towards God. Whatever the future life may be, in whatever its employments or pleasures may consist, and in this matter no man is capable of making even a reasonable conjecture any more than the unborn infant can conceive what a world it is about to enter, is it not obvious that the best preparation for a succeeding state is the proper discharge of the duties of the present; and that all notions of retribution proceed upon the great principle that reward is consequent only upon

labor and honor due to fidelity and fidelity alone? He that used faithfully his ten talents received other ten talents; and it would have been far better for the unprofitable servant even to have put his master's money to the exchangers, that at his coming he might have received his own with usury, than to have buried it in uselessness and neglect. There is a quaint proverb, that "men must eat to live, but not live to eat." This suggests the proper distinction between the use and abuse of the world. The labors of earth must occupy us. This earth is the present scene of human labor. Diligence is an imperative duty of religion. It would be as wicked to withdraw ourselves entirely from the common duties of life and give ourselves up to devotion, as it would be to plunge entirely into the mere pursuit of wealth or pleasure; to let the low objects of life entirely engross our purposes and affections; and to feel that there is no other world but this, to the exclusion of all thoughts of God and all consciousness of our dependence, and of his infinite bounty. The multitudes of both sexes who have been congregated in what are called religious houses in the old world and have entirely separated themselves from society, that they might give themselves up to the exercise of an ascetic devotion, were mere useless beings; and any thing but such Christians as the gospel was designed to make them. If we would not in charity reproach them for their indolence we must pity them for their fanaticism.

The proper conduct of life should be, I repeat it, our great aim. The proper preparation for another world is the faithful discharge of the duties of this. He is the best Christian, who is the best husband, the best father, the best child, the best neighbor, the best friend, the best citizen; and the most diligent,

faithful, and conscientious in all the common as well as extraordinary duties and relations of life. Every thing that pretends to draw a line of distinction between our religion and our earthly duties is inconsistent with Christianity. All we have to fear is lest the animal nature should absorb us entirely; degrade our intellectual and moral nature; stimulate to excess the lower appetites and passions; extinguish or debase those higher sentiments, which distinguish the human from the brute nature; which connect themselves with all our notions of immortality; and are destined to be imperishable.

The proper conduct of life involves two great topics of inquiry; the first, what are the objects of life; the second, how we may best accomplish them.

I. Religion prescribes no particular and definite course of life to any individual; because the situation and talents of different men are infinitely diversified. It inculcates only general principles and precepts, by which every man must regulate his conduct according to his own relations and powers. The tendency of the human mind is to single out some object of pursuit to the comparative exclusion of others; to make it the subject of what is called the ruling passion; and in many cases to pursue it with the enthusiasm of idolatry. The great objects, which we propose to ourselves and the manner in which we pursue them, are a just index to the character, and a proper test of the presence or absence of the temper and principles of the gospel.

The common pursuits of men are wealth, fame, power, learning, or pleasure. Within certain limits and as subordinate to higher ends, all these may be lawfully sought after. But it is inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel to make them the principal or exclusive objects

of pursuit ; and they are not the best ends of life. Will any reflecting man say, that it should satisfy us at the close of life, that we have devoted it to the mere accumulation of wealth ; that we have labored and toiled wholly for this ; this has been the great object of our desires and solicitude ? Will our heaped up treasures make a soft pillow for our dying bed ? Can we carry any of this with us ? and beyond that reasonable provision, which every just man would feel desirous to make for those, who are dependent on him, how infinitely preferable is the beneficent use of wealth, while we have the power to use it, than any mere accumulation, when, let it be ever so great, we must resign it ?

Fame is an object of life which we can as little commend. To maintain an unsullied reputation, that we may transmit to those whom we love this rich treasure — to virtuous children more precious than any golden inheritance ; to live in the memory and grateful affections of those whom we esteem and among whom we have lived, who will love us for our kindness and honor us for our virtues ; to have the esteem and respect and confidence of those whose estimation of character is founded in wisdom and virtuous principle ; this is a reasonable and holy ambition, proper to elevated and good minds. But mere fame and popularity is a poor object of life. Popular applause is an empty bauble ; now given, now withheld ; and tossed about in the crowd as mere caprice or accident may direct ; bestowed often where it is utterly undeserved ; withheld as often from substantial merit ; given in one hour, withdrawn the next ; nourishing pride and selfishness in those who obtain it ; kindling hatred and envy in those, who desire but fail of its attainment. What will it avail us to be celebrated as the greatest of men, or the wisest of men ; or the richest of men ; to have astounded men by the

success of our ambition, the extent of our conquests, the loftiness of our power, the greatness of our wealth or the splendor of our genius? These, in all their brightness, have been associated with moral deficiencies and crimes, which have made their guilty possessors objects of shuddering aversion. This applause is as fickle as the changing aspect of the sky; and often explodes like the meteor at its highest elevation. After all it is a miserably selfish object; we feel that it is worth little or nothing, but as it may bring us into advantageous comparison with those below us; and so it engenders all the bad passions of a successful rivalry. The consciousness of integrity, the approbation of our own hearts, the esteem and respect of those who know us best, how infinitely preferable is this to the brightest eulogy that glitters on the spangled pages of mere earthly ambition? What truly virtuous person would not infinitely prefer to be revered in the memory of Christians as the kind disciple, who washed the feet of our Savior and wiped them with her hair, than as the blood-stained subduer of empires, weeping that he had no more worlds to conquer; or as the founder of those mighty monuments of despotic exaction and human toil, which on the desolate plains of Egypt have defied the decays and the changes of time?

Literature most certainly does not deserve to be the exclusive purpose of life. The pursuit of knowledge to gratify a reasonable curiosity, to aid our own improvement, to minister to the comfort or convenience or welfare of others, is laudable and virtuous; but the pursuit of mere literature as the great object of life is as selfish a purpose as we can cherish; and where we devote ourselves to it as matter of mere personal gratification or pride, without seeking to apply it to purposes of utility, is a sort of literary avarice, which ranks

scarcely higher in the scale of moral worth, than the avarice, which is wholly bent on gold.

The pursuit of mere pleasure is not the great object of life. Do not misunderstand me. We are not to court pain and penance as a passport to the favor of God. The Creator, infinitely benevolent, can have no pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. We are taught by nature to avoid pain; and we are bound to seek our own happiness as far as it is consistent with innocence and duty. But by the pursuit of pleasure, I mean, mere self-indulgence, personal gratification, the indulgence of our ease, the gratification of our appetites, the decoration of our persons, mere pastime, idle mirth, frivolty, dissipation. There is no pursuit which renders men more thoroughly selfish and hard-hearted; which is more hostile to improvement; more a waste of the powers and a neglect of the opportunities for good, which life presents. When such men come to the close of life and see how empty it is of all usefulness, and upon what frivolities it has been squandered, they will require no other than the promptings of their own hearts, to inscribe on it the just sentence—Vanity of vanities.

II. Let us compare with these objects of the desire of mere worldly men, the objects which we may suppose the truly wise man and the Christian to pursue. The great pursuit of such a man is none other than the favor of God: this is the aim of his life. He remembers that he is the creature of God: that God has placed him here; that he is answerable to him for his whole life, and that he must render an account of the trust committed to him.

Under the influence of this highest and holiest principle of human conduct, it will be his first aim to avoid

every thing which is wrong and sinful in thought and speech, in manners and conduct ; he will govern his passions by the strictest rules of sobriety and temperance ; he will dread to do wrong far more than he will dread loss or reproach, or disease, or pain. He will be true and just and equitable in his intercourse with mankind. He will be devoted, affectionate, and faithful in the domestic relations of life. He will be kind and beneficent to the poor ; candid and liberal in his judgments of mankind ; tolerant of the infirmities and prejudices of other men ; forgiving, mild, and placable ; the supporter of public order ; the ready aider of all good enterprises ; the punctual observer and friend of religious institutions ; cherishing no resentments ; thinking no evil ; happy in seeing others happy ; doing good wherever the opportunity for good presents itself ; seeking for opportunities of usefulness ; maintaining an inflexible uprightness, an integrity above all suspicion ; beneficent without ostentation ; acting under a strict and conscientious regard to duty and right ; and his whole conduct marked and his character crowned by an unaffected, humble, and habitual piety.

Such is the object of the Christian's desire, the favor of God, and such the course by which he seeks to obtain it ; the preservation and maintenance of his integrity ; the performance of all his relative and social duties ; an active beneficence, and the feeling of religious obligation and pious duty to God exerting its constant and sovereign influence over his life. These high principles of duty admit of a universal application ; and are infallible to the attainment of their proper ends. Such a life as this, whether it be spent in the midst of affluence or poverty, in the possession of genius or of humble gifts, in the elevated and exposed walks of public or the seclusion of private life, whether

it be the life of a philosopher or a peasant, of the most noble or the most humble, in the lowest occupations or in the discharge of the highest trusts, is the life of a Christian, and secure of its great object, the favor of God.

The proper conduct of life consists in the faithful discharge of its duties. Such are the perfect and upright men, whose end we are advised in the text to mark. Their end is peace ; peace with their own hearts, peace with men, and peace with God. They are the main pillars of the social fabric. They are the substantial supporters of the public order and welfare. They are the blessings of the community ; they are the ornaments of human nature ; and they leave behind them a character most precious to the esteem and affections of those in whose esteem and affections the wise and good desire to live. May God impress on our hearts the necessity, the duty, the honor, the blessedness of such a character. May he incline us to make his approbation and favor, the aim of our whole lives. Such a character is in youth most beautiful ; in manhood most honorable ; in old age most venerable. In its upward ascent we gaze on it with an intense and delightful interest. When it reaches the meridian, we feel invigorated and blessed by its rays ; and acknowledge that human nature has then attained its greatest height of usefulness and honor. As it descends in the western sky, it may shed a milder ray, but its lustre is undimmed and its glories thicken ; and when it sinks below the horizon, and we stand watching its lingering rays, until the last gleam expires, we are comforted with the blessed assurance that it shall rise again with renewed splendor to adorn that heaven of heavens, where the righteous are had in everlasting remembrance and shine as the stars forever.

SERMON XIX.

THE APPOINTMENT OF DEATH.

HEBREWS, ix. 27.

IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MEN ONCE TO DIE.

Nothing with which we are acquainted is exempt from the great law of change, decay and death. This is true of every thing, which has life, whether in the vegetable or the animal kingdom, as far as observation and experience extend; and perhaps, if we were capable of determining, we should find it as true of every part of the material universe. What we call the everlasting hills may themselves be levelled; and, as with the works of man, so the great temple of visible nature may fall, its bold arches burst asunder, and its lofty and noble columns be prostrated. That this earth in its present condition is of comparatively recent origin, there can be no doubt. If it had a beginning, it may have an end. The same power which creates can at its pleasure extinguish. To all who now inhabit it, in a few years it will be as though it did not exist. It has obviously undergone great changes. Great changes are constantly taking place upon it. But whether the earth itself change or not, we ourselves change; this is inev-

itable. It is appointed unto all men once to die. We are moving onward perpetually with the stream. To every thing there is a season. To every plant and tree a period is assigned. Different kinds of vegetables have their course, and after a while go out, and are succeeded by others. Animals too have their season. There is not one known, which is not subject to death. Man is not exempted from this universal law. He cannot avoid this destiny. Let him escape the ordinary accidents, which break off life prematurely, he must at last die. Infancy is succeeded by youth; youth by manhood; old age follows apace; and the scene is closed.

To most persons these are very painful considerations. There is a natural aversion to change, if that change is uncertain, and may alter our condition for the worse. The love of life is a sentiment implanted by the Creator for obvious and wise purposes. We cannot without great difficulty overcome this sentiment; and therefore we start back at the idea of decay, dissolution, and above all, annihilation. Any man, whose mind is not overshadowed by atheism, and whose heart is not corrupted by vice, may put the question to himself; and learn, if he can, what is more depressing than the thought of ceasing utterly to exist?

There are other circumstances, which render the idea of decay and death, in respect either to the physical world or to the animal creation, painful. Look at the world around you; mark how admirable, how beautiful, how curious is every thing which you behold! What mysterious mechanism, what subtle contrivance; what matchless order, what graceful symmetry; what a profusion of splendor every where beam forth in the works of creation! Look at the arched heavens; what mag-

nificence and glory! Contemplate the glowing sun, how constant and beneficent his beams; the countless stars, radiant with their silver lustre; the earth on which you tread, so abundant and beautiful in its products. What is more natural than that you should feel unhappy at the idea that all these must pass away, and like every other part of creation are liable to change and decay?

Remark the flowers, which adorn the fields; the multitudes of animated beings, which crowd upon the earth, which fill the air and sea; observe the wonderful skill displayed in their structure; the infinite beauty of their appearance; the grace and animation resplendent in their movements; the innumerable useful purposes which they accomplish; and the happiness beaming in their looks and expressed in their actions and gestures. It is a depressing thought that they must die; that this strength must fail; this gaiety cease; this glory fade.

Look next at man. How wonderful is this noblest of God's works on earth in the structure of his body, and the powers of his mind! What is more complicated, more curious, more symmetrical than the human form! What more radiant and celestial than the beauty of the human countenance in the purity and innocence of childhood and youth! — But man is not a mere animal; he is an intellectual and moral being. What admiration and interest fill the mind at every contemplation of the powers of the human intellect; the bold conceptions with which it is expanded; the profound and mazy calculations through which it feels its way; and the accumulated treasures of wisdom and knowledge, which it heaps together! How interesting is man in his social and moral relations. Of what virtuous attainments and efforts is he capable; how much good is he able to

effect ; how much happiness is it in his power to dispense ! When we see him accomplishing the proper ends of his being ; filling up life with offices of utility and kindness ; his character adorned with virtue ; his mind fired with the love of truth, and continually extending its brilliant acquisitions ; how can we help feeling pain at the thought that this beauty must wither, this activity expire, and death sooner or later spread his blasting triumphs over the whole. If death were a mere accident in man's existence, or something not originally intended by the Creator : if we must regard it as the work of an evil being, who had the inclination and ability to mar and defeat the purposes of that wisdom and goodness, which gave life to man ; if we were compelled to look upon it as a curse or malediction under which the whole human race were laid without the possibility of escape, there would indeed be reason for grief, alarm, and despair. But it is quite otherwise. Death is not an accident in man's being, but an original feature and a necessary attribute of his constitution. There is no reason to suppose that it was designed that man should be immortal on earth, any more than that other animals ; or that the existences in the vegetable world should be immortal. The general opinion is different ; and some think they have reason to infer, that if our first parents had not sinned, they would not have been liable to death. There is, that I remember, only a single passage in the scriptures from which this might be inferred. " For as by man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." I understand this to mean not that death came as the punishment of sin ; or that man was himself the sole cause by his sins of introducing death into the world ; but because man was made liable to sin, therefore it

was best he should be made liable to death. How powerful is the aid, which the apprehension of death or the consciousness of our mortality gives to human virtue ; what restraints it imposes upon human passions ; to what excesses but for this might they often proceed ; and what misery might the licentious and unrestrained indulgence of them occasion ! If we reflect a moment to what profligacy and depravity, even now, with the certain apprehension of death before them, men proceed, how dreadful is the thought, that, if they were immortal on earth, the human mind must in such a progress be gradually sinking deeper and deeper in guilt and misery ; and may not death be necessary to check and at once put a stop to this terrible progress in evil ; to break up these guilty associations in the mind ; and, if so it may please God, to give the individual in another existence, though it may be by a most painful process, an opportunity of recovering himself from this degradation ; and being purified in the severe discipline to which he may be subjected, of ascending at last to the proper ends for which his rational and moral existence was designed. It is on these accounts death may be said to have been brought into the world by sin. Separate from the highly allegorical form in which the account of the planting of our first parents on the earth is given in the scriptures, and which forbids therefore our pressing any inference from it too strongly, poetry has lent all its eloquence and coloring to embellish these accounts and lead us to draw conclusions from them which a more sober view of the subject certainly does not warrant. Adam, like his posterity, was a free moral agent ; being so, he was made liable to sin ; and being made liable to sin, he was made liable to death. Man was created a mortal being ; it is an original part of his con-

stitution that he should be subject to death. He is as much appointed to die as he is appointed to live.

