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SCS #1289

Thomas F. Torrance,

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THE SERVICE
OF
THE HOUSE OF GOD,
ACCORDING TO THE PRACTICE
OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND;

INTENDED CHIEFLY

TO ASSIST THE DEVOTION AND DIRECT THE MEDITATIONS
OF THOSE WHO ARE NECESSARILY DETAINED
FROM PUBLIC WORSHIP;
AND TO FORM A DIRECTORY TO YOUNG CLERGYMEN
ON THEIR FIRST ENTERING ON THEIR
OFFICIAL DUTIES.

BY

THE REV. WILLIAM LISTON,
MINISTER OF REDGORTON.

“O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”—PSALM xcvi. 9.

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P R E F A C E.

CONSIDERING how many Christians are necessarily detained every Sabbath from attending on the public worship of God, it may seem surprising that no book has yet been published expressly for their benefit. Our parochial churches in the country are erected upon the calculation that only one-half of the whole population, or two-thirds of the adult population, require to be accommodated in church at one time. If this be the case in country parishes, it is notorious that the matter is still worse in our great cities. And although many of the inhabitants of our cities have no inclination to attend church at all, yet the above calculation, that one-third of the religious population cannot attend public worship any ordinary Sabbath, is much within the truth.

In this point of view, the following publication, which professes to be intended for the benefit of those who are necessarily detained from public worship—though it should never be read by any other person—may be regarded as addressed to one-third of the Christian public. But it is obvious to remark, that this third does not always consist of the same individuals; a part of a family only may be

necessarily detained from public worship every Sabbath ; but different members of a family often take this duty upon them by turns, so that, although there be only a third part of the population who are absent from public worship on any particular Sabbath, yet a book addressed to those who are so absent, must be considered as embracing a much larger class ; and may, indeed, be regarded as comprehending the great majority of the Christian community.

But if, upon the most favourable supposition, fully one-third of the community do not attend the ordinances of religion any Sabbath, it is proper to inquire whether other causes do not sometimes occur to render the attendance at church occasionally much more scanty. It is not my intention here to inquire what are the excuses which even the pious sometimes make to themselves for their absence from public worship, or how far these excuses are reasonable, and ought to be sustained "*in foro conscientie.*" It is sufficient to appeal to the appearance of our churches, whether in town or country, when the Sabbath happens to be unfavourable in point of weather, in proof of the allegation that many are withheld from going to church from causes that cannot be regarded as arising from the necessary avocations of life. And we do not cast any reflection upon those to whom this description applies, when we suppose that in such circumstances they should find "A Sabbath-day's Service of the House of God," an exercise neither uncongenial to their disposition nor unprofitable in itself.

If they have a sincere desire to go up to the House of God in order to worship him, and if they

are withheld only by occasional causes, which, though they imply not any continued or personal avocation, they are unable at that time to overcome, it cannot, one would think, be unacceptable to them to have it in their power to go over, *in their retirement*, the same devotional exercises, and be engaged in similar religious contemplations, with those that would have occupied their thoughts had circumstances admitted their attending on public worship.

Here, then, is a wide field for the occasional usefulness, at least, of the following volume, if it be executed in such a manner as to attract and fix the attention, and excite the devotional feelings, of the religious community. There is one class of persons who may be supposed to be inclined to the perusal of such a work, and to whose circumstances it might seem in a peculiar degree adapted; namely, those aged or infirm persons whose situation does not incapacitate them from mental occupation or for pious and religious meditations; but whose health does not permit their attendance on the public services of the church. To all such persons, and, we may add, to those who are employed in attending on the sick, such a work seems fitted either to gratify a disposition to pious meditation where it already exists, or to foster it where the inclination has not been so happily tempered. The season of sickness and infirmity is the time when the mind is especially disposed to sacred contemplation; and if the perusal of this work shall either give scope to the pious inclination of the religiously disposed, in their involuntary absence from church, or excite or cherish in the indifferent, when the mind is unusually disposed to solemn thoughts, such a taste for

religious exercises as may lead them, with returning health and strength, to a more regular attendance on public ordinances, the work will not have been unprofitably given to the public.

It has sometimes, also, occurred to the author, that a book, somewhat of the nature of that now offered to the public, might be of vast service to multitudes of our emigrant countrymen, who, being removed often, in many of our colonies, from the possibility of hearing the word of God *preached*, might find it much to their religious consolation to be able, in their distant settlement, to go over on the Sabbath the same kind of religious exercises to which they had been accustomed at home, and in which they would still have had an opportunity of engaging had circumstances not called upon them to leave their native land. The author is aware that, in order to answer such a purpose effectually, a work much more extensive than that of a single volume would be required—perhaps a separate service for every Sabbath of the year, would, for this purpose, be desirable. But everything of this kind must have a commencement; and if the present volume were, by any means, to make its way into any of the emigrating families of our countrymen, and excite a desire amongst that interesting portion of our fellow-subjects for such a work, the demand would, no doubt, speedily create a supply.

It may, perhaps, be proper also to observe, that such a work as that which is now laid before the public, would seem to be much more requisite in the Presbyterian Church than in the sister communion of the Church of England; because every one has the whole prayers of the latter Church in his hand;

and, with the assistance of a volume of sermons, (and that Church is distinguished for its standard works of this kind,) may go over in his retirement, on any Sabbath, the whole service for the day.

Having said so much in defence of having offered this volume to the public, it may be proper also to say a few words as to its contents.

Upon the extensive plan on which this work has been undertaken, the author believes that it may be regarded as, in a great measure, new in the Church of Scotland; and he desires to put forward this statement as a claim for indulgence to the imperfection of its execution. So far as he is aware, there exists only one small treatise upon anything of a similar plan, under the title of "The Scotch Minister's Assistant," in the first edition, and "The Presbyterian Minister's Assistant," in the second, believed to have been the work of the Rev. Dr Ross. The work is not extensively known in the Church, but has undergone two small editions, the first at Inverness in 1802,* the second in Aberdeen in 1822, after the author's death.† The work consists of forms for marriage, for baptisms, for fencing of communion tables, for table services, for concluding exhortations to communicants, and for prayers on several occasions. From this it will easily appear that the work embraces a very small portion only of what is comprehended in the plan of the present volume.

As to the form in which the first part of the Service of the House of God has been drawn up, it will

* Printed by Young & Imrie.

† Printed for A. Brown & Co., and George Clerk, Aberdeen; Waugh & Innes, Edinburgh; and T. Hamilton, London.

be remarked that it is that which takes place in country churches in Scotland in the winter half of the year, during which season the whole service is completed at one meeting. There are several reasons that have induced the author to adopt this arrangement rather than that which is more commonly in use in our city churches during the whole year, and in our country churches in the summer season, where an interval takes place betwixt the forenoon and afternoon services. But with these reasons it is, perhaps, unnecessary to trouble the reader.

It is also to be remarked that there are here three prayers given for every Sabbath ; and these prayers, it may be observed, are or should be—according to the view which the author has of their nature and object—of three different kinds. The morning prayer should be of a *general nature* and character ; and should be more regular in its structure, and embrace more of the constituent parts of prayer than the others.

As the morning prayer ought to be a *general prayer*, so ought the intermediate one to be of a special nature—having a reference to the subject of the preceding lecture or discourse, pressing it home, in the form of supplication to God, on the hearts of the audience, and concluding with a glance at the subject to be treated in the subsequent sermon.

The concluding prayer is different from either of the former. Like all other prayers, it ought to begin with adoration ; but the principal subject ought to be what are properly denominated public prayers, that is, supplications for public blessings. These, it is obvious, are very extensive, and cannot be comprehended in any single prayer ; and this gives a cer-

tain degree of variety to this kind of prayer, though there are particular subjects, such as supplications for national and congregational blessings, which should form a part of every concluding prayer.

It has often been remarked that the system of lecturing on particular passages of Scripture is almost peculiar to the Presbyterian form of worship; and that it is a distinguished excellence in our Church service. It is the means by which a great degree of the knowledge of the contents and meaning of the Sacred Writings, for which the Scottish people are so remarkable, is conveyed to them. Nothing, indeed, can be conceived better fitted for making a people familiar with the Scriptures than the practice of explaining to them the force and meaning of a large portion of it every Sabbath day. It is the very opposite extreme from the doctrine of the Church of Rome—that the use of Scripture is to be withheld from the laity.

But, great as the advantage of this system is, and laudably as the practice is followed in our Church service, few lectures have been given to the public in a printed form. This may have happened from various reasons, which it is unnecessary here to enumerate. But it may be remarked that, although it may be very easy to give a kind of running commentary on Sacred Scripture, yet it is much more difficult to take a general and connected view of a lengthened passage, and to explain each verse in its connection with or dependence upon it; for a lecture ought not to be a series of little sermons on the different verses as they occur. This would destroy the unity which ought to pervade such a composition; whilst, at the same time, a lecture, being in its nature chiefly explanatory,

everything like controversy ought to be carefully avoided.

Although a lecture be, in some respects, a higher sort of composition than a sermon, yet the characteristic of a lecture should be its extreme simplicity and plainness, both of style and matter. It is as absurd to think of elucidating the Sacred Writings, which are themselves, in general, extremely simple, in pompous and inflated language, as it is to think of explaining them by abstruse, metaphysical, and controversial reasoning. All meretricious ornament must, therefore, here also appear to be entirely out of place, as contributing nothing to the understanding of the passage.

The author does not offer any extended remarks on the sermons here submitted to the public. They are upon important subjects in the Christian scheme, and it must remain with the public to judge whether they are calculated to lead their meditations, when they cannot attend the public worship of God, in that devout and pious train which he professes to have in view.

It may be proper also to observe, with respect to one of these sermons—that in the Ordination Service—that it is necessarily in its nature somewhat different from the others. An ordination sermon, being delivered in the presence of the members of Presbytery, as well as of an ordinary congregation, would seem necessarily to partake both of the nature of a "*concio ad clericos*" and of a popular sermon. The author, accordingly, has endeavoured, in some measure, to unite these two objects, by submitting a piece of abstract reasoning, which the members of a Presbytery might be able fully to comprehend, whilst the

individual sentiments embodied in it are such as might impress the hearts of the people.

With respect to the Second Part of this work, which consists of Communion, Ordination, Baptismal, and Marriage services, the author thinks that it may not only assist the private meditations of those who would wish to be present at the celebration of such solemn rites, and are prevented by necessary causes, but that it may be of advantage, as a directory, to those who, on entering on the clerical office, have to prepare themselves for the administration of these services. He believes that the want of such a book has long been felt in our Church, and that, if properly executed, it would prove a valuable assistant to the young minister, in directing him to the proper topics on which to dwell in the performance of these services.

For this purpose, a mere skeleton of these services might perhaps have been of benefit to the student or young minister; but this would not have answered the other purpose which the author professes to have in view—viz., that of leading the meditations of those who are prevented from attending the public administration of these services, through the same devout train of thought that would have filled their hearts had they been enabled to go up to the house of God to their public administration.

It cannot fail to be interesting to every pious mother, in particular, to have the baptismal service brought to her view in her privacy, at the same moment that her husband is taking upon himself, in the house of God,* the baptismal vows in behalf of her young infant.

* It is the practice in Scotland to administer baptism in the church.

Neither can it fail, on a Communion Sabbath, to be gratifying to every devout Christian, whom circumstances prevent from joining in the service, to have the same divine truths recalled to his thoughts, which, on such a day, had repeatedly filled and delighted his heart, when he had it in his power to go up with the multitude that kept that holy day. "He was glad when they said unto him, let us go into the house of the Lord;" and now that he cannot go thither, his next best consolation is to recall, in private, those delightful contemplations which had so often filled his heart to overflowing, when, in the presence of the "great congregation," he had received the sacred symbols of his Saviour's death.

But not only is the communion service the most solemn service in our Church, and that which a pious man will be most anxious to bring before his mind in review in his closet, when he cannot attend on its public administration; but it is that which requires the most careful preparation on the part of the administrator. It is here that the hearts of his people are prepared to be most deeply impressed and affected, and it is here accordingly that the clergyman is expected to put forth all his strength—not indeed in powerful reasoning, or irresistible argumentation, but by bringing before them lively and impressive views of Christian truth, and, especially, such views as are connected with our Saviour's death and crucifixion.

The last form of service here given, although not altogether a religious ordinance, derives a peculiar solemnity from the sacred and permanent nature of the connection which is established by it. For although marriage be not admitted in any Reformed Church to

be a sacrament, as it was in the Church of Rome, and although it be regarded in our standards as in part a civil contract, yet it is always looked upon by us in a religious light, and considered as partaking of a religious character ; and, therefore, the solemnization of it is every where committed to the clergy. The ceremony, amongst us, is directed to be begun and concluded with prayer ; the minister is to exhort the parties, out of the Scriptures, to the conjugal duties ; and no one who is not in sacred orders dare venture to perform the ceremony without being subjected to civil penalties.

But though, according to the directory, the minister is to make the man and the woman repeat the words accepting the other party as husband or wife, till separated by death, yet this observance has gone so much out of practice, for time immemorial, that a young clergyman, although a man of learning and intelligence, but not familiar with the ceremony as now observed, following implicitly the directory in this particular, was lately subjected by his people to the imputation of an inclination to Episcopacy, and was not even free from the suspicion of a tendency to Popery.

This part of the Service of the House of God, may appear to be adapted exclusively to the use of the student or young minister, as a directory on which to frame his own form of service ; and yet it is worthy of remark, that there is perhaps no part of the service of the sister Church of England that is more frequently read, by people of the Presbyterian persuasion, than the marriage service.

The author cannot conclude these prefatory remarks, without expressing his deep sense of gratitude, to his numerous friends and subscribers, for the

unprecedented support which they have given him in his undertaking. He trembles lest the execution of a plan which has received such general approbation should not justify the confidence which has been so extensively placed in him. But while he solicits the indulgence of his friends and readers for the imperfections which may be discovered in his work, he is yet not without hopes that it may be found useful in cherishing the devotional feelings of the pious, in assisting the young minister in the discharge of his important duties, and in presenting to the public a view of the Service of the House of God, as it is conducted in the greater portion of the country parishes of Scotland.

THE
SERVICE OF THE HOUSE OF GOD.

PART FIRST.

FIRST SABBATH.

MORNING PRAYER.

O LORD, thou art God, and there is none else. Thou, even thou, art God alone. Thou art the only proper and adequate object of religious worship and adoration, for thou art possessed of all excellence and perfection, thou art clothed with glory and honour, and there is no God besides thee. To thee ought every knee to bow, and every tongue to give praise.

We esteem it, O Lord, our greatest and highest privilege that thou hast formed us capable of thy worship, and dost permit us access into thy presence, to offer up our prayers and our praises before thy throne. But what are we, O Lord, that we should presume to approach thy sacred presence, and take thy holy name within our sinful and polluted lips? We are thy creatures, the workmanship of thy hands; but we are thy fallen, thy guilty, and thy rebellious creatures, and thou art a pure and a holy God. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, neither can evil dwell in thy sight; but we are a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters. We have forgotten thee our God, and we have not been moved by all thy goodness towards us. We have been drawn aside from our duties to thee by the seductions of a perishing world; and those blessings, which are the

gift of thy hands, have shut thee, the giver of them, out of our minds. We have despised thy mercy ; we have provoked thy justice ; we have dared thy majesty ; and we have not dreaded thine omnipotence and power. Thou hast borne long with us, not willing that any should perish ; but we have despised the riches of thy forbearance, and long-suffering, and patience ; and that goodness of God which should lead us to repentance, has emboldened us to continue in sin.

O Lord our God, awaken us to a sense of the guilt, the ingratitude, and depravity of our conduct ; lead us to a better temper of mind, and to a conduct more worthy of the creatures of a God that waiteth to be gracious. Thou hast the hearts of all men in thy hands, and thou canst turn them, as the rivers of waters, whithersoever thou wilt. Do thou then, O Lord, inspire our hearts with wisdom and holiness ; excite in us wise purposes and good resolutions ; fix these with such efficacy within us, that our hearts may be established in grace, and our wills subdued to thine obedience. In the bowels of thy compassion to us, do thou send down into our hearts the spirit of thy Son, for the healing of our souls : rectify what is wrong in the temper of our minds ; remove every evil imagination ; correct every wrong inclination. By thy good spirit enlighten our minds in the knowledge of the truth, that we may know what we ought to avoid in order to approve ourselves unto God ; convince our consciences of the necessity of having a respect to all thy commandments ; and imprint more deeply on our minds a sense of the many obligations we lie under to serve and obey thee.

We desire to bless thee, O Lord, for all the means of knowledge, of wisdom, and of righteousness, with which we are so abundantly furnished. We bless thee

for the light of the Gospel, and for the revelation of thy pure and perfect will from heaven. We bless thee for Jesus Christ, thy last and greatest gift to the children of men : that thou hast not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation through the death of a Saviour : that thou hast raised him up, and sent him forth to bless us, by turning every one of us from our iniquities : that, when there was no eye to pity, and no hand to help, thine eye pitied, and thine arm brought salvation. We bless God, that he who was delivered for our offences has been raised again for our justification : that he has sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high : that he is exalted, a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins. Work in us, O Lord, a deep and abiding sense of our infinite obligations to redeeming love ; strengthen our trust in thy mercy ; establish our faith in Christ. May we hearken to his instructions as to the voice of God ; may we follow the example of excellence he has set before us in his life ; may we submit to his sceptre, as the sceptre of our Sovereign Lord.

We bless thee, O Lord, for the institution of the Sabbath-day, and for the opportunity with which, from time to time, we are furnished, of assembling ourselves in thy presence, for the purposes of religious and social worship. We thank thee for the circumstances of health and of strength in which thou dost permit us to assemble ourselves before thee at this time. Do thou be in the midst of us, to bless us and do us good. Be gracious to those also who have been necessarily detained from coming up with us to thy public service. May they know, in comfortable experience, that thou art not a God confined to temples made with hands. Manifest thy presence with them in their retirement. Hear and

answer their secret prayers, and deliver them, in thine own good time and way, out of those circumstances that have prevented them from coming up to worship thee in thine own house.

We pray for thy blessing to enable us to listen in faith, and with teachable dispositions, to the instructions that are to be vouchsafed to us in thy service. May our hearts be in our several employments of speaking and of hearing from thy Word. May strength, in the discharge of these duties, be granted to us from above. And do thou hear and accept of us, for Christ's sake, our strength and Redeemer. Amen.

LECTURE.

2 PETER, i. 5—10.—“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

THE Apostle, in the preceding verses, having observed that the design of the gospel promises is to excite men to the study of holiness or virtue, exhorts them, in the verses now read, to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and charity. He observes, at the same time, that they who are of a contrary character are insensible of

the purity and perfection which the Christian religion requires. He therefore exhorts them to whom he writes, to give diligence to make their calling and election sure; that is, to be careful to cultivate in their hearts the various graces and virtues of the Christian character which he enumerates, and to practise them in their lives, that they may know themselves to be the sons of God, and the disciples of Jesus, by those marks and characters that distinguish them from the rest of the world, which is the only assurance possible of their being called of God.

In explaining, therefore, the verses that have been read as the subject of Lecture, I shall keep constantly in my view that the graces and virtues enumerated have a tendency to promote in us an assurance of the Divine approbation.

That there are many powerful reasons for desiring such an assurance, may be gathered from the expression with which the words are introduced—"And beside this, giving all diligence," says the Apostle. The expression, "giving all diligence," imports both the importance of the thing to be obtained, and the difficulty of obtaining it. The original word, translated giving diligence signifies to act with the utmost exertion in our power; throwing ourselves, as it were, upon it; and is the same as if the Apostle had said, with all your might strive to add to your faith virtue.

Faith, to which we are here exhorted to add the other graces, in the original acceptation of the word, signifies belief founded on the testimony of another; and religious faith, as described by divines, signifies the belief of a doctrine on the credit of divine veracity. But the faith of which the Apostle here speaks, must be understood to comprehend also the approbation of

the heart, and the obedience of the will in the conduct in life. Now this faith is absolutely necessary to give us the well-grounded assurance of the Divine favour. This principle of faith, as it is the sole ground on which the Christian's interest in the merits of the Saviour must rest, so must it be the ground on which his hope, or assurance of the Divine favour is founded. The Apostle, therefore, puts it in the first place, as being the leading principle of the Christian life, and the source, indeed, from which all the other graces, which he here enumerates, must necessarily proceed. And this relative importance of faith, both in the Christian scheme and in the individual object which the Apostle has now in view, may be considered as pointed out to us in the very form of his expression—"Add to your faith, virtue," says he, "and to virtue, knowledge," &c. He places faith by itself, as the great and primary source of this assurance, and then bids us add the other graces of the Christian life to it. When, therefore, we speak of these Christian graces as having a tendency to assure us of the Divine favour, we speak of them not only as having merely a tendency to do so along with faith, but as depending on it as the great source—as emanating from it—and as being, to ourselves, an evidence of it. And you must, accordingly, always carry along with you, that faith is the great foundation of assurance, to which the other graces are subsidiary, of which, indeed, the subsequent observations will themselves remind you.

Some men, indeed, from a sense of the connection between faith and salvation, seem to have carried this doctrine too far, when they have asserted that assurance is the essence of faith, and that every one who has a principle of true faith in him, is assured of salvation.

They who hold this doctrine, do not seem to consider that very different degrees of the same grace may exist in different individuals. Some may have their faith, even when it is of a genuine nature, like a grain of mustard-seed, weak in itself, and perplexed with much doubt and uncertainty; whilst others may have it strong, vigorous, and active, and, according to our Saviour's comparison, spreading like a green bay tree, in the branches of which the fowls of the air may lodge.

Now, though we cannot allow that assurance is the essence of faith, yet it is undeniably certain that faith is a principle absolutely necessary in order to our having a well-grounded hope of the Divine favour. By faith we not only know that there is a God—a being of infinite power, justice, and goodness—at the head of the universe, but likewise that he is reconcilable to sinners; and, as the most perfect man on earth has reason to consider himself as such, he can have no assurance of the Divine favour without that sense of the Divine perfection and that apprehension of the Divine mercy which faith gives him, and that sense of an interest in it which faith warrants him to entertain.

In order, therefore, that we may attain this assurance, let us endeavour to cultivate a principle of true faith in our hearts, by examining, with diligence and impartiality, the evidence of our religion; and, by reflecting on our own need of mercy, let us sincerely embrace it as freely offered to us by Jesus Christ in the Gospel.

“And beside this,” says the Apostle, “giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue.” The word here translated virtue signifies, properly, courage or resolution. It is derived from one of the names of that deity of the heathens* who was supposed to bestow valour or

* Ἀρετή ab Ἀρης, Mars.

success in war ; and, though often used by the ancient writers in a very extensive sense, and for virtue in general, yet I cannot help thinking that it ought to be more strictly interpreted here, because it is distinguished from the other graces with which it is mentioned, and therefore must be supposed to mean some one part of virtue and not the whole ; and what that part is may be easily discovered from the original signification of the word which denotes fortitude or resolution.

Now this is a grace necessary to be cultivated by us in order to our being assured of the Divine favour ; for, if we have not courage boldly to encounter those difficulties that are of a threatening aspect—if we dare not risk our persons, our fortunes, and our reputations, for the sake of God and a good conscience—we can have no reason to look on ourselves as disciples of Jesus—that is, we have not that fixed and firm faith in him, to which courage must be added, in order to our being assured of the favour of God. “ Whosoever will come after me,” says our Saviour, “ let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.”*

“ Add to your faith, virtue ; and to virtue, knowledge,” says the Apostle. Knowledge is a pre-requisite even to faith itself ; for no man can be said to believe the doctrines of religion who has no knowledge of them ; nor can he accept of the salvation offered in the Gospel who is not acquainted with his own condition nor the terms on which salvation is proposed.

But it is probable that, by knowledge in this place, the Apostle does not mean such a competent sense only of the truths of religion as may be a foundation for faith in some degree, but a more extensive knowledge of Divine truth. And this may be gathered from

* Mark, viii. 34.

the order in which these graces are enumerated by the Apostle. "Give all diligence to add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge." This plainly intimates that, by knowledge here, we are not to understand that degree of it which is pre-required and comprehended in the idea of faith, but a higher and more extensive kind: a clearer apprehension, for example, of the perfections of God, as discovered in his works and word; a deeper knowledge of the nature of man, his passions, principles, and opinions; a more intimate acquaintance with the nature and deformity of sin, and the truth and excellence of religion; and the additional motives that may be discovered, by reason and reflection, for avoiding the one and practising the other: in short, all that light which industry and application can give us for perfecting our apprehension of religious truth, and confirming us in the faith of what is revealed.

Now, our cultivating and improving this sort of knowledge will be found an excellent mean of assuring us of the Divine approbation; because it will not only strengthen our faith, but establish and confirm us in the practice of religion and holiness.

A right knowledge of the natures and qualities of things has so evident an influence in promoting the practice of religion, that we find wisdom and religion used everywhere by Solomon in his book of Proverbs, as equivalent and synonymous terms; and, indeed, the connection betwixt them is obvious; for that which constitutes one action good and another bad is, that the one is according to the will of God, and the nature and fitness of things, and the other not. Now, the more perfectly that will and that nature and fitness are understood, the better able shall we be to judge what should be done by us, and the more sensibly shall we feel the force of the obligations that bind us to do what is right.

Verse 6.—“ And to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness.” We commonly receive temperance in too narrow a signification, as importing abstemiousness in meat and drink only ; or, at farthest, we interpret it to signify prudence and moderation with respect to the pleasures of sense.

From the improvement which language is continually receiving, and from the necessity which men feel of being precise in the ideas which they affix to different terms, the force of many expressions comes to be confined to a narrower signification than they formerly denoted. We, therefore, limit the sense of many expressions of the ancients, which have come down to us, far within their primary import.

The word here translated, temperance, signifies *self-command*, or a mastery over our appetites and passions. The ancients, therefore, considered as intemperate, not only those who indulged themselves to excess in eating and drinking, and the other pleasures of sense ; but those likewise who were possessed of too violent and inordinate a desire of any outward object, such as honour, power, influence, or wealth. Because, such as are under the influence of these desires are not masters of themselves—cannot govern and restrain themselves—as the original word translated, temperance, imports ; but are carried away to the practice of sin, by a power superior to their own, and are led captive by diverse lusts.

Now this temperance—this faculty of resisting our desires after external things—is a habit which we must necessarily both cultivate and practise in order to our being assured of the favour of God.

For it is impossible that any one can believe that he has true faith, or that assurance of the Divine favour which is founded on it, who is not able, in the exercise of temperance, to suppress the inordinate de-

sires of corrupt nature, and keep them in subjection to reason and religion.

In order, therefore, to act a right part, and so as to have reason, on good grounds, to conclude that our calling and election is made sure, let us endeavour to overcome our inordinate desires, that we may be able to refuse what they demand, when they cannot be gratified in consistence with the law of God, and our obligations to the practice of holiness.

In order to our being assured of the favour of God, it is necessary, as the Apostle continues, to add “to temperance, patience,” or a faculty of bearing, with a calm and undisturbed mind, the afflictions of life, whether they be imposed by the hands of men, or happen in the ordinary course of the providence of God.

Patience may well be classed with the grace last mentioned, from a similarity in their natures. As the one is the proper habit of mind with respect to things that are pleasant and desirable, so the other is the proper habit of mind with respect to those things that are obnoxious and painful. For, in the same manner as we should check our inordinate desires and affections towards such worldly objects as gratify and please us, so as to preserve ourselves in a state of freedom and independence—at liberty to follow the dictates of reason and conscience with composure and serenity of mind—we should likewise endeavour so to strengthen our hearts against those that are obnoxious and painful, as not to be disturbed by them, nor tempted, for the sake of avoiding them, to do what our consciences disapprove.

But of all the graces mentioned by the Apostle in this place, that which has the greatest affinity to the one I am now considering, is that which is mentioned

in the second place, namely, virtue, or courage. Courage and patience seem to be the same habit of mind, only differently exerted. Courage is used to express the virtue of fortitude when it is active and enterprises; patience, when it is passive and suffers. And as it is necessary, in the Christian warfare, on many occasions, not only to enterprise what is difficult and dangerous, but also to endure with composure the evils with which we may be afflicted, it is necessary, in order to our performing our part well, to be endued with patience, so as not easily to sink under affliction, or have the frame of our minds disturbed by its pressure. For want of patience is naturally attended with many disadvantages. It either inclines us to renounce our duty in order to avoid the sufferings to which we may be exposed by adhering to it; or it disposes us to quarrel with the course of God's providence towards us, and diminishes our love and assurance in him; or it renders us peevish and ill-natured towards those of our fellow-creatures with whom we may have intercourse, and thus takes from our charity in the same manner as it did from our piety in the former instance; or else it perverts our judgments, and renders us unfit for determining what are the gracious designs of God in his providence towards us, or in what manner we ought to act so as to approve ourselves to him. Now, as a steady adherence to the rules of religion—piety towards God, and charity towards men—are absolutely necessary to a well-grounded hope of the Divine favour, and as a clear and undisturbed judgment is of great consequence both to faith and practice, in order to our calling and election being made sure, we should cultivate the grace of patience, and learn to endure hardship with composure, as good soldiers of Christ Jesus.

“And to patience, godliness,” says the Apostle. The word used by the Apostle to express godliness, signifies, originally, religious reverence. But it is often interpreted in a more extensive sense, as signifying that whole temper of mind and kind of affection that we ought to feel towards God. Because reverence is the principal ingredient in such a temper; and it is common, in all languages, to express a class of objects of the same kind, by that name which is proper to some of the most distinguished among them. In this view, the original word, which signifies reverence, may properly, according to our translation, be rendered godliness, as expressive of all that temper and disposition of mind towards God which is fit and reasonable.

Godliness, then, may be supposed to imply a sense of the being and perfections of God: reverence towards him, both on account of his infinite perfections, and the relation we stand towards him as his creatures, and the subjects of his government; love towards him as the best and most beneficent of all beings, and the author of salvation through Jesus Christ; and a regard to his will, as what, both in duty and interest, we are bound to obey.

Now, such a temper of mind, such a character, such affections as these, are absolutely necessary to faith and the right practice of the duties of the gospel, and have likewise a direct influence on a sense of the Divine favour, which naturally flows from a consciousness of possessing that temper of mind and those dispositions of heart which they necessarily imply.

Verse 7.—“And to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity.” As brotherly-kindness is nearly allied to charity, which follows next in order, and is the last grace mentioned by the Apostle,

I shall consider them together, observing that the difference between them consists in this, that brotherly-kindness is a regard for the good of others, attended with esteem—a love excited by a sense of merit in the object—whereas charity is a love of a more original and simple kind, and may be defined, a desire of the good of others, merely as creatures capable of happiness, whether considered as deserving it or not. These two, however, are not so much to be considered as different principles, as the same affection of mind differently exerted. In the same manner as water, when it ascends in vapour or falls down in rain, when it is compacted into ice or driven about in flakes of snow, is water still under all these different appearances; so the principle of universal charity, when it is excited by a sense of the misery of its object, becomes compassion; when by a sense of weakness and dependence, parental affection; when by a sense of benefits received, gratitude; and when by a sense of worth or merit in the object, brotherly-kindness. Though, therefore, we may distinguish between brotherly-kindness and charity in the same manner as we may distinguish water, in its original form, from the same element under any of the various changes it undergoes by the influence of external causes, yet we may consider them both together under the notion of goodwill, and a regard for the happiness of others, which they equally imply. And, therefore, as resolving into this, and comprehended in it, I am now to consider them, when I shew what effect they have for securing to us a sense of the Divine favour.

Good-will to others, then, gives us a sense of the Divine approbation in two different ways. *First*, by being considered, by the person possessed of it, as a thing good in itself, and therefore approved of God;

and, *second*, by influencing all those other habits, both of temper and practice, that give us reason to consider ourselves as in a state of favour with him. Any one who is conscious to himself that he is a friend to others—that he sincerely rejoices in their happiness, and promotes it to the utmost of his power—who knows that he is, on all occasions, willing to do good not only to his friends, his neighbours, and relations, but likewise to all men, however unknown to him—who is conscious that his heart has felt even for the miseries of the inferior creation, and that he has made it his business, as far as could be done in consistence with other relations, to assist and relieve them—that he has been a desirer and promoter of universal happiness, imitating, in this respect, the mercy and beneficence of God, who is kind to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works—every one conscious of such a temper and such a disposition must necessarily approve of himself, and be conscious that in Christ God loves and approves him. For we must always suppose that infinite wisdom will approve of what is good; and, in the same manner as the Apostle asserts that, when our hearts condemn us not, we have confidence towards God, so, when our hearts justify and approve us, upon clear and evident principles, we are likewise assured of his favour.

In this way, therefore, charity and good-will have a tendency to produce a sense of the Divine favour, directly and of itself. But it contributes to the same effect, likewise, by its influence on all the other graces of the Christian character, which promote in us a sense of the Divine approbation; because it is the life and soul of all right practice, the noblest and most generous motive to obedience, and, in our Saviour's account, the fulfilling of the whole law.

If, for instance, we honour and obey our parents only from a desire of long life—the promise annexed to the precept in the Gospel; if we abstain from injuring our neighbour in his person, reputation, or fortune, only that we may be rewarded for being just in these instances, there is nothing noble or disinterested in our conduct, and we display only a narrow and partial regard to our own interest; and, from this imperfect motive, our performances must necessarily be defective. But when, from a principle of charity, and regard for the happiness of others, we choose and desire what the law requires, our obedience will be regular and extensive, according to the extent and spirit of the commandment. Such a generous and disinterested service will give peace and satisfaction to our own hearts, and both be an evidence to ourselves of the soundness of our faith, and likewise assure us of the Divine approbation.

Verse 8.—“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the work of the Lord.” The Apostle here shews us that, in order that we may have these graces in the degree that is necessary to give us a sense of the Divine approbation, they must not only be in us, but abound; that is to say, we must persevere in them, and make progress and advancement in them; for one signification of the word here translated to abound is to increase, or make great. And this is indeed absolutely necessary to make us sure that we really possess them—that our Christian graces are true and genuine, and not the accidental effects of temper and the passions; for there are many appearances in the human mind, which nearly resemble the various Christian virtues, which are only the ordinary effects of the human passions, occasioned sometimes by wrong, and often by indifferent

causes. Some persons, for instance, are zealous in religion only from partiality to their country, from concern for the honour of a particular sect or party, or from pride and opposition to the sentiments of others, and not from a due sense of religion, as a thing noble and excellent in itself, and worthy to be believed on account of the fulness and strength of evidence by which it is supported. Such men may, indeed, imagine that they have faith, because they do not doubt of the truth of religion : they may think that they embrace it from sincere love and approbation, because they have a kind of prejudice and attachment to one set of opinions, and one form of worship, rather than another—in the same manner, and for the same reason, that men are generally attached to the customs and opinions of their country about everything else, whether they be right or indifferent. But this is not the kind of faith that will increase or abound, or in which men will readily persevere, when their worldly interests happen to interfere with it. Then they will begin to wish they had freedom to comply with other maxims and opinions for obtaining the advantages of the world, or avoiding its inconveniences. Then will they begin to examine the ground of their faith ; and, finding nothing in religion which they love and approve from the heart, and nothing in its evidence which they understand in so perfect a manner as to command and fix their assent, they will easily give way to their own choice and inclination ; and their religion will prove, according to our Saviour's similitude, like a house built upon the sand, which, “ when the winds blew and the floods came, fell, and great was the fall thereof.”

To such a faith these men may think they add virtue, when without any fixed apprehension of the excellence

of religion; without any sure conviction of the vanity of every worldly object, when put in the balance with such as are spiritual and eternal; without being fully persuaded that those light afflictions, which may be endured for the sake of God and a good conscience, shall work out for them a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory;—they may imagine that to faith they add virtue, when, either from natural strength of spirit, from constitutional hardiness, or some other natural reason, they hazard their worldly interests for the sake of religion. But when they see themselves surrounded with dangers from which there is no escape—when their natural spirits become wasted by labour and fatigue, or subdued by a long course of suffering—then their constancy will certainly give way; their resolution will be overcome; and, like the Apostle Peter, who, from the natural resolution and strength of spirit with which he was endued, in the garden appeared a bold and zealous defender of his Master against the officers of the chief priests and elders, and the mixed multitude which came to apprehend him, yet, when encompassed with the awe and solemnity of a guarded tribunal, lost his wonted courage, and forgot his boasted resolution. For there is no fortitude that will stand the test which is not built on fixed apprehensions of the excellence of religion, and its superior advantage to anything of a worldly nature. And that we have such a sense of religion, and of its advantages, we can only be certain by persevering in the practice of it, and by preserving our attachment to it, under every trial and temptation.—How, for instance, can we know that we love God, but by persevering in love to him, since there are so many passions in our nature that counterfeit most exactly love to God, which are yet far from approaching it.

Pride, bigotry, and superstition, when they express themselves in persecuting and laying waste the world, under pretence of promoting the interests of religion and the glory of God, may often be mistaken for love to him. They who feel themselves capable of occasional fits of devotion, may likewise think they love God; but if we would know whether we love him in sincerity and truth, we must try if our devotion be lasting and permanent, and such as fills our minds at all times and on all occasions.

It may seem strange that we should be so easily deceived in mistaking one affection for another, or that we should need other proof of what passes in our own minds than our own feelings; yet it is this very mistake, that we certainly know what we feel, that is the cause of our mistaking so much the state of our affections; for different passions so easily assume the form and appearance of others, that we often deceive ourselves more easily than those around us. We mistake pride, or ambition, or party spirit, for zeal for God's honour and the interests of religion, when these prompt to such actions as zeal for religion would dictate; because, from a principle of self-love and self-partiality, we always, in our hearts, ascribe our actions to the best possible motives that could lead to them.

In like manner as to charity, it can only be tried by our continuing or abounding in the practice of it. It is not a transient fit of kindness and good-will, of which even the hardest and most cruel natures may, on some occasions, be susceptible, as is plain from daily experience, that will be of avail; it is not a disposition to do good to others, founded on casual inclination, or arising from accidental circumstances—that is liable to be changed into the contrary disposition by every tri-

vial occurrence, or even by time itself, without any other cause; but it is a disposition to do good, which perseveres in spite of injuries and provocations—a friendship not easily dissolved, like the friendships of the world, that are converted into hatred, envy, or rancorous opposition, by the slightest causes: for “charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.”* This grace, therefore, so essential to the Christian character, if we would have it contribute to our assurance of the Divine favour, must abound, or be increased in our practice; and its genuineness, like that of the others, must be tried by its steadiness and perseverance.

I do not mean to say that it is absolutely necessary, in order to our having a sense of the Divine favour, that we must have all the Christian graces in such lively and vigorous exercise as never to fall short in any one of them. This is more than can be expected in this imperfect state, where the best are guilty of daily failings and defects of duty. We may, no doubt, notwithstanding of these, have such a persuasion of being in a state of favour with God as amounts to little less than assurance. Yet these failings of duty, this unsteadiness in the exercise of the graces of the Christian life, seems to be a principal reason of the faintness of the hopes of Christians, and the strength of the doubts with which their minds are so much perplexed; for it is impossible, whatever we may have been, or whatever attainments we may at any time have made, that we can be satisfied as to our interest in God’s favour, when we are conscious of remarkable failures of temper and practice. And many favourable circumstances must concur before

* 1 Corinthians, xiii. 4.

beings, so imperfect as the best of men are, can attain to what is strictly and properly called assurance. And even they who, by the Divine favour, may attain to this assurance, cannot be supposed to possess it at all times ; for as our faith and love, and other Christian graces, however constant and habitual they may be in principle, must sometimes be changeable in the exercise, so the assurance which is built upon the consciousness of possessing them must often be interrupted, and give place to hope only, mixed with some degree of uncertainty, and, perhaps, sometimes declining into apprehension or fear. And this is the reason why, in the preceding explanation, I have considered the expression of our calling and election being made sure, not of absolute assurance, but of that good hope through grace that naturally attends progress and steadiness in the Christian life ; because absolute assurance is so rare an attainment, that it cannot be supposed to fall to the share of ordinary Christians in any considerable degree, if, indeed, they can at all attain to it. And this hope may well assume the name of assurance, because assurance is hope perfected ; in the same manner as despair, the state opposite to hope, is the highest degree of fear.

INTERMEDIATE PRAYER.

FOLLOW, O Lord, with thy rich and effectual blessing the religious service in which we have been now engaged, and the instructions delivered from thy Word, so far as agreeable to thy mind and will. May the word spoken, being mixed with faith, sink into the

hearts of this people, and produce much fruit in their lives. May we give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. May we cultivate that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. May we have that sense of the Divine perfections, and that apprehension of the Divine mercy, which faith, when true and sincere, naturally produces in the heart. May we examine, with diligence and impartiality, the evidence of our religion, that, perceiving the firm foundation on which it rests, we may receive it as the Word of God with power which worketh effectually in them that believe; and, reflecting on our need of mercy, may we lay hold of it as set before us in the gospel. To our faith may we be careful to add that courage which will enable us to surmount all the difficulties which we may meet in the path of our duty. May we not be moved from the faith we have professed by the terrors of the world; but, dismayed by no danger, discouraged by no obstacles, alarmed by no worldly terrors, may we adhere stedfastly to the profession of our faith, and, through good report and bad report, seek to approve ourselves to our Heavenly Father. May we have that knowledge of the truths of religion which is the essential foundation on which all our Christian graces must rest; and may we seek to attain to clearer intimations, and more perfect discoveries of the works and ways of God, that by these we may be established in the love and practice of all that is good, and pure, and worthy. May we ever retain that mastery over ourselves, our passions, and affections, that will enable us to refuse what they demand, when they cannot be gratified in consistence with our duty to God, and our obligations to the practice of goodness. May we be enabled to submit with patience to all that

befalls us by the appointment of God. Amidst the severest temporary afflictions, may we retain our serenity and composure, that we may not sink under the evils of life, nor have the frame of our minds disturbed by their pressure. May we rather exercise ourselves unto godliness, and have that reverence of the Supreme Being impressed on our hearts which his infinite perfections, and the relation we stand in towards him, essentially require. May we cherish that love to him which is due to the best and most beneficent of all beings, and that regard to his will which is becoming in the creatures of his hand. Give us, we pray thee, that brotherly-kindness and that charity which is the bond of perfectness. May we cultivate that regard to the happiness of others which is the distinguishing badge of the religion of Jesus. By this may all men know that we are his disciples, if we have love one to another. As he has loved us may we love one another. May our love be without dissimulation. And may we embrace in our affection all who hold the same nature with ourselves, and all who are called by the name of Jesus. May these graces not only be in us but abound, that we may not be barren nor unfruitful in the work of the Lord. May we remember that he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he is purged from his old sins.

We pray for thy gracious presence and aid as we are again to be employed in speaking and hearing from a portion of thy word. Fit us for the right and proper discharge of these respective duties. May we remember that we perform them in the service and presence of him whose knowledge is infinite, and who is everywhere present to witness the manner in which we discharge them. May we, therefore, perform them as

accountable to him who knows all our ways, and will judge us at the last day. Do thou pardon the imperfections that cleave to us in the performance of this and all our duties. And all that we ask is for Christ's sake. Amen.

SERMON.

THE OMNISCIENCE OF OUR SAVIOUR, A PROOF OF HIS DIVINE COMMISSION.

JOHN, i. 48—49.—“Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.”

JESUS, having received the testimony of John in Judea, determined to proceed into Galilee, to commence the important ministry on which he was sent; for a prophet, he says, is not without honour, save in his own country. On his way thither he found Philip of Bethsaida, and commanded him—“Follow me.” It appears, from the subsequent part of the history, that Philip was already, in some degree, acquainted with the character of our Saviour; he therefore, without hesitation, obeyed. From the general tenor of our Saviour's discourse, and, perhaps, from the internal impulse of God, Philip was soon convinced that this was the Messiah promised by the prophets. In the fulness of his exultation at this delightful thought, he immediately communicated the glad news to Nathanael:—“We have found him of whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus

of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael, full of the prejudices that influenced his countrymen against the Nazarenes, and recollecting that the Saviour of his country was to be born in Judea, in the town of Bethlehem, answered in derision—“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip, unable to satisfy the doubts of Nathanael, but convinced that the opinion he had formed was just, trusted that our Saviour’s discourse would convince him. He therefore replied in the language of his master—“Come and see.” In obedience to this invitation, Nathanael immediately set forward, resolved to make a candid inquiry into the case, and see if this was indeed the Messiah. As he drew near, while he was yet a little way off, Jesus perceiving him, declared to those who were around this honourable testimony concerning him—“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” Nathanael, astonished that Jesus, to whom he was an entire stranger, should know at first sight the nature of his character, asked him—“Whence knowest thou me?” Jesus shews him that he was not only acquainted with his general character, but that even the most private actions of his life, and those circumstances which he thought had escaped the notice of all mankind, were known to him. In confirmation of this, he mentions to him a particular, which at once conveyed to him the proof of his omniscience—“Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.”

It should seem that Nathanael had lately retired from the observation of men, and, under the shade of a fig-tree, had expressed himself in so explicit a manner in prayer to God as to merit the character our Saviour gives him. When then Nathanael found that Jesus, though absent, was acquainted with all that had passed

in that private retreat, the conviction of his omniscience flashes across his mind ; and he exclaims, in the fulness of assurance, “ Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.”

Let us, in the following discourse, see, in the *first* place, what effect this omniscience of our Saviour has in establishing his Divine commission ; and let us, in the *second* place, see what is the proper improvement of the subject.

In the *first* place, A degree of knowledge, superior to that of human nature, is, in itself, a direct proof of a divine commission. It is true that, in looking into the history of the human race, we may meet with individuals who have attained to a degree of knowledge superior to what had been attained by mankind before them. There are hardly any of the sciences in which new and surprising discoveries have not been made by the study of individuals, which have enlarged the sphere of human knowledge far above that of which those who lived before them could have formed any notion or conception ; and this has not impaired their faculties, but rather facilitated their farther discoveries, and paved the way for new inventions by others.

By individuals also have been discovered new principles, which, by their application to different sciences, have led them to a knowledge of nature, and of the causes of natural appearances, to which no man ever before attained, and of which the great mass of mankind around them were utterly ignorant. By the knowledge of these principles and of their application, these men have been able to produce effects that appeared quite astonishing. They have even seemed to possess a control over the powers of nature. The most distant planets have been brought within our view. The re-

sistance of the winds and of the tides have been overcome. The pointed lightning has been averted from its course, and men have seemed to wield the thunder of Heaven. Mankind have beheld with astonishment; yet all this has happened without any claim on their part to a divine commission, or any supposition, on the part of others, of the existence of supernatural power.

But all this does not invalidate the proposition with which we set out, that a degree of knowledge, superior to that of human nature, is, in itself, a direct proof of a divine commission; nor does it afford any presumption that, by the progressive nature of human improvements, mankind can ever attain to that degree of knowledge of which we have an example in the text. For these men, however superior their knowledge may have been to what was possessed by mankind before them, have uniformly been equalled, if not surpassed, in the same paths by those who have succeeded them. But the instance of knowledge that lies before us stands as unrivalled at this moment, and has ever stood as unrivalled as at the time that it extorted the exclamation from Nathanael—"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."—Indeed, the greatest discoveries that have been made in science, and the greatest improvements that knowledge has received, are what may be comprehended by any mind. But where is the man whose knowledge is not bounded by the extent of space—who can penetrate the heart of the stranger—who can see the secret devotions of the humble, and hear the aspirations of the penitent breathed under his own fig-tree?—shew me him, and, without incurring the imputation of superstitious credulity, I shall believe him possessed of a divine commission.

But, in the *second* place, not only is there a difference

in the degree of knowledge possessed by our Saviour from that possessed by those who have attained to the greatest height of human wisdom, but there is also an essential difference in their nature.

When any man attains to any remarkable degree of knowledge, we can trace the process by which he arrives at it; we can see the principles from which he sets out; we observe the media of investigation by which he proceeds, and we examine the legitimacy of his conclusions. He ascends, as it were, by a ladder, and we can mark every step where his foot has rested. But the instance of knowledge that lies before us is deducible from no human principles. There are no existing media of investigation that can lead to it; it can be drawn by no conclusions; the thing is in itself, from its very nature, utterly incapable of all induction. There being, therefore, no other principle to which we can reasonably impute it, we may confidently ascribe it to divine efficacy.

In the *third* place, The converse of the proposition now illustrated holds true. I mean to say that, supposing our Saviour to have appeared in the world to publish the revealed will of Heaven, we should conclude, from reason, that he must have been possessed of infinite wisdom.

It is evident that, in order that any person may be able to illustrate any doctrine successfully, he himself must be able to understand that doctrine. If, then, our Saviour had come only to publish such moral truths as are of themselves discoverable by the light of nature, it would not appear, from the face of the thing, that he must have been possessed of more than human wisdom. But there could be no necessity for a revelation to publish to us such truths as are of themselves sufficiently

obvious ; he must, therefore, have come to publish those truths of revelation which could not have been discovered by human reason ; which, even now that they are revealed, human reason cannot sufficiently account for or comprehend. Of these in revelation there are many. And although, in revelation, doctrines evident from the light of nature are mixed with such as are known only by inspiration, yet it was only on account of the latter that revelation was necessary. Human reason, therefore, being no competent judge of those truths, to the confirmation of which revelation was necessary, could not successfully publish them. It follows, therefore, that supposing our Saviour to have been sent by God to publish the revealed will of Heaven, he must have been possessed of more than human wisdom.

This naturally leads me to remark that, if our Saviour was possessed of more than human wisdom, we are naturally led to conclude that his wisdom was infinite and eternal.

It is obvious that we can form no notion of the limits of a wisdom that is superior to that of man. We cannot measure or set bounds to it. With respect to us who are human beings, it is the same whether his wisdom was infinite and eternal, or whether there was any limits to it at any point betwixt that of the wisdom of man, and that which is infinite and without bounds. For all the purposes of his mission to the children of men, it might have been sufficient that he was possessed of wisdom superior to ours, if we had been the only objects to whom it had reference. But the gospel which Christ came to publish must have a reference not to man only, but also to God ; for it comes to reveal to us both his nature and his will. Now, if his nature be infinite, then he who came to reveal it to us must be pos-

sessed of understanding which is able to comprehend it; that is, before he can reveal anything to us concerning the nature of an infinite and everlasting God, he must be possessed of wisdom which is infinite and eternal.

Again, before he could reveal to us anything of the *will* of God, he must have known what that will was. Now, if the will and nature of an infinite and eternal being be inscrutable to any inferior intelligence, then must he himself have been God, or equal to God. And this seems to be the foundation of that saying of our Saviour, "No man knoweth who the Father is but the Son."*

Now we may observe, that this knowledge which our Saviour had of his Father's will was different from the knowledge which was communicated to the prophets. They often uttered predictions which they did not themselves understand; nay, which were not understood at all till after their accomplishment. But Christ came to *explain* the will of God, and to deliver it unto us, not in symbols and shadows, as the prophets had done, but in clear and explicit views, so far as our nature would admit. Nay, he came to explain those symbols and shadows in which the will of God had formerly been wrapt; to elucidate whatever was dark or intricate in former predictions; and to set the whole before us in distinct and intelligible characters. Now this he could not do without understanding both the nature of these predictions and the object to which they referred. And, as they came from a being whose nature was infinite, his knowledge must have been commensurate with that nature; that is, the very end and object of his mission—that of revealing to us the will of God—required that he should be possessed of infinite wisdom.

* Luke, x. 22.

In the *fourth* place, This omniscience of our Saviour answers the description of prophecy concerning him :—
 “ And there shall come forth,” says Isaiah,* “ a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots : and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord ; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord : and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.” Accordingly we find that there was an universal expectation among the Jews that the deliverer of their country should be possessed of infinite wisdom. Thus, our Saviour no sooner declared the nature of Nathanael’s character, and mentioned to him particulars which he was certain had escaped the notice of all mankind, than he exclaimed, “ Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel !” Thus, also, when the Samaritan woman, at the well of Jacob, found that our Saviour, though a stranger, was intimately acquainted with her history, she immediately concluded him to be the Christ. “ Come,” says she, to the men of the city, “ come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ?” † Now, how did the Samaritans treat this conclusion of their townswoman ? Did they entertain doubts about the soundness of her doctrine ? Did they deny the inference she had come to ? Did they hesitate, as if the premises did not warrant the conclusion ? These questions are answered by the simple narrative of the historian :—“ Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” ‡ “ And many of the Samaritans of that city

* Isaiah, xi. 1, 2, 3.

† John, iv. 29.

‡ John, iv. 30.

believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.”*

Now, in order to understand this argument, let us make a supposition :—There are a number of men who have been overtaken by misfortune ; they are in extreme poverty ; they are unable to liquidate their just debts, and they are apprehensive every moment of being thrown into prison. They have, however, a friend and benefactor on whom they greatly rely ; his kindness and beneficence they have often experienced ; he has rescued them from their greatest dangers ; he knows their present situation, and he has declared he will not desert them in this their last distress : he has promised to send his son to relieve them ; he has given them some idea of the time when his son will be with them ; and he has told them that his son is acquainted with their circumstances equally with himself. The time when their deliverer was to come is already arrived, and they are in anxious expectation of him. If, at this time, one of these persons should find a stranger who should talk familiarly with him concerning their circumstances, and who should mention to him particulars which none but their benefactor knew, would he not, even before the stranger had time to explain the nature of his message, immediately conclude him to be the person they expected, and would there not be a just foundation for the conclusion ?

Now, the circumstances here are precisely the same. The Jewish nation were sunk in the deepest distress. They had often experienced the favour of God, and they trusted he would not forsake them. He had promised to send his Son to redeem them ; and they

* John, iv. 39.

anxiously looked for this promised Redeemer. The Spirit of the Lord was to rest upon him—the spirit of knowledge and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might : he was to be of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. When, then, Nathanael found that our Saviour, though absent, was witness to those secret devotions which he performed in the fear of Jehovah, did he not reasonably conclude that this was the branch from the stem of Jesse on whom the Spirit of the Lord was to rest ?

Let me, in the next place, point out to you the improvement of this subject.

In the *first* place, Let us learn hence to come to the examination of religion with candid and unprejudiced minds. Nathanael, agreeably to the prejudices and opinions of his countrymen, was convinced that nothing good could come out of Nazareth ; but, hearkening to the testimony given him by his friend, he resolved to examine into the reports he had heard, and be swayed by the appearance of truth. Journeying towards our Saviour with this candid intention, the splendour of his omniscience burst upon his mind, and, forgetting the prejudices and attachments of his nation, he yielded to the force of conviction, and embraced the doctrine of our Saviour, as the word of God, with power.—It is true that we cannot now be addressed by our Saviour in person in words similar to those which we have in the text. Jesus has now withdrawn from the observation of men, and has ascended into the presence of his heavenly Father, to remain by the side of his glory till he shall appear in judgment at the great day. But the testimony which he has given us is still in our hands. The evidences of our religion are full and explicit, and sufficient for the conviction of

every candid mind. If, therefore, we come to the examination of religion with minds prepared to be influenced by the truth, we shall find it sufficient for the conviction of our hearts, and we shall be constrained to exclaim with Nathanael of old—"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."

In the *second* place, Let us admire the wisdom of God in accomplishing our salvation, by one endowed with infinite wisdom. Man is a reasonable being; he is endowed with the power of reflection and consideration, and the inspiration of the Almighty has given him understanding. In any change that is to be produced upon him, therefore, the means to be used must be adapted to the nature and faculties he has received. Every individual must be treated according to his nature, if any change is to be produced upon it. The stone that is to be removed from its place must be impressed with force, for of impulse only is it susceptible. The wild beast that is to be broken from its fierceness, must be subdued by hunger and severe correction; or, if its nature be more gentle, it must be soothed with softer treatment. But the mind of man is a being of a different kind; it is susceptible of persuasion; it is capable of conviction; it can perceive the force of truth, and feel its power and energy. In any change that is to be produced upon its character and sentiments, therefore, the means to be used must be adapted to his nature, and accommodated to the internal part of his constitution: they must be addressed to his reason and understanding.

And was not he who knew what was in man most capable of rousing the attention and convincing the understanding of man? Was not he who knew the heart most capable of touching the affections? Was

not he who was endowed with infinite wisdom most capable of stating the truth in a light most calculated to produce conviction? There is nothing that has a more powerful or universal influence on the minds of men than the appearance of wisdom: it elevates the humble in his lowly cell; it atones for the conceit of the proud; it is a garment of praise to the great; and it raises the poor even above the rich. How much more, then, must it recommend the virtuous, and sanction the opinions of the good?

In the *third* place, Is the knowledge of our Saviour so great? Then how careful ought we to be of all our actions. While he was on earth, he knew the thoughts and intentions of men: he is now exalted at the right hand of God, and he still searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. Are men ashamed to be seen by others while they indulge in their vices and their crimes? Does the midnight felon prowl under the cover of darkness to hide his deeds from view? Does the licentious libertine seek the secret hour to hide his midnight revels? How much more would they be afraid if they suffered themselves to consider that the all-searching eye of Jesus watched their secret steps? There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. If he thus knows the actions of men—if he thus can penetrate their most secret retirement—what hope can they have of escape in the day of judgment? He who now knows our actions is soon to be our judge; and, as certainly as his knowledge is unerring, so certainly his judgments shall be just. Let us fear, then, to commit a single action, or cherish a single thought, which we should wish to be hid from his view, or which we know his wisdom cannot approve.

How vain, also, is the formality and hypocrisy of those in the service of God, who flatter him with their lips, while their hearts are not right with him. Of all the devices that can enter into the heart of man to conceive, this is one of the boldest and most daring; it is also the most vain. To put on a mask of dissimulation before God! to draw near to him with the mouth, whilst the heart is not right with him! It is in vain that they thus worship God; and, if their very religion be vain, how great is that vanity.—We see here also the vanity of those who live in the neglect of the secret duties of religion. Many, it is to be feared, are guilty in this respect. They lay themselves down to the slumbers of the night, and rise to the labours of the morning, without ever bending the knee of prayer or opening the lip of praise. If such men are regular in their religious performances before others, what can be the cause of their neglect of secret duties? They do not consider that Jesus searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. Either they do not believe that he seeth in secret, or they do not consider that he will reward them openly.