Nor, in the next place, can death be considered as a malediction or punishment. Is it possible, consistently with any just and reverential sentiments of the equity and goodness of God, the great moral governor, to regard that as designed for the punishment of guilt, which we see falls alike upon the vegetable as well as the animal world, the brute creation as well as human beings, the virtuous as well as the vicious; upon children often, who have scarcely opened their eyes to the light of life, equally as upon those who have grown grey in uselessness and vice? Surely it must be a singular government to ascribe to a God whose holiness and goodness are perfect, which makes no discrimination in its penal retributions, and confounds alike the innocent with the guilty.

Let us cherish more worthy sentiments of the Creator. Of him reason, nature, and religion require us to think that only which is good. The changes and decay which every where prevail in the physical world are his appointments. He it is, who has appointed unto man once to die; who has fixed man's term on earth, as he has appointed the term of existence to other of his animal creatures; and has decreed that one generation after another should pass onward in the ever flowing current of life that they make room for those who are to succeed them. All this then must be the dictate and appointment of infinite wisdom and benevolence.

Under no circumstances whatever then has man any grounds to complain of the divine appointment, in relation either to the terms or conditions of his existence. With what propriety can man complain that God gives him only a limited term on earth? Had he any right

to ask for immortality on earth? Does the Creator do him an injustice that he has fixed a period to his present being? There are countless multitudes of living beings, endued with capacities for enjoyment, to whom a year would seem like an eternity; and whose whole existence is measured by a season, or a summer's day, or a single hour. Is it for man then to complain, when there scarcely exists an animal on earth, which is known to live ordinarily so many years as he?

But if man might claim to be immortal on earth, why might not all the other animals have pressed an equal claim; and what would be the condition of the earth, or rather of its inhabitants, did there now continue to exist, and should there hereafter forever continue to exist, all of every kind to whom life has been imparted and in whom it might in the revolutions of an eternal succession of years be enkindled? What imagination is bold enough to conceive the accumulation of want and misery which must have been long since crowded into this little space? In the period which is here ordinarily allotted to man, he is capable of reaching all the improvement and of enjoying all the happiness, which his present powers admit. Why may we not with equal reason therefore believe this of every other animal to whom God has given existence? What a proof of the divine benevolence then is it, in fixing a term or course of existence, and preparing for a succession of different beings, that he thus provides for an extraordinary and properly speaking an infinite diffusion of the capacity for improvement and the means of enjoyment, in this interminable multiplication of individual existences?

But the effects of decay and death are terrible, offensive, depressing. Your heart is ready to sink within you when you contemplate the dreadful effects,

which death presents to the senses—what a waste of power, of skill, and of art he occasions! Why is it that what is arranged with so much harmony, should be disordered and torn asunder; that what is gifted with so much beauty should become so hideous; that an existence, which seems so abundant and buoyant with delight should be stopped; that what is so bright and glorious in intellectual power should be extinguished; and that what is adorned with all that benevolence, purity, and piety can impart should be removed by death? But you are thus complaining of that which makes existence so valuable; and it is an obvious inference from such complaints, that it would have been more benevolent in the Creator not to have made his works so beautiful; and to have withheld from his creatures such noble capacities for usefulness, knowledge, virtue, and improvement; that he has made his human creatures too much the image of his own intellectual and moral excellence; and has given them too many means of wisdom and virtue. What is more remarkable in the Creator's works than the infinite multiplication of the forms of beauty, the capacities for enjoyment, and the powers of action and improvement. What a study of the divine benevolence is here opened to the researches and joyful admiration of the contemplative mind; and what more ungrateful than to complain of it? This gift of Heaven, which we call life, is imparted to us, as we see and understand, only on certain conditions and for a certain term; and whenever it is taken from us in the persons of those to whom we were attached, shall we complain that it was, while we possessed it, so splendid, useful, beneficent and happy; and shall we think that God should rather have made it worthless?

But we wish there could have been no fear of death; that life had been given without this liability to pain and sickness; and that we could part with our friends without the anguish of grief and regret. I can touch upon these topics only in the slightest manner; they furnish abundant matter for many discourses. The fear of death in the lower animals exists only in that degree, which is requisite to keep them from exposure to peril, and to prompt them to provide for their subsistence. The fear of death in man is a much stronger sentiment; but here it is most important to self-preservation, industry, and exertion; and to man reason, philosophy, and religion are all ready to lend their aid in order to restrain and qualify this sentiment, and enable him to render it as useful as it might otherwise be distressing and hurtful. Now without this fear how careless would men be of their own lives; how reckless of the lives of others; and what an all important restraint over the violence of human passions would be removed? what a preventive of crimes, what a security for the order and peace of society would be taken away?

But we desire to be saved from pain and sickness. Let us not ask for that which is in the nature of things impossible. The sensibility to pain, from which we suffer much, is the very means by which in other cases we enjoy much. If we are sensitive to pleasure, we must of course be liable to pain. If we would remove from life all sickness and pain, we should take away many of the most wholesome restraints upon human conduct; and we should take away likewise all occasion and opportunity for sympathy, kindness, and humanity. Often have I seen a sick chamber made even delightful by tenderness, affection, unwearied assiduity, patience, and kindness; and many a time in the midst of pains the

most severe, have I seen the bosom heave, and the countenance lighted up with a grateful pleasure, which no words can express, at the contemplation of that devoted care and love, which no toil nor watching nor peril could check, allay or exhaust.

But we would have our friends depart without feeling any grief or regret for their departure ; or in other words we would not love them when alive and we would forget them as soon as they are dead. Is it not so ? for how is it possible we can love them and our affections not be wounded when they die ; and how is it possible that we can remember their benefactions, and be sensible to the want of their aid and kindness and counsel, and not feel a regret that we can have them no more ? Shall we presume to speak of affection and friendship, and yet desire to forget the beloved friends that have left us ?

In the last place, let us not complain of death, nor lament that life is given to us on earth on the condition that it must be sooner or later surrendered ; for life, which is God's gift, is sufficient for the purposes for which he gave it. God designed it to be a blessing ; his wisdom and goodness forbid any different conclusion ; and it may be made such, both to its possessor and to the community when it is employed as it should be.

When we see it directed by prudence and discretion, marked by honest labor and industry, by exemplary temperance, moderation and frugality ; when we see it distinguished by the strictest fidelity and kindness in the domestic relations of life, by an unwearied generosity and beneficence, by private charity and public liberality, and above all, regulated by the principles and sustained by the best hopes of religion, we may pronounce the gift of life a distinguished blessing from God, a blessing to its possessor, to his friends and to the community.

It would be wrong to complain of the appointment of death, when the best purposes of life seem to be accomplished; and a complaint of the removal of such a friend implies a want of gratitude for his having lived.

In whatever respects reason and philosophy may fail to reconcile us to the appointment of death, the instructions of the Gospel are ample and effectual. This day commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. On this rock, as Christians, we rest our hopes and exult in the assurance that "because he lives we shall live also." He has taught us that man must die in order that he may live; that this life is preparatory to another; that the gate of death is the passage to an immortal existence. May these hopes sustain us; and enable us to ask, where O! death is thy sting; where O! grave is thy victory? The proper preparation for death is a life of integrity, innocence, usefulness, and piety; may it be our happiness so to live, as that death may approach us, not as an unwelcome messenger, but as commissioned by that Being who alone hath immortality, to conduct us to his divine presence.

S E R M O N X X .

T H E S T A T E A F T E R D E A T H .

JOB xiv. 10.

MAN DIETH AND WASTETH AWAY ; YEA, MAN GIVETH UP
THE GHOST ; AND WHERE IS HE ?

THE sentence of decay is passed upon every thing that lives. Human life is measured by various periods on earth ; care, caution, self-government, security from accident, and vigilance in guarding against ordinary perils, contribute to prolong it ; but no art and no carefulness can preserve it beyond a certain time ; let it exist under circumstances the most auspicious, in spite of every thing that we can do, decay will begin and presently accomplish its work. This is evidently a principle or law of our nature ; of which we cannot divest ourselves ; which we cannot contravene or rise above ; and man was as much made to die as he was made to live. Death is not therefore a curse ; for who can believe that the Divine Being would have brought the human family into existence, or would prolong the species under any malediction ; but that death is not, as some per-

sons suppose, a curse, is evident from the simple fact that the vegetable and brute creation are alike under its irrevocable sentence. That can never therefore be regarded as a penalty, which visits all without discrimination ; and falls equally upon those who are not, as upon those who are, moral and responsible.

Death however to man is a different dispensation from what it is to the vegetable or the brute creation. The vegetable existences are without sensibility ; the brute creation suffer little or nothing from the apprehension of death ; their pains are wholly animal ; and as they have no expectation, so they can have no hopes nor fears beyond that which is present and immediate. The case is totally different with man ; many exciting and interesting associations mingle in his mind with every thought of death. With reluctance and difficulty in most cases does he become reconciled to it ; and a cloud of uncertainty hangs over its effects and results. The feeling, which dictated the exclamation in the text, is one, which often oppresses, rends, tortures the heart almost to bursting. Man giveth up the ghost and where is he ? In the long succession of centuries, what multitudes of human beings have occupied this earth ; filled up their appointed term, and then departed ; where are they ? Where are those who lived before the flood ? where are they who came after it ? Where are the great ones of the earth ; the kings, who held empires in subjection ; the conquerors, who desolated and enslaved whole countries, and led on their thousands and tens of thousands to new conquests ; and where are the glittering and triumphant hosts, who followed in their train, and felt as though this earth was too narrow for their victories ? The wise men of the earth, who heaped up the treasures of philosophy and claimed to have received their

wisdom as a special gift from heaven, where are they? Where are the rich men of the earth, with their heaps of wealth, their lands and houses, their ships and merchandise, their slaves, and their bags of gold? The king and the subject, the conqueror and the captive, the philosopher and the fool, the rich and the poor, have alike departed; the diadem of the monarch has faded; the laurels and sceptres of conquest have withered; the pride of learning is laid low; the accumulations of avarice are scattered; their possessors have been compelled to loosen their grasp, and to let them go; and all rest in that silent abode, where all are equal and there is no distinction. But where now are they? There are inquiries and solitudes which come nearer to us. In our congregations, in our own homes, in the limited circle of our kindred, acquaintances, and friends, how many are there, in respect to whom the inquiry often forces itself upon us, where are they? Parents, whom we revered, children, whom we idolized, friends, who were a part of ourselves, beloved acquaintances, kind neighbors, those who lived to serve, to instruct, to guide, to bless, to adorn the community, where are they? What has become of the kind affections which actuated them, of the virtues, which distinguished them; of the noble enterprises which they conceived; of the great works, which they began; of all their labors, purposes, attainments, hopes? where now are they?

It would be very presumptuous to attempt to answer this question? Imagination and hope may frame a thousand delightful conjectures; but we need something more than imagination and hope to rest upon; we gather around us the affecting images of the departed; we clothe them with the virtues and moral graces which adorned them while they lived; we inspire them

with the same kind affections, the same benevolent and holy purposes, which here actuated them; we would fain speak to them, and imagine ourselves listening to their gracious words, and the objects of their accustomed sympathy and affection; but we cannot long deceive ourselves with these fond delusions. We wake from these dreams to the overwhelming conviction of their removal; and are compelled to ask where are they? and as often compelled to wait without an answer to this natural but painful interrogatory.

The Christian scriptures do not allow us to question the certainty of a future life. They declare it; they persist in the declaration; they have no reserve nor hesitation in regard to it; it is the basis on which rest all their counsels, precepts, and doctrines; it is their great object to teach and confirm it. Let any reflecting reader of the New Testament, as far as possible independent of the prejudices and biases of sectarian notions, be asked what is the object of Christianity as he finds it in the New Testament? His only answer will be, he can give no other, that its great end is to assure men of a future and an immortal life; and to teach them by virtue and piety to lay a certain foundation of happiness in that life. This is a remarkable fact; and the circumstances of the case are so extraordinary, that it has often occurred to me, in my inquiries into the evidences of Christianity, to ask, not how can these things be true, but how can they be false? not why should I believe them, but how can I disbelieve them? not what grounds are there for faith, but what grounds are there for doubt? Let us look at the case. The New Testament bears all the marks of a true history; by which I mean that according to all established and safe rules in regard to human testimony, these writings may be traced up to

the times, when they profess to have originated; they were written by the individuals to whom they have always been ascribed and whose names they bear; and those who composed them confided in the facts which they relate. History fully establishes the fact that so sincere and entire was their belief, they without hesitation surrendered their lives to confirm it, and sealed their testimony with their blood. Under these and other circumstances of the case, it is impossible to impute to them any disposition or attempt to impose on others. The only question that can arise is, were they themselves deceived? was it a matter in which they were likely to be mistaken or deluded? Now what is the case? An individual in humble life, and favored by no external advantages, assumes to be the herald of the great truth, that men shall survive death and live forever. They voluntarily associate themselves with him; they become intimately acquainted with him; they are admitted to his familiar confidence. They reverence his perfect integrity. He assures them of a future life and promises that by his own resurrection from the dead, he will give them an undoubted proof of it. They are the witnesses of his death. They are the witnesses of his restoration to life. They see him and converse with him after that event. They have the fullest opportunity of becoming certified of this great fact; and so entirely satisfied of it are they that they boldly encounter every peril, endure every hardship, and at last die to confirm it. In facts of this extraordinary nature and matters of sensible observation, there is scarcely a possibility of their having been deceived. Consider, in the next place, the entire disinterestedness of Christianity and the utter absence of all motive to practise an imposition upon mankind. Reflect upon the impracticability of

inducing so many different individuals to join in any combination of this nature to practise an imposition of no possible service to them, but exposing them to many present evils. Say what you please, of the imperfections of these documents, their apparent contradictions, the errors of transcribers, the mistakes of printers, the corruptions or interpolations which they may have suffered ; yet, after all, the great facts remain the same ; and how can we account for all these and many much stronger circumstances connected with them, if these facts are not as related. If then they are so, if it be true only that Jesus Christ assured men of a future and an immortal life, and rose from the dead according to his own express prediction in confirmation of this great truth, the question of a future life is settled, and its certainty established.

In this respect the gospel only confirms the suggestions, I had almost said, the teachings of reason, and common and universal feeling. What people have been found who regarded death as the utter annihilation of being, and who have been without some notions or expectations of a future life ? The human mind, in spite of all the appearances of nature, revolts from the conclusion ; and fondly cherishes the belief that the conscious being still survives the dreadful destruction, which it witnesses. Can any reflecting person believe that this short scene is the whole of human existence ; that a state so imperfect and unfinished completes the plan, which occupied the divine mind in the creation of man with all the noble and improvable faculties with which he has endued him ; and especially can we believe that God would ever have planted in the human breast such a strong passion for life, kindled and nourished these desires and aspirations after immortality but to mock the labors and hopes of man ?

The great question of a future life being settled; and, if the history of Jesus be true, its certainty may be said to be established, we impatiently ask, in the next place, where is this future life; how is it; the friends who have left us, where are they? To this inquiry, painfully interesting as it is, we have no answer. Innumerable conjectures have been suggested. Conjectures may satisfy those who have not lost friends; but they afford little relief to those who have. The only effectual consolation that I know is in the assurance of the universal providence of God. Of this we can have no doubt; to him the regions of the dead are as much present as those of the living; the dead as the living are equally the objects of his care. In the emphatical and affecting language of Jesus, all live unto him.