In the *fourth* place, If this consideration should check the wicked in their iniquity, so ought it to encourage the upright in well-doing. He who sees and will bring to light the most secret deeds of the wicked, is also acquainted with and will suitably estimate the sincere services of the upright; and if the wicked should be ashamed and afraid of the knowledge and discrimination which Jesus will have of their ways, so may the good be encouraged and fortified by the same consideration; for the knowledge which our Saviour displayed of Nathanael's conduct was evinced by his approbation of his character. "Behold," says he, "an Israelite indeed,

in whom is no guile." Our Saviour's approbation of Nathanael is here expressed simply by a declaration of his qualities; for it requires no more to testify approbation of the good than merely the declaration that they are so, in the same way as it requires no more to evince disapprobation of the wicked than the simple assurance that their character is known. And this may serve to assure us that, although our excellence and worth may not receive its due reward from men, because they may mistake our character, and judge erroneously of our actions, yet this will not be the case in the estimation of the blessed Jesus. He will judge of us according to the truth and reality of our integrity; and no circumstance can disguise, more than it can conceal from his knowledge, either our sincerity or our devotion.

In the *last* place, Let this encourage us in our approaches to a throne of grace, in the assurance that our most secret prayers shall be heard. Nathanael's devotions under the fig-tree, though concealed from the knowledge of men, were witnessed by the absent Saviour. And we may be assured that those supplications which are heard by no mortal ear, are listened to by an omniscient Lord. But we must, for this purpose, remember, that if our prayers would be accepted by him, they must be sincere and earnest. As, from his infinite wisdom, he is acquainted with our secret devotions, so, from the same cause, he can discover their hollowness or deceit. How vain then is the hypocrisy of those who, in the worship of God, draw near to him with their mouths, while their hearts are far from him. Let us, therefore, worship him, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. He sees our most secret devotions, he hears our most private prayers; and, if our prayers to him in secret are made in earnest sincerity,

he will reckon us as Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.

May Almighty God grant that our characters may be approved by an omniscient Saviour, and that our prayers, presented in private or offered up before men, may be accepted of Him from whom not even the most secret imaginations of the heart are hid. Amen.

PUBLIC, OR CONCLUDING PRAYER.

O LORD, our God, thou art great, and thy name is great in might—the Lord of Hosts—the mighty One of Israel—among the gods there is none that is like unto thee. Thou art He that sitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers before thee. Thou stretchest out the heavens like a curtain; thou spreadest them out as a tent to dwell in. Thou hast laid the foundations of the earth that it cannot be moved. Thou hast also set bounds to the sea, saying, hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall the pride of thy waves be stayed.

Teach us, O Lord, to consider what we owe unto thee, who art the author of our existence and the source of our happiness—who art alone, and in the highest sense, our Father, and who standest in a nearer relation to us than any earthly parent can do. May we pay the love, the obedience, and the reverence of children; may we trust in thee; may we depend upon thee; may we promote thy glory in all things; and always may

we act, as far as we have power, in suitableness to our great obligations to God.

With ourselves, O Lord, we desire to remember before thee the whole of our brethren of mankind. Do thou, O Lord, do good unto all according to the pleasure of thine own will. Spread the knowledge of thy Son's gospel abroad over the face of the whole earth. May pure and undefiled religion, before God the Father, everywhere prevail. Reform the reformed churches of our religion more and more in simplicity, in purity, and in faith. Dwell in that part of thy vineyard which thou hast planted amongst us. Be for a wall of fire around our Zion, and the glory in the midst of her. May no weapon formed against her ever prosper. Be particularly gracious to this parish and congregation: high and low, young and old, rich and poor, do thou bless them all one with another. Bless them in their basket and in their store: above all, do thou bless them with all spiritual blessings in high places, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Bless all with whom we are connected by the ties of kindred or duty. Bless our friends, our well-wishers, our benefactors; forgive our enemies, and enable us to forgive them. Be a father to the fatherless; a husband to the widow; the orphan's stay, and the stranger's shield. Comfort those that mourn; bind up the broken heart; sooth and compose the disturbed and afflicted spirit.

We desire to intercede with thee in behalf of our native land, the united kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland, and the dominions and colonies connected with it. Bless our gracious Sovereign the Queen. Prosper her in all her interests, public and domestic. May she long reign over a free, a religious, and loyal people. Though raised above the ordinary ranks of life, and

placed in a public and exalted station, may she enjoy all the felicity of private and domestic bliss. Give thy favour to her royal consort, Prince Albert; and vouchsafe thine Almighty protection to their young and beloved children, the Prince of Wales and the Princess Royal.

Surround our Queen's throne with the wise and faithful of our land, men fearing God and hating covetousness. Counsel the deliberations of Parliament, and direct them to such measures as may promote the public prosperity and the domestic peace and happiness of this great empire. Bless all inferior rulers and magistrates. May they not wear the sword of justice in vain. May they be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise and protection to those that do well. Bless the whole body of the people. May they be distinguished for their regard for religious principles and observances, for their respect and attachment to the institutions of their country, and for their social and domestic virtues.

Follow with thy blessing the whole of the religious service in which we have this day, in this place, been engaged. May our religious observances tend to enlighten our hearts, to elevate and purify our affections, and to strengthen and establish us in the faith of what is revealed. Be graciously present with us in what awaits us of our duty at this time. May we sing to thy praise with devotion in our hearts and melody on our lips. Dismiss us with thy blessing. Enable us to spend the remainder of this day, and all the days of our lives, in thy fear and service. And all that we ask is in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

SECOND SABBATH.

MORNING PRAYER.

O LORD, thou art the most high God—the only Holy One—the Almighty Sovereign of heaven and of earth. Thou, O Lord, art from everlasting. All the gods of the nations are but idols ; but the Lord has made the heavens, even the heaven of heavens, with all their hosts.

And as, by thy great power, thou hast created all things, and brought them out of nothing into being, so, by thine infinite wisdom, hast thou preserved them in existence ; and they all continue this day according to thine appointment. The day is thine ; the night also is thine ; for thou hast made the light and the sun. Thou hast made summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. Thou appointest the moon for seasons, and the sun knoweth his going down. Thou givest thy snow like wool ; thou scatterest the hoar-frost like ashes. Thou castest forth thy ice like morsels, and who can stand before thy cold ? Thou sendest forth thy word, and melteth them. Thou causest thy wind to blow, and the waters flow : they descend from the mountains, they flow amongst the valleys, and the little hills rejoice on every side. Thou coverest the earth with clouds : thou preparest rain for the ground : thou greatly enrichest it from the river

of God, which is full of water. Thou settlest the furrows thereof. Thou preparest corn for it when thou hast so provided. Thou crownest the year with goodness, and thy paths drop fatness : they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness. The hills are covered over with flocks, and the valleys are clothed with corn. They shout aloud for joy, they also sing together. O Lord, how wonderful are all thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all. Thou commandedst, and they were created ; thou hast also established them for ever and ever.

We revere, O Lord, thy majesty and greatness, and adore the glory of thy wisdom, and power, and goodness, shining forth in all thy works. Thou art the everlasting God, who createdst all the ends of the earth ; who faintest not, neither art weary. Thou, Lord, art our God, and we are the workmanship of thy hands. Thou art he that made us, and not we ourselves. We are thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture.

While, O Lord, we adore thy great and glorious perfections, and rejoice in omnipotence, prompted by goodness, directed by wisdom, and exerted for the good of thy creatures, teach us to aspire after a conformity with thee in thy moral perfections, and to adorn our nature with all those excellences which are the glory of God. May we be holy, as he who called us is holy. May we be merciful, even as our Father in heaven is merciful. May we be righteous, even as he also is righteous.

But when, O Lord, we consider our ways, and look back on our past lives, we must acknowledge, with shame and sorrow, the many evils we have committed, and the little good we have done, in the several relations in which we have been placed in life. Thou

hast written thy law on our hearts, and revealed thy will to us in thy word ; thou hast united our happiness and our duty, and hast given us commandments, in the keeping of which there is an exceeding great reward ; thou hast given us exceeding great and precious promises, to animate our virtues, and make us partakers of thy Divine nature ; thou hast encouraged us to a patient continuance in well-doing, by the hopes of glory, of honour, and of immortality ; and thou hast deterred us from evil, by revealing thy wrath from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. Yet, O Lord, we have dared thy displeasure and despised thy grace ; we have abused thy goodness and neglected our own best interests ; we have forsaken thee, the source of life and the fountain of hope, and we have chosen those paths of folly that lead down to the chambers of death.

O Lord, our God, we would humble ourselves greatly before thee, and make confession unto God. To us belong shame and confusion of face, because we have sinned against thee. O that thou wouldst awaken in us that godly sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of. Smite, Lord, our hard hearts, and grant us that contrition of spirit which is a sacrifice thou wilt not despise ; touch our consciences with a sense of our sins before it be too late ; convince us of those sins that most easily beset us, before they have obtained dominion over us, and we find no place for repentance. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness have mercy upon us ; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out all our transgressions ; for we acknowledge our iniquities, and our sins are ever before us. Against thee, and thee only, have we sinned, and in thy sight done this evil. God, be merciful to us who are sinners ; make us to have joy and gladness,

that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice; create in us clean hearts, and renew right spirits within us; cast us not out of thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from us; restore unto us the joys of thy salvation, and uphold us by thy free grace.

We rejoice, O Lord, in the knowledge of thy salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. We thank thee that he came into this world to suffer and die in our room and stead; and, by one offering of himself, to perfect for ever them that are sanctified. O Lord, how wonderful is that scheme of redemption which thou hast wrought out for us, by one who, appearing in our nature, was the eternal Son of God. Justly may our souls be lost in wonder in the contemplation of this mysterious plan, that the guilty sons of men should be redeemed from deserved wrath and condemnation by the sacrifice of the immaculate and holy Jesus. O Lord, fill us with a desire to become sharers in this great salvation. May Christ truly have died for us; may we receive him by faith, that we may be made partakers of the merit of his death; may we be justified freely by his blood, and sanctified by the spirit, that we may be clothed with his righteousness in the great day of the Lord, and escape a sentence of condemnation.

Be with us, O Lord, at this time, in the performance of our respective services, in speaking and in hearing from a portion of thy word. Touch the lips of the speaker, as with a live coal from the altar of God, that he may not preach himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord. Give thy people the hearing ear, the understanding and believing heart. Let our services be accepted in the Lord. Let us be profited by them. And do thou pardon the imperfection of these services, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

LECTURE.

MATTHEW, XXV. 1—13.—“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

THE parables of our Saviour are illustrations of spiritual doctrines by the similitude of some external circumstance or story, to which they have an analogy. They are made use of by him in order to attract the attention of his audience to the divine truth which he means to convey, by exciting their curiosity to know the result of the story or supposition with which it is compared. By this means, truth is set before them in a more pleasing form, makes a deeper impression on their hearts, and is more easily remembered by them than it would have been had it been set before them in dry and abstract terms.

For understanding our Saviour's discourses of this kind, it is of the utmost importance to attend to the

scope and intention of the parable, to bear in mind what is the doctrine which he means to illustrate and enforce, and to consider what the practical truth is which the similitude is intended to inculcate.

Our Saviour himself sometimes explains and illustrates the parables of which he makes use, explaining to us the force of every circumstance, and illustrating the analogy of every particular. Thus, having made use of the parable of a sower, who, going forth to sow, cast some of the seed by the way-side, which the fowls of the air devoured—some in stony places, which, having no depth of earth, were scorched by the heat of the sun, and withered away—some amongst thorns, which sprung up and choked them—and some in good ground, which brought forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred fold—he proceeds, apparently at some little distance of time, to explain who the persons are whom he means to point out by every one of these descriptions. Sometimes, however, the explanation which he gives is confined to one or two sentences, which merely point out the moral or scope of the parable. Thus, in the parable of the vineyard let out to husbandmen, representing the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles, the whole improvement which he makes of it is contained in three verses,* the first of which applies the parable to himself in a quotation from the Psalms:—"Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."† The second contains the general scope of the parable in these words:—"Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

* Matthew, xxi. 42, 43, 44.

† Psalm, cxviii. 22.

And the third confirms the inference which the priests and elders had already drawn from it; and, in doing so, represents the severe doom of those who should reject the Gospel by a reference to the description given of it by the Prophet Isaiah.* And, at other times, we are left to gather the explanation of the parable from the context in which it stands, and from the tendency of the discourse which occasions it, as in the instance before us.

We are to be led to the explanation of this parable from the discourse in which our Saviour was engaged in the latter part of the preceding chapter, where he urges the duty of watchfulness, from the uncertainty of the time of his coming, and from the conclusion which he himself draws from the parable in the thirteenth verse, from which it appears that he is still pursuing the same design:—"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

The time, then, of which our Saviour was speaking, in the preceding chapter, was the time of our Saviour's coming to judgment; and of this time he continues to speak in this parable:—"Then," says he in the first verse, then when Christ shall come to judge the earth, and to call all men to an impartial account of their conduct, that is the time when the actions of men shall be brought to the touchstone; when the hearts of men shall be revealed; when a distinction shall be formed betwixt the wise and the foolish, the good and the bad; and when every one shall receive a just recompense of reward—"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins." The expression the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, is

* Isaiah, viii. 14, 15.

taken in two different significations in Scripture. Sometimes it signifies that kingdom which is to be enjoyed in another world by those who believe in Jesus. Thus our Saviour says—"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* "Now this I say, brethren," says the Apostle to the Corinthians,† "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." "Not every one," says our Saviour, "that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."‡ But, in a more frequent sense, it is taken to signify the dispensation of the Gospel. Thus John the Baptist preached, saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand:"§ that is, the Gospel scheme is just about to be opened. And in this sense it is taken in all the other parables of our Saviour in which he likens the kingdom of heaven to various similitudes.—In conformity with this interpretation, it must be obvious that the ten virgins, whose conduct forms the subject of our Saviour's observations, must represent the condition or behaviour of those who live under the Gospel; who, considering the dispensation of the Gospel as a kingdom, must necessarily be the subjects of that kingdom; and their joint profession of the Gospel must have its analogy in the parable in the virgins taking their lamps and going forth to meet the bridegroom. This part of the representation in the parable has its origin, we are informed, in an ancient ceremony in the institution of marriage among the Jews. And some commentators seem to be of opinion that something analogous to it still subsists in some eastern countries. But the ancient custom, at least, was for the bridegroom to lead home his bride under night

* John, iii. 3.

† 1 Corinthians, xv. 50.

‡ Matthew, vii. 21.

§ Matthew, iii. 2.

by the light of lamps or torches. On such occasions a number of young men accompanied the bridegroom, and an equal number of young women attended on the bride. These are supposed to be alluded to by our Saviour under the name of the “children of the bride-chamber.”* And it is also to these that our Saviour, under the mystical character of the bridegroom of the church, is supposed to refer, when he is prophetically represented as saying, “I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse : I have gathered my myrrh with my spice ; I have eaten my honey-comb with my honey ; I have drunk my wine with my milk : eat, O *friends* ; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”†

In this parable our Saviour supposes such a marriage to take place, and to be attended, as usual, by ten virgins, among whom there subsisted a remarkable difference of character. Verse 2.—“And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” This difference of character among the virgins is intended to intimate that all who profess the religion of Jesus are not equally stedfast and fruitful ; and that great infirmities and blemishes may be concealed under the showy garb of a splendid profession. Nothing, however, seems to be implied in the division of the virgins into wise and foolish, as to the proportion of the professors of the Gospel who shall be admitted into, or shut out from, the kingdom of heaven. Nothing, indeed, seems to be clearly or specifically intimated to us on this point in Sacred Scripture ; and, when the question was put directly by the disciples to the Saviour, he seems purposely to have avoided it. “Lord,” say they to him, “are there few that be saved ?” Had it been necessary or proper to answer the question, we may believe

* Mark, ii. 19.

† Song of Solomon, v. 1.

our Saviour would have done it; but he merely replies—
“ Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”*
Be not so solicitous to know how many shall be saved, as whether you shall be amongst the number. And this is, indeed, the great and important question with every true and sincere Christian—not so much who they are that shall be saved, as whether his own name shall be among them.

Among those who profess the Gospel, it is obvious that the wise virgins in the parable represent those who adorn their profession by a suitable and worthy practice; who bring forth the fruits of the Spirit which are in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth; such as abound in the graces and virtues of the Christian life; such as stand firm and unshaken against the pleasures and allurements of sin, which they wisely judge to be deceitful and unsatisfying, and bringing bitterness in the end; such as remain stedfast and unmoved against the storms and threatenings of an angry world, against the reproaches of the scornful, against the misrepresentations and calumny of the malicious, inasmuch as they know that it is but a little while, and they shall not only obtain a complete deliverance from the afflictions of the body, and the aspersions of a good name, but shall, if they endure to the end, be put in full possession of glory, honour, and happiness, that shall never know an end. They are such, in fine, as adorn their lives with all the ornaments of holiness and goodness, as beautify their minds with pure and pious dispositions, and are careful in practice to yield an exact obedience to the Divine laws, and to regulate their conduct by the pure and perfect precepts

* Luke, xiii. 23, 24.

of the gospel of peace, persevering, without variableness or shadow of turning, in all the ways of righteousness and truth.

These are called wise, because pure and undefiled religion, to which they pay a constant regard, is the best and truest wisdom. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”*

It is religion that directs to the greatest and most durable happiness; it is religion that secures the interest of the soul and the concerns of eternity; which is as much greater wisdom than the wisdom of the world, as the soul is nobler than the body, and eternity a more considerable duration than time. It is religion that secures the internal peace and tranquillity of the mind, which affords a more rational and manly pleasure than any of the transient enjoyments of sense. In fine, it is religion which gains the favour of God, which being obtained, what signifies the hatred and displeasure of the world. “In his favour is life;”† and “his loving-kindness is better than life.”‡

As the wise virgins thus represent the good and the stedfast professors of the Gospel, so the foolish virgins represent such as assume religion from false and sinister views—as know nothing of that noble principle of love to God, which is the best source of true religion—but trust entirely to the nature of their profession, its zeal, or its loudness, without regard to those graces and virtues of a good life which that profession necessarily requires. And it is lamentable to how many of the Christian profession this character of the foolish will apply. All men have a desire to be happy, and to escape the miseries of another world; but there are many who

* Proverbs, ix. 10.

† Psalm, xxx. 5.

‡ Psalm, lxiii. 3.

cannot be at pains to prepare any materials for happiness, or bring forth those worthy fruits of repentance, without which they can expect no interest in the Saviour's merits or atonement, to avert the wrath of an offended God. They, therefore, wish to substitute some other thing in the room of real goodness, which may pass with others, and deceive themselves, rather than be at pains to subdue their unruly passions, to mortify their corrupt affections, and conform their lives to the laws of the Gospel. They willingly, nay, they earnestly, grasp at something to palliate or cover over their wicked practices, but they cannot bear the thought of entirely giving them up.

It is on this account that religion has, in all ages, degenerated so much into little formal observances, and into zeal for lesser things, to the neglect of the weightier matters of the law. It is upon this account that so many are so loud and noisy in their profession—so keen and zealous in their particularities of opinion—whilst the great and important parts of practical religion, piety of life and reformation of manners, are left to perish. These men who thus trust to an empty profession of religion, without a conformable practice, may well be denominated foolish; for what greater folly can there be than for men, in matters of the greatest moment, to act against the declarations of Scripture, and, by their lives, to contradict their profession?

Our Saviour supposes the half of these virgins to have been wise and the half foolish; and the wisdom of the one he makes to consist in getting their lamps ready, and furnishing themselves in time with oil to feed them, that they might have light both whilst they waited for the bridegroom and whilst they conducted him to the house. The folly of the others he makes to

consist in the want of this care ; so that, when the bridegroom came, their lamps had gone out. “ They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them : but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” The design of these virgins, in taking their lamps, and going to meet the bridegroom, was to do him honour, and offer him the customary respect on the day of his marriage ; and, therefore, when it is said of the foolish that they took their lamps, we may presume that, at their outset, they made as good and as splendid an appearance as any of their neighbours. But here was their ruin ; they made no provision for the continuance of their service ; they took no oil with them to feed the flame ; so that, like the blaze of thorns under the pot, it made only a momentary flame which suddenly expired. Their appearance was a mere formal profession ; and what better than hypocrisy and pretence is a profession of religion without a practice conformable to it, and a constancy and perseverance in the paths of righteousness and truth ? It is the sincere exercise of every spiritual and divine grace that, like oil to the flame, nourishes and strengthens the profession, and makes it a light which shines so clearly before men as engages all who see its good works to glorify our Father who is in heaven.

“ But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” It was not their design to deceive mankind by a transient and showy appearance. Hypocrisy was not the principle that actuated them ; it was an upright and honest intention, and a sincere desire to approve themselves in the eyes of the bridegroom. Therefore they took oil with them in their vessels with their lamps, to brighten the light when it would otherwise become dim.

In the same manner, if Christians are indeed sincere

in their profession—if they assume religion from a good principle, and earnestly desire to please God by steadfastness and constancy in doing well—it will be their wish and endeavour to receive God's grace, and constant supplies of the Holy Spirit, to support that outward profession, and bear them up against all the opposition they may meet with till the coming of the Lord to judge the world.

Verse 5.—“ While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.” Both wise and foolish, being unable perfectly to watch, slumbered by the way. There is no perfection in the present state : the best and most eminent Christians may be overcome by infirmity ; and, though they suffer not their lamps to be extinguished, yet, for want of care and attention, they may burn dim. “ While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.”

The weakness of human nature—the strength of corruption within—the number of enticing temptations without—render an uninterrupted steadfastness, and a continual constancy and watchfulness, exceedingly hard and difficult. Even the disciples of our Saviour, while he was yet personally amongst them, and they had but shortly before received a charge from him to watch and pray lest they should enter into temptation, were yet so powerfully overcome as, the very same hour, to slumber and sleep. And who is there among us who does not, some time or other, slacken his diligence, and slumber on his guard, so as to prove an easy prey to the ceaseless attempts of a cunning and malicious enemy ? Many good Christians are at times careless and remiss in their preparation for Christ's appearance ; the most lively of their graces may, at some seasons, languish and decay, and their activity in their Master's work become enfeebled and relaxed.

I do not say this to encourage remissness, or to foster carelessness and sloth ; I speak it not to discourage the struggles and well-meant endeavours of the weak ; but I speak it to animate our courage, to enliven our diligence, and to quicken our activity and zeal in a careful preparation and watchful expectation of the coming of the Son of God—that our loins may be girded, and our lights burning, and we ourselves like unto them that wait for the coming of the Lord.

It should be our care, instead of fainting or growing weary, the more hard the task, and the more severe the work, to exert the greater activity and vigour ; and, the greater the hazards are which we run, to maintain the exacter watch over ourselves. It should be our care to avoid every appearance of evil, every shadow of sin, lest, by slow degrees and imperceptible steps, the enemy gain such an empire in our hearts as to lead us captive at his pleasure. Let us then watch and pray, that we may not be surprised slumbering when the bridegroom cometh, or living in sin when death and judgment overtake us.

Though Christ may delay his coming, he will appear at last : he will come to judgment ; and then his enemies shall know that forbearance is no release ; and his friends, to their comfort, that he that will come shall come, and shall no longer tarry. It is said in the sixth verse—“ And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh.” A cry shall come from heaven, arise ye dead, and come to judgment. The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and the trump of God ; and so terrible will be its peals, that they who are in their graves shall awake with trembling, and all the pillars of the earth shall shake.

And, what will increase the confusion and aggravate

the dread of this awful summons, it shall be made at midnight, at the most dismal and unseasonable time, when none that are alive and remain shall in the least expect it. Fast locked in easy sleep, and suddenly awakened into terror, unable to recollect themselves, motionless and pale, they must stand before the Creator.

The appearance of the Lord at the last day shall be sudden and unexpected. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."* It will surprise men unawares, because no man can tell when it will be. It will steal upon the world as a thief into a house; for "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."† And if it shall be thus sudden and unexpected, how much is it our duty to be well prepared for it; that, when the summons shall be given to go out to meet the Lord, we may not be surprised or confounded before his impartial tribunal? Let us consider what miserable confusion will cover the faces of ungodly men, when the angel that standeth upon the earth and the sea shall lift up his hand to heaven, and swear by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no more. What would they not then give for some short return of that time they had so wretchedly abused, to prepare for this terrible event? What worldly enjoyment, what sensual pleasure, what beloved passion, would they not cheerfully sacrifice for the small favour of some few days to repent and reform their ways? but it is then too late. The sun shall be darkened, the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven shaken. All nature must quickly feel the universal shock. The heavens shall be shrivelled up as a scroll; the earth shall be tossed from its centre;

* 2 Peter, iii. 10.

† Matthew, xxiv. 36.

the mountains and hills shall be overthrown ; and well were it for the wicked that they would fall on them, and hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

Verses 7 and 8.—“ Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are gone out.”

Well was it with the wise, they had only to trim their lamps to make them give a clear light ; but miserable was the condition of the foolish, their lamps were just expiring when their light was most required. And this significantly represents to us, that hypocrites, if they have sufficient guile, may keep up for a while a fair character in life, and the show of religion which they assume may dazzle the weak eyes of mortals. But what does this avail ? When they appear before the Son of man, that deceitful appearance, like the flame of an expiring lamp, will suddenly vanish, and leave them in obscurity and darkness. The difficulty to which they shall be reduced, will lead them to have recourse to others for a share of that oil which they had provided for their own supply ; a request equally absurd and fruitless, as is implied in the answer they received in the ninth verse.

“ But the wise answered, saying, Not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you : but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” As the man who is ready to sink in the waters is apt to catch at every feather that swims on the surface, if possible to keep himself afloat, so will the wicked, at the day of judgment, try every expedient, and have recourse to every shift, to save themselves ; but all will be as ineffectual as the foolish application of the virgins who would have shared of the oil which the wise had in store.

They may plead for a share of that grace which will

brighten the countenances of wise and true Christians, but no share of the merit of others can then be extended to them : every one must then stand on his own foundation ; every one must be tried by his own conduct. No imputation can be made to them from the grace of others : as the tree falls so must it lie. No obedience of one man can be imputed to another ; for the obedience of none can be greater than what is required of him.

These virgins being unable to procure a supply of oil from their neighbours, who had only what was sufficient for their own use, are represented as sent to the market to buy ; but this was a step taken out of all due season. Verse 10.—“ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage : and the door was shut.” This circumstance is represented agreeably to a custom that took place at these marriages : when the bridegroom came, the bridemaids who were attending on the bride went out to meet him and conduct him to the house where the bride was ; and when they entered, the door was shut, and the marriage proceeded.

And this may be regarded as a fair warning to such as put off their repentance to a bed of sickness, and perhaps of death. There can be but little chance that they who take no care in the time of life and health to prepare for another world, shall have any success on a bed of death. What can a poor mortal do in such a hurry of time, in such a confusion and amazement of mind, and so much pain, it may be, and weakness of body ? How can he hope that God will hear him in his extremity, when he is conscious that he despised this God in his greatest prosperity ? How can he expect that God will regard his repentance, that is forced from him in the day of his necessity, when he obstinately

refused to hearken in the day of God's mercy? Or how can he imagine that such an important work as that of preparation for another world shall, in the ordinary way of God's providence, be performed in so unsuitable a time? I don't assert the *impossibility* of a death-bed repentance. I only wish to impress upon you the folly of *trusting* to it; for, at least, it is difficult and rare, and no one would risk the success of his temporal affairs on such an uncertainty.

Verses 11, 12.—“Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”

When these virgins had obtained the oil they had gone to buy, they returned to the bridegroom's house, hoping yet to be in time for the marriage. Finding the door shut, they called to the bridegroom for entrance; but they had neglected the opportunity of waiting on him. The door was shut, and the ceremony begun; and he could not consider them as his friends, who had failed to pay him the customary and requisite service; his answer to them, therefore, was, “I know you not.” This is the sentence in the parable, and no less dreadful is the analogous sentence that will be passed at the great day on those who have not waited for the coming of the Son of man. Debarred from the presence of the Lord, they are shut out from the knowledge and intimate view of his nature, without the least gleam of hope that ever it will be better with them. The sentence is passed in the most solemn manner by him whose words are incapable of repeal, for they stand fast as the pillars of heaven, which cannot be shaken. It will not avail them, when he appears in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, to plead or call for mercy. The day of grace is spent, the door of mercy is shut, and he who

once appeared to save his people from their sins, shall then appear in the character of a just and impartial judge, who must turn a deaf ear to the cries of despair.

The moral or improvement of the parable is given us in the thirteenth verse :—“ Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” Keep a strict guard over yourselves, be continually vigilant, and always in readiness to welcome the Son of man.