We may safely leave our departed friends with him; commit these dear treasures to his keeping; resting assured that they still live; enjoy an intelligent, conscious being, under his kind protection and love; how and where must, as we should wish it might, rest wholly with him. Where else, if we had the power to choose, should we desire to leave them? When a parent dies, how much does it console him, what a relief does it yield him, if he can commit his children, unprotected and helpless and exposed as they might otherwise be, to the care of some kind, efficient, and faithful friend? May not we, with a far higher and stronger confidence, commit those, who are dear to us, to the care of that Being who is able to protect and bless them, and who is as wise and good and kind as he is powerful.

There are other considerations, which must greatly contribute to our consolation. We mourn for departed friends because we loved them. We loved them because they were lovely. They had minds bright with

intelligence ; hearts full of kindness ; hands active in works of good. They were deeply established in virtuous principles. Their virtues were mature. Their hearts were deeply imbued with piety. We watched their progress with intense interest as we saw them day by day, advancing in wisdom ; extending their means and efforts of usefulness ; rising continually higher and higher in the improvement of their minds and characters, and in those qualities, which render them the ornaments and blessings of society. If they had imperfections and frailties, we lost sight of them in the splendor of their virtues ; and we admire human nature, as it thus exhibits itself to our observation, as the noblest work of God. In the presence of that moral glory, with which it is resplendent, the brightest objects of the material world are dimmed. When God permits us to look at an object on earth so fair, with all the interest, affection, and reverence, which it claims, let us not forget that it is what it is, because he has so formed it. All its powers and capacities, all that it is, and all that it is ever capable of being, came from him. If he has formed on earth an object so lovely, if he has given here an existence so valuable, if he has made a being so much what we desire it should be, that it engrosses all our affections, and we can hardly say how we would wish to alter it, can we have any distrust of his power and disposition to impart existence in another world in even a far improved form ; under circumstances which shall leave no change to be desired ; when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this earthly form, which in its brightest glory is perishable, shall be wrapped in the robes of divine and immortal splendor ?

There is another consideration of great moment. We have as yet been made but very imperfectly acquainted

with ourselves. The secret of our conscious being remains unsolved ; and constitutes a problem, which has for centuries occupied the sagacity and acuteness and anxious penetration of the most profound and inquisitive minds that have ever lived. All that presents itself to our immediate observation is material and sensible. We do not hear without an ear ; we do not see without an eye ; we do not feel without nerves ; we cannot move without muscles ; we cannot think without brains ; and when these external organs or parts are defective, deranged, or removed, the perceptions and faculties which depended on them are affected in a corresponding proportion.

Are we to infer therefore that man is wholly material ? that these external organs and parts are all that make up the man ? Certainly not. We can think of them only as mere instruments by which the mind or the conscious being holds its communications with the external world. If we cannot see without an eye, yet no man feels that the perception is in the eye itself, any more than the astronomer believes that the perception of the heavenly bodies is in the mere instrument with which they are brought within the scope of his vision. If we cannot move without the action of the muscles, yet no man believes that the motion of the muscle is produced by itself operating upon itself, but feels that they are set in exercise by the will of the individual to whom they belong. If all the different muscles, sinews and powers of the human body had an independent power of voluntary motion and action, how could they be brought to act with that harmony, which characterises their movements. Every man must feel that they are all submissive to some separate power or will, call it by what name you please, residing in the individual ; but

how operating, in what consisting, we know not ; and cannot approach to an explanation of it any farther than our own personal consciousness declares its existence, its distinct personal existence. Let us call it, if you will, the mind or soul of man. This then is the seat of perception, consciousness, intellectual improvement and of all moral perception and exercise. This constitutes the man, the individual, and this to a certain degree remains the same through every change which takes place in our animal constitution. The body, from infancy to mature age, must naturally undergo an almost entire change. The senses which are material, the nerves of feeling, all the organs of perception, must partake of these alterations. Yet amidst all the changes which the progress from childhood to manhood may make, which accident or sickness may effect in us, our conscious being remains. We feel, in spite of all these changes in our external and physical nature, that we are the same beings. Our consciences reproach us with the faults and vices of former days, and cheer us with the recollection of deeds of usefulness and virtue, which marked the course of years that have long since gone by. The changes, which death effects in us, are all, as far as we can see, material. The soul may survive them all. We have reason to think does survive them all. A future life necessarily implies the continuance of this intellectual, moral, conscious being.

None of the changes of death, therefore, which are all earthly, should distress us. The mind, the soul, the moral, the conscious being, lives. Over that death has no power. We see how it can be from our own experience of its power of surviving the changes which here take place in our physical nature and which from youth to age, are little short of total ; and as a fu-

ture life is made certain to us, the conscious being must still live.

All that rendered our departed friends so lovely and dear to us ; all that made them what they were, their intelligence, their moral qualities, their kindness, purity, conscientiousness, benevolence, piety to God, still live, and make them the same beings they were here. Yes ; and all that hemmed in and limited the exercise and operation of these noble faculties and sentiments, all that made us afraid ever that these virtues should be abated, should flag, or should be overcome with the body, is thrown off ; the soul now feels its powers unrestrained ; and entering upon a new life, unclogged with the impediments and restrictions, which here encompassed them, its upward flight is unrestrained, its progress interminable. Let us feel then that death is not the destruction of our existence ; but the destined passage by which the human soul is to be translated from an imperfect to a far superior state, where its virtues will be unchanged and its proficiency, in all that is excellent and proper to it, become boundless and eternal. Let us be consoled by these blessed hopes, which are so fully confirmed in the gospel ; and render thanks unto God, who has thus given us the victory through Jesus Christ.

SERMON XXI.

IMPERFECTION OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.

I. CORINTHIANS, xiii. 12.

FOR NOW WE SEE THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY; BUT THEN FACE TO FACE; NOW I KNOW IN PART; BUT THEN SHALL I KNOW EVEN AS ALSO I AM KNOWN.

ONE of the strongest impressions, which rests upon a reflecting mind, when man surveys himself, the world in which he is placed, and human life in its countless changes, is that of the imperfection of human knowledge. With respect to many subjects of anxious and reasonable inquiry, nature is entirely silent; gives no information; removes no darkness; solves no mysteries; and leaves us at the threshold of our investigations, incapable of advancing one step; and with respect to many things, which we would gladly know, revelation itself teaches little or nothing; and our burning curiosity is not satisfied but only the more excited.

We must admit that there is much positive good in life; were it not so it would be difficult to say how

there could be any positive evil. If we enjoyed nothing, we could suffer nothing. If we possessed nothing, we could lose nothing. It is ungrateful to suggest the thought that there is not great good in life; that the world, in which we live, is not good and beautiful; bearing upon every part the bright impressions of an unbounded kindness and love. The natural creation is full of beauty, transcendent beauty; a splendor, a magnificence, which language cannot describe, and which can be represented by nothing but itself. The heavens are studded with countless glories. The earth is adorned with innumerable forms of beauty, and abounds in examples of contentment and felicity. The moral world presents an aspect far more interesting to the contemplative mind. It is deformed by vice; it is stained with many blemishes; it is marked by innumerable imperfections. Yet on the other hand it is ennobled by virtue; it exhibits many examples of an integrity and purity, which seem above corruption; and by moral attainments and enterprises, which show that man has a near affinity to an excellence far superior to what is earthly and visible; and which our imagination and our reason naturally suggest as belonging to the beings of another world. Then also, after every abatement has been made, which you choose to make, there is to be found among men so much honor and magnanimity, so much kindness and generosity, so much disinterestedness, sympathy, and friendship, so much love and tenderness, that we are compelled to pronounce God's moral creation also good and beautiful, bearing the luminous tokens of his transcendent benevolence.

Yet we see none of this without great abatements; there is in human life, in man's condition, in the condition of God's moral creation, such a mixture of good

and evil, of joy and sorrow, of disappointment and hope, of clouds and sunshine; that we are often staggered in the conclusions which we form. Sometimes we impatiently question whether evil does not predominate; and too often we give to life the coloring of our particular and temporary feelings; when we are cheerful the world seems bright and beautiful; and when we are sad, the picture is reversed, and clouds and darkness overshadow our prospect. Too often it happens that we acquire a propensity and habit of looking upon the dark side of every thing; we are scarcely sensible to the common bounties of the divine Providence; and we become so accustomed to observe defects and faults and blemishes and imperfections, that we see nothing else, because we look out for nothing else.

All will admit that such a disposition is wrong, and unjust to God and man. There are many evils in the world. Sin is always and wholly evil, and there is certainly much of that. All that gives us pain we deem evil, and there is much of that. There is a great deal of unavoidable distress in life. Temptations overcome us and we are mortified and stung to the heart with the consciousness of our weakness, folly, and guilt. We determine on a course of self-government, duty, virtue, usefulness; yet our resolution fails us at the moment when we presumed most upon it; and our efforts and labors become abortive. We approach the prize, and just as we stretch out our hands to seize it, we fall, and lose our hold; and the object of our pursuit is removed from us. We indulge the bright dreams of hope; and fancy spreads before us her countless forms of beauty and wealth and honor and pleasure and all the delights of the sons of men, but we never quite reach them. Even the best attainments of

human life, certainly as far as they appertain to this world, fall short of our expectations and do not yield all nor nearly all that we confidently anticipated. There are many evils in life, which are oppressive, and overwhelming. Poverty is a real evil; hunger, nakedness, want, anxiety and fear, the too frequent concomitants of poverty, are all evils. Sickness stretches us on beds of pain and torture. Malice or anger or resentment, throw their bitterness or poison into the springs of our enjoyment; and render their waters nauseous and hurtful. Sudden calamities and misfortunes, against which no human foresight can guard, and which no skill can evade, prostrate us at once; and often when most at ease in our possessions, and every outward circumstance combines to promote our enjoyment and accomplish our hopes, death obtrudes himself and all is changed; changed indeed; our house is left unto us desolate; and we are compelled forcibly to put away from us, what was most dear, and what we once felt that we would not part with for worlds.

All these evils, all these disappointments, all this vice, imperfection, and sorrow, all that poor man is doomed to suffer, all these frightful and affecting alterations, which a few moments, a single parting sigh, a momentary and convulsive struggle makes in the condition of man, compel us to turn in upon ourselves; and make us feel as we observed, the narrowness of our views and the imperfection of our knowledge; that now indeed we see things through an obscure medium and know but in part. We are oppressed with the consciousness of our ignorance; we know little why all this is so; the course of nature and of human life is a problem that we can but imperfectly solve; and the mind needs all the support and consolations under these circumstances, which reason or religion can give.

I. Through the goodness of God these supports and consolations are not few ; and they are obvious and ample. There is first of all things the consideration of the universal government and sovereignty of God. We cannot too often revert to this truth ; we cannot too deeply impress it upon our hearts. It is the only ground of confidence under many of the evils of life. The simplest statement of this great truth is the most affecting ; and conveys to a reflecting mind all that it can desire to know. God governs the world ; he orders all things. That he is almighty the whole creation proclaims. That his wisdom infinitely transcends any conceptions which we can form of it, the color of the humblest flower that adorns the earth, the structure of the minutest insect, that your eyes can discern, the suggestion of any single thought that flashes upon your mind, all abundantly testify. That his goodness corresponds with his power and wisdom, the countless testimonials of it in nature and in our own condition and history, will testify. Imagine to yourself the best of human beings, the kindest of earthly parents, and think of such an one as having the disposal of your lot ; and then remember that the kindness of God infinitely surpasses any conceptions which your own experience or imagination can suggest. Combine every image of wisdom, kindness, purity, benevolence, which can suggest itself to you ; think of all that is great, good, lovely, useful, endearing, benevolent ; and yet it will bear no more comparison to the greatness, goodness, and excellence of the divine character, than the brightness of the glow worm to the splendors of an unclouded sun ; it will indeed be nothing ; all language here is vain ; all comparisons are futile. God is all goodness, all love, all purity ; infinitely better than your best wishes, or best

conceptions can make him. Let us bow down in humble adoration before the ineffable excellence of this great Being ; and pour out our entire confidence ; and ask ourselves, at whose disposal we can desire to be but at his ; and how can we cherish fear, or distrust, or anxiety under his government ?

We remark next that even the evils of life are not unmixed with alleviations. There is a compensating power always at work by which some of their pains are balanced and their violence mitigated. There is in life no unmixed evil but sin ; and yet sin itself and its dreadful consequences, are not always without a beneficial result to others, and sometimes to the guilty individual himself. But in all other of the evils, appertaining to man's nature and condition here, there is always much, which, even in the midst of our sufferings and lamentations, calls upon us for gratitude to God, and throws the light in upon the most darkly shaded picture. Is it not our duty to look at these alleviations, these benevolent compensations, and to estimate them as we should ? When men suffer pain is it nothing that they have intervals of ease ; and to the man who suffers, relief from pain becomes pleasure ? When one sense is extinguished, is it nothing that the others are improved and quickened ? When we contemplate one of the most deplorable of human calamities, idiocy or madness, the lamp of reason burning with a dim or a flickering light ; and the mind, which was once the bright image of the Creator's glory, shattered and in ruins, is it nothing that so many kind hearts are melted with compassion, and so many kind hands are stretched out to afford relief ? Does not loss imply previous possession ? Can there be disappointment where there has been no hope ? Does not the existence of injustice imply that of justice ? Can

there be grief or sorrow where there has been no affection or pleasure? Are not the weaknesses and sorrows and frailties and sicknesses and countless sufferings incident to our nature and condition, so many occasions and excitements of compassion, kindness, patience, forbearance, mercy and love? Is it not ungrateful to God, not to observe, in this chequered scene, how he is pleased to set the one over against the other?

Many of the changes and ills of life are indeed hard to bear. It requires all the fortitude which our poor nature can collect, to stand up under them; and all the confidence in God's government, which our religion can inspire, to submit to them with calmness and resignation. Yet in those which most deeply wound our affections and disturb our peace and comfort, we shall find at least that the affliction might have been aggravated and that we might have had more to suffer; we shall certainly find more than this, much positive good intermingled with this evil, and occasions to acknowledge God's great mercy in the midst of his heavy judgments. If we dared to recur to some of the most affecting cases of loss and disappointment and sorrow among us, we should learn this; and we should be consoled by it.

When those whom we most dearly love have been called in the providence of God to suffer days and weeks and months of sickness and pain, is it nothing that they have not been called to suffer alone? that all, which human art could do, has been done; all, which kindness could do, has been done; all, which affection could do, has been done. Is it nothing that when pain has been severe there have been intervals of ease; when wakefulness has been protracted, the repose which followed has been proportioned; that though the strength failed, reason retained her empire; that if fear often threw her

clouds over the mind, yet hope held alternate dominion ; and that the sick chamber, though darkened and shut in, was often irradiated by all the cheerfulness, which domestic endearments could inspire ; and if it presented a scene of disease and suffering, and the gradual decay of what was pure and lovely, it presented at the same time a scene of uninterrupted and unmixed kindness and love ; of a patience, assiduity, and affection that never wavered or hesitated or flagged ; and on the other hand of a grateful and affectionate sensibility, which felt all this and knew its unspeakable value. Is it nothing that we have seen these days of trial sustained with cheerfulness and hope, with patience and kindness ; and when the fatal sentence showed itself in characters which could not be misinterpreted and announced a speedy execution, the patient and long tried sufferer bows in humble submission and pious confidence to the will of God. Is it nothing that we have been privileged to serve such friends ; that we have seen them at last through the trials of life with an unspotted purity ; and that we can bid them farewell at the grave with the certain hope of meeting them in a better world.

II. But religion furnishes far higher alleviations than these under the various calamities and trials of life. In the best cases, as we have already observed, the human heart is oppressed with the consciousness of the imperfection of its knowledge. We do not ungratefully deny the alleviations, which God permits to be intermingled with our afflictions. We admit them to be numerous and great. Yet the physical and moral evils, which exist in the works of a perfect Creator, oppress us. We ask why they exist at all ; why was man called to suffer, and exposed to all these varieties and alternations

of sorrow and joy, of success and defeat, of possession and loss? The general answer to be given, is that beings possessing moral freedom must of course be free to do wrong; made capable of virtue, they must be capable of vice; and, as far as we can understand the subject, moral beings could only be trained to high moral attainments by trial and moral discipline. But I will not dwell on this topic, which is deserving of a much fuller illustration than can now be given to it.

There is another answer to be made to these anxious inquiries; it is given in the text: we shall presently know more. Now we see the ways of God through an obscure medium, a dark glass; presently we shall see face to face and stand in the unclouded light of his presence; now we know in part; our perceptions are dull; our prospect hemmed in; obstacles oppose and difficulties multiply in the way of our inquiries; presently we shall know even as we are known; these clouds will be scattered; our views enlarged; the whole mystery of human life unravelled; every thing will be explained; and can we have a doubt that every thing will be shown to be consistent with and dictated by the infinite wisdom, goodness, and benevolence of God?

There is something inexpressibly affecting and grand in this expectation; an expectation, which reason and nature inspire, and which the Christian revelation most fully authorizes and confirms. How often have our hearts been ready to sink within us, as we have looked upon some of the mysterious dispensations of the Divine Providence; but we shall know more; and every thing will be satisfactorily explained. There is enough in this expectation, where it is coupled with just views of the divine character, to console us under every trial.

We are familiar with the ignorance of the infant child. How imperfect his vision, how narrow his conceptions, how limited his knowledge in comparison of the educated and matured judgment, upon which religion and philosophy have poured their combined light? Yet the change from the one to the other of these states is not to be compared to the greatness of that change and the extent of that progress, through which, we trust, the human mind is destined to pass, when it quits this world for another. We reprove the impetuosity and impatience of childhood and youth, because they are not quiet under the decisions of long experience and mature age. Should we not deem far more unreasonable and criminal in ourselves any distrust or alarm in regard to that wisdom, which a small degree of reflection would teach us is perfect and incapable of error?

Now we know in part; but soon that, which is in part, shall be done away. We are here in the dark. Man's duty is clear; the path of peace and satisfaction, of improvement and usefulness, all this is plain enough to an honest mind. Let us thank God for it and endeavor to perform the duty assigned us as well as we are able. But there is a deep and distressing obscurity hanging over many of the dispensations of Divine Providence. Can we doubt that this obscurity appertains to ourselves, and not to the subject? It is the consequence of our limited, imperfect and often prejudiced vision.

The human mind is destined to rise above all this; to see clearly what it now sees imperfectly; and to see much which now it does not see at all. Here its advancing progress is most interesting, beautiful, and wonderful; what must it be when it bursts from the shackles, which here confine it! Do not say that this is all

a romance, the bright illusions of fancy. It cannot be. I would as soon doubt my own existence as with my eyes open and my understanding awake, come to the conclusion that this short life is the whole of human existence ; that this narrow sphere is the whole range of the human soul ; bearing as it does the impressions of immortality ; and continually swelling with aspirations after a loftier flight. What an imperfect work would man then seem ? what an unfinished state would this appear ? and how possibly could we reconcile that goodness, which has imparted these illustrious faculties to man, and inspired these glowing aspirations, and excites and cherishes in every virtuous bosom these delightful expectations, with a despotic malignity, which if all the hope of a future life and future progress be vain, can only have done it that he might triumph in our disappointment and torture us with despair ?

But it is far otherwise. God is infinitely good. There is in him no mixture of imperfection. We shall ultimately see this and learn that all his ways are perfect. At present he gives us perhaps all the light, which we can bear. Could the fulness of that glory, to which God has destined the human mind to ascend, burst upon us at once, it would doubtless be more than our weak faculties would take in or endure. He has designed the human soul for immortality and for interminable progress in knowledge and holiness. In the religion of the gospel he has given the assurance and the pledge of this. I would to God, my friends, that our minds were enlarged to comprehend this greatest of all truths in its fulness and power. Every thing earthly would fade away before it. In the mean time let us cherish a humble confidence in God, who is worthy of all confidence. In the faithful discharge of the duties

here assigned us, and in the calm endurance of the trials to which he sees fit here to subject our faith and piety, obedience and love, let us go on without alarm and repining; and wait a consummation worthy of his adorable and incomprehensible wisdom, goodness and love.

SERMON XXII.

ACQUIESCENCE IN THE WILL OF GOD.

I. CORINTHIANS, xv. 28.

THAT GOD MAY BE ALL IN ALL.

To the Christian, God is the great object of thought, feeling, purpose, and duty. On this bright centre of all that is good and glorious let him fix his eye. Here let him bring his affections. Here let him place his hopes. Hither let him direct his humble services. Let God be to him all in all.

What has this earth to give that can satisfy, console, compensate, sustain him under the heavy pressure of trials, which so often threaten to sink him to the ground. All the pursuits, which begin and end here, are vain. All the pleasures, which are purely sensual and earthly, are unsatisfying and disappoint his wishes and expectations. The objects around him are changeable. Those, which are most dear, perish even in his embrace; and he is compelled to let go his hold often when he presses them most closely to his bosom. When a man acquires, possesses, enjoys all that the world can give, treasures

are heaped on treasures, his glittering honors descend upon him in golden showers, pleasure spreads before him her most delicious banquet ; if this be all, the time will come, if it does not early come, when he will feel that it is nothing ; and the sense of its emptiness will compel him to acknowledge with the royal epicure of ancient times, all is vanity.

In this world of change, trial, and disappointment, where man's wishes and powers avail so little ; where such a cloud of mystery often envelopes the uncontrollable events of his condition ; where often nothing else seems left but to commit himself to the current of his destiny ; where he is so often compelled to feel how impotent and how ignorant he is ; where sickness teaches him his weakness ; and disappointment and bereavement fill his heart with anguish ; and the empire of death extends over all that is dear to his affections, confidence, and hopes, what is there to satisfy the anxious mind, or to console the broken heart but God ? What shall sustain him, what can soften a single pang that wrings his aching bosom, what can shed a single gleam of hope over the darkness, which surrounds him, but the thoughts of God ? To the Christian, God is all in all. He every where recognises his presence. He acknowledges his agency in every thing. He confides in his universal government as the perfection of all wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. He desires nothing so much as an entire conformity to the divine will ; he seeks to make an absolute surrender of all his wishes, feelings, purposes, hopes and duties to God ; that God may be to him all in all.

Such we believe and inculcate as the duty which man owes to God ; which religion demands of him ; which constitutes the highest exercise of piety, and to

which it should be our great desire and effort to bring ourselves ; a duty as difficult as it is excellent and desirable ; and to which the mind must advance slowly, through habitual and earnest effort, and by severe discipline and trial.

The Stoics among the ancients sought only to render man alike insensible to every external influence, to all sentiment of pleasure or pain. Man was to enjoy without a consciousness of pleasure ; he was to suffer without complaint or emotion. They aimed to harden the human heart ; to steel his nerves, to sear his flesh, and to convert this living, sentient, susceptible being into a statue of stone. But how little was such a philosophy to be esteemed or revered. It was only another name for pride, selfishness, and brutality.

Others besides these philosophers, these self-called lovers of wisdom, have seen fit to represent all grief and sorrow as weakness, of which a wise man should be ashamed ; and require us to submit simply because we must submit. Misfortune, say they, is inevitable ; disappointment is inevitable ; decay, change, and death, are all incident to man's condition on earth and all are inevitable. If this is all that they can say to us under our afflictions, we must cry out with Job, miserable comforters are ye ! I see not how it is suited to reconcile us to our condition, to be told that its evils are inevitable. If this truth were detached from other considerations, it would not allay, it must aggravate our grief.

Atheism is indeed far more dreadful. If it be possible that men can look upon this world, upon man, his concerns, his trials, his mortal destiny, and feel that the whole is undesignated, accidental, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, without object, or aim, or use, I can conceive of no heavier despair resting upon the human heart, than

must sometimes rest on theirs. It is the blackness of darkness, uncheered by a single ray of consolation or hope. It is like setting man afloat in a frail and perishable bark on a dark and shoreless ocean, without any power of shaping his course; and where he can look for nothing, but presently to be merged in its profound and sullen waves.

God, my friends, has not left us to this dreadful trial. The world to us is not without God. Man is not the victim of a resistless and blind fatality. He is not compelled to submit without reason, motive, consolation, or hope. The Christian knows in whom he has believed. He feels that God is all in all; that the world is under the dominion and direction of a Being as wise and good as possible, who will ultimately conduct every thing to a proper issue. It is to such a Being that religion demands our submission; and for such a Being claims our entire confidence and resignation.

This entire surrender of the heart to God, this feeling that every thing is of God, we have said is a difficult duty. It is difficult because our pride and selfishness are great; because of our weakness; because of the strength of our affections; because of our ignorance, and the imperfection of our faith. We have great confidence in our own judgments. We complain of the course of nature; we impeach the wisdom of the arrangements of the divine providence. We would have ordered things, as we think, far differently. We would have made a world from which all suffering should have been excluded. We would have had no clouds over the sky, and no storms to rend the air. We would have shut out from the world all natural and moral evils. Man should have been constituted a perfect being; alas! how different from what he is. We would

have excluded all infirmity, and sickness, and sorrow, and death. This, in the pride of our hearts, we think would have been to arrange things on earth far better than they are. The true spirit of Christian resignation and confidence requires us to renounce such conceits, as springing from pride and too often verging to impiety. The world in all its circumstances and relations is constituted by a wisdom in comparison with which all human wisdom is folly. Things here on earth are as God designs or permits them to be. Infirmity, sickness, disappointments, sorrow, bereavement, decay, and death, are incident to the nature, which God has given, and the world in which he has placed us. They are his appointments. How uncertain is human knowledge! How narrow and circumscribed is man's view of the works and the purposes of God? and shall he presume to set up his feeble judgment in opposition to that unbounded and infallible wisdom, which constituted and governs all things. Resignation is difficult because of our selfishness. We dread suffering; we reluct at relinquishing any thing that we call our own; we cling with a tenacious grasp to our possessions. We hold on to them because they are our own. We are anxious to accumulate and secure our treasures. We like to add house to house and land to land. We desire to multiply our friends; and our selfishness prompts us to value what we possess, perhaps far beyond what it merits, simply because we are permitted to call it ours. True resignation requires us to look upon every thing which we possess as the property of God, the great proprietor of Heaven and Earth; as holding it for him; as loaned for our Master's use; given at his pleasure, and when he pleases and as he pleases to be resumed. Resignation is difficult because of our affec-

tions. God has made us to love and to be loved. There are the ties of kindred and blood ; the strong ligatures of conjugal, fraternal, parental, and filial love. There is a friend, who is closer than a brother ; children are a part of ourselves ; their talents, virtues, society, kindness, attentions, and aid, are all important to us. Innumerable hopes and delightful anticipations gather and brighten around them. Resignation demands of us to submit them without reserve or condition to the will of God ; when it requires us to acquiesce in their sufferings, it seems a harder duty than to acquiesce in our own ; and when it calls upon us in all the loveliness of youthful innocence and purity, and all the brightness of youthful promise, to commit them to the grave, it imposes a duty deeply wounding to our affections, and the agony of which, none but they, who have felt it, can know. Resignation is difficult, in the last place, because of our ignorance. We know very little. We have reached only the surface of things. The causes of things and of events lie far and deeply concealed from us. The purposes of life, and still more the purposes of death, are very partially disclosed to us. The future is hidden from our view. Certain and beyond all doubt as a future life is made to us, yet how, and when, and where, are questions prompted by an ardent, a natural, a reasonable curiosity, to which no answer has been obtained. From that bourne to which all are hastening, there has been no return ; nor has any message of admonition or affection been sent back. Resignation is difficult in the last place, because of the imperfection of our faith. We are to walk by faith, not by sight. In the midst of darkness the most obscure and confounding we are required to trust in God, and to wait the ultimate developement of his great plans. After

the example of the faithful patriarch, we are to yield up at his command the child of promise, not doubting the power of God to accomplish his purposes, however opposed to our own reasoning and calculations. How liable under such circumstances is our faith to be weak and imperfect. We assent to the great truths concerning God, his eternity, his providence, his government; yet so vast are they, that the application of them is extremely difficult. We are sensible creatures, surrounded with objects which address themselves to our senses; conversant only with what we see and feel; with what is tangible, immediate, and present. We find therefore an extreme difficulty in confiding in what is future, distant, invisible, spiritual, with that strength of faith, which converts the objects of another world into realities; and enables us to regard this life and its various goods and evils in their humble and proper character. We believe in God; yet what mind is wise enough to conceive of his vast nature, so as to satisfy even partially a few of those great inquiries, which naturally and strongly press upon the reflecting and anxious bosom. We believe in a future life; yet what can be more difficult than to frame conceptions of it, which are free from objections, that we find it hard to answer; and which cast a shade over the strongest and brightest faith.

Such are some of the difficulties, which stand in the way of our resignation to God; which excite our alarm, when the prospect around us threatens our repose; which make us shrink back from the labor, and sickness, and disappointment, and griefs, which are inevitable; and which make it so hard a duty to give up, when God is pleased to demand the sacrifice, the dearest objects of our affections and hopes.

Yet however difficult the duty of entire resignation to the will of God may be, we cannot doubt that it is a reasonable duty; and examples are not wanting in the history of the wise and pious, where men under the pressure of trials almost beyond the power of human endurance, have calmly and meekly, nay, I had almost said, joyfully submitted to the blow; and have said with one of old times, though he slay me yet will I trust in him.

May God, my friends, give us strength to perform our duty. We may weep, but let us not complain. He will have compassion upon that weakness, which belongs to our nature, and that tenderness which he has taught us to cherish. Yet it is not a blind acquiescence in his government, which he demands. Limited, imperfect, and erroneous as our views may be, there is every thing in nature, reason, revelation, human experience, to claim our entire confidence towards God.

There is nothing in nature that is fortuitous or accidental. Every thing is the result of design and arises from the operation of those great laws, which are so essential to the harmony, nay, to the existence of the creation; from which the greatest good results; and which are obviously founded in a wisdom that is incapable of error. Nature is every where beautiful. Happiness and good were the design of the creation and beyond a doubt preponderate throughout the Creator's works. Our own experience has often admonished us how incompetent we are to discern what is best for ourselves, and has shown by many an affecting example that the gratification of our wishes is not unfrequently the evil which we have most reason to dread. The blessed instructions of the scriptures leave us no room to hesitate as to the duty of an unreserved and unqualified

submission to the will of God. To the Christian, God must be all in all; and his prayer must always be, thy will be done.—In the light of divine revelation, it should support and console us, that this world and all its concerns are wholly under the government of God; that the present life is an inconsiderable portion of man's existence; that an immortal being awaits us; that the afflictions, which we here suffer, are the dictates of a love and mercy as pure and lasting as the nature of that good and holy Being who exercises them; that every thing here is leading us onward to the great purposes of our existence; and that we shall reach at last, if we render ourselves worthy, a state of purity, peace, and felicity, far holier and better than any conceptions we can frame of it. There, by the blessing of God, we may meet again the dear parents and children and friends, who have finished their pilgrimage on earth, much sooner than we could have wished; but at the time, which God himself has appointed. It would be most ungrateful not to admit these consolations. Let us try to receive them. May that merciful Being, who has here so closely connected us with each other, that the removal of those, whom we love, seems like the taking away of a part of ourselves, have compassion upon that weakness of our nature, which renders it so difficult to bear our trials; and give us at last in his divine will an absolute repose of all our affections, interests, desires, and hopes.

SERMON XXIII.

MAN'S DEPENDENCE

MATTHEW, vi. 27.