Let us then be persuaded, as we know neither the day nor the hour of his coming, to make all due preparation for another world, that, when death shall overtake us, we may not be surprised—that, when the last trump shall summon us to judgment, our hearts may not fail us for fear, because of those things that are coming on the earth. Let us speedily resolve to break off our sins by repentance, that we may not have that great work to begin when our life is drawing near to a close. Let us carry always oil with us in our vessels, that our lamps may never withdraw their light. Let us be careful to abound in every heavenly and Divine grace, and to be filled with the fruits of the Spirit, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Let us frequently be employed in fervent prayer to God, as a duty which our Saviour himself joins to that of watching, that he may shed abroad his Spirit on our hearts : that he would inspire us with the love, and fit us for the practice of Godliness : that thus having a conversation becoming the Gospel ; that thus walking as children of the light and of the day, sober, vigilant, and holy, when Christ, who is our judge, shall appear, we may be presented faultless before his presence with exceeding joy. Amen.

INTERMEDIATE PRAYER.

O LORD, we desire again to draw near to thee, to offer up our supplications at the footstool of thy throne. Impress upon our hearts, we pray thee, the religious instructions to which we have now been called to listen. May our religious exercises, being accompanied by the influences of thy Spirit, tend to our spiritual improvement and advancement in grace and holiness; may we adorn the profession we make of the religion of Jesus, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, which are by Jesus Christ, to thy praise and glory; may we be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord; may we cultivate those graces and virtues of the Christian life which are an ornament of great price; may we adorn our lives with holiness and goodness; may we cherish in our hearts pure and pious dispositions; and, in practice, may we yield an exact obedience to the Divine law.

Do thou forbid that we should prove, in our preparation for the coming of the Son of man, like those foolish virgins, who, in going forth to meet the bridegroom, took no oil in their vessels with their lamps. May we not assume religion from false views, or private and sinister ends; may we not trust to the outward profession of it, or the mere observance of its institutions, to the neglect of those graces and virtues which it requires; but, in the exercise of every spiritual and Divine grace, may our profession be accompanied with a constancy

and perseverance in the paths of righteousness, and holiness, and goodness, and truth.

May it be our sincere wish to please God in all things ; may we desire to receive such constant supplies of strength from thee as may support us against all the opposition we may meet with in the path of duty, till the coming of the Lord to judge the world ; may neither the weakness of human nature, nor the strength of corruption that is in us, nor the enticing nature of the temptations with which we may be assailed, throw us off our guard in our preparation for eternity, or interrupt that continual watchfulness which is essential to our establishment in righteousness.

May we continually bear in mind that the great day of the Lord is approaching ; and that it may come upon us in a time when we think not of it, and an hour when we are not aware. Do thou forbid that we should put off the work of repentance till the season of sickness or the day of our death ; do thou forbid that we should be so occupied with the business of the world, and so negligent of the work of salvation, that at the coming of the Son of man the gate of mercy should be shut against us : may we watch because we know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh ; may we remember that he that will come shall come, and shall not always tarry ; may we therefore be always ready and prepared, that death may not surprise us unawares, but that, when he who is our glory shall appear, we may be with him where he is.

Do thou be graciously present with us as we are further to be engaged in meditating on the instructions of thy word at this time. Enable us to fulfil our respective duties with that circumspection and care, and that sacred regard to thy known and revealed will, that is

becoming in those who are sensible of the solemnity and responsibility of the service. All these blessings we pray thee to bestow upon us, for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son. Amen.

SERMON.

THE CHRISTIAN GRACES SUPERIOR TO MIRACULOUS GIFTS.

I Corinthians, xii. 31.—“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”

IN the first ages of Christianity, God thought proper to confer extraordinary powers on his people for enabling them to support the truth in opposition to those storms of persecution which harassed it on all hands, and to overcome the prejudices of men's minds, which tended to tarnish and deface its beauty. A power of working miracles was absolutely necessary to any person who should attempt to gain the attention of the Jews, or produce any considerable reformation on their minds; for they were more apt to be wrought upon by supernatural appearances than by any ordinary evidence, however plain and conclusive. As our blessed Saviour, therefore, derived his commission from heaven, it was absolutely necessary that it should be confirmed by miracles. This the nature of the thing required; for nothing else could be evidence in the case. But God, out of his abundant mercy, and in compliance with the general bent of the Jewish inclination, continued this miraculous power with the Apostles, which was also

conferred on many private Christians. Upon the day of Pentecost, when the twelve were met together, the influence of the Holy Spirit was communicated to them in a more liberal and extensive manner than it ever before had been : they were more fully informed of the extent of their commission to teach all nations ; and they were miraculously endowed with all necessary qualifications for that purpose. In an instant they received a faculty of speaking all languages, at least as many as they had occasion to use in the course of their ministry ; a power of foretelling future events, of dispossessing devils, and of curing all manner of diseases. The power of healing diseases, indeed, was conferred upon them before our Saviour's death, when they were sent forth on a particular charge ; but it is reasonable to believe that they had these miraculous gifts bestowed upon them in a more liberal manner on that solemn occasion when they were sent forth to act upon a wider sphere and more extensive commission.

Some of those, likewise, who were not called to travel for the propagation of the Gospel, had the same miraculous power conferred on them for the edification of the Church and the conviction of unbelievers. Hence, it was usual, in Christian assemblies, for the people to speak in foreign languages, whilst others interpreted ; some to prophecy, some to exhort, and others to cure diseases ; and, as the exercise of these powers was left to human discretion, they were sometimes apt to interfere and disturb the harmony and good order of society. The Apostle, therefore, in the fourteenth chapter of this Epistle, earnestly recommends to the believing Corinthians in these matters to study decency and the good of the Church.

And as the same gifts, and equal degrees of the

same gift, were not conferred on all, it appears, from the chapter where our text lies, that there had arisen animosities and emulations among them. In order to allay these, the Apostle intimates to them, that, though there were diversities of gifts, yet it was the same spirit from which they proceeded; that, though there were diversities of operations, yet it was the same God that wrought all in all; and that God divided to every one his different offices and functions, in the same way as each particular member of the natural body has its office allotted to it for the health and good order of the whole. By this apt similitude, he intimates to them that it was absolutely necessary, in the economy of the Christian Church, that there should be men of different talents; and that it was as absurd for them to envy the superior abilities of others of their brethren, as it would be for the feet to envy the ears the faculty of hearing, or the eyes the privilege of sight; and, by the same similitude, he at the same time recommends to them that mutual sympathy and union of interests that prevail in the members of the natural body, which suffer in general the calamities of each other, and make their peculiar excellences subservient to the common good. “But covet earnestly the best gifts,” says he, “and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.” As if he had said, I do not blame you for desiring those gifts and qualifications that may render you conspicuous among your brethren; yet to be of an humble and charitable temper—to be fully satisfied with the measure which God has allotted to you, and not to envy the superior abilities of others of your brethren—is a character more truly excellent, and of greater estimation in the sight of God, than any external dignity. That this is the meaning of the text, is plain, from the whole strain

of the chapter to which it is added as a conclusion, as well as from the tenor of the subsequent one, which is employed in the praise of this noble and Christian disposition.

I propose, on this subject, *first*, to explain to you, in a few words, the nature of this temper which the Apostle calls a more excellent way.

In the *second* place, I shall shew you its advantage over all supernatural gifts.

And, *thirdly*, I shall recommend it to your practice by a few plain arguments.

In the *first* place, This more excellent way which the Apostle recommends, appears, from the context, to consist of piety and resignation to the will of God, and charitable affections to our fellow-men. If we revere our Creator in the days of our youth—if we think of him with pleasure and enlargement of mind—if we reflect on all his benefits with suitable sentiments of his unmerited goodness—if we determine to use our faculties in adorning our nature, and contributing to the happiness of the world around us—if we receive every event that is measured out to us with humble and cheerful resignation—if we make not our own happiness the sole object of our concern, but are ever ready to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep—and if, without repining, we can see others exalted above us, and receiving greater blessings from the hands of God than we are permitted to enjoy—then may we reflect, with comfort to our own hearts, that we have been enabled to walk in this excellent way.

In the *second* place, I am to inquire on what account this pious and charitable temper is preferred to all miraculous and supernatural gifts. And here we may appeal to the feelings of every man's mind, whether he

would not have a greater personal esteem for one who is a lover of God, and a lover of mankind—for one who is temperate, and just, and beneficent—than for one who is destitute of these amiable qualities, but endowed with a power of foretelling future events, of healing the sick, or of speaking languages without being taught. There is nothing we so much approve as a pious, sincere, and honest disposition. No faculty, either natural or acquired, can render a character estimable in our sight that is destitute of these. Could a man pretend to all knowledge—were he able to number the stars of heaven—understood he all the powers of nature, and the latent springs that move this mighty universe—had he strength and beauty, and a refined genius in the nicest and most curious arts—yet, if he be a despiser of God and a hater of mankind, if he lead a vicious and abandoned life, and display in his conduct indifference to the welfare of the world, we look upon his character with horror, and, if we do not hate him—a passion which finds no place in the breast of a Christian—we, at least, regard him as one of the most despicable of his species. It is not enough to reconcile us to the character of Balaam, for instance, that he was employed to reveal the will of God, and supernaturally inspired for that purpose, so long as the Scriptures inform us that he was a sorcerer, covetous, impious, and deceitful. Neither will it be an unjust sentence which our Lord will pass at the last day on those who had been endowed with the spirit of prophecy, been enabled to dispossess devils, and permitted to work miracles in his name, when, notwithstanding, he shall profess unto them—“I know you not whence ye are, depart from me all ye workers of iniquity;” for there is no faculty or privilege, however high in its nature, that can be of any consideration in the sight of God, unless it

be exerted under the influence of a pious and charitable temper.

But piety and charity must also be more valuable than any external gift or faculty, as that which gives value to anything, which would otherwise be insignificant without it, must of necessity be more valuable than that to which it contributes. Suppose a man can heal the sick, yet if he have no love to God, no regard for his creatures, how shall he exercise his talent? He cannot, on this supposition, relieve any man from a desire to benefit him; because he is destitute of charity. Neither can he do it from a regard to God, or a sense of the equity of his commandments; for this would require piety, another grace excluded by the supposition. If, then, he exert his miraculous power at all, he must either do it from vanity and ostentation, or from a dread of the vengeance of heaven. How infinitely preferable to such a character must we reckon that of every pious and charitable Christian, who, though incapable of curing a disease with a word, yet sympathises with his fellow-creatures in their afflictions, and contributes his endeavours towards their recovery, from a sincere regard to their welfare, and in obedience to the will of his Heavenly Father.

I am now, in the *third* place, to recommend this duty to your practice by some plain arguments. And, in the *first* place, let me recommend it to your practice from its beauty and gracefulness, and the dignity it adds to the person possessed of it.

It is evident that we never contemplate anything with so much satisfaction, considered as forming a part of a system, as when it appears evidently conducive to the perfection of that whole with which it is connected. This relation gives it a certain grace, which disposes

us to regard it with admiration. But let a thing be ever so beautiful in itself, yet if it have a tendency to promote confusion in that order of things in which it is placed, we no longer regard it with satisfaction, but determine it to be useless and incommodious. If, for instance, in any compound machine there should be a wheel of the most precious metal, skilfully executed, and adorned with the nicest touches of art, yet if its motion hold no correspondence with the other parts of the work—if it interfere with them in their revolutions, and jar with everything around it—we should reject it, notwithstanding its finery, and desire to have its place supplied by another, though of coarser metal and inferior workmanship, better adapted to the constitution of the whole, and contributing more to the regularity of its operations. This holds universally in all material systems, and must, with equal reason, obtain in the intellectual nature. For if it be agreeable to see any part of inanimate nature proceeding with a certain propensity towards the end of its being, and contributing to the perfection of the material world, how much more beautiful must it be, in a higher order of things, to observe a rational being contributing to the perfection of his nature, and pursuing, with design and intention, the interest of that superior world to which he more properly belongs? The order of the heavens is beautiful to behold; the planets circling round the sun, and regarding him as their centre, by whose continued influence they are preserved in their orbits, and prevented from wandering through the void of space, mutually communicating, for the benefit of each other, that light and heat which they had freely received from the great light. But how much more beautiful is it, in a higher order of things, to behold the pious looking up to God, the author of

their existence ; never departing from the end of their creation, nor forsaking the interest and society of his creatures, but freely communicating with their Christian brethren what they have freely received from the hands of their Father.

The excellence of this pious and charitable disposition will farther appear from its advantage to society, and the effect which it has in promoting everything truly good and conducive to the happiness of the world. Every bad man sheds a malignant influence around him ; his corrupt example and evil communications are infectious ; his wrathful and outrageous conduct assimilates others to his violent character ; for besides man's natural propensity to imitation, the injuries he does them excite their revenge, and revenge insensibly leads to the same violence and outrage. If he be covetous, or pursue unlawful pleasure, his companions easily catch the infection ; especially if, by any appearance of excellence, he still retain a place in their esteem. Thus is vice rendered familiar to their eyes, and stript of that hideous form which it always wears to those who have not been accustomed to its view ; and when the horror of vice is once removed, it undermines, by degrees, every good disposition, and overshadows, in time, the whole of a character. Nor is its influence confined to those who are near, or exposed, by their situation, to the sphere of its attraction. Often have vicious practices, invented or imported by a few, been spread by the influence and example of a court, infected the places of dignity and trust, and overrun, by degrees, the whole of a nation. " Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth !"

But if vice be fruitful and propagate its likeness around it, so also do religion and virtue. A good

man, encompassed by a wicked society, sets before them in his life an example of tender charity and heroic virtue: he displays to their admiring eyes the dignity of conscious and unaffected integrity; and, by rendering honour for insults, kindness for injury, for cruelty mercy, he teaches them to despise their own violent and injurious behaviour, and allures them to the love and practice of goodness.

Let me recommend to you this pious and charitable temper, from its good effect upon ourselves in quieting those disorders that arise in our minds, and in furnishing us with the most noble and refined satisfaction.

In the present state we are exposed to many trials and temptations. The condition in which we are placed does not admit of our being completely happy. Every man must meet with many things contrary to his inclinations, and be often frustrated in his fondest hopes; and if he be not prepared against these events by a pious and charitable temper, they will sit heavy on his mind, and unfit him both for performing the offices of life, and for enjoying anything that is good or comfortable in it. But if he be possessed of this happy disposition, he will regard everything that befalls him as designed by the Supreme Being for the good of the universe. He will submit to the visitations of Providence as wounds inflicted by the hands of a friend; for he knows that God can do his people no real evil, because he has put it in their power to profit by every dispensation.

Nor will a man of a pious and charitable temper be easily disturbed by the injuries he may receive from others. Himself a friend to all mankind, he is ready to put the most favourable construction on all he may suffer from them. He will ascribe it to proceed, in one

person, from ignorance ; in another, from prejudice ; in a third, from mistaken notions of real character He will be unwilling to imagine their injurious behaviour to proceed from cool and deliberate malice : but, being fully satisfied of the uprightness of his character and the equity of his intentions, he cannot fail to regard every man as a friend to what he really is, though he may entertain personal prejudices against him arising from mistaken notions of his true character. These reflections will naturally arise in the mind of every charitable man, and have a great influence in moderating his resentment, and keeping his mind free from those violent passions that harass the angry and revengeful every moment of their lives ; intruding on their softest hours of life, and mingling with all their enjoyments.

Again, a pious and charitable temper gives a man an opportunity of enjoying the most noble and refined satisfaction of which our nature is susceptible.

It is here to be observed, that the proper happiness of a reasonable being consists in the exercise of right affection, and the contemplation of perfection and excellence. There is a pleasure arising from the view of abstract truth, and the order and arrangement of material objects ; but, where there are none of the more noble and generous affections of the soul exerted—no love, no gratitude, no beneficence—the pleasure is of an inferior nature, and but of short duration. Were an atheist to employ himself in considering the order and economy of this noble universe, he might wonder indeed at the lucky accident that put things so handsomely together, but he could feel no joy, no satisfaction, comparable to that of the pious heart, when he contemplates the external face of nature, not only as beautiful in itself, but regards it with a certain interested affec-

tion, as an express image of the ideas of that Almighty mind which he loves and adores. Every instance of goodness in the constitution of things, warms his gratitude and inflames his love; and, as these affections are pleasant in the exercise and pleasant in the review, they constitute an entire felicity, infinitely superior to that which results from the most successful inquiry into speculative truth, or the nicest sense of external order and proportion.

Thus it is manifest that love to God makes the contemplation of the universe, which is in itself extremely agreeable, still more delightful, and constitutes indeed by far the greater part of the enjoyment. Forasmuch as right affection is preferable to mere science—as much as the generous emotions of the heart are attended with greater satisfaction than the cravings of curiosity—so much more pleasure must the pious and charitable mind feel above the mere inquirer.

Another source of pleasure that is open to every pious and charitable man, is the privilege of reflecting on that tenor of conduct which he observes as regulated by a regard to the Divine will, and a sense of the relation he stands in to his fellow-men. There can be nothing more satisfactory to a neighbour than the sense of having always behaved with civility and kindness: there can be nothing more agreeable to a friend than the consciousness of being always steady and constant in his affection: there can be nothing more delightful to a father or a son than the conviction of having constantly discharged the duties of these relations. Must it not then give infinite satisfaction to every well-disposed mind to reflect that he has acted honourably in the highest of all relations, and behaved in a becoming manner towards his God?

Nor is a charitable disposition towards our neighbours attended with less agreeable feelings: indeed, it constitutes so great a portion of our happiness, that no man can find in his heart to live without it. Even tyrants and robbers, who should seem, by the general tenor of their conduct, to be utterly destitute of kind affection, have been found to enter into the strictest friendships with particular persons. His own private affairs are too narrow a sphere for the exercise of any man's mind; and, were men insensible to social gratification, even in the hurry of the world, he would languish as in a solitary waste, and overlook many of those refined gratifications which engage a great share of his attention, and furnish the noblest employment to the faculties of his mind. How great, then, must be the pleasure of the charitable man, who partakes of all the good that falls within his observation, and shares in the happiness of all around him. Though he himself be poor, yet he can look without repining on the affluence of the rich. Though he should be afflicted in his body—though he should be unjustly injured in his reputation—though he should be of small account in the world for power, wisdom, or ability—yet, possessing his soul in patience, he can enjoy all these in the fortune of his friends; for *he* really enjoys anything who is thereby made better; and he is, undoubtedly, benefited by the prosperity of others, who thence finds occasion of exercising the noblest affection, and reaping the most refined satisfaction. Even the exercise of pity, which is attended with a greater degree of pain than any other charitable affection, does not want its share of pleasure. There is a certain self-approbation which attends the consciousness of a compassionate temper, which counterbalances the bitter part, and renders it far more plea-

sant than painful, whilst even the pain with which it is attended is agreeable. Let him who has ever experienced it, tell how sweet it is to rise in behalf of injured merit, and assert the cause of defenceless innocence. When our tears flow for the sake of the unfortunate who are upright, it is a noble sorrow that needs no repentance; for the pains of virtue are sweeter than the pleasures of sin. Thou selfish soul, then, whoever thou art, solace thyself with thine own enjoyment; drink deep of the cup of thine own pleasure; return to the draught the hundredth time; yet a wretched being thou still must be. Destitute of the noblest satisfaction of the mind, thou shuttest thy heart against the felicity of others, and madly convertest to an instrument of torment what might serve to increase thine own felicity.

May Almighty God inspire us all with this pious and charitable temper, that, living in the world with peace and comfort, we may be prepared for a glorious and happy immortality.

PUBLIC, OR CONCLUDING PRAYER.

O LORD, praise waiteth for thee in Zion, and to thee shall the vow be performed. We will extol thee our God and King; we will bless thy name for ever and ever. We bless thee for all the discoveries which thou hast made of thyself and of thy perfections to the children of men. Of old thou camest down upon Mount Sinai, and madest thyself known to our fathers from heaven. Thou commandedst them precepts, and statutes, and laws, by the mouths of Moses and the prophets.

We bless God that thou, who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spakest to our fathers by the prophets, hast, in these last days, spoken to us by thy Son. O Lord, grant us wisdom and grace to receive him as that great prophet whom thou hast raised up, whom we are bound to obey. May we believe, from the heart, that form of sound doctrine which has been handed down to us. May Christ dwell in our hearts by faith. May he be made unto us wisdom, and sanctification, and redemption. May that God of peace, who taketh away the sins of the world, make us perfect in every good work.

May we study to honour and obey thee in all things which thou hast made known to us as thy will. May we rejoice in thee as the giver of all grace and mercy. Make us glad in the light of thy countenance, and cover us with the shadow of thy wings. As obedient children, let us not fashion ourselves according to the world that yet sitteth in darkness, and ignorance of the great things thou hast done for us; but, having all things given unto us pertaining to life and godliness, may we walk worthy of him who hath called us to his kingdom and glory.

Thou hast commanded us to make our prayers and supplications for all men; and we entreat thee to extend thy mercy, and the knowledge of thy kingdom, to enlighten the whole world. Let the unsearchable riches of Christ be preached among the Gentiles; and make all men to see what is the fellowship of the mystery which, from the beginning of the world, has been hid in God. May the nations to whom the Gospel has been preached, by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, be kept sensible of their great obligations to God, and walk worthy of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Dwell, we pray thee, in the lands of Great Britain and Ireland. Prevent the judgments which our sins have deserved, and bestow upon us those favours which we have not merited at thy hands. Be not provoked, by the carelessness or indifference of the people to religious things, to remove the kingdom of God from among us, and to leave us in the darkness and shadow of death. Make us to feel the power and live under the influence of that faith which we profess, proving what is acceptable to the Lord, and always abounding in every good work.

Bless thy servant our Sovereign the Queen. May she long reign in righteousness and peace over these realms, and live in the hearts and affections of her people. Bless her royal consort, Prince Albert. May they enjoy every domestic blessing which can spring from mutual attachment and affection. Watch over the infant years of the Prince of Wales and Princess Royal. Deliver them from, or support them under, and bring them out of all the diseases and dangers incident to childhood and youth. May they be brought up in the fear of God, as the only sure source both of comfort and stability even to their exalted station. May the whole Royal Family delight to do thy will, and be made happy in thy favour.

Guide those who govern under our Queen in the faithful discharge of their duty, to the suppression of vice, and the protection of religion and virtue. Let thy Holy Spirit ever actuate the ministers of the Gospel of Jesus, that thy work may prosper in their hands, that the whole people may be brought to the acknowledgment of the truth which is after godliness, and be built upon in the most holy faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Bless this corner of thy Church, and dwell in this congregation. Bless the whole of this people with all

Divine blessings, as thou seest them most to need. May those of higher rank be distinguished by their goodness, and be eminent patterns of piety and holiness to all around them. Relieve the wants of the distressed ; comfort the afflicted ; sanctify every dispensation, and make all things work together for good to them that love thee. Preserve the stranger ; support the fatherless and widow ; give food to the hungry ; spare useful lives ; prepare those that are appointed to die, for death, judgment, and eternity. Watch over a young and rising generation. Let them be trained up in the fear of God, and instructed in such principles of sound knowledge and true religion as enlarge and inform the mind, and preserve and govern the heart and life. Awaken sinners to a sense of their sins. Confirm the saints in the holy faith ; comfort their hearts, and establish them in every good work. Prosper the labours of the poor and industrious, and defeat the designs of the deceitful and wicked. May those that go to sea in ships, whether in the pursuit of their lawful calling, or in quest of a habitation and place of rest, or for whatever other causes, be under thy peculiar care. When they see thy wonders in the great deep, and their soul is melted because of trouble, then do thou make the storm a calm, and cause them to see how great and powerful a deliverer thou art, and how able and ready to help them that trust in thee.

Repay the kindness of all who have done us good. If there be any who do us evil, we pray thee to forgive them, and bring them to a better mind. Bless our friends and relations, and all in whose happiness we have an interest. Guide them, by thy counsel, in the ways of wisdom and holiness, and conduct them to the possession of thy heavenly kingdom.

We wish well to the whole human race. We rejoice in the propagation of happiness, of righteousness, of wisdom, and of religion. And we earnestly pray that the knowledge of the truth and the spread of the Gospel of peace may be great and wide, and carry with it comfort and blessedness to the uttermost parts of the earth. Let thy word and Spirit be counsellors to us, to keep us in the paths of wisdom and righteousness.

Follow with thy blessing the services in which we have now been engaged. Assist us in singing to thy praise. Send us from thy presence with thy peace and favour. Forgive the sins even of our holy things; for, even in these, we come short and offend. Keep our hearts in thy fear, that we may ever seek thy favour, and, finally, attain thine everlasting salvation.

And unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory, and majesty, and dominion, and power, now and for ever. Amen.

THIRD SABBATH.

MORNING PRAYER.

O LORD, thou art the blessed and only Potentate, who alone inhabitest the regions of eternity, dwelling in light inaccessible and full of glory, and to which mortal sight cannot approach. Thou art infinitely high and exalted in thy nature, and the praises of men and of angels can make no accession to thy glory; for thy happiness is secured beyond the reach of accident or change. From everlasting to everlasting thou art God, without either variableness or shadow of turning. Thou art the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever. With thee a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years.

Thou art also, O Lord, infinitely great and powerful. Thou didst form this world out of nothing, by the word of thy power; thou spakest, and it was done; thou commandedst, and all things stood fast. Thou didst rear up the mountains, giving laws to the winds and the seas, and ruling the violences of nature with a powerful and irresistible hand. The heavens, also, and all the hosts which they contain, are the workmanship of thy hand. Their changes and revolutions mark thine infinite wisdom; their magnitude and unbounded space shew forth thy greatness and thy power. Thou coverest thyself with light as with a garment, and thy throne is sur-

rounded with the splendour of inaccessible glory. Thou art glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, continually doing wonders.

Thou lookest on the earth, and it trembles; thou touchest the hills, and they smoke; thou holdest the waters in the hollow of thy hand; thou measurest out the heavens with a span; even the dust of the earth thou numberest; thou weighest the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth go continually before thy face.

With fear, O Lord, and reverential awe, confessing our sins, and deploring the corruption of our nature, it behoves us, at all times, to approach thee. That we have broken thy commandments, that we have neglected thy precepts, that we have transgressed against thy holy law, we sincerely acknowledge and confess. Should we endeavour to justify ourselves, should we attempt to palliate our sins, or should we dare to deny them, our own hearts would condemn us. We, therefore, entreat thee, O thou searcher of hearts! who knowest the thoughts contained in the inmost recesses of our breasts, enter not into judgment with us; for, in thy sight, no flesh living can be justified. Remember not, O Lord, against us our former iniquities, and let thy goodness prevent us from falling into the same snares. May neither the cares of this world, nor the deceitful influence of riches, nor the corrupt customs of the world, ever induce us to forsake thy holy law. Let thy precepts be our instructor; let thy will be our guide; let the example of Christ for ever conduct our steps; that, hereafter, our whole lives may be such as become the friends and the disciples of Jesus.

We rejoice, O Lord, in the hope of salvation which

thou hast set before us through Jesus Christ thy Son. We bless thee that he came from heaven to save us; by the sacrifice of himself to make atonement for our transgressions, and to deliver us from guilt and condemnation. O give us thy grace, to incline and to enable us to receive him. Through thy Divine Spirit, may we be led to accept of him as all our salvation and all our desire. We need, O Lord, thy assisting Spirit to overcome our indifference, as well as to subdue our corruption. Let us be no longer insensible of our need of a Saviour. Excite in us the desire, and give us the power of coming unto him; that, by the exercise of faith in him, we may be renewed in our hearts, and reformed in our lives, and purified from all corruption of the flesh and of the spirit. Let us not, O Lord, continue any longer indifferent to our own best and highest interests. May the salvation of our souls become to us our chief end and aim; and may every temporal pursuit and every temporal gratification, inconsistent with these, be subdued within us.

We thank thee, O Lord, for all the means of grace and all the instruments of devotion. We bless thee for the reading and hearing, but, especially, the preaching, of the word. May they become, in thy hand, to us the means of salvation. Do thou open and enlarge our understandings, that we may be enabled to profit by these services. We employ thy Divine assistance as we are now to be engaged in them. Give us composure of spirit and solemnity of thought, that we may be fit for such sacred employments. Be especially assisting to us, we pray thee, in speaking and in hearing from a portion of thy word. Bring Divine truth in a seasonable time to the mind of the speaker. Dispose thy people to hear without prejudice. Enable them to

overlook the imperfection of the instrument through which Divine truth is conveyed to them, and to fix their whole thoughts on the things represented, so far as they are consonant to thy mind and will. And may all our services, presented in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer, find acceptance in thy sight, now and for ever. Amen.

LECTURE.

MATTHEW, xxv. 14—19.—“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.”

THESE verses contain our Saviour's parable of the talents that were committed to the several servants upon their master's taking a journey into a far country. And the design of it is to teach us that our condition in this world is not a state of sloth and inactivity, but a state of diligence and business; and that our success with regard to the things of another life depends on our wise management of this.

The parable of the ten virgins, in the preceding verses, shews us the necessity of habitual preparation and actual readiness for the coming of the Son of God,

since they who had oil in their vessels had only to trim their lamps and enter in with the bridegroom to the marriage; whereas they whose oil was spent had the door shut against them while they went to buy; and whether they found opportunity of making the purchase, was of no importance. They had neglected it in its proper season. They sought to repair their error too late; and, before they could effectuate it, the door was shut, and could not be opened. This parable, on the other hand, shews the necessity of diligence and activity in the business of our souls, and of a wise improvement of present opportunities, as the best means of forming our souls to that stedfastness and preparation that shall procure us a welcome reception from the Son of man when he comes to judgment.

The parable which we have here set before us is recorded also by the evangelist, Luke;* but there is a striking difference in the manner in which it is narrated by the two historians. The evangelist, Luke, makes no difference in the sum which was given to the several servants, but makes a great difference in the improvement which they made on the same sum. Each having received one pound, one of the servants gained ten pounds; another, of his pound, made five. In the narration of this evangelist, one of the servants received five talents, and gained five talents beside them; another received two talents, and made of them other two. The time also in which the parable is said to have been delivered by the two evangelists is different. Luke makes it to have happened earlier in our Saviour's history than is done by Matthew; the former placing it before the parable of the vineyard let out to husbandmen, whilst the latter

* Luke, xix. 12.

places it after its delivery. These circumstances have led some commentators to conclude that the two parables are altogether different: but there does not seem to be any necessity for such a supposition. It is certainly not difficult to conceive that our Saviour repeated his parables at different times to nearly the same effect, for his instructions were, no doubt, frequently delivered, not only to different audiences, but also repeatedly pressed on the same hearers; in the same way as we find that our Saviour performed even miraculous works very nearly similar to others which he had performed at an earlier period, with only some small alteration of circumstances; of which kind are his feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, and four thousand with seven loaves and a few fishes.*

With respect to the difference in the time in which the parable is said, by the two evangelists, to have been delivered, it is to be remarked, that there are many of the events of our Saviour's life which are not recorded in the same order by the different evangelists. Thus the storm at sea, and the cure of the demoniacs, are mentioned by this evangelist before the calling of Matthew, and by Mark and Luke after it.† Thus also the cure of Jairus' daughter is recorded by Matthew before the choosing of the twelve disciples, and by the other evangelists subsequent to it.‡

But there is so striking a resemblance betwixt the two parables, that we cannot help regarding them as the same. The improvement which the servants make

* Matthew, xiv. 17—21.; xv. 32—38.

† Compare Matthew, viii. 24—28, and ix. 9, with Mark, iv. 37, and iii. 18, and Luke, viii. 23—27.

‡ Compare Matthew, ix. 18—26, and x. 1, and Mark, iii. 13, and v. 22, &c.

of the sums committed to them, though it be not the same in the two parables, yet has a striking analogy; and the reward bestowed upon them is, in both, proportioned to the improvement made. The unprofitable servant also makes the same excuse for his negligence, in the two parables, and nearly in the same words. And, above all, the improvement that is drawn from the whole parable, is, word for word, the same in the two narrations.

In this parable, as in the former, our Saviour makes a comparison of the kingdom of heaven to sensible things.

“The kingdom of heaven,” in it, as in the former, still represents the economy of the Gospel; or the dispensation of God’s providence under it. It is compared, in the fifteenth verse, to a man travelling into a distant country. “For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country.” By the man who is here represented as taking a journey into a foreign country, we are to understand our Lord Jesus Christ, who, having come down into this world to save the souls of men, before he left it again and ascended into heaven, delivered full and ample commands to all who should ever call themselves by his name, who are here represented as his servants. These commandments are contained in that sacred Testament where his Father’s will is largely explained and revealed. But he has not only left his commands with his servants; he has also delivered to them his goods. By which we are to understand all those gifts, whether of providence or grace, which he bestows: all the natural endowments of mind—wisdom, reason, and learning; the enjoyments of the world—riches, honours, and dignities; the blessings of more special providence and grace—the ordinances of

the Gospel, and the opportunity of attending them. Every blessing we enjoy as men, every privilege we share as Christians, is the peculiar and kind gift of heaven, which comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is every good and perfect gift. He is the Lord and Master; we are but so many stewards; and, therefore, it highly concerns us to take good heed how we husband our Master's goods, for we must give an account of them at the great day of the Lord.

Great endowments and fine abilities—much wealth and high power—exalted means of grace, and frequent opportunities of increasing in holiness—will only bring upon us the greater and heavier account, if we do not improve these advantages to the ends for which they were given; to lead ourselves and others to the love and relish of Divine things, and to serve the ends of religion and righteousness.

Are, then, the mental accomplishments of any amongst us great; is the genius good, the judgment clear and strong, and the imagination lively and active? Then it is that man's business, and it is his highest interest, to be conversant with those great and heavenly truths that alone are worthy of his study; to search deep into the adorable beauties and glorious perfections of the great God, and those wondrous and amazing works of nature and of Providence which his almighty arm, directed by infinite wisdom, has accomplished. But especially is it his business to search, more and more, into the nature, end, and design, of those great doctrines and sublime precepts of religion which are contained in the sacred writings, which are designed to be the rule of our conduct here, and the standard by which we shall be judged. Are we enjoying the light of the Gospel of Jesus? are the duties of religion more certainly

revealed and more strongly inculcated upon men than ever they were before? then surely we should walk as children of the light, esteeming highly the means of grace, and carefully maintaining a conversation becoming the Gospel of Jesus, that this may not be our condemnation, that light has come into the world, and that we have loved the darkness rather than the light, because our deeds are evil.

We have, in the fifteenth verse, the proportion which the master observed in distributing his talents :—“ And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability.” The only proper inference from this is, that God disposes his favours according to his pleasure, and that all men have not the same advantages with others; for we are not to understand this part of the parable so strictly as to imagine that God, in the distribution of his blessings, has always a regard to men’s abilities, and their capacities of using them; that he bestows health and strength of body, for instance, or great wealth and substance, upon those only that are most capable of making a good use of them; and that he never confers the richer endowments of the mind, or the more valuable privileges of grace, on those whose disposition will lead them to abuse them. This is contrary to known fact; for we have seen the stoutest bodies wasted by the imprudent, not to say impious, irregularities of life. A fool may as readily be born to fortune as a wise man; and the most valuable of God’s blessings, by the folly and perversity of men, have been frequently converted into the greatest evils. Much less should we imagine that Divine grace, in dispensing spiritual gifts, is confined to fine parts and exalted understandings—to large fortune or great interest in the

world—which might be naturally inferred if the parable were to be strictly interpreted in all its parts.

Parables are not to be stretched to an exact parallel in every particular, but are only to be applied to the particular point and purpose intended; the moral of the parable being, as has been well observed, not like two plain surfaces, which touch each other in every point, but like a globe upon a plane, which touches it only in one.

This is evident from the conclusion which our Saviour makes from the parable of the unjust steward, who, on the prospect of being deprived of his employment, considering how he might best provide for his own interest, comes to the resolution that he will be fraudulent to his master, and favourable to his lord's debtors, and instead of an hundred measures of wheat, which one owed, made him write down eighty, and instead of an hundred measures of oil due by another, made him write down fifty, that they might be kind to him in his necessities, and receive him into their houses. Upon a view of this conduct, his lord commended the steward—not, indeed, because of his injustice, which the parable, if stretched to its utmost length, would bear, but because of his shrewdness and sagacity in providing for his own interest. This is plain, from his own express words, he “commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely”—that is, according to his own views, not because he had acted unjustly—“for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”

In the same manner, in this place, all that we are to understand by the master giving to one five talents, to another two, to another one, according to their ability, is that God divides to every man severally as he wills,

and that all are not possessed of the same opportunities and the same endowments.

Verses 16, 17.—“ Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.”

We have here the improvement and success of the two faithful servants—they both went and traded with their talents. This intimates plainly to us, that our state here, as Christians, is a state of activity, and that the progress we make in our master’s business depends greatly on our diligence and care. No man can hope to be successful in trade or merchandise without diligent and constant application: this is the life and spirit of business. It is not great friends, it is not great interest and connections, that alone will make a man successful, if he be careless and slothful in himself, and look not after his own affairs; such innumerable inconveniences must arise from such a behaviour as no friends, no connections, can prevent; as no extent of funds can withstand. And, therefore, it is almost proverbial that inactivity is the bane of business.

It is the same in the business of Christianity. If we sit still and foolishly imagine that, because we call ourselves by the name of Jesus, are baptized into his faith, and have sometimes witnessed a solemn profession before God and his people, that, therefore, we will reap all the benefit and advantage that can be derived from him, we shall miserably deceive ourselves. It must, therefore, be our constant business to frame our lives agreeably to the convictions of our hearts, and the outward profession we make of being engaged in so important a work. The business of religion is the most serious and important business of man; and cer-

tainly it ought more steadily to be pursued than any worldly or bodily concern. Its interests are eternal, and shall never know an end; and surely it concerns us to spare no labour and to save no pains, but to exert our utmost diligence and care in that business which shall bring us such stable and permanent advantage. Let us then resolve on a prudent and well-regulated zeal in this case. Let us resolve that no pleasure or amusement, no temptation or allurements of any kind, shall be able to turn us aside from the vigorous pursuit, or involve us in the cold neglect of it; neither let us be discouraged by any little disappointment we may meet with in the Christian life; on the contrary, the more frequently we meet with these, we should let them prove the greater spur to our application, and lead us to redouble our activity and care.

The success of business depends greatly, we may say entirely, on a steady perseverance in it, in despite of any losses to which, for a time, it may expose us. These must necessarily happen in the course of human affairs, especially in the commencement of any undertaking. But if these should discourage us from the prosecution of a well-concerted scheme, there can be no hope of ever attaining success in it. The case is precisely the same in religion. We must lay our account with being often disappointed and foiled in the pursuit of holiness and virtue, especially on the first entrance on a religious course. But this must not discourage us from steadiness and constancy in the even course of righteousness and truth.

It is not to be expected, while we are in the body, that we can be altogether freed from its infirmities. In the very best of men, and the most perfect of Christians, much more in the commencement of a religious course,

their passions will sometimes prevail over their reason, and the strongest sense of duty give way to present temptation. But let no man too hastily despair on account of such neglect or failure : on the contrary, he should watch with the greater care, and the more unweariedly pursue a regular course of a religious and well-ordered life, if he would attain Christian perfection.

In fine, let us never rest content with any determinate proportion of goodness, nor willingly remain satisfied with such a pitch of piety or virtue as we have already attained, without aiming at farther degrees of proficiency and increase. Our not doing so is to fall into a blunder which is the bane of all success. It would be like giving up business, in the ordinary affairs of life, just when we are most capable of carrying it on with efficiency.

If, then, we would trade successfully with the talents committed to our charge, we must fix to ourselves no limits to our progress, but, forgetting the things which are behind, we must press on to those that are before. Let our attainments be what they may, let the measures of grace we have received be ever so full, we must only consider these as additional excitements and farther helps towards larger communications and higher improvements. And thus our path shall be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

There is another thing observable in these verses. That it is expected we should make improvement in the business of religion in proportion to the advantages we enjoy. He that received five talents, traded with them and made other five ; and he that received two, gained other two. This may reprove the sloth of professing Christians, who live under the clear light of the Gospel,

and enjoy so many advantages and means of grace. To whom much is given, of them, says our Saviour, much shall be required. And who are there that have greater abundance than Christians, who have the Gospel of Christ so fully and incorruptly taught us; who have its rich and valuable blessings so freely proffered; who have the paths of virtue and happiness marked plainly out before us; who have every necessary assistance to carry us on steadily in these ways; and who have the most noble incitements and most powerful motives to engage us in the pursuit. He is certainly greatly to be blamed in business who, though he may possess great capital, have a fair prospect of business opening before him, enjoy great friends and numerous connections, and every desirable advantage to encourage him and enable him to prosecute it with success, yet suffers his business to languish and decay from his own inactivity and sloth.—And is not he infinitely more worthy of blame who is careless and negligent in that one thing needful, the business of religion, when he has all imaginable advantage put into his hands to carry him on in it to the greatest perfection.

Again, this may encourage weak and darkened Christians, either those who have not such excellent means of grace afforded them as others, or whose judgment and understanding are not so capable of improving them. He that received two talents gained only two others; yet, we know that the sentence of approbation was as cheerfully pronounced upon him as upon the servant that gained five. Are you, then, careful to do your best to improve in goodness, and to enlarge your knowledge to the utmost of your ability? Despair not, O man! for God will respect the sincerity of the heart, and the serious endeavours of the soul; and

where he has sown sparingly, will expect sparingly to reap.

In the next verse we are informed of the foolish conduct of the slothful servant, who had received one talent from his master.

Verse 18.—“But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.” This servant was, indeed, careful that his master’s talent should not be squandered or lost; and, for the purpose of securing it, he hid it under the ground. But although it was not embezzled or wasted, neither was it improved to any good purpose; and it was as effectually useless, whilst it was in his possession, as if it had been entirely lost.

He is but ill-formed for business who imagines that he cannot dispose of his money with safety otherwise than by hoarding it up in some secret place, or is afraid of venturing it out in trade, lest, from the hazards of business, he should lose the whole. And as such a man can never make a figure in active life while he labours under this slavish dread, so neither can a Christian make any advances in religion whilst his endeavours are checked and his spirits intimidated by frightful views of the hazards he runs and the hardships he must undergo in its ways. In both cases these fears and terrors take their rise from too short and contracted views, from too narrow and scanty a knowledge of either kind of business.

The man who thoroughly understands the nature of trade, will never be afraid to embark his capital in its pursuit; and the more full and complete his knowledge of business is, the more will such fears vanish, and the more assured will be his expectations.

It is precisely so in the business of religion. Those

false and deceitful notions, which so much startle some men—those vain imaginations of its severities and hardships—spring from partial views and narrow conceptions of its nature. The more perfect the knowledge is of true religion, the more speedily will such terrors disappear, and with the greater cheerfulness and pleasure will the Christian make progress in his work.

Here, then, we may observe the great necessity and advantage of being well instructed in the principles of true religion, by which we shall avoid splitting on that rock on which others have run the hazard of shipwreck. Those gloomy notions and hard thoughts of religion which flow from a superficial knowledge of it, have often entirely frightened men from entering on its practice; and, consequently, (for the spirit of man is an active principle, and cannot be idle,) have been the unhappy cause of their engaging in an evil course, and of their giving themselves up to work all manner of iniquity with greediness; whilst they have thrown a damp on the spirits of others, and have so enfeebled their endeavours, that, instead of going on to perfection, they have sat still and done nothing; and though, perhaps, they have made no bad use of their powers and opportunities, yet neither have they improved them, but, with the slothful servant, have hid their Lord's money in the earth.

It is said that it was he who received one talent that digged in the earth and hid his lord's money; and this may teach us, that it will be no excuse of men's sloth and negligence that their advantages are small and their opportunities few, in comparison of those of others. Whatever their advantages may be, whatever be the talents they possess, it is their duty to improve them to the best advantage. It is not enough, therefore, for men, because they have not all the opportunities they

may possibly wish, therefore to content themselves with doing nothing at all—without aspiring to that height of perfection which it is possible for them to attain. It is a very preposterous resolution, that, because they cannot do all they could wish, therefore they will not do what they can. How few soever be their external opportunities—how small soever their personal abilities—they must do the best they may with them.

And this is an advantage they have above others, that the less their abilities are, if they yet improve them, proportionably greater will be their reward. Had he who had only one talent committed to his charge employed it to such good purpose as to gain two, without doubt his reward would have been more complete than that of him who, having received five, gained only five. Let not men, then, be discouraged that their personal endowments are not so fine, or that they have not so many advantages as others—that their circumstances in the world—their station in the great scenes of life—the duties of the respective offices in which they are engaged—deprive them of great advantages which others may enjoy in pursuing the business of religion. If they are but careful to improve as they may—if they are not disposed, in sloth and indifference, to make these things the excuse of their negligence, but diligently husband what time they can find for religious exercises, and employ their talents, such as they are, to the best purposes, through Divine grace, they shall gradually grow up to perfection, abounding still more and more in all the fruits of the Spirit, till they are meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Verse 19.—“After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.” These

servants received not their talents for their own use, and therefore must be accountable how they employed them; and in the same way all men shall be reckoned with at the great day of the Lord. We know not when this day of account will come, for it will come in such an hour as we think not of; but we know certainly that it will come; and blessed are the servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find faithful and wise. It may, indeed, be deferred for a time; but, though the Lord should delay his coming, he will at last certainly appear, and all his holy angels with him. For, however we may neglect our business, our Lord will perform his work; and, though we should foolishly trifle away our time, in his own good time he will call us before him, whether we be prepared for it or not; and wo be to that servant who flattereth himself, in the vain imagination of his heart, that the Lord delayeth his coming, and upon that delusive principle indulges every kind of vicious excess, and lulls himself secure in sin; for the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites.

Since, therefore, as the lord of these servants came and reckoned with them, so our Lord shall also appear in the clouds, and summon all the sons of men before his dread tribunal—since we must give an account of every deed done in the body, whether good or evil—how carefully ought we to husband our talents, and improve by the frequent means of grace we enjoy. The greater our advantages are, the heavier will our doom be if they are neglected and misimproved; if we use them not in subserviency to the great design for

which they were bestowed—to promote the great ends of religion and righteousness.

To whom much is given, of them much shall be required; and surely none have greater abundance, or enjoy more valuable opportunities of proficiency in religion and goodness, and those Divine graces that will fit us for a welcome reception and cheerful approbation from the Son of man, than we Christians do.

In the Gospel of Jesus, the plainest instructions concerning duty are given us, and the fullest discoveries of the most acceptable manner of worshipping the true God. There, life and immortality, which were long buried in darkness and ignorance, or wrapt up in uncertainty, are brought to the clearest light. There, the most powerful assistance, even the Divine aids of the Spirit of grace, is promised to carry us on, if we are not wanting to ourselves, steadily and without wavering, in the right paths of religion, and through the most wearisome stages of the Christian course. We have there the paths that lead to happiness and glory marked out to us; Divine strength is offered to quicken our obedience, and to support us against those temptations that might lead us astray; while life and death, happiness and misery, are set before us, to encourage us in goodness, and deter us from iniquity. What more could we require, or what could be better calculated to forward our improvement?

These are advantages of which the darkened heathens and the deluded part of the Christian world are deprived. These are peculiar to us, who have the Gospel purely and incorruptly taught; to whom the knowledge it imparts is clearly laid open, if we will only be at the pains to learn; and to whom its true and

unblemished profession is neither darkened by deceit, nor endangered from tyranny and oppression. Shall we not then lead suitable lives? Shall not our improvement be somewhat suitable to our advantages? Will we yet bring forth nothing but weeds and thistles, notwithstanding all the culture that is bestowed, and all the pains that are taken with us?

It may, therefore, be of great advantage, to quicken us in the way of religion, frequently to revolve these things in our minds; often to consider the certainty of that impartial trial to which we shall be brought before the judge of all the earth. And let us not foolishly amuse ourselves with the idle notion of its being at a distance, and that, though we indulge ourselves in sin, we shall have time enough for repentance and reformation before that great event. Are we yet strangers to the uncertainty of human life? Know we not that the life of man is but as a vapour, which appeareth for a little, and then vanisheth away. "As for man," says David, "his days are as grass. As a flower of the field so he flourisheth. The wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place where it was shall know it no more." Is this then a ground on which to risk our everlasting welfare, since our eternal state is as finally determined, upon our departure out of this world, as at the day of judgment; "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."*

Besides, what can be more displeasing and ungrateful to the Supreme Being, than, because he defers his coming, and long puts off the day of judgment, therefore to continue long in sin, and put off the work of re-

* Ecclesiastes, ix. 10.

pentance and amendment? For what is the reason that Christ delays to come to judgment? It is not that he forgets to come, or that he has laid aside the thought. For "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness:"* that is, his delay to fulfil the promise of judging the world is not, as ungodly men would believe, that he has fallen from it; it is only because he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Is it not then a most perverse abuse of the time that is allowed us for amendment, to harden ourselves in our iniquity as if we should never be called to judgment, since the reason of the delay is only that we may have space to repent, and may have an opportunity, if we will but embrace it, of yet avoiding in time the miseries of eternity?

Let us not then presume to go on boldly in sin, because the Lord delayeth his coming. Let us rather be resolved to fly from it speedily, as we would fly from a pestilence; knowing assuredly that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the righteous and the wicked, and that this day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the earth, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.

In the subsequent passage, we have the good account which the faithful servants made of their talents, and the high approbation and complete reward which their lord bestowed upon them.

Verse 20.—"And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou

* 2 Peter, iii. 9.

deliveredst unto me five talents : behold, I have gained besides them five talents more.”

He thankfully acknowledged his master's goodness in bestowing on him so liberal a share of his goods. And this may teach us that it ought to be our care frequently to reflect on God's kindness towards us, and the rich effects of his grace which we enjoy ; often to revolve in our minds the particular instances of his amazing goodness ; and cheerfully, with gratitude and praise, to make mention of them before him in thankful acknowledgment and adoring admiration.

He came, saying, “ Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents : behold, I have gained besides them five talents more.” This is not to be understood literally, as if, in the day of judgment, the faithful servants of Christ shall produce with boasting, and make mention of all their good deeds. This our Saviour himself will do for them, as you may see from the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth verses. Our Saviour himself will say to those whom he shall set on his right hand at the judgment of the great day, as the reason of his doing so—“ For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” But it intimates that they who rightly improve their talents shall have boldness in the day of Christ, and appear before him with holy confidence.

This faithful servant came with the highest cheerfulness, and gave up his account to his master, in the confidence that he would be accepted in the Beloved. So shall it be with the righteous in the day of the Lord. They shall come with gladness in their countenances ; they shall lift up their heads with joy, because their

Redeemer liveth, and the day of their redemption draweth nigh ; whereas the wicked, who sinned with a high hand, shall then be ashamed to lift up their eyes to their Judge. Those who once gave defiance to heaven, and scorned the terrors of its denunciations, shall then be filled with trembling, and, with fainting hearts, shall await the doom of their righteous Master. But the faithful servants, who feared to sin, and trembled at the thoughts of iniquity, without fear or trembling now, but with solemn awe, indeed, of the glorious Majesty, shall cheerfully come forth into his presence ; and though they appear before the tribunal of the Most High, they shall have confidence through Christ, and not be ashamed before him.*

Verses 21, 22, 23.—“ His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents : behold, I have gained two other talents besides them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” We have here the procedure of the judge towards the faithful servants. He first commends their faithfulness and integrity, and then proceeds to determine their reward. The Lord, the judge of all the earth, who well knows the integrity of his servants now, will give testimony to it at the last day. They who are found faithful to their Master and his trust, shall then have the approbation of him who cannot err, however

* 1 John, ii. 28., iv. 17.

they may now be censured and condemned. Christ will openly acquit them from all malicious charge, and publicly approve of them before men and angels, and the whole multitude of the heavenly host.

Having thus testified his approbation of their conduct, he will then proceed to determine their reward. "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Then shall they enter into the joy of their Lord; that joy which he has purchased for them; which he now himself possesses; nay, of which he is the fountain and the source. Then shall all tears be wiped away from the eyes; and every spring of comfort and fountain of joy shall be opened up. They shall reign with the Lord, and their joy shall be full; for in God's presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Let us then consider that these glories that are in reserve with the Lord, this crown of glory, this everlasting kingdom, this fulness of joy, all that exceeding great reward that is prepared in heaven, are only designed for the faithful and persevering; for those who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality. Would we then have any share in these things—would we have any interest in the heavenly happiness and the transporting pleasures of an after life—let us take good heed to ourselves that we embezzle not our Master's talents, or hide our Lord's money in the earth; but, with the faithful, exert our utmost endeavours to employ our talents to the best advantage, and to improve by all the means of grace which we enjoy. It is only thus by vigorously aspiring after greater and greater advancement in the business

of religion, and higher and higher improvement in spiritual interests, that we shall obtain the approbation of the Lord, and have the transporting sentence pronounced—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Our Saviour, having thus encouraged our hopes by setting before us the happy success of the faithful servants, proceeds to work upon our fears by representing the miserable effects of sloth and negligence in prosecuting the concerns of the soul, and also to awaken us out of that indolent insensibility and slothful security which cut off all possibility of success in the affairs of eternity, and will certainly ruin our everlasting peace.

Verse 24.—"Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed." He pretends to make an excuse for his unprofitableness; and, with consummate effrontery, shifts the blame from himself, and lays it on the severity of his master:—"I knew thee that thou art an hard man," &c.

This represents to us the common practice of wicked men, who are always disposed to cast the reproach of their miscarriages on others, and often to lay the blame even on God himself. They are unwilling to ascribe it to any failure in their own conduct, because it would lay them under the necessity of reformation; otherwise they would find no peace in their own breasts; and the quiet enjoyment of their impieties might be too often disturbed by the reproaches of a vexatious conscience. It is, therefore, a more grateful remedy to them to throw the blame somewhere else than on their own misconduct; and God's severity in denying them his grace, and thereby rendering it impossible for them to

do otherwise than they have done, has often been the language of wicked men—the deceitful excuse of their impious practices.

But let these men know that such excuses are vain and foolish; and, however they may make a fair appearance, and dazzle their own eyes, or lull the upbraidings of conscience asleep, they are merely superficial, and have no foundation in truth; for it is certain that none who ever rightly improved the common gifts of Providence, or what measures of talent they possessed, ever perished for want of sufficient supplies of saving grace. God is not unreasonable in his demands, as these men would represent him. He does not demand brick where he has provided no straw. Whatever is required is also promised in covenant. If, then, we perish, we must impute it to our own fault.

Verse 25.—“And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.” Good thoughts of God never fail to produce love to him, and that love necessarily tends to make men diligent and faithful in his service; but hard thoughts and unworthy conceptions of him beget a slavish fear, which must enervate the endeavours, and nourish sloth and inactivity. This servant had conceived very harsh notions of his master’s severity: that he expected to reap where he had not sown, and gather where he had not strawed. And what was the offspring of these conceptions? It was a dastardly dread which threw a damp upon his spirits, and so effectually cut the sinews of all his exertions, that he never so much as tried to profit by his talent; but, with the spirit of a sluggard, hid it in the earth.

Despair, or even an over-anxious fearfulness of failing in any attempt, is a most unsurmountable barrier in

the way of all good success ; for it slackens all care and pains, discourages from any vigorous endeavour, and nourishes a negligent and slothful disposition. But, on the other hand, hope raises the spirit, inspires courage, and rouses every vigorous exertion. It is surprising, indeed, what prodigious influence a well-founded hope has on any sort of enterprise. It gives energy and strength to all the muscles of action : it is the spring of every noble and generous feat : it is the source of that true courage which gives life and spirit to man, and vigour to all his efforts and endeavours. Despair, on the other hand, is a great enemy to religion ; and the austere and melancholy are often the unhappy Christians who are discouraged from attempting religion at all, or are led to give up their endeavours, if they have entered on it, from the apprehension that it is so hard a service, encumbered with such difficulties, and attended with such sufferings, as render it unsupportable and intolerable to human nature.

This is a temptation exceedingly dangerous ; and, like all noxious and destructive weeds, it thrives best in uncultivated ground. It has the greatest influence where knowledge is weak and imperfect, or darkened and misled. It is, therefore, of the highest importance in the business of religion, both to be on our guard against those false and unworthy notions of God, which carry terror and bondage with them, and destroy all reasonable hope, and to form in our minds just and perfect views of the true nature of religion itself. A partial and imperfect knowledge of it gives great scope to its enemies to dress it up in whatever form they please, and either to strengthen the prejudices of men of false principles against it as unpleasant and irksome, or to nourish gloomy conceptions of its hardships in

the serious and well-disposed. But a thorough knowledge of religion, its nature, its principles, and its ends, will dispel those prejudices which represent it so huge and monstrous, and will shew it in its proper light, as neither so unpleasant and intolerable as wicked men would represent it, nor so frightful and unsupportable as to discourage the melancholy and devout.

Since knowledge, then, is so highly necessary in religion, is it not strange that it should be so much overlooked and neglected among men of all ranks? Nothing, indeed, is more common than for some men to have religion continually in their mouths, nay, to quarrel with their neighbours about it, though they seldom know what it means. There are some who are at greater pains to signalize themselves by a noisy zeal than to cultivate any real acquaintance with the nature of that peaceable religion which, at the same time that it teaches self-diffidence and modesty, inspires the highest sentiments of love to one another. But there are others whose blood runs as surprisingly cold in everything relating to religion, and who are extremely negligent and slothfully remiss in all spiritual concerns. They undervalue—for they are at no pains to acquire—that knowledge which of all other is the noblest and most excellent, and in comparison of which all other knowledge is but empty noise and transitory show. This is the height of stupidity, for it is to neglect the knowledge of those things that most nearly concern them, and are most necessary to be known in order to their eternal happiness and the salvation of their souls.

No one, however, must imagine from this, that knowledge is all that is required for salvation. Knowledge may be very extensive in these matters, and yet may

be merely speculative; and where that is the case—where it does not descend into the heart and life, and govern the actions—to build the hope of heaven upon it is to build on a sandy foundation, and the structure will miserably fall into ruin in the day of trial, for it is only they that know these things and do them that are happy. “If ye know these things,” says our Saviour, “happy are ye if ye do them.”* But though mere knowledge cannot save of itself, it is, nevertheless, highly necessary, as without it no progress can be made in the ways of religion; since, were there no other barrier, as the smallest reflection will easily discover that there are numbers, that of giving temptation so great an advantage to work by, is more than enough to endanger the best resolutions.