WHICH OF YOU, BY TAKING THOUGHT, CAN ADD ONE CUBIT UNTO HIS STATURE?

IN these striking words the great Teacher, Jesus, admonishes some who stood near him of their weakness and dependence; a subject which deserves much of our thoughts from the moral uses to which it may contribute. The exhortation, which he gives to his disciples, in connexion with the text, must be familiar to you. He is reproving the great anxiety, which preyed upon them, and opposed their moral improvement, which made them slaves to the world, and miserable under groundless apprehensions. He reproaches them with a distrust of the Providence, which was every where active around them, and displayed itself in countless forms in God's wide and beautiful and magnificent creation; in the regular changes of nature, and the beneficent but ever varying aspects in which she presented herself to their observation. He bade them cast their eyes abroad and observe the flowers of the field, and the birds of the air. Per-

haps, my friends, it was at such a season as it now is, when Jesus uttered these words; when nature, so recently awaked from the deathlike sleep of winter, is clothed in her most splendid apparel; and new existences are every where starting into life, in forms more varied than our conceptions can embrace, to feast upon the unbounded goodness of the universal Parent. If God so clothe the flowers of the field, in a glory which no regal magnificence can rival, could they indulge a fear that they should be neglected? Why then should they distress themselves, under the providential care of such a being, with an unreasonable anxiety. He proceeds to remind them, as in the text, that such anxiety could avail nothing. The future was not under their control. No solicitude, however wakeful, could foresee; no vigilance, however diligent, therefore could provide with certainty against the events of the morrow. They would not be justified in the want of a sound discretion, which would warn them of the earliest approach of danger. They were not to remit a provident preparation for any of those changes, to which the history of others and their own experience admonished them they were always liable. Beyond this, however, they were not to indulge an anxious or fearful temper. What the morrow should be rested with God. It was hidden from human sagacity by an impenetrable veil, which the wisdom and kindness of heaven draw over it. Little as they could foresee, still less would they control its changes and trials. They were weak and frail beings; they could not add the smallest measure to their stature; they could not make a single hair white or black. Their painful solicitude, their wasting and restless anxiety were vain. They were in the hands of God; dependent upon him for every thing and in every respect. They were to

feel this dependence and to be humbled under the conviction of their impotence. Such was the spirit of our Saviour's teaching; such the lessons, which he inculcates in the text; lessons, which, however mortifying to human vanity, are salutary to human virtue; and not less adapted to us than to those who heard them from his lips.

Man is a dependent being; he is a frail being. His knowledge scarcely deserves the name of knowledge. His power is bounded within a narrow compass. His life on earth, when protracted to its utmost limits, is short and transient; and when you have summed up, even in the best cases, all that he has attained, and all that he has accomplished, it will appear as nothing. The youthful imagination, fired with an ardent ambition, at the commencement of the race of human life, sees before it a boundless field of exertion and acquisition. In its romantic visions, it contemplates the lofty accumulations of knowledge which it designs; the schemes of extended usefulness, which it purposes to accomplish. It imagines itself endowed with a sagacity, which few things can elude; and an ability, to which great things will be feasible. It cannot advance far however before it finds itself hemmed in by insurmountable limitations; and wakes from the delusive reveries of youth to learn its actual ignorance and impotence.

I. What indeed does man know; or rather how much is there that he does not know, and in comparison with which, his boasted acquisitions are altogether inconsiderable. What is his knowledge of the past? Of what has occurred within his own observation, the sum is very small; what he learns from the testimony of others, scarcely deserves to be differently designated. History

reaches back to a comparatively short period ; all the great events, which it records, may be compassed by the memory of a child. Of the future he knows nothing. The occurrences of the approaching hour are, properly speaking, no more within his discernment, than are the occurrences of centuries, whose number is scarcely within our calculation. To know with certainty what shall be, rests alone with that omniscient mind, to whom the past, present, and future, are the same. Of what is present only does man take immediate cognisance ; and here human knowledge touches only what is purely external, sensible, and obvious. It discerns only the superficial qualities and relations of objects ; of the substance on which these rest, what matter itself is, what spirit is, he knows nothing. The outward appearances are familiar, but the internal operations, the secret causes of things, are impenetrable. The capacious mind, which was familiar with the revolutions of the heavenly worlds, and taught to demonstration the great law, which compelled all to keep their places, reciprocally attracting and attracted to preserve their balance, and to move on in their mystic courses in uninterrupted harmony, the same acute discernment, which measured the progress of light, and taught us to separate its brilliant combinations, was not competent to define what light is ; and was as far, as the new-born child, from being able to explain the simple principle, by which all this host of heaven is marshalled, to say in what it consists, or how it operates. The distinguished anatomist, who first followed the blood in its multiplied and labyrinthine circulations, could no more than the most ignorant, say how the blood is formed, and still less, by what secret influence it is propelled in its varied rounds. Take indeed the most simple effort, as we choose to denominate it, of our physi-

cal nature ; raise a limb, extend a finger, open an eye, and who can make even an approach to an explanation of the manner, in which it is effected? Look abroad into the ample book of nature : who is competent to stand forth as her interpreter, and unlock her hidden machinery ; and say with confidence, thus it is that the seed germinates, and the flower expands ; that existence is imparted ; that life and being are sustained ; thus it is that the fish floats in his native element ; the bird sustains himself in the air ; the beast courses the plain ; thus it is that the innumerable races of animals and vegetables are brought into being, and having performed their destined part on earth, are succeeded by other generations, who crowd at once into the places which they leave? Human sagacity indeed, when most acute, has as yet scarcely penetrated the external covering of things ; and human knowledge, proud as it is of the acquisitions which it has made, can in truth explain nothing.

II. What, we ask in the next place, can man do? Knowledge is power ; but if human knowledge is the measure of human power, then of course, man's power is small. Man's power, indeed, is small. Great and small, are relative terms ; and the attainments of human ingenuity, and the results of human skill, if we compare them in their mature state, with the weakness and ignorance of infancy and childhood, are something ; but compare what man has done, with what is possible to be done ; compare what man has done and can do, with what God has done and can do ; and it is not to be named or thought of. What can man do? Let him brace himself for the struggle, and see if he can stand up before any one of the elements of nature, when it

comes out in its power and majesty. Let him try his strength, and see if he can turn the course of the gentlest wind ; or check the ascent of the slowest vapor ; or repress the softest wave of the rising tide. Let him mould in matter as he will, and try if he can make it move, but as it is impelled. Let him make, as he chooses to term it, "the canvass breathe ;" go near it, and find it only what it was before he touched it with his magician's wand. Let him try, what he is pleased presumptuously to term, the divine art of sculpture ; and see, if he can infuse into the admired productions of his wonder-working art, a single spark of animation. Let him bring forth the most brilliant inventions of human skill, the proudest triumphs of his genius, the optical instrument, which has made him the inmate of other systems and other worlds ; and compare this, with that most wonderful of God's visible works on earth, the human eye. Let him bring out his books of sorcery, and accumulate the treasures of the animal and vegetable and mineral kingdom ; and turning out his compounds and his simples, see if he can make one drop of blood, or add one cubit to his stature, or make one hair white or black. Let him try if he can arrest the progress of disease at his pleasure ; or at his pleasure prolong his existence one second. Let him go out into the fields, and see, if at his pleasure, and without the aid of sun, and earth, and water, and air, or indeed with their combined aid, he can make the seed germinate, or paint the crimson blossom, or "tip the insect's glittering wing with gold." But why have we need to multiply the proofs of human impotence. In comparison with what is to be known, man knows nothing ; in comparison with what is possible to be done, man can do nothing. How can we but feel that man is an ignorant, a frail, and altogether a depend-

ent being ;—dependent upon God always ; in every thing ; for every thing.

III. What are the sentiments, which the consciousness of this dependence, should produce in us ; what are the uses to which it should lead us ?—

1. First, it should make us humble. Never was any juster sentiment than the familiar one, which men so often quote, without feeling any thing of its truth, that “pride was not made for man.” It is not for such a being, whose views are so circumscribed, and whose discernment is itself so imperfect, to be dogmatical or peremptory in his decisions ; to undertake to teach where he himself knows nothing ; to solve mysteries, which the divine omniscience only can unravel ; and to attempt to force his own crude and imperfect conjectures, on subjects most obviously, not cognoscible by the human understanding, upon the belief of his fellow men, as the infallible decisions of a superior illumination. We do not say, that man has not, or is not capable of acquiring all the knowledge, which is requisite to direct him in his duty. God has given him ample means of attaining this. The ignorance, in which he finds himself involved, and the imperfection and limitation of his faculties will not justify or excuse him in entire unbelief or a universal skepticism. The plain principles of duty, and the great truths which are essential to his virtue, consolation, and happiness, are made so plain by the light of God’s word, that he who runs may read, and the way-faring man, though a fool, need not err therein. Much, indeed, through the goodness of God, in the teachings of nature, and in the bright page of divine revelation, has been made known to man ; enough to elevate his mind, to occupy his noblest thoughts, to sanctify his affections, and to make him

in some humble measure like his great Creator, knowing good and evil. But beyond what has been inculcated so plainly, that there is no mistaking it, it is not for such a being to be positive and authoritative, bold and presumptuous ; to insist upon seeing for others ; or upon their using his sight, which, even in the brightest day, and under the clearest sky, is hemmed in by the same horizon as their own.

2. Our dependence inculcates other lessons of humility. Man is apt to “ feel power and forget right ;” but certainly it is not for such a being to think himself above others ; to oppress his fellow-creatures ; or, if he possesses the ability to affect their peace or happiness, to exert it otherwise than to promote those objects. He sustains with others a common dependence upon God. He is no more able, in truth, to provide for himself than they are able. He has no advantage above them than what, if so it had pleased God, others might have had over him. All the strength upon which he relies, and all the gifts in which he claims a boasted superiority belong to him, not by any original right, but are wholly derived from a common source. If he differs from others, it is God who causes him to differ ; surely, it is not for him to regard his fellow-men with any superciliousness, or pride ; nor to forget, that he may himself, if so it should please God, be reduced to a state of dependence upon them, even more complete and humbling than the lowest of them now appears to hold upon himself. This calls upon him for duties, of which humility is the natural, the congenial soil ; the duties of justice, compassion, forbearance, kindness towards all men ; and a strict adherence to the great Christian rule, of doing to others as he would that they should do to him.

3. The last great lesson which this sense of dependence should teach us, is that of piety to God. Man is entirely dependent upon God ; in the most literal, immediate, and complete sense. God is to man what no other being is to him. To man God is every thing. Man lives in him. What he has, all that he has, all which he has ever had, all that he can have, must come from God. Separate himself from him he cannot. Live without him he cannot. God's providence encircles and sustains him. When God pleases, he lives ; when God pleases, he dies at once. What he does, he does with the power which God gives him ; what he possesses or enjoys, God permits him to possess and enjoy. Our duty is to cherish deeply and habitually, the sentiment of this near relation to God. Piety requires, in the language of the scriptures, that " we walk with God, and acknowledge him in all our ways."

The first duty of rational piety, is to obey God. He has prescribed to us a rule of life. We are bound to follow it. The life which he enkindled, the powers which he entrusted to us, should be devoted to his will. The second duty of piety is gratitude. Our blessings all come from him. His bounty should be seen and felt, and gratefully acknowledged by us. What is more odious than ingratitude ; and in what case can ingratitude be so base, and so utterly without excuse, as from man towards God ; towards the being who gave him existence, and formed that existence for happiness.

The third duty of piety is submission, or rather, resignation to the will of God. We are in his power ; if he sends suffering upon us, he seeks only our good ; and he sees that the sufferings, which he sends are needful, and may be salutary. But the great duty of piety, and that which the text in its connexion was

mainly designed to teach, is that of entire confidence towards him, the surrender of the soul to him. Divines have sometimes denominated it, the absorption of the human in the divine will ; so that we may be wholly satisfied with what God appoints ; seek wholly what God approves ; desire only what God may see fit for us ; bow down in humble submission, in meek confidence, in profound reverence before him, and pray that his "will may be done on earth, as it is done in heaven." This is the perfection of Christian piety. Those who do not understand it, may call it mysticism or fanaticism ; but they call it so, only because they do not understand it. It is a temper most elevating to the human mind, most purifying and improving to the human heart ; the richest spring of benevolence in the soul ; of activity in doing good to the human family, because they are God's family ; and the most powerful instrument of virtue and improvement. The life regulated by such a principle, is the life of heaven ; the heart, which glows with such a sentiment, is armed against every corrupt influence, and is rapidly advancing in that purity, which qualifies man for the presence of God.

IV. Consider the birds of the air ; they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Contemplate the lilies of the field how they grow ; they neither labor nor spin ; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his magnificence, was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothe the grass of the field, shall he not much more clothe you ?

You, who have eyes to see, and hearts to feel, at this animating and quickening season, when God makes his creation anew, look round upon the beautiful world in

which he has placed you. He reneweth the face of the earth. Consider the countless forms of beauty and splendor, which his works present to your sight. Look at the myriads of animated beings now living and starting into existence, for whose subsistence and happiness, his unlimited and exhaustless bounty provides. Then say, if you can feel any distrust of his paternal goodness ; if you will not dismiss all anxious fears in regard to his government ; say, if you can then doubt, that he has made all things well ; and can have a fear that his intellectual and moral creation, will be ever alike the object of his care and kindness ; that in the end, the dark spots which now disfigure it, will be removed ; and it shall be seen, like the revival of the year in the natural creation, in all that beauty, glory, splendor, and promise, to which we believe God has ultimately destined this his noblest work.

SERMON XXIV.

THE SINS OF MEN CHARGEABLE TO THEMSELVES.

JAMES i. 13, 14, 15.

LET NO MAN SAY WHEN HE IS TEMPTED I AM TEMPTED OF GOD, FOR GOD CANNOT BE TEMPTED WITH EVIL, NEITHER TEMPTETH HE ANY MAN ; BUT EVERY MAN IS TEMPTED, WHEN HE IS DRAWN AWAY OF HIS OWN LUST AND ENTICED. THEN WHEN LUST HATH CONCEIVED, IT BRINGETH FORTH SIN, AND SIN WHEN IT IS FINISHED BRINGETH FORTH DEATH.

NOTHING is more general than a disposition to free ourselves from the blame of our sins, and to ascribe it to some one else ; sometimes with great presumption to God. This is not a modern device. When our first parents had sinned, and their guilt was charged upon them, the answer of the man was, “ the woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat ;” and the woman, in her turn, was as prompt to reply, “ the serpent beguiled me and I did eat.” Men do this with the expectation of relieving themselves from the responsibility ; but it is vain ; it is a pretence, which cannot shield them. The sins of men are

their own ; they belong to themselves ; the blame is not to be transferred to others ; it must rest with them. The apostle in the text refers to this propensity of mankind to get rid of the blame of their sins. Some who had been criminal undertook to excuse themselves by saying that the temptations to sin were too powerful for them, and that these temptations came from God ; that they were therefore impelled to sin. What is his reply ? Let no man say when he is tempted, or as it might be more forcibly and properly rendered, seduced to sin, presume to say he is tempted, urged, or compelled to sin by God. God himself cannot be seduced into sin ; neither doth he seduce any one. But when a man is overcome, he is overcome by his own uncontrolled passions and appetites ; he is seduced into sin by the voluntary and allowed working of his own vicious desires and feelings ; the blame of his sins therefore rests on himself. This is a serious fact ; it is of a most practical character, and deserves our consideration.

We have said that it is not an uncommon fact for men to attempt to shift the blame of their sins from themselves, and not unfrequently they have the presumption to charge their sins upon the author of their existence, that being, whose nature is incapable of any stain or blemish, and who holds sin in abhorrence.