“I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.” It is observable, that this servant comes with considerable confidence to give in his account, relying on a vain plea he had to make, which he imagined would be heard; for he was able to say, “Lo, there thou hast that is thine;” though I have not brought any return by hazarding my talent in trade, yet, this I can say, that I have kept it safe; and if I have not made it more, yet it has run no risk of being diminished in my custody. This he thinks will bring him off with safety, if not with commendation and applause.

Many go on securely, without any dread of the appearance they are to make in judgment, confiding in pleas as vain and frivolous. The foolish servant thought his account would pass, because he could say, “Lo, there thou hast that is thine:” I have not been a

* John, xiii. 17.

spendthrift of my goods, I have not so grossly abused my talent as many in the world do.

And is not this the precise plea on which numbers, at this day, ground all their hopes of happiness. They say, we have not spent idly what you have given us; we have not scandalously employed our wit, our natural parts and endowments, in ridiculing things sacred and serious, or in bantering and running down those who profess to be devout. We have not wasted our substance in drunkenness and gluttony, as many others have done, nor have we employed our interest or power in the world in oppressing the poor and defrauding the innocent. This is, indeed, what many cannot say, who run into all the excess of sin and wickedness. Yet it would amount to no more than this—"Lo, there thou hast that is thine;" as if no more were expected of them than abstaining from the gross abuse of the talents committed to their charge.

How childish and frivolous is such a plea! Are no positive duties required in religion? And will not failures in these as certainly condemn us as the more open and daring acts of sin? Is there no such thing as prayer or praise enjoined? No private devotion of heart required? No public homage, in company with the great multitude, in the sanctuary of the Lord? Are no improvements expected from advantages bestowed—no fruitfulness from painful and laborious culture? It is absurd to think so. Even the earth, which, after pains and culture, "beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."* And dreadful must be the end, and severe the destruction, of reasonable beings, but barren and fruitless

* Hebrews, vi. 8.

Christians. "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation."* Only exercise yourselves unto godliness, and be diligent in your calling, that the end may be eternal life.

Verses 26, 27.—"His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." The daring confidence of this servant is humbled, and his foolish plea rejected. Thou knewest that I was an hard master, and if your opinion had been just, the consideration ought to have been an excitement to your exertion, and a spur to your activity and care. Though you had no regard for me, yet you ought to have had respect, at least, to your own interest; and since you knew me to be severe, you should have given the greater pains to have produced an account without defect, and blameless.

This is the natural conclusion he ought to have formed, and this is the wise use we ought to make of the severe impartiality that the Judge of the world will exercise in the great day of account. And because he will then be a consuming fire to the slothful and wicked, we should now be zealous to serve him with reverence and godly fear.

"Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." It was no justification of his conduct that he safely preserved the talent committed to him; for, to have made the plea good, he

* Hebrews, vi. 9.

should, at least, have put the money out to interest—have placed it in the hands of the exchangers—and then the master, at his coming, would have received his own with reasonable advantage.

What an idle thing, then, is it for men to imagine that they may be acquitted before the dread tribunal of that Judge who seeth in secret, because they have lived in good repute in the world, and refrained from the more gross and scandalous crimes, the more notorious and daring acts of wickedness; while, at the same time, they are so far from improving their graces, or carrying them to any higher degree of refinement, that they can scarcely be said to exercise them at all, so as to be able to bring in so much as the small return of interest upon their talents. Some honest endeavours, at least, to benefit by the opportunities we have enjoyed, some evidences of a desire to trade profitably with our master's talents, are expected of reasonable beings. And if Christians are sincerely desirous to improve as they best may, our Lord will not despise the day of small things. But as the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, so in vain will be the expectation of slothful servants at the day of Christ; and the idle must bear a sentence of condemnation.

Verses 28, 29, 30.—“ Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” We have here the sentence that is passed on this wicked and slothful servant, and the reason of its infliction. He is sentenced to be deprived of his talent, and condemned to outer

darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.” This teaches us that no man’s gifts, whether of nature or Providence, will be of any avail to him in the day of judgment, unless in this life he has been at pains to employ them to the valuable purposes for which God has bestowed them. The glory of heaven shall not be the portion of them who have had a great portion of the world’s honours or wealth, great natural abilities, or great advantages of literature and knowledge, and other natural accomplishments; but of those only who have made a wise use of these advantages—made them subservient to the honour and glory of God, and the great ends of virtue and religion.

A reason for this is assigned:—“Unto every one that hath shall be given”—that is, every one who rightly improves his talents shall receive more than he strictly deserved; “but from him that hath not”—that is, from him who, though he possess advantages, yet derives no benefit from them, and is as if he had them not, suffering them to lie idle, careless about exerting them in any way for the glory of God—“from him shall be taken away even that which he hath.” His advantages will be of no profit to him, and will avail him nothing when he stands most in need of their service. This may be applied not only to the common blessings of Providence, but also to the more especial gifts of the graces of God’s Spirit. They improve by exercise, and brighten by being practised. They gather strength by being exerted; and the more they are put forth into action, they become the more vigorous and lively. But when the slothful puts his hand into his bosom and craves a little longer sleep, a little longer slumber, those

parts and endowments, those heavenly and Divine graces, which, in an active spirit, would shine forth in splendour, and grow up to perfection, must gather rust and age by lying idle, or, like a neglected fire, be entirely extinguished.

And this is not only the natural tendency of things—as natural an effect as wealth and honour are the reward of the diligent hand, or perfection in any art the result of long practice—but it is more certainly effected by the peculiar blessing of heaven, and the powerful aids of the Spirit of grace, which is never wanting to those that put their trust in the Lord.

Thus, to every one that hath—that employs well his abilities, and exerts them vigorously—to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

But this is not all the evil that shall arise from the neglect of our talents. The deplorable misery that the wicked and unprofitable servant incurs is represented in the thirtieth verse:—“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” This is the picture that is always given us of the state of the wicked in Scripture. It is represented as a state of outer darkness, melancholy and comfortless, into which not one ray of light from the Divine presence shall ever enter to gladden or refresh the gloom. There, all is frightful and inconsolable. Day shall never dawn; but one long and dismal night shall evermore prevail. There, it is said, is weeping, which shews great and extreme sorrow; and gnashing of teeth, which bespeaks bitter vexation and exquisite torment. There, a lively apprehension of that sublime and exalted happiness which the saints enjoy in heaven

will heighten and add poignancy to the pain. There, enraged conscience will never cease to aggravate the misery by perpetual upbraidings, and severely to lash their wretched hearts in the extremity of bitterness and fury.

This is the portion of the slothful servant ; and how should the thought of it fill us with fear, and quicken us to diligence in our duty ? We all have received talents of one kind or other ; and if we do not use them for the great ends which they were designed to serve, if we suffer them negligently to lie idle, and impiously betray the trust which God, in bestowing them upon us, has committed to us, we may certainly lay our account with the displeasure of our Judge, and an eternal destruction from his presence and the glory of his power ; even everlasting condemnation to that outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Awake, then, thou that sleepest ! Arise, O slothful man ! and know yet, whilst thou mayest, the things that belong to thy peace before they be hid from your eyes. Say, then, O wretched and deceived ! what can lull you secure in sin—what can prompt you to negligence or sloth ? Is there any pleasure in inactivity ? Or, grant the pleasure exquisite and great, are not the pleasures of sin for a season, and such as bring bitterness in the end ? Or dost thou think, O man ! that dost such things as are worthy of death, that thou canst escape the judgment of God ? Has not the Lord said it, and shall he not do it ? shall not his word stand fast as the mountains of brass, and the pillars that cannot be shaken ? And has he not declared that destruction shall be to the wicked, and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity ? Consider this, ye that forget

God, what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God.

Let us, therefore, seriously reflect on this dreadful misery of the unprofitable servant, that, being persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, we may rouse ourselves out of lethargy and sloth, lest the Lord rouse him as a raging lion, and tear us in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Let us, while it is yet time, shake off this fatal slumber, lest, with some of those that sleep in the dust of the earth, we shall be made to awake to shame and everlasting contempt.

In a word, let us be no longer slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Let us exert our most vigorous endeavours to improve in well-doing. Then may we with pleasure wait for the coming of the Lord; for we may, on good ground, look for his approbation and reward. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

INTERMEDIATE PRAYER.

O LORD, we come again into thy presence to bow down and worship before thy throne. Thou art worthy to receive all homage, adoration, and praise. Thou art the great and everlasting God, the Creator of heaven and of earth. All things were made, and all things were established by thee. Thou art the former of the human race, who didst call us out of nothing into being, and didst breathe into our nostrils

the breath of life. Enable us, O Lord, to remember that thou, who art our Creator, will ultimately be our Judge; that thou shalt call us to an account of our stewardship; and that we shall receive from thee a just recompense of reward.

Convince us, we pray thee, of the necessity of diligence in the business of religion, and of a wise improvement of our present opportunities. Enable us to remember that our Lord has committed to us our various talents, with the charge that we should occupy them till he come. May we remember that this charge extends to all those gifts whether of Providence or grace which we have received from thy hand, and that we must not be negligent of the improvement of any one of them.

If we have received the good things of this life, may we use them as not abusing them, and may we administer them to our own improvement and the benefit of others. If we have riches, may they not corrupt us; if we have honour, may we not abuse it, but employ it to promote the service of religion and the best interest of thy people. If we have received from thee vigour of mind and strength of understanding, may we employ them to search the deeper into thy nature and perfections, and those great and everlasting truths which thou hast revealed to us as the measure of our duty and the standard of our trial. If we are enjoying the light of the Gospel, and have the duties of religion clearly revealed and uncorruptly taught us, may we maintain a conversation becoming the Gospel; and may it not be to our condemnation that light has come into the world, and that we have loved the darkness rather than the light, because our deeds are evil.

Enable us, O Lord, to remember that the temporal blessings of thy Providence are administered promiscu-

ously in this life, and that the portion of good things which thou permittest us to enjoy is no proof of thine especial favour towards us, or of our capacity for employing them to thy honour and service; but, may it be our endeavour to improve them to the best purpose which our ability will permit. Teach us also that the absence of the possessions of this world is no testimony of thy displeasure against us, or of our downward inclination to corrupt or abuse them.

Give us, we pray thee, O Lord, a spirit of diligence and assiduity in the pursuits of religion. Let us not hope for thy favour, like the Jews of old, merely because we have Abraham for our father; because we are called by the name of Christian; because we have been baptized into the faith of Jesus; or, because we have ourselves sealed a covenant with thee at thy table: but may we be careful to abound in the faith of Christ, to frame our lives according to our profession, and zealously and constantly to pursue our higher and more important interests.

May no temptation prevail with us to relax our vigour in so important a pursuit. May no business, no amusement, no occupation of any kind, ever induce us to remit our diligence, or involve us in sloth and inactivity; but may we rise superior to every disappointment, and may our past failures be but an excitement to our diligence and a spur to our industry.

Let us not, we pray thee, O Lord, rest satisfied with the measure of grace or goodness we may at any time have reached, "as though we had already attained, or were already perfect;" but, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, may we press towards the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. May our path be as

the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

May we remember, that to whom much is given, of them much shall be required. May we not, therefore, permit any of the talents committed to us to remain hid in the earth, unprofitable and useless ; but may we give diligence suitably to improve every gift that comes from thy hand. And to animate and quicken us in the discharge of so important a duty, teach us to bear in mind the uncertainty of human life ; that we know not what a day may bring forth ; that this night our souls may be required of us. May we, therefore, always be as those who wait for the coming of the Son of man.

May we be enabled to appear with confidence before our Judge at the great day of the Lord ; may we come with gladness to present our accounts unto thee, in the hope that thou wilt accept of the improvement which, in the faith of Jesus, and the strength of thy grace, we have been enabled to make of our advantages.

Do thou deliver us from that confusion which shall cover the slothful and the careless when they appear before their Judge. May we not be of the number of those who set at nought thy counsels and reproofs, who scorn the denunciations of thy wrath, and bid defiance to the God of heaven ; but may we be of the number of those who fear to sin, and tremble at the thought of offending so good and gracious a God.

We would not, O Lord, desire that assurance which, in such frail and imperfect creatures as we are, may be characterised as presumption ; but may we be enabled to lift up our face with joy before thy judgment-seat, and not be ashamed in thy sight.

Oh ! enable us, in the exercise of faith, to contemplate those glories that are reserved for us in the

heavens, and that exceeding great recompense of reward which thou hast in store for the faithful: that we may be animated to diligence in the pursuit of heaven, and, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality. Do thou forbid that we should be like the slothful servant, who wrapt up his talent in a napkin, or hid his lord's money in the earth, leaving it either to rust in inactivity, or be corrupted by unnatural employment; but may we aspire after greater and greater advancement, and higher and higher degrees of perfection, until we are meet to be translated into thy presence and glory.

Guard us, we pray thee, O Lord, from all those false and unworthy notions of thy nature which will damp our courage and extinguish our hope in thee. Enlarge our views of thine existence, and of the spirit of that religion which thou hast given us. Dispel our prejudices against it, and enable and dispose us to accept of it as the Word of God, with power, which worketh effectually in them that believe.

Give us not that knowledge which puffeth up, but that true knowledge which should lead us to humility, and the practice of all the Christian graces.

May we not flatter ourselves that we are innocent, because we are free from those sins to which others are subject, whilst our own peculiar passions bear rule within us; because we have not run into the same excess of riot; because we have not seated ourselves in the chair of the scorner, and laughed at everything sacred; whilst yet our religion has been mere external form, or empty profession and show, and we have not made that progress in righteousness which a proper improvement of our advantages warranted and required.

Teach us, O Lord, that our natural gifts and advan-

tages are of no avail to procure for us thy favour, unless, in obedience to thy commandments, we have diligently employed them for the purposes for which they were bestowed.

Do thou forbid that any of us, by the abuse or unprofitable employment of our advantages, should be subject to that terrible denunciation—"Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Let us not, therefore, be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord ; and when he comes to judgment, may we hear that blessed sentence pronounced on each of us—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

We pray, O Lord, for thy presence with us as we are again for a little to be engaged in speaking and hearing from thy Word. Let us engage in these duties with suitable solemnity and composure of spirit. May Christ dwell in our hearts by faith. May we be careful to meditate upon his excellencies, and duly to esteem him. For his glory as God, for his perfection as man, for those excellencies which are so conspicuously displayed in his mediatorial offices, may he be precious to our souls.

Hear these our prayers, O Lord ; and when thou hearest, forgive us, for Christ's sake. Amen.

SERMON.

CHRIST PRECIOUS TO HIS PEOPLE.

1 Peter, ii. 7.—“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.”

It was almost an universal opinion that prevailed among the Jews, that the Messiah should appear, in great pomp and splendour, in the character of a mighty conqueror. They expected that he would subdue all the enemies of their country, and advance their nation to the highest pitch of worldly power and grandeur. This mistake was originally founded on a wrong interpretation of some of the prophecies concerning him, in which he was spoken of as a king indeed, and mighty conqueror : that he should receive the heathen for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. But these were only figurative descriptions of his spiritual dominion, of his victory over death and the grave.

The Jews, however, from partiality to their religion, and a desire of being raised above the rest of mankind, greedily caught at the literal interpretation of these prophecies, and had no regard to those other predictions, in which he was described as a person in low condition in life, without any of that splendour that glitters in the eyes of the world ; but glorious in himself, King of kings, and Lord of lords, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. They did not consider that he was to be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. They had no notion of his appearing in such circumstances ; and therefore, when he did appear in them, they despised

him. For there was no form or comeliness in him, why he should be desired by those who were not capable of being touched by the grandeur of his character, which could not be affected by the lowness of his circumstances, but shone with the brightest splendour through all the sufferings he underwent for mankind.

Many who thought themselves great in the world, judged it beneath them to own as their Lord a person in such mean and ordinary circumstances of life; nor would the superstitious and unthinking part of mankind regard his plain and simple lessons, delivered without that pomp and ostentation of learning to which they had been accustomed in their scribes and doctors. Even the very nature and tendency of his precepts could not fail to be unpleasant to the carnal mind. To be told that God prefers mercy to sacrifice—that he will not be satisfied with the external part of religion—that holiness is absolutely necessary to happiness—that it is only the servant that does his master's will that will be accepted of him at his coming—and that it is necessary to mortify the flesh, to cut off a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, in order to being fit to enter the kingdom of heaven—these are truths that must have been unacceptable to a people sunk in vice and superstition, and could not fail to render the character of him who taught them odious to numbers of all ranks, who sought to appease the Deity by forms and ceremonies only. On this account it was that, when he came to his own, his own received him not.

There were others, however, that judged of him in another manner. Touched by the mighty works which he did, they submitted their prejudices to reason; and, convinced in the end that he was the true Messiah foretold by the prophets, raised up to be a Prince and a

Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins, they received him with gladness, and submitted to his authority. To such only Christ was precious—“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.”

In discoursing from these words, I shall, *first*, Explain to you the character of the persons spoken of in the text to whom Christ is precious.

In the *second* place, I shall assign some reasons why Christ is precious to such characters.

In the *third* place, I shall make some improvement of the subject.

In the *first* place, I am to explain the character of those to whom Christ is precious.

First, Christ is precious to such as have got the better of those prejudices that are entertained against his religion by men of worldly minds and corrupt affections. We have seen the prejudices that were entertained by the Jews in our Saviour's days, arising from the very nature of their religion, and the peculiar and exclusive notions which it led them to cherish. The case cannot be thought to be better with those who have no religion; and, therefore, the same kind of prejudice against our Saviour's doctrine still subsists in our day among those who have no feeling of the excellence and benefit of its doctrines. To them his religion appears with a severe and forbidding aspect: they reckon the service of the world freedom and liberty, and the service of religion slavery and bondage.

But the man to whom Christ is precious, reckons the restraints of God's law safe and honourable. He looks upon himself as enjoying the most complete liberty, because he is not only permitted, but strongly encouraged to do whatever is really for his good. On the other hand, he reckons the condition of the wicked

man to be the most abject slavery ; who is compelled, by his inordinate desires, to follow such a course of conduct as he sees to be evidently for his hurt ; exposed every moment to the terrors of conscience, and inwardly trembling under a sense of the Divine displeasure. This cannot fail to give him a high esteem of Christ, the great end of whose appearance was that he might set us free from the bondage of corruption, and bring us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Again, Christ is precious, or, as it might be rendered, honourable to such as have learned to esteem that which is truly good. A great part of mankind, through natural infirmity of mind or corrupt education, make those things the object of their admiration which are not truly worthy of it. We have seen that the Jews regarded nothing which was not accompanied with the appearance of grandeur and magnificence ; and that they despised our Saviour's instructions because they were delivered in plain and simple terms, and were destitute of that pomp and ostentation of learning with which the teaching of their scribes and doctors had rendered them familiar. The same disposition will be found to prevail in many minds in our own day. They are struck with show and appearance, whilst they neglect excellence of a substantial kind—piety towards God—kindness towards men—temperance, patience, and perseverance in well-doing. These, though they be the chief dignity and excellence of man, have yet less of show in the eye of the world ; and when attended by adversity, are easily overlooked by the unthinking part of mankind. Hence it came to pass that when the unbelieving Jews beheld our Saviour on the cross, they thought themselves at liberty to deride him, and, from his present circumstances of distress, concluded him to be a mean

and unfortunate man, whilst he was acting the grandest part that ever was exhibited to the world—rising victorious against principalities and powers, “and by death destroying him who had the power of death.” And even after his glorious resurrection and ascension, they continued to upbraid his followers that they were the disciples of one who had suffered as a malefactor; for the cross of Christ was to them a stumbling-block.

But the persons to whom Christ is precious, view things in a very different light. They have learned to abstract their esteem from worldly power and splendour. They have been taught to value piety and goodness for their own sake, and to trace them in the lowest circumstances of suffering. And hence it was that the Apostle Paul was so far from being moved with what was commonly objected against the ignominious death of Christ, that he expresses himself with the greatest confidence regarding it. “God forbid,” says he, “that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* They whose minds were thus rightly disposed, beheld his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father. And this true estimate of what is really worthy and excellent, is another part of the character of those to whom Christ is precious.

Third, The persons to whom Christ is precious, are such as are of an humble and sober disposition of mind. We have seen that many of those who were raised to power and dignity among the Jews, thought that it would demean them to take their religion from one in such ordinary circumstances in life as those in which our Saviour appeared; and the same disposition still prevents many from imbibing the true spirit of Christianity. There is

* Galatians, vi. 14.

nothing, indeed, so inconsistent with religion as pride. This may easily be made appear from the ingredients that are necessary to constitute such a temper. Every man that is proud, must necessarily be ignorant. He must have but inadequate notions and ill-formed opinions of the glory and excellence of God, and the perfection of his works. If he had that high impression of the true excellence of the Divine nature which every one must have who is habituated to contemplate the Divine perfections, he would see himself to be so far deficient that he would be constrained to acknowledge that he is in his best estate altogether vanity.

But pride also includes hardness of heart, and an uncharitable frame of spirit towards our fellow-creatures. It is not a man's imagining himself to be possessed of qualities which he has not, that really constitutes him proud. The most humble and meek may deceive themselves with respect to their own characters, as well as those of others around them. Pride consists in that swelling of the heart which disposes us to congratulate ourselves on account of some fancied excellence, and to despise others on account of their imagined inferiority. It makes us prone to anger, ready to resent the least indignity, and, from contempt of their persons, incapable of bearing provocation from our fellows. This hardness of heart is inconsistent with all religion, but particularly with Christianity, the badge of whose profession is love and kindness, and which is in itself a display of the greatest tenderness and most exalted condescension that ever was exhibited to the world.

Besides, pride is inconsistent with true religion, as it has a natural tendency to make us ungrateful to God for favours received. The proud man is ready to arrogate

everything to himself, and to imagine that everything he possesses was bestowed upon him as the reward of his merit, and is no more than he deserves. His love, therefore, and gratitude to a benefactor, must necessarily be less than that of the man who wisely considers that he has nothing but what God has given him, and is nothing but what God, out of his abundant mercy, has been pleased to make him. Upon all these accounts it is that the proud are so much spoken against in Sacred Scripture, and are in a particular manner represented as the objects of the Divine displeasure. God is said to know the proud afar off;* and to scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts;† but he has declared that he will look to, that is, that he will approve of “him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit;”‡ and that “their’s is the kingdom of heaven.”§

Since humility, then, is so essential a part of religion, and since pride is so inconsistent with it, humility must be a necessary part of the character of those to whom Christ is precious. Humility is, perhaps, one of the least splendid of all the Christian graces, and the most exposed to misrepresentation. But when it is closely considered, there is none that is more illustrious, or that argues greater firmness and strength of mind. It proceeds from large and comprehensive views, and a just knowledge of the genius and order of the universe. It is easy for a man, through ignorance and mistake, puffed up with vain ambition, to aspire to things above him, and to contemn superior worth; but it requires true greatness of mind to persist with firmness and constancy in an inferior rank; to submit with cheerfulness to the

* Psalm, cxxxviii. 6.

† Luke, i. 51.

‡ Isaiah, lxvi. 2.

§ Matthew, v. 3.

administration of Providence, and to judge of himself with impartiality and candour; and this is a necessary part of the character of those to whom Christ is precious. They who esteem him truly, will have the same mind in them that was also in him, who was meek and lowly in heart, who took on him the form of a servant, and who humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The last part of the character of those to whom Christ is precious is, that they are such as have felt the effect of his teaching, his example, and his Spirit, on their hearts. This is a practical proof of the excellence of the Christian religion, which will strongly establish the faith of any man who has felt it; it will give farther weight to every argument which is brought for its support; and it is that alone which will enable us to acquiesce in the truth with any degree of certainty. Our doubts may be silenced by speculative arguments, and our assent won by the force of evidence; but when we are powerfully convinced, by the Spirit of the Lord, of the excellence of the character of Christ—when we are made to see his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father—when we are made sensible of the justice of his precepts, and the certainty of his promises—when we are made to hate sin, and see a greater degree of deformity in vice—when we experience those happy consequences that regularly flow from faith in the Gospel—we will naturally be led to approve of it as the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation; to love the Lord Jesus, the author and finisher of it, who will likewise, on this account, be precious to our souls.

In the *second* place, I am to shew you why Christ is precious to persons of this character. On entering

on this branch of the subject, we may observe, that the words are susceptible of a different interpretation from that on which it is founded. This is not, indeed, the place either for introducing grammatical disquisitions, or for proposing critical emendations of our authorized version; yet, it is impossible to avoid remarking, that the words of the text admit of a different translation from the one generally received. They occur in the middle of a highly figurative description of our Saviour as the chief corner-stone of the Church, and of the apostles, or rather of Christians in general, as lively stones "built up a spiritual house" unto God. "Behold," says the apostle in the preceding verse, "I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall never be confounded;" and then follow the words of our text, which, in strict interpretation, are to be applied, not to our Saviour, but to Christians in general, and should be translated thus:—"Unto you, therefore, who believe, is this honour," viz., the honour of building, or being built, on a foundation of which they shall not be ashamed. But we may take the words as given in our translation, as they form a distinct proposition by themselves, and afford ample subject for pious meditation. *First*, then, Christ is precious to his people, on account of the dignity of his person, as he is both God and man. The Divine nature is the source of all that glory that appears amongst the creatures. The perfection of the angelic nature itself is but a faint ray derived from this eternal light. And all that beauty and comeliness, all that wisdom and power, which appear so conspicuous in the works of creation, give us but an inadequate representation of the glory of the great Creator in comparison of what he is in himself; for it is impossible that infinite and

uncreated excellence should be fitly expressed in that which is made, or that that which is omnipotent and eternal should be contained by that which is frail and finite.

Besides, it is but a small part of his works that can fall within our narrow and limited observation. We are but imperfectly acquainted with the extent and variety of those laws by which this material universe is governed, and we do not observe a thousandth part of that beautiful contrivance by which even the natural world is kept from falling into disorder, or preserved in that beauty and regularity in which we at first beheld it; far less can we see through the scale of intellectual beings, and observe their various orders and dependencies, when we are not able to account for our own perceptions, and the different operations of our own minds. Yet, notwithstanding of this, we have sufficient reason to conclude, even from that part of God's works which we behold, that he is infinite in all perfection. Though his glory cannot be fully expressed in this great and mighty universe, and can still less be perceived when his works are but imperfectly comprehended, yet he has published such visible traces of his wisdom and power, and justice and goodness, in everything that he has made, that we have reason to admire and adore him, and to be satisfied that, although we cannot understand him as he is, yet we can conceive of him as infinite and boundless. In this respect, then, the character of our Redeemer ought to be precious and honourable in our eyes, as he is God; the Creator of men and angels; by whom all things exist; who, in the beginning, laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the workmanship of his hands; who is appointed heir of all things; who is the brightness

of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.

Again, Christ is precious to his people with respect to his human nature, which is also perfect. His human virtues are not so awful as the Divine. The glory with which they are attended is of a milder nature, but therefore well adapted to work upon our minds and engage our affections. We are most interested in anything that is human; our compassion is most easily moved by human sufferings, and we are soonest won by examples of goodness in a human character. There is a natural sympathy and brotherly affection which unites us to beings of the same frame and constitution with ourselves; because, from what we experience in our own minds, we are conscious of their feelings, and more sensible of their excellence. Hence, whilst we honour the Redeemer as the Son of God and partaker of the Divine nature, and love him on that account with awe and reverence, he is still farther endeared to us when we consider him in his human character, as clothed with our nature, and our elder brother.

It is agreeable to us to contemplate anything in its perfection—even any of the inferior creatures, if perfect in its kind, has something of comeliness and beauty in it which disposes us to regard it with admiration. How much more shall the nature of man, seen in its perfection, as existing in the character of Christ, seem noble and illustrious—that nature which was originally formed after the image of God, and, though sadly corrupted, still retaining some portion of its original dignity and beauty—how splendid and attractive must that nature appear in the person of the Messiah, without spot or blemish, adorned with every virtue that is competent to it! And how apt to conciliate *our* esteem and appro-

bation, who judge of characters by our own standard, and have the highest esteem of whatever is perfect in our nature.

Thus is Christ precious to his people in respect of the dignity of his person, as he is both God and man.

Second, Christ is precious to his people on account of the peculiar excellences which he displayed in his character as Redeemer. Among the excellences by which he was thus distinguished, his obedience to his Father's will is conspicuous. "Lo, I come," says he, ("in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God."* It was always as his meat and drink, more pleasant and agreeable to him than the supply of his natural wants, to do the will of Him that sent him.†

There is nothing more fit and expedient, nothing more conducive to the good of the world, than that God should be obeyed in all things. Every society is best regulated, and proceeds with the greatest order and harmony, when every particular member directs himself according to the opinion of the wisest and best, embodied in the regulations acquiesced in by all. And in this great city of the world, the will of God, who is the Head and Sovereign, is that alone which every one ought to obey, in order to promote, not only his own happiness, but the happiness of the whole. For he only knows what is fit for his creatures in general, and for every one of them in particular, and has the tenderest regard for their interest and welfare. It, then, order is to be preferred to confusion, or happiness to misery, it is fit that God should be honoured and obeyed. Now this obedience must recommend such as practise it to

* Hebrews, x. 7.

† John, iv. 34.

our esteem and regard, and must, particularly, make the character of the blessed Jesus precious in our eyes.

This leads me to notice another excellence of the character of Christ as he is Mediator, namely, the extensive nature of his design in what he did and suffered. It is requisite in every perfect action that it should have a respect to the whole of those ends which may be attained by it. If any of us should do an action materially good—relieve the wants of some necessitous object, visit the sick and afflicted, instruct the ignorant, or deliver such as are in danger—yet, if in this we have no regard to the will of God, no respect to the whole order of being, no desire for the general happiness of our own species, we should be so far deficient; for everything we undertake will admit of a regard to all these particulars; and whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we may do all to the glory of God. Now, as what Christ did for accomplishing the salvation of sinners was perfect, he must have had a regard in it to all of these. We should not, then, take a narrow and contracted view of our Saviour's character; we ought to consider it in its full extent, as far as our faculties will admit; we should regard him not only as the friend of mankind, but likewise as having a regard to the whole of those beings whom God has rendered capable of happiness. And our viewing thus the love of Christ in its full extent, will render him precious in the esteem of his people.

These considerations may not always present themselves to us in our views of our Saviour's life; because, from the natural infirmity and imperfection of our minds, we are not capable of viewing any object in a great variety of lights at once; but when we set ourselves to meditate on the excellence of our Re-

deemer's character, we should endeavour to regard it in all its extent, and to view it, as far as we can, in all its perfection; and this will naturally render him precious in our eyes.

But, while we thus view the extensive nature of our Saviour's design, we must not forget that it was from special love to the children of men that he came into the world. And this view also will render him precious in our eyes. That he loved us, appears in this, that he laid down his life to make atonement for our sins; and the greatness of that love was manifested in overcoming the obstacles that lay in its way. We are by nature sinful, a people laden with iniquity. We are easily overcome by the slightest temptations. Often are we ungrateful for favours received, and rebellious against the God of all our mercies. These sinful propensities would have been effectual barriers in the way of our acceptance—blemishes sufficient to have made us abhorred by any but the Father of mercies—to have overcome any love but the love of the Redeemer. From love to us he undertook the work of our redemption; a work which was not to be completed at once, but which required a gradual process to bring it to perfection. Not only did he charge his Providence with it from the beginning of time—bringing up his people out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm—drying up the deep before them, and conducting them through the waves as through the wilderness—leading them through the desert by a cloud by day, and all night long by a pillar of fire—but when the fulness of time was come, he condescended to become man and tabernacle upon the earth; through a life of suffering and reproach, terminating in a cruel and ignominious death, to accomplish the scheme of man's salvation.

Nor was the price to be paid at once. It was necessary for him to continue long in a state of humiliation, enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself, and submitting to innumerable indignities, until he should be able, by a long process of teaching, and by repeated examples, to prepare his disciples for the part they were to act after his ascension. And even after his resurrection, he still sojourned with them for forty days, informing them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. And then only was he removed that he might appear for them in the presence of God. Here then is love from eternity to eternity. He will never leave them nor forsake them, but will be with them in every exigence and in every trial, even till the dissolution of all things, when the angel of God shall arrest the sun in his progress, and, lifting up his hand to heaven, shall swear by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no more. *

Thirdly, Christ is precious to his people, on account of his sufficiency to be a Saviour and Redeemer, as he is able and well qualified for effectuating their deliverance from the state of sin and misery into which they were sunk, both by the power and wisdom of which he was possessed. He is sufficient, as he is possessed of infinite power; he has all power in heaven and in earth committed to him; he has the government on his shoulders, and is the Prince of the kings of the earth; he is not only able to govern a willing people, but can dash in pieces such as oppose him like a potter's vessel; his power and glory are prophetically described in the Book of Psalms.† “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in

* Revelation, x. 6.

† Psalm, xlv. 3, 4.

thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness." He has the keys of hell and of death;* he "openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."† Since then he is possessed of such universal and unlimited power, who shall be able to hinder him in the execution of his purposes of grace and mercy towards the children of men.

He is able by his power to deliver them from the world. The greatest danger to which a Christian is exposed, is from what is called the world: from the enticements of men; from the pleasures of life, and from its calamities. The evil examples and corrupt communications of those with whom we may converse, the advantage they may have over us by means of superior power or sagacity, may often lead us to dangerous compliances, to do such things as are inconsistent with duty. The pleasures of the world may engross too great a share of our affections; wealth, honour, and power may set themselves in the chief places in our hearts, and prove a snare to our souls; or we may, on the other hand, be terrified with the apprehension of those calamities that may befall us, and, in order to avoid them, neglect our duty, or act inconsistent with it. In all these respects the world becomes a dangerous adversary to the integrity of man. But Christ our Redeemer is sufficient to enable us to overcome it. He can render his people superior to the terrors and allurements of present things. He can inspire them with courage and resolution to bear adversity, and enable them to out-brave all those terrors that would frighten them from persisting with steadfastness in that which they know to be right. He can likewise make the blandishments of

* Revelation, i. 18.

† Revelation, iii. 7.

the world, all those things that men are apt to choose instead of their duty, cheap in the esteem of his people, by making them acquainted with higher pleasures and higher enjoyments, that will yield them a more noble and refined satisfaction. That which makes us so fond of those possessions that are uncertain and transitory in their nature, is our being unacquainted with good things, that are of better and more enduring substance. But if once we are taught to have a relish of those true riches and that true happiness which result from the enjoyment of God, and from being conformed to his image, we will rest in these as our complete portion, as being all our salvation and all our desire. And such views Christ is able to give us. He can enlighten us by his spirit; he can edify us by his instructions; he can encourage us by his example; by all of which he holds forth true goodness in its most lovely form, for engaging our esteem, and making us despise everything which comes in competition with it.

Again, Christ is a sufficient Saviour, as he is wise. He is not only the power of God, but the wisdom of God, for salvation, to all them that believe. Man is a reasonable being, endowed with a sense of what is right and wrong; and, in any change that is to be produced upon him, he must be reached through his reason and understanding, and wrought upon through the operations of his mind. It, therefore, becomes necessary that the Gospel dispensation, which was intended for the reformation of mankind, should be framed in such a manner as to gain our assent by the force of its evidence, and awaken our gratitude and love to God, by the examples of kindness, mercy, and beneficence which it proposes: that it should make us hate every evil and wicked way, by setting goodness and excellence

before us in the highest perfection, and in such instances as were best adapted to our faculties, and most proper for engaging our imitation. Our faculties were corrupted by sin, the best affections of our nature were in a great measure laid asleep, and the mind had contracted a bias towards sensible objects, and neglected such as are Spiritual and Divine. In order, therefore, to restore our nature and effectuate our reformation, it was necessary that such objects should be proposed to us as might awaken the affections of our hearts, and direct them in a proper channel, that they might be raised up from a state of death to a Divine and Spiritual life. And this important scheme was executed by Jesus, who was the wisdom of God unto salvation. And it could not be executed by any but he, who knew perfectly what was in man, who understood his nature and saw his defects, and who was perfectly acquainted with the means necessary to cure them. Accordingly, he has suited his instructions in the Gospel to all circumstances and conditions of men. In it there are consolations for the afflicted, and considerations for moderating the mind in the highest prosperity. It contains directions in all cases of difficulty, and strong support and encouragement in the hour of temptation. It is a wise contrivance, adapted to all capacities. It teaches wisdom to the simple; to the young man knowledge and discretion; and on such as are fraudulent and treacherous in their disposition it inculcates sincerity and openness of heart. Those that are sunk in superstition and servile fear, looking on God as a cruel and outrageous being, it encourages to approach with holy confidence, as children to a Father; and such as proceed with a high hand in wickedness, contemning the law of God, and despising its threatenings, it reminds of the decisions of justice, and the

terrors of Almighty displeasure. The fierce and outrageous it makes meek and gentle ; and such as are of a weak and feeble constitution it strengthens in the performance of what is right and good. It abases the proud, by making them apprehend their lost and miserable condition by nature, the greatness of their sin, and the deformity of their character : it raises the humble, as it points out to them the value of their immortal souls, which God regarded so highly as to redeem at so great and unspeakable a price, as it confirms all their privileges, and establishes their hopes of glory, honour, and immortality.

Since, then, the Christian religion is so excellent in itself, and so well adapted to the circumstances of mankind—since it was published, both by its author, and afterwards by the apostles, with such excellent skill and manifest advantage, both in point of evidence and of application to the circumstances of mankind—we can never enough admire the wisdom of the great author and finisher of our faith, who will likewise, on this account, be precious to our souls.

In the *third* place, I am to point out the improvement of this subject. The great lesson which we should draw from it, is to examine and try ourselves whether we are of the number of those to whom Christ is precious ; for it is a matter of the last importance, both to our peace and comfort in this world, and our happiness in the next, that we be not deceived in this matter. If Christ be not precious to us, we are none of his, and are entitled to none of the benefits of his purchase : we are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of grace. In order, therefore, to ascertain whether Christ be precious to us, we must examine our hearts with diligence and impar-

tiality, whether we have really the marks of those that love Christ. Love is a sympathy of nature, founded on an agreement of sentiment and temper, which can only take place betwixt such as are in some measure conformed to each other in dispositions and affections. God, indeed, loved us before we had a being, and, consequently, before we had any likeness to him, or anything amiable in us to engage him to love us. Nay, he loved us when we were sinners, and enemies against him, and fitter objects of detestation and displeasure than of his love and affection. But the love that subsists in the breasts of Christians is a principle of a very different nature, and cannot be expected to equal the love of God to his creatures either in kind or degree. It is a love founded on esteem, and a sense of benefits received, and will bear a strict proportion to the agreement and similarity that subsists between them. He, then, that loves Christ on account of his obedience to his Father's will, must himself also be disposed to obey it. He that loves Christ on account of his regard to the happiness of all God's creatures, and of mankind in particular, must also himself be desirous of contributing, as far as his influence extends, to the perfection of God's works, and must be a friend of mankind. And in order to value his humility aright, we must ourselves be humble and resigned. Now, in order to determine whether Christ be really precious to us, whether we have a real love to him, we must try ourselves, and see whether we have those graces in us which form the ground of our admiration of him.

But another way by which we may judge whether Christ be really precious to us, is by our dispositions towards his people. "By this," says he, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to

another :” * that is to say, men may judge of your love to me by your love to your brethren of men. And the reason of this connection is obvious. They that are Christ’s have the same mind in them that was also in him. Their character, as we have observed, will have a resemblance to his ; and the same motives that excite our love in the one case, will have a proportional effect in the other. But if we do not love our Christian brethren, we have reason to suspect that we do not love Christ on good grounds, but that we mistake in estimating our own characters, and deceive ourselves.

Again, if we really love Christ, we will love his ordinances. All the institutions of religion have a tendency to promote in us like dispositions and tempers. The Christian will find, by his attendance upon them, his love of the Redeemer increasing more and more. They are, as it were, the pledges of an absent friend ; and if we love our friend, we will value the pledges and tokens he has left us. We will take pleasure in regarding them, because they both bring to our remembrance him whom we love, and are an expression of his love to us. Anything that brings a friend to our remembrance, must give us satisfaction. Much more must the ordinances of religion be pleasant to him who loves the Saviour, which remind him of his best friend, his most merciful deliverer, and most gracious benefactor. But if we find that we have no regard to the institutions of religion, we have reason to suspect that we are not of the number of those to whom Christ is precious.

If we love Christ, and are of the number of those to whom he is precious, we will likewise love his law, which

* John, xiii. 35.

is wisely calculated to form our manners into a resemblance of his. Our hearts will, therefore, assent to it; we will be made to see its justice and excellence, and the advantage with which it is attended, as exemplified in the life and character of Christ, and will be led to practice it in conformity to his example. But if we do not love the law of righteousness, if we decline to make it the rule of our conduct and behaviour, whatever warmth of feeling we may think we sometimes feel toward the Redeemer, we are not of the number of those to whom Christ is precious, and do not love him on sufficient grounds.

To conclude, let us endeavour to attain to a right knowledge of Christ's character, that we may be amongst the number of those to whom he is precious, and who love him in sincerity. If our love of him be not founded on just views of what he is in himself, and what he has done for the glory of God and the good of mankind, it is but an imaginary being who is the object of our affection, and not the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us, therefore, meditate much on his moral perfections, his obedience to God, his love to men, his patience, his humility. Let us not affront the Divine goodness in providing such a Saviour for us, by despising him, but shew, by the reception we give to his Gospel, our esteem of its great author; that we reckon it a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus has come into the world to deliver and save us.

May Almighty God grant that Christ may become precious to us; that we may regard him as the chief of ten thousand, and altogether lovely. Touched by his mighty works, and by the perfection of his nature as God and man, may we submit ourselves to him, to learn

his will, and to obey his injunctions; and may he become unto us the power of God and the wisdom of God. Amen.

PUBLIC, OR CONCLUDING PRAYER.

O LORD, thou art great, and greatly to be feared; thou art good, and much to be loved. Who would not fear thee and serve thee, for thou only art holy? Thou art the supreme and wise disposer of all things. Whatsoever thou, the Lord, pleasest, that doest thou in the heavens, and in the earth, and in the seas, and all deep places. Thou commandest the sun, and it shineth not, and thou sealest up the stars. Thou turnest the shadow of darkness into morning; thou makest the day darkness, and it is night.

O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong God like unto thee, or thy faithfulness round about? Strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand. The heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord; thy faithfulness also in the congregation of saints. For who in heaven can be compared unto the Lord? who, among the sons of the mighty, can be likened unto our God?

With what reverence, O Lord, ought we to stand before thee, whom all nature reveres, and to worship that God with whom is terrible majesty. By terrible things in righteousness mightest thou answer us. But blessed be God, who turnest not away our prayer from thee, nor thy mercy from us.

We revere thee, O Lord, as our Creator and our God. Thou, O Lord, art our Father, and we are all

the work of thy hand. Thine hands have made us, and fashioned us round about. Thou hast clothed us with skin and flesh; thou hast fenced us with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted us life and favour; and thy visitation hath preserved our spirit.

We bless thee, O Lord, for the rank thou hast assigned us in thy creation—that thou hast made us rational beings, and endowed us with immortal souls capable of enjoying eternity with thyself in heaven.

We bless thee for the advantages of our birth and education; that we have been born and brought up in a land of knowledge and Christian freedom, where the light of the Gospel of Christ has shone out in its splendour. We bless thee for the instruction, in its truths, which we may have received in our earlier years: that we have been trained up in the ways of wisdom and religion, in the knowledge of thee the true God, and of those truths that concern our highest interests, and not left to ourselves in a corrupted world, to follow, without restraint, the impulse of wicked hearts, or the dictates of untutored minds.

We bless thee for the care of thy Providence over us, and for our preservation in safety amidst the many evils of this imperfect state. By thee have we been sustained from our youth; our praise will be continually of thee.

Above all, we bless thee as the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in high places: that thou hast raised up thy Son, and sent him to bless us in turning us from our sins; that he appeared in our nature to instruct us by his doctrine, and, by his example, to conduct us to wisdom; that he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross;

that he rose again from the dead by the glory of the Father; that he is exalted a Prince and Saviour to thy right hand, where he lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Teach us, O Lord, to revere thee as the supreme and wise Ruler of the universe, who dost superintend, and direct, and govern all things. Let us rejoice in thy wisdom and great goodness, which hath brought light out of darkness to thy fallen creatures, and restored them to a higher capacity of happiness than that from which they fell.

Seeing that, out of thine infinite mercy, thou hast so loved the world as to give thine only begotten Son for the redemption of our souls, we pray that thou wouldest shed abroad thy love in our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost; that we may feel a warm and affecting sense of redeeming love; that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith; that the love of God may constrain us to live, not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us, and rose again; and that the grace of God, that brought salvation, may teach us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present evil world.

Rejoicing in the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, we pray for its extension to our fellow-men of every nation and kindred. Let thy Son's reign be extended over all the earth. May true religion be everywhere publicly taught and believed; and may the knowledge of it be accompanied with a sanctifying and saving effect on the hearts and lives of men. Prosper the endeavours that are now making for extending the ordinances of religion to those of our countrymen who have taken up their residence in distant colonies to which the sacred institutions of the parent country have

not yet been extended. Raise up and send out labourers to the harvest which is now so abundantly ready, that the power and influence of the Gospel may be preserved alive among them.

Give efficacy to religion wherever it is statedly and purely preached. Be especially gracious to our national Church, and preserve her in efficiency and purity amongst us. May the simplicity of our form of worship commend her the more powerfully to the hearts and affections of our people, that they may rejoice in her as their own chosen vine, planted by the great Master of the vineyard, and nourished by the influences of heaven. We commend this congregation to thy favour and protection. Richly bless every individual among them. Endue them with every good and pious disposition. Prosper them in their temporal and spiritual interests. May they have of the world's goods and be satisfied. May they have spiritual blessings in higher measure and degree; yea, even above their wishes or their thoughts.

We implore thy special protection of our native land. Bless and prosper our gracious Sovereign the Queen. May she long sway the sceptre, in peace and prosperity, over these realms; by her piety and justice ruling in thy fear; by her condescension and charity reigning in the hearts and affections of her people.

We pray thee to accompany the religious service of this day with thy blessing. Enable us to sing to thy praise with devotion. Dismiss us with thy favour. Go with us to our several places of abode. Continue to bless us all our lives. And to thy name be the glory. Amen.

THE
SERVICE OF THE HOUSE OF GOD.

PART SECOND.

PREPARATION SABBATH.

MORNING PRAYER.

O LORD, our God, thou art great, and infinitely exalted above our imagination and our thought. There is none like unto thee, neither is there any God besides thee. Thou art the Lord that createdst the heavens, God himself that formed the earth. Thou createdst them not in vain, and there are no works like unto thine.

We adore thy greatness, which is unsearchable ; we revere thine omnipotence and thy wisdom ; and we give thanks at the remembrance of thy holiness. We rejoice in the goodness of God, which endureth continually, which doeth good to all, which giveth rain and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

O Lord, we lift up our souls unto thee, the Father of our spirits, and the Friend of man, and entreat of thee that wisdom which is profitable to direct, that we may be enabled to perform the duties required of us according to our obligations as men and the hopes thou hast given us as Christians. Teach us, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and we shall observe it unto the end. Quicken us after thy loving-kindness, so shall we observe thy statutes, O Lord.

We rejoice, O Lord, in that rank which thou hast assigned us in thy creation—that thou hast created man in thine own image, and that thou hast made him capable of happiness, resulting from the contemplation of thy perfections, and from conformity to thy holy will.

We bless thee for all the favour we have shared. We bless thee for our preservation; for thy continual care and watchful providence over us; for our life; for our health and safety; for our food and raiment; for withholding the many judgments our sins have deserved; and for bestowing upon us a multitude of undeserved blessings.

Let not, we pray thee, the thankful remembrance of these things ever depart out of our minds; and let all thy loving-kindness engage our hearts more firmly to thee.

Above all, O Lord, we bless thee for thy love to mankind, in sending thy Son into the world to save us from our sins; for the light of truth which he hath made to arise upon us; for the divine laws enjoined us in thy Word; for the high example of excellence set before us in his life; for his humiliation unto death, and the shedding of his blood for the remission of our sins.

Let that grace of God, which hath thus brought salvation, enable us, as we are taught, to renounce all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearance of the great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Replenish our hearts, we pray thee, with the fear, the

love, and the honour of thee our God; with justice and charity towards mankind; with purity, temperance, meekness, and humility; with a fervent zeal for thy glory, and with a serious care of our own immortal souls. And grant, we pray thee, that we may not only persevere in these, but daily grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, and bring forth fruit more and more unto perfection, until we come into thine everlasting kingdom.

We humble ourselves before thee, O Lord, and confess our sins. In many things we offend all. Our iniquities are increased over our heads, and, as a heavy burden, are too heavy for us. Enter not into judgment with us, O Lord. Pardon our iniquities, for thy name's sake; and grant us redemption through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone we have hope, and through whom, we beseech thee, to vouchsafe us thy forgiveness, according to the richness of thy grace, and, in thine own good time, an inheritance amongst the saints in light.

We bless thee for the many advantages we enjoy of a holy life—for the instructions of the Gospel—for the freedom of thy house—for all the ordinances of religion; and especially for the Sacrament of the Supper of our Lord, of which we have the near prospect of becoming partakers.

Grant unto us, O Lord, such measures of thy grace as may enable us rightly to improve these exalted privileges; and especially to prepare ourselves for a solemn approach to thy presence, in the most sacred institution of our faith.

Be graciously present with us as we are now assembled before thee. Make us glad in the light of thy countenance. Elevate our hearts to worship and serve

thee. Touch our lips, that we may shew forth thy praise. Open our ears, that we may hear thy Word; and let it find a ready access into our hearts. May our meditations be of thee, of Jesus Christ thy Son, and of the preparation made for his appearance. Let thy blessing rest upon a preached word, that it may tend to the comfort, the direction, and edification of thy people. Do thou forbid that, in preaching it, we should seek the praise of men, or that we should disguise or conceal Divine truth, to obtain their favour; but may thy Word have free course and be glorified. And, seeing all our services here are mixed with much imperfection, do thou forgive the sins that mingle even in our religious worship, and accept of us and our imperfect services only for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son, to whom, with thee the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all blessing, and honour, and glory, world without end. Amen.

SERMON.

THE CHARACTER AND OFFICE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

ST LUKE, i. 76.—“And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.”

WE have it in view, my friends, next Lord's day, to commemorate the death and sufferings of the Son of God, who came from heaven to save us. We are to meet together, on a day set apart, for the solemn purpose of doing honour to the memory of him who

appeared to the captives, their deliverer; to the sick, their physician; to the guilty, their advocate with the Father; to all men, their Redeemer and their God. That we may be prepared to meet the Lord, and give an honourable reception to this Prince of Salvation—for, “behold, the Lord God will come”*—I have chosen to follow the method which was formerly observed, to introduce the Baptist before the Lord, that, being now also his forerunner, he may prepare a way for him in our assembly, and make straight in the desert soul a highway for our God—that thus, when the King of Glory shall come amongst us, on the day set apart for his remembrance, we may all be ready to receive him, and shout with holy joy, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”†

Let us, therefore, consider this harbinger of our Lord, and see what are his commission and employment. Let us hear what it is that he proposes, and what he demands of the children of men.

Of whom can we be better informed than of his own father, to whom an angel announced the birth and office of his son: that father who had lost his speech, as a sign of the truth of the message brought to him from heaven, when he doubted it; and whose tongue was now loosened, to declare the design of Providence in the miraculous birth of the child. Hear, then, what he says in the text:—“And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.” In these words you cannot fail to observe two things. *First*, The office itself of the Baptist—“Thou, child, shalt be called

* Isaiah, xl. 10.

† Matthew, xxi. 9.

the Prophet of the Highest;" and, *second*, The manner in which he should perform it—"Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." *First*, We have the office of the Baptist; he was to be the Prophet of the Highest. The messenger, or forerunner, spoken of by Malachi, was to be a prophet. Zacharias here says of his son, that he was to be the Prophet of the Highest; and our Lord himself declares that he was a prophet, and more than a prophet;* and that no one was a greater prophet than he.† Great cause, then, had Zacharias to feel extraordinary joy. After having lost all hope of children, he saw himself the father of a son, to support the honour of his house and the glory of his race. But what rejoiced him was a son without equal, the wonder and joy of all Israel—than whom there hath not arisen one greater among all those that are born of women—a son whom heaven and earth, whom men and angels, whom God himself honoured and praised; for the prophet had foretold him, an angel had announced him, and God himself gave him a name. And all men marvelled, and laid these things up in their hearts, saying, with prophetic astonishment, "What manner of child shall this be!"‡ A son who was to be great in every way; great in his virtue, great in his ministry, great in his life, and great in his death. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord."§ An inspired prophet, who prophesied of Christ as one coming after him, the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose; who pointed him out—"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"¶ who declared

* Matthew, xi. 9.

† Luke, vii.

‡ Luke, i. 66.

§ Mark, i. 3.

¶ John, i. 27—29.

the superior dignity of Christ's mediatorial office, and his eternal existence before his incarnation;* who administered his baptism, and preached the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; who, as our Saviour says, foretold the sufferings of the Messiah,† how it was written that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be set at nought; who taught their duty to all men; and, at last, lost his head in prison to seal the truth which he brought from God; whose name, given him from heaven, was John, or Grace, not on account of the grace or gentleness of his disposition or manners—for he was austere, rigid, and severe—but because, as the Prophet of the Highest, he was sent to declare God's gracious intentions towards men, and to preach the grace of the Gospel in the Messiah, the expectation of whom had been raised in them by all the preceding dispensations of religion—a prophet so great that he was apprehended to be the Christ, but too great to accept a dignity that belonged not to him:—"And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ."‡

This may serve to explain to us the meaning of what the angel said, when he declared to his father, in the fifteenth verse, "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord." Had this declaration been made to one whose heart was filled with the love and esteem of the vanities of this earth, what sort of greatness would he have anticipated for his son? what is there valuable in the goods of the world, what is there illustrious in its dignities, what is there magnificent in its honours, that he would not have figured to himself, when thus assured by an angel of the future greatness of his child?

* John, i. 15.

† Mark, ix. 12.

‡ John, 1, 20.

But Zacharias, more rightly instructed, knew better how to explain his son's greatness. He placed it in his being the Prophet of the Lord:—"And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest." It is not thus that the world judges of greatness. Those are esteemed great who are rich, or in authority, or raised to worldly honours, nay, sometimes those who render themselves distinguished and successful by their crimes. But the greatness of the Baptist was not of this nature: it consisted not in those deceitful vanities of which the world makes such parade. His greatness consisted not in the pomp of dress—for he "had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins;"* nor in the magnificence of his table—for his meat was locusts and wild honey; nor in the accommodations and splendour of a palace—for he lived in the deserts, and laid himself to rest in the caves of the ground. But the dignity of this child consisted in this, that he was a Prophet of the Lord—a great preacher of his grace—a mighty labourer to establish his kingdom among men. This was what transported the aged Zacharias. He rejoiced not nor anticipated that his son should be rich, or powerful, or be raised to the honour of the priesthood, or the highest dignity of the state. His satisfaction and his joy consisted in this, that he was to be a prophet, filled with the Holy Ghost;† a successful instrument of declaring God's glory, who should turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God;‡ who should turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.§

Such was the anticipation of this father of the pro-

* Matthew, iii. 4. † Luke, i. 15. ‡ Luke, i. 16. § Luke, i. 17.

mised greatness of his son, which the event so well fulfilled. And from it Christian parents may learn a rule by which to regulate their wishes for the greatness of their children. Such greatness, in kind and degree, as the angel promised, and Zacharias anticipated for his son, it would be impious in them to expect for theirs. But the nature of the greatness, which they should wish for them, they may here surely discover, not what will make them great in the world only, but what will make them great in the sight of the Lord. Religion, indeed, forbids them not to be anxious for their worldly prosperity; but it requires them to form no desire for their greatness, which is inconsistent with higher obligations. Nay, it requires that righteousness should be the foundation on which they wish that their worldly greatness should be raised. Whilst then they may lawfully desire their children's prosperity, let not their sole satisfaction be to see them wealthy or rich in the world's substance, but rich in faith and good works. Not distinguished merely by high endowments and intellectual qualifications, but by those good dispositions and pious affections, those virtues and graces of the Christian life, which, in the sight of God, are of great price.

But, farther, John was not only a prophet, but was to be owned and acknowledged as such. Thou shalt *be called* the Prophet of the Highest—thou shalt be taken notice of as the Prophet of the Highest—qualified by God, and acknowledged by men. Accordingly we know that John was designed by God, from his birth, for the sacred office which he sustained; and the word of the Lord came unto him in the wilderness. And he came to all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of

sins.* And all the people received him as a prophet; as such the Pharisees feared him; Herod respected him at his court and in his palace; and afterwards, when he would have put him to death for Herodias' sake, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.† When the chief priests and elders of the people, too, questioned the authority of Jesus Christ, in order to confound them, he only asked them one thing:—"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" These masters of the temple durst not vilify John, by saying of men—"If we shall say, Of men; we fear the people: for all hold John as a prophet."‡

The prophets were extraordinary men; the messengers of God, the heralds of his will, the sacred ministers of his oracles, who revealed his mysteries, and published his wonders. But what rendered the mission of John the more remarkable was, that the spirit of prophecy had ceased for nearly four hundred years, from the time of Malachi, when God raised up John. After so long and dismal a silence, what an extraordinary thing was it to see a new prophet appear, with all the light, the knowledge, the power, and the virtue of the ancient seers of Israel? And ought not his coming to have removed the veil from their eyes? since by so many evidences they were forced to own him, what his father here declared him to be, the Prophet of the Highest; and since he revived amongst them that spirit of prophecy of which their fathers had so long been deprived, in order that, by this revival, he might prepare the way of the Lord, and dispose his countrymen to receive the Messiah.

* Luke, iii. 2, 3. † Matthew, xiv. 3, 5. ‡ Matthew, xxi. 25, 26.

The prophets were raised up to oppose vice ; and when was there greater need of a prophet ? when was the world more overrun with wickedness, religion more debased, or the service of God more corrupted ? The church of God, our Saviour himself called a synagogue of Satan, the temple he denominated a den of thieves. The chair of Moses was occupied by false teachers ; the priests were hypocrites ; and the people divided into contending sects.