This is not often done in direct terms ; though there are those, who have openly said and written that God is the author of their sins ; and when men were not hurried on fast enough, then he has stood by and put the evil exercises into their hearts, that with more certainty and swiftness they might be impelled to destruction. It is lamentable to reflect upon the extravagances into which virtuous and even powerful minds will be led, for the sake of supporting the theories, which their imagina-

tions have invented. Others have said, that God made man to sin with the proud design of displaying his own glory in their recovery from the abyss, into which by his own constitution they had precipitated themselves, and then calls upon them to be grateful for their deliverance, which is much like a physician, who by the administration of poisonous drugs, should reduce his patient to the verge of the grave, that he might show his skill in his restoration. This may be well as a trial of the physician's art; but what claims there can be upon the gratitude of the patient, who, for no higher purpose and at the imminent peril of his life, is made the subject of such experiments, it would be difficult to show.

But although a direct impeachment of the divine goodness and equity is rare, yet there are many indirect ways by which the same end is accomplished. Thus men are disposed to ascribe their sins to an innate corruption of their nature, which descends to every son and daughter of Adam as an entailed inheritance, which inclines them to sin as they are by nature inclined to eat or sleep; this is one way of charging their sins upon God; he is the author of their nature and they come into the world only what he makes them. Others represent the condition in which they are placed, the trials by which they are surrounded as the immediate appointment of his providence, and of a nature to render sin inevitable. Others speak of their sins as the result of an irrevocable necessity, by which they are impelled to do wrong without the power of resistance. In all these familiar examples men charge their sins upon God; and treacherously soothe their own consciences with the idea that they are blameless. It is a delusion, and a man may know it to be so, who will consult his conscience fearlessly and listen to its honest dictates.

Our inquiry is, can any man do wrong without blame? Let us see what qualifications an answer to this question admits of. First, we say then, that all is not sin which appears such. The apostle, on this subject, makes a distinction, which deserves to be remembered: "Sin is not imputed, where there is no law; and where no law is, there is no transgression." There can be no sin, where there is no knowledge of the distinctions of right and wrong, no discernment of the great principles of human duty. This applies directly to the early period of infancy and childhood. Men often appeal to the excesses of passion observable in children, and to the early examples of deception and falsehood, which are sometimes witnessed among them, as proofs of an original depravity. But they are far from being so. We admit the fact, that children are prone to excesses of passion; they are often selfish, irritable, resentful, obstinate, headstrong; though these characteristics are far from being universal; and do not, in truth, apply more strongly to childhood, than to a later period of life. But in early childhood, they are no marks of depravity, they are not sins. There can be no sin, where there is no capacity of understanding moral distinctions, of discerning the difference between right and wrong. Though there are great differences as to the time when the moral powers develop themselves in different minds, yet the mind must have acquired some maturity, before it is capable of intelligent discriminations. The excesses of the passions in children are not always sinful. All the passions, of which God has made man capable, are implanted for some good end; and in their original character, are innocent. They naturally tend to excess. It is the province of wisdom and virtue to determine the restraints to which they are to be subjected; but this

must be the result of experience, cultivation, and maturity of judgment. Children, therefore, are not responsible; these excesses of passion are not sinful in them, until they have become capable of discerning clearly the principles of moral duty, and have reached an age when they might exercise that self-command, and give that direction to their passions, and impose those restraints upon them, which virtue and religion require. When they have arrived at this period, then indeed the excesses of the passions become sinful, and they are responsible for them. Children are said likewise to be given to falsehood, prevarication, deception; and these things are cited as triumphant proofs of an original and innate depravity. We admit that these are common failings or vices with children, though not to the extent which is usually represented. But first we say that children generally are not responsible for them, and secondly that they are not so much the vices of children, as of persons of adult age. It is not natural to children to lie; but it is natural to them to speak the truth; and they would always speak the truth, and act the truth, if they were not driven to an opposite course by a fear of punishment, or corrupted by our example, and taught to deceive, by the countless deceptions and falsehoods, which they see practised, and hear uttered, in the ordinary business and intercourse of life; and by the encomiums which they hear passed continually upon successful cunning and fraud; and upon that subtle and polished address, which the customs of refined society demand, but which children, who are admitted behind the scenes, discover is deceptive, and only put on for the occasion. Then again, what magnificent falsehoods we tell them, by way of quieting their restlessness; what equivocal, or evasive, or false answers we think ourselves, through a mistaken

and false modesty, at liberty to give to many inquiries, dictated by a natural and artless curiosity, which it would be much safer to gratify by speaking the truth, or to repel by a direct refusal to answer; and then too, how often we oblige them by bribery or fear, to lie and deceive, in order to hide our own folly, to gratify our own vanity, or to shelter our own weakness. It must be observed likewise by every one, that a great part of the language of social intercourse, is so hyperbolic and extravagant, that to them it must appear false. We, who have been long accustomed to it, are not deceived by it; it is a sort of depreciated currency, which men, familiar with society, never take at its nominal value, but always at a large discount; much of it, all of us understand to be entirely valueless, and merely serving as a form of intercourse; but it is some time before children learn this; they hear it; they believe, they know it to be false; but they see it circulate, given and accepted by persons, whose example they regard as a proper standard of duty; and by such a process, and such examples, they are early taught to deceive. It could hardly be otherwise. These vices in children, therefore, do not spring from any innate or original perversity; but they are taught them and taught them under such circumstances, that their early proficiency can excite no surprise.

We observe in the next place, that there are cases of real and unavoidable ignorance of their duty in persons, who have passed the period of youth, and have reached a time of life, when in ordinary circumstances, such ignorance would be utterly without excuse. These are not frequent; they must be rare in a community favored as our own. There may be a want of natural understanding; or there may be an entire want of education;

and an impervious darkness may overspread the mind; or it may have been their inevitable lot to have been born and cradled in ignorance and vice, and to have been trained amid scenes of darkness, pollution, and crime, where no moral distinctions were acknowledged, where even the names of virtue and religion were never heard; and scarcely any thing less than a miraculous influence could have ever led them to regard themselves as moral beings; or to the knowledge of the great principles of moral duty. Such cases of inevitable ignorance, inevitable as far as the individual himself is concerned, as we have now described may exist; we admit their extreme infrequency; but if they can be supposed to exist at all, it is easy to see, that the moral responsibility of such persons, can be only in proportion to the moral powers or advantages afforded. Such must be regarded, as almost the only imaginable exceptions to the position, that the blame of men's sins must rest upon themselves.

But what are the ordinary excuses, under which, if not avowedly yet virtually, men are accustomed to shelter themselves. Is their ignorance of their duty to excuse them? There are few, and those very extraordinary cases, at least among us in which such an apology can be offered. The great principles of moral duty, are familiar to all. If any are ignorant of them, it is an ignorance, attributable wholly to their own neglect, and for which they are answerable. How seldom does a case occur, in which any man among us, if he will inquire and reflect, can be authorized in saying, I am unable to determine what is right or wrong. We have innumerable aids and guides to the knowledge of our duty. The moral sentiments of the community are universally and eminently enlightened. We have a perfect rule in the teachings and example of Christ. Let

a man inquire for his duty here, let him inquire for it with a docile, a candid, and an honest mind, and he can never be at a loss.

Will the common plea of thoughtlessness afford an apology for what is wrong? Is it enough for a man to say, "I did not think, I did not reflect?" Is such an apology to be admitted in behalf of a being, whom God has made a rational and reflecting being; and by such powers, distinguished him above his other creatures on earth; surely not. It is the prerogative of the human mind, that it is capable of surveying the past, and profiting by its experience; of extending its views into the future, and of calculating with moral certainty, the results of its conduct. Has not man understanding? Was he not made to act with reflection, forethought, calculation, discretion? and what apology can it afford for such a being to say, I acted without reflection; let the result of his conduct be what it may, this itself would be a crime.

Will it afford any apology for our sins, will it in any measure extenuate our wrong actions to say, that they are habitual? This rather, much rather increases their criminality. If an action is wrong, certainly the repetition of such an action cannot alter its nature, otherwise than, as it aggravates its guilt. Perhaps we say, that the sin has become so habitual, that we commit it without a consciousness of the fact. This is a common case. But that depravity must be extreme, and the blame in proportion, when our vices have become so much matter of habitual practice, that we have lost the sense of their guilt, and commit them without remorse, nay, without being aware of it; and as we perform the other indifferent actions of our lives.

Will it excuse us to say, that the inclinations and passions from which our vices spring, are all natural; make

a part of our constitution ; and were designed to be indulged and gratified ? This may be true ; doubtless, it is true, in respect to them all ; but it is an argument, which, though often urged, a little reflection will show to be utterly fallacious. Water is a most useful element ; should we, therefore, plunge in and drown ourselves. Fire is a most beneficent agent ; should we, therefore, kindle up a universal conflagration. Exercise and repose are both essential to health ; but indulged or used to excess bring on disease and suffering. Food is necessary to life, but the excess of it will destroy life. Many of the most simple substances in nature are, when used with moderation, salutary, agreeable, nutritious ; but passing beyond these limits, become offensive, poisonous, and fatal.

To the brute creation God has given an instinct, which teaches them what to choose and what to shun, and admonishes them how far they may go with safety. To man he has given reason, a guide far superior to instinct ! God has indeed bestowed on man various passions and appetites. He has provided for the gratification and indulgence of all of them ; and by innumerable counsels and admonitions, physical and intellectual, natural, moral, and religious, he has defined the limits beyond which it is incompatible with his safety and happiness, and consequently with his duty, which is always coincident with his safety and happiness, to pass. Experience defines these limits. Religion adds her express instructions in aid of reason and experience. Conscience is loud and urgent in her admonitions, until she finds her admonitions are despised, when she turns away in disgust ; and then by her absence wreaks a terrific vengeance on the obdurate heart. If it is plain that God designed that these natural passions should be indulged,

and might be indulged consistently with innocence and happiness, it is as plain and as certain as our existence, by the multiplied guards and limits which he has set up, and which are as obvious as they could be made, that he permits their indulgence only under certain restraints and within the bounds of moderation. What these limits are, no honest mind, which does not suffer its judgment to be bribed by its passions, can mistake? Within these limits they are innocent; beyond them they become criminal; the barriers are determined; if we pass them it is at our peril. Cannot we be content to travel in the highway, but we must burst through every enclosure, and insist that all the metes and bounds so essential to the security and well being of society, shall be thrown down and obliterated, and man be permitted like a beast of the forest to rove every where unrestrained; and shall we insist upon doing this, and trample upon the rights of others; condemn the sovereignty of the state; and yet persuade ourselves that we incur no guilt because we are only gratifying our natural love of liberty?

Shall we think to excuse ourselves, in the last place, by saying that our temptations to sin are irresistible; we have not the power to withstand? What man can do has never yet been absolutely determined; the limits of man's moral ability have not as yet been fully reached. We may say with safety, that, under the moral government of a wise and good Being, man will never be subjected to trials, which he has not the power to withstand. Does not God in religion and conscience call upon us to flee from vice and to adhere to virtue; but if man had not the power to do this, dare we follow out the conclusion that God is chargeable with such a mockery of human weakness? What man can do, when he stands as yet unsubdued by vice, lofty in his views,

fixed in his principles, determined in his resolutions, erect in the sublime majesty of conscious innocence, when in his presence even temptation is disarmed, as in the presence of our Saviour the ruffians sent to seize him fell prostrate before the resplendent beams of his countenance ; and what man is, when wasted by vice, broken down by the consciousness of guilt, the slave of habits, which like the incubus have fixed their talons in his breast and there repose in unmingled horror, with the depressing consciousness of purposes a thousand times broken, principles of religion presumptuously set at defiance, all sense of character gone, afraid even to think of God, that kind friend whose goodness he has so often abused, and for whose blessing he now does not dare to look up ; between men thus situated, and these are no fictions of the imagination, what an immense difference ! the power of the one to resist temptation is ample, his courage bold ; the power of the other ! how shall I speak of it ? wretched, wretched man ! your own self immolater ; perhaps however the power is not wholly gone ; but how small it is ! The spark of virtue, like the spark of life in the drowned body, may still linger about these sad remains of what was once glorious and bore the image of God, and was destined for heaven ; and the same breath, which first kindled life, may fan it to a flame ; but if he complains of the want of strength to resist temptation, where must the blame rest but on his own head ? He has destroyed himself.

Man has the ability to do the will of God. He has the power of his own virtue. If he has it not, it is because he has thrown it from him. This power in its original condition and gift is ample, and adequate to every trial ; but the truth must not be concealed that, in proportion as we swerve from virtue, this power is diminished. In this school of trial, in which God has seen fit to place us,

man is to be trained up for immortality. His course may be arduous. His trials many. But they are regulated by a wise and benignant providence, who will impart all needful succor, when it is sought and deserved. God helps them who help themselves; and what an affecting spectacle, what a divine triumph, when man is seen, in the courage and strength of religious principle, rising above them all; and, in the midst of trials the most severe, coming out unhurt; as the shipwrecked mariner when cast upon the shore, where the waves roll high, is sometimes seen now rising, now sinking, and when at last hope is almost gone and we fear he has fallen to rise no more, he presents himself on the very crest of the wave, with a courage unspent, and reaches the shore in safety. Examples are not wanting of such triumph; and the Christian, while he looks to the author and finisher of his faith, who was touched with the feeling of human infirmities and tempted as we are, yet without sin, has always before him one who has taught him how to conquer; and calls upon him in the language of triumph and consolation, be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Man has the power of doing the will of God; his sins are his own; the blame must rest upon himself. Let him not say when he is tempted I am tempted of God. God cannot be tempted with evil; neither tempteth he any man. But if he will still resist these plain teachings of reason, experience, and religion; let him consult his own breast, that will decide the question. There sits upon the throne of his heart, a judge, whose decisions, if he will hear them, will be against him. His own conscience, if he permits it to speak out, will teach him that he is amenable for his sins; and that no man ever yet committed a voluntary wrong without incurring a proportional guilt.

SERMON XXIV.

VALEDICTORY,

ON RESIGNING THE PASTORAL CHARGE OF THE CHURCH IN BARTON
SQUARE, SALEM. DEC. 4, 1831.

LUKE, xiii. 5.

PEACE BE TO THIS HOUSE.

THIS was the ancient salutation of kindness and affection, both when friends met and when they separated. What it precisely implied, as it was then used, cannot be ascertained. Perhaps it was only the expression of common courtesy and good will. It may be a prayer for those in whose behalf it was offered that they might have peace with themselves, peace with men, and peace with God. In this respect it was a most benevolent wish. But be its meaning as extensive as it may be, let it include all of good which this world can afford, and all of happiness in a better world, to which faith and hope can aspire, I adopt it, in truth, as my own most hearty desire and prayer in respect to every family and every individual belonging to this Christian household. Peace be to this house. The peace of God be poured into your bosoms.

My great desire is for your religious welfare ; for your

prosperity as a Christian community. It is now seven years since you united yourselves as a Christian society, on the great principles of religious liberty, free inquiry, personal independence, and universal charity. These are the true principles of the gospel; they will be better known as that shall be more studied; they will prevail more widely as the temper of the gospel is more widely diffused; and they will last as long as that shall endure.

Pardon me, if, in the next place, I speak of myself; an occasion like the present seems to establish its propriety. It was at that time that I was honored by your appointment to become your religious teacher and pastor. The acceptance of this office was to me the greatest trial of my life; and I sought to enter upon it with that diffidence and self-distrust, which such a duty was suited to awaken; with a reliance upon your candor and kindness, which has been fully met; with an uprightness of purpose, which often seems to compensate for the consciousness of inability and the distrust of one's own fitness; and with an entire confidence in God to aid the honest performance of duty and the diligent use of those talents, be they greater or less, which he has committed to any of his servants.

Under a consciousness of most imperfect and limited conceptions on subjects where the Deity may charge even his angels with folly, I have never presumed to speak with authority; but as a fellow-learner, I have with diffidence sought to stimulate and assist your inquiries. A subject of such universal concern as religion, as far as it is matter of practice and duty, I have considered as universally intelligible to men of unperverted and sound understandings. The Gospel was addressed to plain and honest minds, and plain and honest

minds can understand its important and practical lessons. The great principles of natural religion, are so simple, that our Saviour thought that men could gather them from the birds of the air, the flowers of the field, and the clouds of heaven ; and he demanded of those who stood around him, “ why they did not of themselves judge what is right.” The Gospel was addressed to the poor, the uneducated ; and it was committed to unlettered men to teach it to others. It would be most strange, therefore, if only the learned could understand or explain it. In truth, its great and practical principles and character, are most simple, as those will find it, who study it in the teachings and example of Jesus, rather than amidst the confusion of tongues, the hyper-criticisms, the presumptuous, or the frivolous conceits of uncompromising, prejudiced, bigotted, infuriate polemics ; and enveloped in all the mystery and metaphysical abstruseness of theological controversy. Under these impressions, I have spoken to you with a confidence that you were as competent as myself to determine what is true ; and have called upon you, “ as wise men, to judge what I say.”

I have urged you to seek for religious knowledge, as the most important of all others ; and as the best attainment of the human mind. I have called upon you to seek it in nature ; this is God’s earliest revelation ; the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament showeth his skill ; and to study the sacred scriptures, as containing a revelation from God, where by symbols and allegories, by the history of nations and individuals, by the suggestions, and counsels, and experience of many wise and good men of different ages and countries, by the lessons and predictions of those ancient seers, to whom he partially unsealed the book of human destiny,

and by the teachings of a special and divinely illuminated messenger and his apostles, he has taught us his will, his providence, his moral government ; his just demands in regard to human duty, his righteous constitutions and laws in regard to human happiness, and his benevolent and glorious purposes in respect to man's immortal destiny.

I have called upon you to pursue your religious inquiries with entire freedom and independence ; to make truth your only object ; to follow what appear to be its leadings, wherever they may conduct you ; waiting calmly the results of such inquiries, with minds as far as possible uninfluenced by prejudice, uncorrupted by passion, unawed by fear, unbribed by hope, unperverted by skepticism ; holding your conclusions with a just distrust of the infallibility of all human judgment, a proper respect for the opinions of other men, and a determination to keep the mind open to any new light which may approach it. I have called upon you to believe on evidence, but not against evidence ; not to receive without reason, but never to outrage reason ; to apply to the sacred scriptures, the same rules of candid and wise interpretation, which you would apply to other writings of equal antiquity ; and to exercise your own reason, enlightened by the best and all the extraneous aid which you can procure, as the proper umpire of your faith, and the just interpreter of the scriptures to you ; but never to regard your reason as the umpire of other men's faith, and as the interpreter of the scriptures for those who have reason and the inalienable right to judge for themselves as well as you.

I have urged you to study the New Testament, as the particular directory of Christian faith and duty. The Old Testament scriptures are Jewish scriptures, and

though of the highest value for general reading, are no farther connected with Christianity, than as they contain and inculcate the same great principles of moral duty ; as they abound with predictions of the coming of the Messiah, and greatly confirm the evidence of the divine mission of Jesus ; and as their language, allusions, and customs, may serve to illustrate and explain the language of the New Testament. In many respects, the Mosaic and the Christian systems differ from each other ; and the scriptures of the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus and his Apostles, are the standard to which our ultimate appeal must be made ; and where we must go to learn the true character of our religion.

I have inculcated upon you, the highest reverence for Jesus, as a teacher sent from God ; and called upon you to receive him with the veneration, confidence, gratitude, affection, and duty, to which his miraculous, beneficent, holy, heavenly character entitle him. I have reminded you, that his miraculous works were the acts of divine power ; his precepts, the dictates of divine authority ; his teachings, the counsels of divine wisdom ; his revelations, the suggestions of divine inspiration ; and you were therefore to acknowledge him as a rightful master, as an infallible instructor, as a perfect example of duty, and as a sure guide to eternal life and happiness.

As far as I have been able, and as well as I have been able, to understand his religion, I have explained it to you as the great rule of life, the unerring standard of faith, and the only certain foundation of our expectations of immortality. I have presented it to you as the purest system of moral virtue, which has been given to the world ; as the comforter of men, by assuring them of the placableness, the paternal character, and the paternal providence of God ; as the great encouragement to human

duty and virtue, and the great terror to neglect and vice, by teaching the certainty of a future and exact moral retribution, in which men must reap what they have here sowed ; and as the efficient source of consolation to the bereaved and broken heart, and the supporter of the human soul in the approach of death, and under the consciousness of decay, by its blessed doctrines of a resurrection from the dead, an immortal existence, and a heaven of purity and love and happiness for those, who have qualified themselves on earth for its rewards.

Such are the simple outlines of the religion of the gospel as I have aimed to exhibit it to your faith and affections. I have pressed upon you constantly to consider the great ends and objects of the religion as wholly practical. I have inculcated its moral duties generally and specifically. I have reminded you that the object of a Christian's aim and life should be the preservation of his virtue, the avoiding of every wrong, the humble and faithful discharge of all his social and relative duties, the diligent improvement of his mind and heart, the advancement and elevation of his virtue, with a view to that future life, where the happiness of man is not to be matter of arbitrary appointment, but the natural and necessary result of his own moral condition and character.

In conformity with what I deemed the true character and spirit of the gospel, I have inculcated upon you the strictest temperance, purity, and self-government ; the most inflexible regard to truth, justice, and equity ; the forgiveness of injuries ; the allaying of all resentments ; and the cultivation of peace and love. I have urged upon you, the most active benevolence ; and that you should measure your beneficence only by your power. I have admonished and entreated you against all selfishness, spiritual pride, bigotry, intolerance, and superstition.

I have inculcated an unrestricted and universal charity, and have bade you consider all men as your brethren; to disdain the distinctions of sect or party; to open your communion, and to proffer your fellowship to all serious and honest men, leaving it for every individual to determine for himself, as he alone has the power of knowing, how far he is serious and honest. I have charged you to consider your religion, as a religion of universal love; to be thankful to God that you are blest with its light; but not to feel that your possession of it can ever operate to the prejudice of those from whom it is withheld; to remember that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, "he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Such are the views of religion, which, with unfeigned diffidence, I have presented to you, as the result of my own inquiries. As far as they may be true, may you receive and adhere to them; may they operate to your virtue and consolation; to aid you in every duty; to support you under every trial; to sustain and comfort you in the hour of affliction and death. They render the gospel the best gift of heaven to mankind. It has been my privilege to sow the seed; may the grace of God give the increase; and may this religious community be long and forever distinguished by its simple and practical faith, and above all, by the blessed fruits of such a faith in their characters and lives.

As your pastor, it has been my most earnest desire and endeavor, to counsel and instruct the young in the great principles of Christian duty and piety; to render every office of kindness and friendship in my power; to sympathize with you in your afflictions, sicknesses, and bereavements; and to impart to you, as far as I was able, the consolations and hopes of religion. My constant and

great regret has been, that my ability so imperfectly corresponded with my wishes. I have most anxiously led in your public devotions; and it is a matter of delightful reflection to me, that this place has never been desecrated by theological strife or bitterness; and that our devotional services have been of a character, in which, every sincerely good man, be his denomination what it might, could cordially and entirely join.

Such has been the course of instruction and pastoral duty which I marked out for myself, and have anxiously endeavored to pursue. I have not assumed to be your master, but your friend; and have laid no claims to any influence or authority over you, other than what reason, truth, conscience, and friendship, might give me.

I look back upon the many imperfections of my ministry with the deepest humiliation. I have fallen very far short of my own desires. I owe much to the candor and kindness with which you have received my labors. I claim no credit but that of uprightness of intention, and the most anxious desire and effort to perform my duty. This consoles and sustains me, and permits me to hope for God's acceptance. Without this I should be miserable.

I can say in truth in his presence, that my profession, as it was the object of my early and only choice, has been now for more than a quarter of a century, the object of my devoted attachment; its duties have been more grateful to me than any other; and success in the performance of these duties, and in the results to which they might lead, has been the constant and supreme object of my wishes, desires, labors, and prayers. I have felt the deepest concern in whatever concerned my people. I have considered that our interests were the same; that their gains were my gains, their losses my

losses, their sorrows my sorrows, their friends my friends, their children my children. I have most earnestly desired their religious prosperity; their moral welfare: their present, but still more their everlasting good. May God provide for you and yours all of good and of happiness that you can desire.

I had fondly hoped to have spent my life among you, and to have terminated my earthly labors in the bosom of friends, whose kindness, under every trial, has been devoted and unremitted. The providence of God has otherwise ordered it. My health has been now for some time very imperfect. My preparations for the pulpit, have often been made at the cost of great pain; and if continued, I have feared, of irreparable injury to my health. In this imperfect state of health, the anxieties of my parochial connexion and responsibility have been exceedingly oppressive to me. Under these circumstances, and not without the admonitions of the best medical advice, given in a spirit of perfect friendship, I have feared, perhaps without reason, either that my life must be the sacrifice to the continuance of my parochial connexion, or that I might be thrown as a burden upon a people, whose interest is dearer to me, than any earthly object, beyond the interest of those whom God and nature have made one with myself; and remain for years an invalid, incompetent to the proper discharge of my duties, and prejudicing their interest, by preventing the labors of one, who might be found competent to occupy the place in which I stood. Under these circumstances, in which I humbly hope my judgment may not be at fault, after much and anxious consideration I asked a release, which you have granted me in the most friendly manner. As we have lived together in uninterrupted harmony, let us thank God that we can separate in kindness and peace.

This trial has been one of the greatest and most painful in my life. If I thought any other as great and as painful awaited me, I should implore God by an early release to save me from it. I am consoled by the conviction that it is however only a partial separation; and though it dissolves the legal and formal ties existing between us, it makes no alteration in the far better ties of mutual confidence, esteem, and affection. May this chain of Christian friendship be kept bright and strong and unbroken between us, so that "whether I come and see you or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs that your conversation is such as becomes your religious profession; and that you stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

I thank God that I am permitted to bear a public and grateful testimony to the kindness and fidelity of your attachment and conduct towards me, which has been eminent and uninterrupted. Your good opinion has been a most grateful reward for my imperfect services. Your ready and generous sympathy and your just estimation of my conduct have sustained me under many and severe trials. In the bereavement, which removed from me one of the dearest objects of my affections and hopes, and one whom I idolized too much, your tender sympathy greatly alleviated its bitterness to myself and my afflicted family. The remembrance of your kindness is written where nothing but the loss of reason or death can efface it; and it will find its recompense with that Holy and gracious Being, who has made us to love and serve each other.

The passage of time makes great changes with all. The revolutions of seven years have produced remarkable alterations. Misfortune and death have

been busily at work among us. The removal of families from the town, who were once connected with us, has been almost unprecedented. The bereavements of death have been numerous and most afflictive. May the providence of God repair these losses and permit you to see days and years of the brightest religious prosperity. I shall deem your welfare and happiness my own. If it should please God to restore my health and continue my life, your prosperity will ever be to me a source of consolation and delight.

The endearments of affection, friendship, and mutual regard, and especially the ties of Christian communion and fellowship, are the most sacred, which exist on earth. Let us cherish them as the best sources of our consolation and happiness, rejoicing in a religion which assures us that, though interrupted by death, they shall be renewed and made perpetual in a better world.

The connexion of a Christian minister with his people brings them into a relation to each other with which the most tender associations are connected. I have not strength on this occasion to trust myself to speak of them. The duties of my profession have always been to me a source of the purest gratification; and I have found a rich compensation in the grateful kindness with which they have been requited. But the teachers of a religion, be they who they may, are of no consideration compared with the religion itself. Mortal as they are they pass away, but the great truths of religion and their solemn application remain.

The objects of your association are not objects of mere pleasure or taste or friendship; but of infinitely higher moment. The religion addresses itself to you as immortal and responsible beings. It discloses a future state of moral retribution to every human being. Pas-

tor and people, the teacher and the taught are alike interested in its great results; and must stand together before God to answer for the trust which he has committed to them. In the blessed religion, which he has given us, he has proffered pardon for our sins, aid to our weakness, guidance to our duty, rewards to our virtue. May this blessed religion be to us all that God designed it should be to any, the rule of our lives, the foundation of our hopes, and our guide to a blessed immortality. Under its quickening, sanctifying, and elevating influences may it form us for heaven; and introduce us, once fellow travellers on earth, into the joint possession of the celestial inheritance. The future is veiled in darkness. The connexions of life at the longest must be short. Time places his rough hand upon us all. Parents, children, friends, neighbors, fellow men, one after another, take their leave and depart. Time permits no man to pause or linger, but continually impels us forward. When the conflicts and labors of life are over, may we, through the goodness of God, be gathered to that eternal home, where the painful farewells of earth shall be exchanged for the triumphant congratulations of Heaven.

A D D R E S S

TO THE SOCIETY IN BARTON SQUARE,
SALEM,

AT THE INSTALLATION OF A SUCCESSOR.*

THE induction of a minister into the pastoral relation is an occasion to serious minds of deep interest. The humblest actions of life have an important influence; and, such are the various complicated and reciprocal relations of society, a wide and lasting influence; often reaching to persons of whom we have no knowledge, places far distant from us, and times, which stretch onward beyond our calculation into the unseen future. The pious widow, who cast her mite into the treasury centuries ago while the Lord sat over against it, in her wildest dreams could not have imagined that her example was to go down to thousands, nay, to millions, to teach the great truth that the character of our actions is to be determined by the motive and the power, much rather than by the effect. The affectionate woman, who washed the feet of her blessed master and wiped them with her hair, beyond this simple testimony of affection to Jesus, little thought that she was erecting a memorial, which should stand as an encouragement to grateful duty wherever the gospel should be preached

* The Rev. James W. Thompson, 7th March, 1832.

in the whole world, and should last as long as the gospel should endure. If the humblest actions of life are important, still more so are the actions of public men and bodies of men, in what are called the great concerns of society.

The induction of a minister into the pastoral office is one of these great events. I know as well as any man the painful anxieties, which press upon his heart on such an occasion, as he thinks of the duties and responsibilities, which he takes upon himself. The relation is a mutual relation; the duties are mutual; there are reciprocal responsibilities; the feeling is not all on his side; every honorable, and reflecting person, with whom he then enters into this sacred relation, will be impressed with his own obligations and anxiously inquire in what way they are to be met. The transactions of this day may and must have a lasting influence upon him, who assumes the office of your pastor, and those, who receive him in that interesting character; upon yourselves, your children, those, who may come after your children's children; upon the great interests of society, the cause of truth, morals, public order, human happiness, and consolation; upon your present condition, and your condition, when passing beyond the bounds of earth and time.

I need not ask your serious attention therefore when in obedience to the duty assigned me, I call upon you, my friends, the late and beloved people of my charge, to inquire what these are, and to weigh them well.

That you will treat your pastor with justice, candor, kindness, and honor; with an anxious solicitude for his health, comfort, reputation, and success; with sympathy in the afflictions, which may befall him, and with the confidence and respect to which his talents and virtues

his good intentions, and faithful performance of his duties may give him a claim, he need have no doubt. I will answer for you. There is no society, where he will find more of these honorable sentiments. He may be with you therefore without fear, other than the fear of failing to fulfil your just expectations ; and of being unable to make a suitable return for the generous friendship, which he will experience. My own inability in this respect, has been to me a source of constant regret. What a blessing is this kindness ! The beneficence of God has hardly provided for his creatures any good so valuable. To the minister it is absolutely inestimable. As he is necessarily very dependent on public opinion, he becomes extremely susceptible ; and in his exposed situation feels sensibly every cold blast that blows upon him. The good opinion of those to whom he ministers being altogether essential to his usefulness, there is good reason, if there were no other than this, why he should feel concerned for it. Insolence, indifference, neglect, cruelty will break his heart, if he have one to be broken. You can know little of the extreme sensitiveness of feeling under which a minister labors, if he is a man of delicate and benevolent mind, unless you could be placed for a while in his situation. The good opinion of his people is of the utmost importance to him ; it is his consolation, his delight, his honor, his pride, his great means of usefulness. His labors avail nothing without it. The averted eye, the scornful sneer, the pointed neglect, the cold indifference, the rude censure, inflict wounds, which are very painful, and which, after they are healed, leave scars behind that we can seldom remove if we would, and which show how much we have been grieved. Perhaps this is an effeminate weakness ; but it is a weakness incidental to the peculiar situation in which a

minister is placed. It might be better for him to have a heart of stone and nerves of iron. But could such a man preach the gospel of peace, of love, and of consolation? He could know nothing of it. What he never felt he never could impart. Kindness will above all things stimulate his exertions. To a good mind, no motive is felt more powerfully than gratitude. Kindness will awaken his gratitude, and this will stimulate the powers of his mind that he may return kindness for kindness, and render himself deserving of what he receives. You will treat him with kindness. You know I do not mean with fawning, flattery, sycophancy, an extravagant admiration, or a foolish idolatry; nothing like it; but with that candor, courtesy, indulgence, and uniform friendship and frankness, which his honorable efforts and good conduct claim, and which are no more than just to the variable-ness and smallness of human ability and the weaknesses and imperfections, which appertain to every human character. You will receive him therefore as a friend; as such let him be recognised in your families, and by your children. Do not expect too much of him. Do not complain of him unless you have the best reason for complaint; and in common justice do not pass sentence of condemnation upon him until he has first heard the accusation and been put upon his defence. Do not suspect him under any circumstances of a disposition to neglect you; nothing is more improbable. The motives, which operate upon him, all lead to the reverse of this. Do not claim more of his time in visiting than he can afford consistently with his higher duties and studies; and remember that he must be better able to judge on this subject than any other person. There is no profession in society, which is liable to more interruptions and more severe taxes upon his time than that

of a minister ; and there are few which can less afford it. But what is it, some men say, to scribble off a sermon of half an hour's length, and to get up and pour it out at your tongue's end? If this were all, this indeed would be nothing. The proper answer to this question must depend upon what kind of sermon it is. If it be an instructive, well digested, sensible, useful, practical, serious discourse, it is not the mushroom growth of an hour, or a day. It has cost days, weeks, perhaps months, of study and reflection. The mere putting it on paper, is one thing ; the preparation of it is a very different thing. No man is gifted with inspiration. Such a production is the child of labor and study only. The more simple it is, the more intelligible it is, the more it is such that you are disposed to say when you hear it, "this is all true ; this is what I knew before ; this I understand ; this I feel," so much the more evidence you have of its being the ripe fruit of reflection and diligent cultivation and pruning. Take out the time necessarily occupied in his preparations for the pulpit ; in his proper studies ; in the interruptions to which, especially in a city, a minister is liable ; in his duties as a citizen of the commonwealth ; in the claims which society makes upon every public man, and especially upon the clerical profession ; in his duties to his family ; in such recreation and exercise in the open air as are indispensable in a sedentary life, as much to the vigor of the mind as of the body, and you will find not a large proportion remaining for common visiting. Certainly he should be much with his people and do all that he can. If he knowingly and wilfully neglects the sick, the afflicted, the decayed, the unfortunate, the aged, blame him ; he will deserve it. But if you are in health, remember that he has some claims upon you as well as

you upon him ; it is easier for you to visit him than for him to visit you ; but if you seldom or never call on him, when neither your advanced age nor circumstances give you the right of exemption from rendering the courtesies of society, you certainly afford him strong reasons to believe that his visits to you are not desired.

As a gentleman, an instructor, a friend, as your minister and pastor, you owe him all the civilities of refined life. None understand them better than yourselves ; none will be more prompt to pay them. But I have far higher claims than these to urge in his behalf. You and he have entered into a sacred relation, the results of which are infinitely more important than any personal considerations on either side. What are the objects of your association ? religion and morals. These are great subjects ; the greatest which can interest the human mind ; a religion taught by God, and morals taught by God ; and which must be the foundation of your improvement, your happiness, your well being as long as you continue to exist. Serious and enlarged minds only are capable of estimating these great subjects. What are the motives, which are connected with these objects ? They are of the highest character ; motives drawn from earth and heaven ; from time, and eternity ; from your own nature as moral, accountable, immortal beings ; and from your relation to God, on whom you are wholly dependent.

If the settlement of a minister were a mere setting-up of a golden calf, whom the people should come to worship instead of worshipping God ; if our churches are mere theatres for the gratification of our pride, and the display of our conceit and folly ; if God and religion, life and death, heaven and hell, are only empty names, matters of pure fiction, words of terror to child-

ren and poor women, about which we will condescend to come once a week to hear what some babbler will say, wrapping ourselves up in the conceit of our own superior wisdom because we do not believe one word of them, and cherishing a miserable self-complacency because we have found out an easy way to keep the community under wholesome restraint, deeming them very good things for our neighbors, but about which we need not concern ourselves, it is not worth while to take all this trouble, and incur all this expense. It would be as well to be consistent, and, like the atheists of the French Revolution, raze our churches to the ground, and scatter our bibles to the winds; giving out at once that there is no God; that man is a beast, and death an eternal sleep; and so shutting out every gleam of hope that has fallen upon the human mind, dashing from the parched lips of poor and suffering man the only cordial that has ever touched them, and gathering even a far deeper darkness over the grave than has as yet ever settled upon it; so that when we leave there our parents, friends, and children, we may feel that it is like throwing our most precious treasures into the fathomless ocean, and the heart must be wrung with a more unmixed and bitter agony than it has yet experienced.

But suppose on the other hand these things are true; that religion is all that it professes to be; man is what that represents him; a poor, blind, helpless, imperfect, sinful, dying creature; needing its light, counsel, aid, and promises, to direct, to console, to support him. God has had pity upon him; and has sent the messenger of his mercy to recall the wasted prodigal, to bind up the broken-hearted, to bring him back to his duty, his honor, his true happiness; and especially to teach

him the dignity of his origin and the immortality of his destination ; then what earthly blessing is so great as the gospel ; what are so valuable as the institutions of religion which are suited to instruct and elevate the human mind : to form men to all that is good and kind, to raise them from mere earth-worms to children of light ; to direct the storm-beaten mariner over the tempestuous sea of life to a haven of rest ; and to make him feel, though there be nothing around him but a dark and dreary waste of waters, where neither sun nor stars for many days appear, that there sits up aloft a divine Protector to care for and to save him ?

Such is the light, my brethren, in which I know you view the subject ; and in forming a new connexion with a Christian pastor, you will feel that you are engaged in one of the most important transactions of life ; and providing for objects than which this earth presents none more valuable, and none by you more valued.

In behalf of your minister I claim then as matter of justice, of honorable contract, without abatement, without compromise, your co-operation with him in the proper and great objects of your connexion ; the support of the gospel and its actual influence among yourselves and throughout the community.

Without this co-operation rendered cordially and punctually, he must labor in vain. What can be the use of preaching to those who will not hear ? What a painful discouragement to his best efforts to find that either they are not received at all, or received only with indifference, or sloth, or neglect. That you might understand this, I wish only, as I before remarked, that you could for a short time place yourself in his situation and feel what he feels. This would at least make you pity and pray for him.—I might say that common

justice demands this at your hands. Your contract with him involves mutual obligations. If it is his engagement to preach, it is yours to hear; and honorable minds will be as much disposed to perform as to exact justice.

Your punctual and serious attendance upon public worship will do much to encourage him; to incite him to labor more and more anxiously for your advantage; and to give you the fruits of his mind matured by study and brightened by the enthusiasm of success. But if, on the other hand, you neglect him; and compel him to see only empty pews, and to speak to silent walls, you extinguish his zeal and crush him to the earth. Besides, a regular and interested attention to public worship, encourages every other reasonable and proper effort for the religious prosperity of the society. The catechism and religious instructions of the young, the observance of the Lord's supper, the baptism of your children, are duties upon which I need not now, because I have so often addressed you. The establishment of a religious library would be of comparatively little expense and great benefit, as must be every circumstance or arrangement which serves to attach the members and especially the younger members of the society to its interests, and bring them into a nearer connexion and acquaintance with their minister. One thing, more than any other, will contribute to the prosperity of the society; not that you should feel merely a strong interest in the success of your minister but in each other's success; remembering that as members of the same religious community you are brought into an intimate fraternity and equality with each other, and ought to feel the strongest sympathy in the concerns and welfare, the character and happiness of each other.

This will contribute in many ways and with powerful effect to your unanimity, increase, and comfort, and be most subservient to the general objects of your association. May these objects, my dear friends, in respect to yourselves and your pastor be fully answered; and may the best blessings of Heaven follow the transactions of this day.

There are great occasions in every man's history; great to him if not to others. The present is emphatically such to me. The proprieties of the occasion require me to speak of myself, which under other circumstances I would gladly have avoided. The interesting relation, which it was my lot to hold with you, and which continued for more than seven years with uninterrupted and unabated harmony to the last, has now passed into other hands; and the providence of God has required me to retire from a situation, which it was my highest ambition to fill to your improvement and satisfaction. The decision to retire was neither hasty nor unadvised. The conviction that my health must fall an entire sacrifice to the continuance of my official duties and anxieties, and the fear that under such circumstances I might become a burden upon a people, whose interests were as dear to me as any earthly object, induced me to resign my charge. Subsequent experience has served only to strengthen the conviction; and I have to acknowledge the kind, affectionate, and honorable manner, in which you met my wishes.

To retire in any measure from a profession, which has been the early and constant object of my life; to break up a parochial connexion formed under circumstances of peculiar interest; endeared by many associations; and whose duties were always discharged

with pleasure, as they were always requited with kindness ; to enter upon a new enterprise with all the uncertainties of the future prefigured by past experience ; to separate from friends than whom no man ever found truer or kinder ones ; and whose fidelity and tenderness have often overwhelmed me, make this indeed a great occasion to me ; and I ask your prayers to God that I may meet it as I should ; and that it may not fail of its proper effects upon my future character and what of life remains to me. For all your kindness to me and mine I thank you. It is but a poor return ; but it is all which I can make ; and the sincerity of the offering will render it acceptable.

Life is in itself so short and uncertain that we must not give ourselves over anxiety for its unavoidable changes, which only bear us onward to higher and permanent destinies.

I cannot meet you on this occasion without recalling the memory of those, who were once associated with us, but who have been translated to sublimer services. Their dear and precious and venerated images hover around us, and, as in the splendid visions of the apostles, make it good for us to be here. The places honored and consecrated by their earthly presence are vacant ; but higher places are adorned by the purity and glory of their virtues. All live unto God. They still mingle their devotions with ours, and both ascend as a joint sacrifice to a common Father. Are they not always near us ? In the vivid recollection of what they were, do we not feel their presence ? From their lofty seats in Heaven they beckon us to follow them ; they invite us upward. Yes, friend ! parent ! brother ! sister ! child ! we will seek to follow you ; and mingle our songs with those celestial praises, which celebrate a

world redeemed; the grave abolished; the victory of man's immortality achieved; and death himself subdued at the celestial conqueror's feet!

Every thing earthly perishes by using. By whom you hear is of little moment compared with what you hear and how you hear. The preacher of the word passes away; but the word itself abides forever. To preacher and to hearer, all which, in comparison with any thing and every thing else, deserves attention, is to be what the gospel requires. Preacher and hearer must stand before God and give each of them an account of his stewardship. The favor of God should be the supreme object of our ambition and that must rest upon our individual and personal fidelity. To the attainment of this may all the institutions and means of religion in respect to us prove subservient and effectual. The favor of God comprehends all good in earth or Heaven.

NOTES.

“THE corner-stone of the INDEPENDENT CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN BARTON SQUARE, IN SALEM, was laid JULY 4, 1824. The Church was opened with appropriate religious services on the 7th December, in the same year. HENRY COLMAN was installed as the first pastor, February 16, 1825. At his request the Society granted him a dismissal, which took effect December 7, 1831. The following record of the Ecclesiastical Council, convened upon that occasion, will show all the proceedings connected with the dismissal and retirement of Mr. COLMAN.

The Clerk of the Society laid before the Council the following extract from the Society's records, containing Rev. Mr. Colman's communication to the Society requesting a dissolution of his pastoral connexion, and the doings of the Society thereon.

MR COLMAN'S REQUEST FOR A DISMISSION.

SALEM, 12TH SEPTEMBER, 1831.

*To the Members of the Independent Congregational Society in
Barton Square, Salem :*

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS — For nearly a year past I have felt that my health has been gradually declining. The painful duties which the last year unfortunately devolved upon me, and an afflictive domestic bereavement have been felt with great severity ; and an increasing anxiety to meet the just expectations of my friends, added to the feeling of imperfect health, renders my professional duties very arduous, and makes

me fear that a long perseverance in them must be at the expense of all ability to be useful, if not at the peril of life. It is not so much by speaking in public as in my preparations for the pulpit that I suffer, and these are seldom completed by me, but at a great expense of labor and health.

These circumstances reduce me to the painful necessity of asking leave to resign my pastoral charge at the end of the present parochial year, or at such time after that, whether it be three or six months, or any other term, as may be most convenient to the Society.

They will allow me to express the hope that they will act freely on this subject. If they deem my request improper, I shall be contented and happy to serve them as long as I have any ability to give them satisfaction; but if they regard it as reasonable, I ask only such a dismissal as will accord with the candor, kindness, and honor, which I have uniformly experienced from them.

I have not taken this step without the most anxious consideration. It has seemed to me, that my duty to myself, my family, and the society, requires this measure, and I pray that my judgment may not be at fault. I am unable to express the grateful and affectionate sense I have of the kindness which I have experienced from my people; and the distinguished acts of personal friendship for which I am indebted to many among you. I have only to lament a performance of my duties very imperfectly corresponding with my wishes; and to assure the society that I have no stronger desire than for their individual and united prosperity.

It is with no small anxiety that I throw myself and those dependent on me upon the world, with imperfect health and little to depend upon but my own personal labor; and it is with extreme regret and disappointment that I contemplate a separation from friends whose good opinion and kindness have been my highest honor and delight, and whose sympathy has been most grateful in the time of affliction; — and from a people than whom one more candid, friendly, intelligent, and virtuous cannot be found.

I am ever,

With the most grateful respect and affection,

Your friend,

[Signed]

HENRY COLMAN.

This communication having been deliberately considered, at a legal meeting of the Proprietors, held at the vestry, Sept. 29, 1831, the following Preamble and Resolutions, which had been previously agreed upon at an informal meeting of the proprietors and occupants of pews, were unanimously adopted, viz:—

A communication having been read from our beloved pastor, the Reverend Henry Colman, stating that so great a decline of his health had taken place, as would render it impracticable for him for any length of time to continue the discharge of his pastoral duties, and requesting to be dismissed from the society at the end of the present parochial year, which will expire on the seventh day of December next,

Resolved, That although we deeply regret that any event should have occurred, the result of which shall be the dissolution of our connexion with a pastor, heretofore so adequate to the most able discharge of all his duties, whose instructions have been so impressive and eloquent, whose character is so pure and whose temper and disposition are so amiable, we deem it incumbent on us, under Mr. Colman's peculiar circumstances as respects his health, to agree to his request; and we do hereby consent that he shall be dismissed from, and that his connexion with our said society shall be dissolved on said seventh day of December next.

Resolved, That in thus dissolving a connexion, which was formed and has continued under circumstances of peculiar interest, we embrace the opportunity of tendering to Mr Colman our sincere regards, and best wishes for the restoration of his health and for his future happiness.

THE END.