To oppose all this, God sent a prophet, in the spirit and power of Elias, to prepare his ways, and to turn the hearts of the children of Israel to their God. And nothing could intimidate his intrepid soul—not the authority of their teachers, not the power of the magistracy, not the majesty of the crown, nor the offended vengeance of Herodias.

To declare what is to happen, and foretell what is yet to come, is what belongs to the office of a prophet. God sent John to declare the coming of the kingdom of Christ ; and what more important tidings could he bring than this—the object of their hope, the end of their wishes, and the subject of their prayers. The whole of the prophets were sent to give knowledge of the Messiah ; to reveal him who was to be the deliverer of men, and to bring them salvation. As Christ was the end of the Mosaic economy, the body of all the shadows of the law, the origin of all its images, the substance of all its figures ; so everything in the prophets had a respect and reference to him. If they threaten evil, they revive the spirits with the hope of a Saviour ; if they promise good, they direct expectation to the glory of the Redeemer. Do they reprove, censure, and awaken conviction, they fail not to turn the eyes of men to the new covenant, where God promises to write

his law on their hearts, to forgive their iniquity, and to remember their offences no more. Christ is the end of all their discourse; the subject, the centre of all. John, in like manner, directs men to him. He is the soul of his ministry, the subject of his preaching, the ground of his promises, the source of his consolations. To him he directs their views:—"To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

The prophets inquired with care and anxiety into the nature and time of our Saviour's appearance, or, as it is expressed by the Apostle Peter, "Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify;"† but John was at no loss to know this. He declared him already come, and as standing in the midst of them. He administered his baptism, declared his grace, promised the immediate establishment of his kingdom, the pouring out of his spirit, and, in express terms, pointed him out as he walked, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"

But the text, in the *second* place, points out the manner in which he should perform this duty. "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways." Jesus, the Christ of God, did not surprise men unawares by his coming. The world had long been prepared, by a variety of events, by a long train of circumstances, and by a number of predictions, for his appearance. Even his forerunner himself was foretold;

* Luke, i. 77—79.

† 1 Peter, i. 11.

and now he appears, and directly precedes him, to declare his immediate approach; that, seeing his messenger, men might be disposed to receive him as the Angel of the covenant who should come now immediately to his temple; that, perceiving his star, they might eagerly look for him, as the day-spring from on high, which, through the tender mercy of our God, hath visited us. Thus was fulfilled the prediction of Malachi,* “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.” And thus, too, did Isaiah prophecy of the Messiah and his harbinger,† “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.” This language is figurative, and must be understood in a manner suitable to the nature of that King who comes as the great Captain of Salvation; for, as he is a heavenly and spiritual king—who came to take up his residence within us; to erect his throne in our hearts; to conquer, not with carnal weapons, but by the sole efficacy of his word and spirit—so the preparing the way before him must be spiritual also.

When, then, it is said that John shall prepare his way, the true force of the expression must be, that he will come to remove the hindrances that oppose themselves to the establishment of his kingdom in the soul, as well as his Gospel among men. These obstacles are of two sorts, vice and error; the two great impediments to the power of religion in the soul and the establishment of the Gospel in the world.

* Malachi, iii. 1.

† Isaiah, xl. 3.

As to the vices of the world, we have already seen how great and unbridled they were; and the evangelists acquaint us with what freedom he corrected and reprov'd them:—"O generation of vipers," says he,* "who hath warn'd you to flee from the wrath to come?" An acquaintance with the manners of those times shews us that this is not the warm language of passion, but epithets purposely selected as adapted to the characters addressed, and intended, as they were naturally fitted, both to guard others against the infection of their bad example, and as a warning to themselves, to rouse their consciences and awaken their conviction. In the use of religious ordinances, which should soften men's hearts, they were only hardened in their sins; and, if they had not been plainly dealt with, there was no hope but that they would abuse his baptism, as they did other sacred institutions, not to reform their hearts, but to quiet their consciences, and to make them rest secure in the external observances of religion, as all that was required of them.

"O generation of vipers, who hath warn'd you to flee from the wrath to come?" "Bring forth therefore," continues the Baptist, "fruits worthy of repentance." Manifest the sincerity of your religious professions by the fruits of holiness in your lives, particularly by repentance of your sins, which are so many and great. Reform whatever is amiss in your conduct, and shew forth your repentance by the purity of your actions, and the piety and holiness of a good life. Thus should sinners prepare the ways of the Lord and improve the blessings of the kingdom of God.

Nor were the errors of the Jews in religious doctrine

* Luke, iii. 7.

less pernicious than their vices; and, above the rest, three were remarkable. The first was, that men were justified and made righteous by doing the works of the law. This was a manifest obstacle to the grace of the Gospel; he who founds his justification on his works being, in disposition, quite contrary to that humble frame of mind which would lead him to embrace the Redeemer and seek salvation in him. No less pernicious and hostile to the reception of the Saviour was the second error of the Jews, that their sacrifices and victims were sufficient to expiate sin and satisfy Divine justice—a belief incompatible with the sacrifice of Christ as the only true propitiatory sacrifice, and as alone efficacious for the expiation of sin. But a third error of the Jews was also hostile to the reception of the Saviour—namely, that the reign of the Messiah was to be glorious on earth, accompanied with the pomp, and power, and magnificence of empire; an imagination directly opposed to the nature of the kingdom of Christ, and one of the greatest hindrances to the reception of the Messiah, who declared that his kingdom was not of this world.

These vices and errors, with which the Jews were so miserably corrupted, were hindrances to their reception of the Saviour and his entrance into their hearts. These are the hills to be levelled, the valleys to be filled up, the rough places to be made smooth, and the crooked straight, that the glory of the Lord might be revealed, and his throne established in their souls. These were the obstacles John had to remove in the ways of the Lord; and this was what he laboured so powerfully for—to correct vice and remove error. He beat down their pride and confidence in the flesh. “And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our

father : for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”* He exposed their hypocrisy and false devotion, by calling them, as we have seen, to real goodness, not to confide in the external observances of piety. He confounds the vain thought, that they merited justification by their works, preaching to them the remission of sin through the tender mercies of God, as the only means of justification before him ; and, to confirm them in it by a visible sign, he administered baptism, to be a seal of the pardon of sins graciously offered in a Saviour. And this is what is called by the Evangelist Mark,† his preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. He undeceived them of the false sentiments they had of the efficacy of their sacrifices, addressing them in these remarkable words—“ Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world !” This is the sole victim really propitiatory, of which all the others were only types and shadows, and no other blood than this can wash away the sins of the human race. And he corrected their vain ideas of the Messiah’s kingdom, by denominating it the kingdom of heaven, in order to lead them not to seek there the good things of this world.

By these means did he prepare the ways of the Lord ; leading them from error to the truth ; from vice to virtue ; from hypocrisy to sincere piety ; from the pride of works to humility and repentance ; from shadows and ceremonies to the true and lively images of things ; from the sacrifices of the law to the Lamb of God.

In this manner he accomplished his office, and thereby

* Matthew, iii. 9.

† Mark, i. 4.

fulfilled the prediction of the angel in the sixteenth and seventeenth verses :—“ And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just ; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

This language plainly imports that, at the coming of the Baptist, irreligion should be so prevalent, that parents should even be unconcerned about their children, and as careless of forming their religious principles as if they had no interest in their happiness. This, we may easily conceive, would be the natural effect of the avowed infidelity of the Saducees on the one hand, and the hypocrisy and false religion of the Pharisees on the other. Seduced by the specious reasoning of libertinism, and despising the weakness of superstition, men would become indifferent to religion itself ; and when men neglect religion in their own conduct, it is not to be expected that they should be careful to instil the principles of it into the minds of their children. Destitute of true understanding and without natural affection, they leave them to themselves in these most important of all concerns, as if there were no temptations which they must resist, no corruption to counteract, no ignorance to be informed, no soul to exist beyond the grave. These the Baptist remedied by his preaching, by turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. And then, from mere affection to their offspring, they would be solicitous to make them truly good, to form their inward man to piety, as the best friend of purity ; and to give them right views of another world, as the balance to the miseries of this.

Let us, in conclusion, endeavour to improve this subject in reference to our present situation. Did John the Baptist, then, appear as the Prophet of the Highest, did he prepare the ways of the Lord by calling men to repentance, and turning many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, then may we see what is the proper way of preparing for the Lord under the dispensation of grace, of which he was the harbinger. It is properly repentance that prepares the way of the Lord, under the reign of the Messiah, as it did at his approach. It is repentance that opens the way and makes the paths straight; that levels the rocks and mountains of pride and self-conceit, which lift up men to notions of their own merit; that fills up the valleys of diffidence and despair, where timorous souls sink in a deep sense of sin, and unjust distrust of Divine mercy; that plucks up the thorns of worldly care, which choak the word of God; that makes the crooked ways even and smooth, reclaiming men from the sinful courses in which they wander, to lead them in the straight path of life; that removes the stumbling-stones that prevent our drawing nigh to Christ, and that draws us forth from those perplexed labyrinths into which the corruptions, the follies, and the errors of the age have thrown us, to conduct us in the plain paths of religion and holiness, by which the Saviour so happily communicates himself to our souls.

You may easily see to what all this tends, and to what it obliges us. It is to shew us how to prepare the way of the Lord, and to convince us of the necessity of doing so. The Baptist laboured in this work in his time, because the Saviour was then ready to appear; and we may justly say that we are now in a similar situation; not only because he will next Lord's day be

present with us, in spirit, at his table, but because he is ever in his assembly to offer us a participation of his merits and his grace. It is true, that from his table to our hearts the distance is perhaps great; for our hearts are often shut against his entrance, though he stand at the door and knock. This, at least, we must think, if we judge by the number of those who appear to receive little benefit at the table. Many present their bodies, approach the table, take the bread, receive the cup, and give place in their mouths to these mysterious symbols, whilst the Saviour enters not their hearts nor gets possession of their affections. They return empty to the world, and feel not the power of his presence in their souls. Whence comes this evil? What is the cause of this disorder? It is because they have not prepared the way of the Lord. They have neither opened their hearts nor made his paths straight. They have brought hearts shut up by impenitence, as by a heavy stone, against the entrance of the Redeemer. How could he enter into hearts so ill prepared to receive him, so barred against his reception? Where worldly cares engross the heart, it is already too full to give him entrance; where falsehood, fraud, and injustice lodge, he cannot make his abode. A shameful prostitution of heart to impure and unmanly pleasure, shuts the entrance against his sacred presence; and it is impossible that he can dwell with pollution and guilt.

Before you come to his table, you must prepare a place for him who comes to seek a throne in your hearts. As the wise men opened their treasures and presented him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh,* so you must be willing to sacrifice the gold so valued,

* Matthew, ii. 11.

the pleasures that are so seductive, the cares that alienate the heart from God, to make a real treasure of his grace, and to find a pleasure and an interest in his worship and service. Thus, having removed the hindrances and cleared the access to your hearts, he will come and pour forth a thousand blessings and a thousand graces.

Come, Lord Jesus, come to us in this manner; come thyself to make and prepare thy way to our consciences, by the power of thy holy spirit, without which neither the Baptist nor any other of thy servants can effectually prepare them; come, to open the door which incredulity and impenitence have shut; come, to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of our welcoming thee, that we may receive thee worthily in thy sacrament, to lodge and keep thee; that we may serve thee here, and be received where there are no ways to prepare, where all thy designs and all thy efforts are crowned and rewarded.

PUBLIC, OR CONCLUDING PRAYER.

WE adore thee, O Lord, as the God who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. Search us, O Lord, and know our hearts, try us, and know our thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. We confess before thee our sins and transgressions. With humility and deep contrition of spirit, we acknowledge our manifold iniquities in their guilt and aggravations. Thou knowest, O Lord, the evil of our ways, and thou

needest not our confession to acquaint thee with them ; yet, as the first-fruits of our penitence, we would set them in order before thee. Let not, O Lord, the confession which we make be the confession of the mouth, but in bitterness of spirit may we acknowledge them. May we grieve for sin, not because of the temporal evils alone with which it is attended, but may we mourn over it as grievous to the spirit of grace and dangerous to our immortal souls. May we regard it as the cause of our Saviour's sufferings and death ; even that death which thou art calling us so soon in this place to commemorate.

Fill us, O Lord, with a deep hatred of that evil thing, which could not be atoned for but by the sacrifice of the Son of God. May we regard *our* sins, committed even at this distant day, as having a share in our Saviour's sorrows ; and may we look into our hearts, that we may find them out ; and, when we have found out what those sins are which most prevail within us, may we turn from them with hatred and detestation. We would, O Lord, turn from our evil ways, by amendment and reformation of life ; but we feel our own infirmity and weakness, our total inability, in our own strength, for such an important work, and the power which corruption has over us, retarding us in the path of the divine life, and calling us back to sin and sense. Lord, do thou thyself awaken the new nature within us. Create in us new hearts. Take thou away our stony hearts, and give us hearts of flesh. Turn thou us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto the living God.

We bless thee, O Lord, for thy grace and mercy, manifested to us in the scheme of salvation, through Jesus Christ thy son. We praise thee for the invitation thou art extending to us in this place, of commemorating,

next Lord's day, the dying love of our Redeemer, in the holy Sacrament of the Supper. Do thou prepare a people for thyself in this congregation. May they that hunger and thirst after righteousness drink of the waters of life freely, that their souls may be filled.

We pray for thy blessing to rest on all the preparatory exercises, both public and private, in which they may be engaged. Do thou follow with thy blessing the exercises of this Preparation Sabbath. Be graciously present with thy people on a day of fasting and prayer. Come up with them to thy house, and give them grace to listen to the instructions that may be delivered to them. May they come into thy presence, and worship in thy fear towards thy holy temple. Assist them in their private exercises and secret devotions. Enable them to examine themselves of their knowledge, that the sacrament may not be to them mere bread and wine, but the memorials of their Saviour's broken body and shed blood; of their faith, that, in a spiritual service, they may not look for bodily sustenance or enjoyment; of their repentance, that they may have a serious conviction of sin, and turn from the love and practice of it; of their love and gratitude to God, the Author of Salvation, to Jesus the Mediator and Redeemer, and to their fellow men, the common subjects of their Saviour's purchase; that thus they may present themselves worthy guests at their Master's table.

We pray for the public prosperity of this our native country; for the Queen and the Royal Family, that thou wouldst bless them; for her Majesty's ministers, that thou wouldst prosper their administration; for the Parliament, that thou wouldst direct their deliberations; for all rulers and magistrates, that, without respect of persons, they may administer justice to all; for the minis-

ters of religion, that they may preach the word in purity and singleness of heart; and for the whole body of the people, that they may be religious and sober, prosperous and peaceful. Command thy blessing on the service in which we have this day been engaged. Accept of our thanks for the communications we have received of thy grace and goodness. Carry forward a preached word on the hearts of thy people. Confirm whatever good purposes they may have formed. Awaken the careless and secure to a sense of their true interests. And let thy gracious spirit be vouchsafed to all, to assist them in the discharge of every duty.

Give us grace to make melody in our hearts in singing to thy praise. Dismiss us from thy presence with thy blessing. Carry us in safety to our homes; and accept of the private devotions in which thy people may this evening engage; and to thy name be the praise and glory. Amen.

ADDRESS,

INTIMATING A DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER, PREPARATORY TO THE LORD'S SUPPER.

IT is now my duty, my Christian brethren, to intimate to you that it is intended, in dependence on Divine Providence, to observe Thursday next as a day of fasting and prayer, within the bounds of this parish, preparatory to the celebration of that sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper, which we have in view next Lord's day. The service we have so near in prospect is the

most solemn act of religion in which men can engage on this side of eternity, and requires great previous consideration and preparation, in order to its due and proper observance. It is, therefore, the laudable practice of our Church to set apart a day expressly for this purpose—for public, as well as personal prayers, for the Divine blessing upon our souls, in preparing ourselves for so sacred and solemn a work. Your attention will, on that day, be turned, in this place, by ministers well-qualified for the service, to subjects that are, no doubt, suited to your situation and views, and that may lead you to meditations fitted to prepare you to shew forth your Saviour's death. But there is, in the mean time, much space for reflection, and there are many subjects that may properly occupy your thoughts before that day arrives. To some of these I have now endeavoured to turn your attention, and it ought to be your duty to revolve them in your thoughts in your retirements. You ought indeed to consider what you have now heard, not as giving you a full and complete view of these subjects of contemplation, but as suggesting to you some topics that may profitably occupy your thoughts, and which you ought to pursue and follow out in your retirement. But if this cannot be done, as, perhaps, the situation of many in a common audience does not admit of it, it is especially your duty to apply the truths which you have now heard to your respective circumstances and your present views.

The advent of our Saviour, and the preparation that was made for his coming, are topics well-fitted for your present contemplation; and you cannot too carefully meditate on the character and office of him who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, with a view to prepare yourselves for coming to meet him at his table.

“ Behold, thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways before him.”

The very appearance of a prophet, after the cessation of prophecy for so long a space, prepared men for something extraordinary as about to happen. And the direct testimony which John gave to our Lord, afford all men the fullest assurance that these anticipations were well founded, and that, if it had not been for the prejudices which the Jews entertained on the subject, they would have perceived that he was the Messiah to whom the predictions of the other prophets were meant to apply. We have seen that there were three of these prejudices that indisposed the Jews from receiving our Saviour—the persuasion that they could obtain justification through the works of the law; that their sacrifices were a sufficient expiation for sin, and a full satisfaction to Divine justice; and that the Messiah was to erect a temporal kingdom on earth. And the same kind of prejudices, if they prevail in our hearts—though modified by the complexion of the present times—will be equally obstructive of our reception of him at his table. The imagination that the deeds of the law are sufficient for our justification is not confined to the Jews, and is altogether incompatible with the virtue and efficacy of that death which we are to commemorate; and, if we have any such imagination, it will be worse than fruitless for us to shew forth that death. We ought, therefore, to examine and inquire whether we have any such vain and sinful impression, that we may correct and remove it, and come in a full reliance on Christ's death, on Christ's death alone, for justification and acceptance. We have not, indeed, the same temptation or inducement that the Jews had to trust in the efficacy of any other sacrifice than that of the Son of God; but we will be

guilty of the same error with the Jews if we fail in any other way in a full reliance on the atonement which our Saviour has made for us in the sight of God. We may know that our Saviour has not come to erect a temporal kingdom on earth, yet we may not be fully impressed with a sense of the true nature of his kingdom. It may not be erected at all, or it may be only partially erected in our hearts, and, even at this day, we may look for a worldly and carnal wisdom in his Gospel. In any of all these cases we are not fit for the table of the Lord. We must, therefore, come renouncing all merit of our own, and desiring to lay hold of the righteousness of Christ. In commemorating the sacrifice of the Son of God, we must take care that we sacrifice not to any other gods. And we must not only know that the external kingdom which he came to erect on earth was not carnal but spiritual—we must also receive him as our spiritual King, who is to live and reign in our souls.

It may happen, perhaps, that we are more subject to the vices than the doctrinal errors of the Jews, and these will be just as effectually a disqualification for our meeting him at his table, as they were at first for his personal reception among the Jews ; and if, in this respect, we be not properly prepared for the solemnity we have in view, we will, like the Jews, pervert God's ordinances from the saving purposes for which they were designed to a hardening ourselves in sin and iniquity.

You have seen that the great mean by which the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord, was by preaching the baptism of repentance. And, in the prospect of coming to the table of the Lord, the practice of repentance is the great duty required of us, on a day of solemn humiliation and fasting, preparatory to that sacred service. Let us, therefore, apply our-

selves to the conscientious performance of this duty; and, in order to it, let us look into our hearts, that we may see what those sins are in which we have most indulged, and what that special sin is which does most easily beset us. But let us not think it enough to mourn over and lament our sins; but let us, as the most important part of this duty, strengthen ourselves in the firm and steadfast purpose that we will forsake and amend them.

Having said so much as to the necessity and manner of our preparation for this duty, I need not, I think, use any argument with you, either to persuade you to an attendance on that solemn ordinance, or to urge on you a religious sanctification of that day of fasting and prayer, which has been intimated, in order to prepare us properly for its observance.

Alas! my friends, if we attend to our own hearts,—their proneness to sin—the overwhelming influence which worldly objects have upon them—their coldness and indifference to spiritual things—and the difficulty of exciting them to ardour and elevation in their devotions,—we shall acknowledge the necessity of availing ourselves of all the means that are in our power for putting us into a right and proper frame of spirit for the performance of so sacred a service. And he must either be ignorant of his own corruption, or have an overweening confidence in his own strength and his own righteousness, who can either refuse or neglect to avail himself of the opportunity afforded him of devoting a day to sacred meditations and religious instruction, with the view of preparing himself for this most solemn Christian observance.

Be it your care, therefore, sacredly to devote that day to the purpose for which it is intended. Attend on

the public instruction and worship of God's house; and, when you come there, let your attention be fixed and your thoughts collected; and think not that your whole duty is discharged by your public exercises, however sincere and however earnest. Your private meditations are still more essential and important. Let these be directed to a careful examination of your own hearts and lives. See that your views and motives in coming to this ordinance be correct and Christian, and influenced by no private or sinister consideration. Examine diligently your past conduct, that you may find out your besetting sin, that you may see your whole sins in their true nature and character; that you may view them through the medium of your Saviour's sufferings; and that you may be led sincerely to repent of and forsake them. And, above all, be sincere in your private supplications at a throne of grace, that you may obtain just views of the nature and end of the institution; that you may perceive the sacredness of the service and the obligations it lays upon you; that, coming to it with all due preparation, with all holy and heavenly dispositions, you may indeed shew forth the Saviour's death; and, receiving a blessing on it from above, experience it to be indeed profitable, and elevating, and delightful to your souls. Amen.

FAST DAY SERVICE.

MORNING, OR GENERAL PRAYER.

O LORD, thou art great, and greatly to be feared in every assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are about thee. Thou hast commanded that we should seek thy face, and thy face, O LORD, we do seek. O LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us, and grant us thy peace. But what are we, O LORD, that we should take upon us to appear in thy presence, and come before thee in the most solemp services of thy temple. We feel, O LORD, that we are sinful, and that we need much preparation to fit us for such sacred observances; and therefore do we come before thee, on a day of fasting and prayer, to implore of thee that preparation of the heart, which alone can fit us for coming aright to our LORD's table.

And now, O LORD, would we humble ourselves deeply before thee in a sense of our sins and transgressions. We have forsaken thee the God of our mercies, and walked after the imaginations of our hearts, and according to the course of this world, hearkening unto that spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience,

Thou hast called, and we have refused to hear; thou hast stretched out thy hand, and we have not regarded. What duties have we not neglected? and what sins have we not committed, in thought, and word, and deed? Yet, in this state of guilt, whither can we flee but to thy mercies which are infinite?—to whom can we go but to that Jesus who hath the words of eternal life? Through him, therefore, O Lord, do we cast ourselves upon thee; to thee do we confess our sinfulness, and lay open our griefs, most humbly beseeching thy grace. O turn away thine eyes from beholding our sins, and let thy fatherly mercies in Christ be moved towards us whom no power but thine can help. Hide thy face from our sins, and blot out all our iniquities. We are weak, do thou restore us to strength;—we are polluted, do thou purify our hearts;—we are blind, do thou enlighten us;—we are deaf, do thou open our ears;—we have strayed from God, do thou bring us back from our wanderings;—we are spiritually dead, do thou raise us to newness of life. Henceforth may we avoid every sin as dangerous to our souls, and live eternally to God. Persuade our minds in all things to follow a good conscience. Bend our wills into a ready compliance with thine own. Strengthen all our powers to perfect holiness in thy fear; and so sanctify us thoroughly in soul, and body, and spirit, that we may be faithfully and entirely thine unto death.

We bless thee for Jesus Christ thy Son, our Saviour. We bless thee for the knowledge of thy will which he has made known to us; for the offers of pardon and peace with God which he has made us; for the promise of thy grace which he has given us; and for the rewards of glory which he has set before us. We bless thee for the institutions of Word and Sacrament, so

well calculated for maintaining light and knowledge among mankind ; for promoting the great interests of truth and righteousness in their hearts and lives ; and for advancing the happiness and salvation of immortal souls.

We bless thee for the near prospect thou art affording thy people in this place of approaching thine altar ; of commemorating the blessed death of our Saviour, as a propitiation for our sins ; of shewing forth the love of God in the redemption of our souls ; and of bringing us anew under the engagements of the religion of thy Son. O Lord, prepare thy people for this solemn service. We are sensible, O Lord, of our unworthiness to partake of it ; but the command of our dying Saviour renders it our duty ; and the many spiritual maladies which we labour under, make it our privilege to apply to this sovereign remedy for the health of our souls.

We, therefore, implore thy blessing upon the services of this preparation day. Give thy people the spirit of prayer, and enable them to lay open their hearts to the instructions of thy word. Be with us in speaking and in hearing at this time. May the message of peace and reconciliation come home to our hearts, to convince us of the need we have of a Saviour, both to deliver us from the guilt and condemnation of sin, and to bless us by freeing us from its power and dominion.

Hear these our prayers, we beseech thee, for Christ's sake. Amen.

SERMON.

CHRIST SENT TO BLESS US, BY TURNING US FROM
OUR INIQUITIES.

Acts, iii. 26.—“Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

IN this chapter we have an account of a remarkable miracle performed by Peter and John on a certain man that was blind from his birth, and also of a sermon which Peter delivered after the cure. The miracle was wrought to make way for the sermon, to confirm the doctrine that was delivered, and to prepare men's minds for its reception; and the sermon was preached to explain the miracle, and to sow the ground which by it was broken up. The history of the miracle we have in the first nine verses, and the impression it made upon the people to the twelfth. They who had been witnesses of it, were filled with wonder and amazement, and gathered together about the two Apostles—some to gratify their curiosity with the sight of two men endowed with such extraordinary powers; and others, we may believe, with a desire to hear them, concluding that their doctrine must be of divine origin since it had such a divine ratification to confirm it.

From the twelfth verse to the end of this chapter, we have the sermon delivered by Peter on this occasion, the scope of which is to bring men to Christ; to make them repent of their sin in crucifying him; and to induce them to believe in him, now that he was glorified, and thus to comply with the design of the Father in sending him into the world.

Like a skilful physician, the Apostle, in the first part of his sermon, opens the wound to which, in the latter part, he applies a remedy. Having represented their sin in crucifying the Saviour, in order to prevent their despair in having done so, he exhorts them to become true Christians—to believe, to repent, and to be converted; encouraging them thereto by the promise of pardon, and the consideration of Christ's second coming; and founding the promise on the relation they stand in to God, as children of the prophets, and of the covenant God made with their fathers.

In the last verse, which we have now read, the Apostle acquaints them with God's gracious and merciful design towards them. Unto you first—unto you, Jews and inhabitants of Jerusalem, who are the lost sheep of the house of Israel—though you have denied the Holy One and the Just, and crucified the Lord of Glory, you are not excluded from God's mercy, or denied the offers of Christ's salvation; on the contrary, unto you first is the offer made. Unto you first—though not unto you only;—to you, the seed of Abraham, the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with the fathers—to you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning every one of you from his iniquities.

Christ's personal administration, at its commencement, like that of the prophets, was exercised among the Jews. "He was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God."* He was not sent, as he himself declares, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and he forbade his disciples to go in the way of the Gentiles, or any city of the Samaritans, "But go rather to the

* Romans, xv. 8.

lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* Accordingly, the gospel was, by the grace of our blessed Redeemer, everywhere first offered to the Jews. Had it been otherwise, many who were converted in this method might have been exasperated and lost; for, of all things in the Christian religion, the Jews were most averse to the doctrine of the universality of Christ’s kingdom; because they had long been accustomed to consider themselves as God’s peculiar people, and the rest of the world as having no title to his favour.

After his resurrection, he was, indeed, preached to all nations, but the Apostles were to begin at Jerusalem; and, in pursuance of this, we find them continuing to preach to the Jews till they judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life; and then they turned to the Gentiles.†

What the Apostle here says, however, of God’s raising up his Son Jesus, is not to be understood so much of his raising him up from the dead—though that is, perhaps, not to be excluded—as of God’s raising him up as a Prophet in Israel. And this may be gathered both from the form of the expression in the text, and from the signification of the word in other passages of scripture. The form of the expression in the text would seem to imply that the raising him up, here spoken of, took place before he was sent forth to bless them—“God, having raised up his Son, sent him forth to bless you.” And, in the same sense, the word is used in the twenty-second verse—“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me.” This would lead us to think that the phrase is *chiefly* to be

* Matthew, x. 6.

† Acts, xiii. 38—46.

understood of the Father's fitting, appointing, and authorizing him to be a Saviour.

It is, however, by virtue of Christ's death, and of his being raised up from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God, that men are blessed in Jesus; for this was the *great* way in which he was sent to bless men. God sent not his Son to condemn the world; but that the world, through him, might be saved. But he was also sent to bless us—and it is a great blessing—"in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." He saves us from our sins by turning us from them, and thus qualifying us for the blessings he had purchased for us.

In discoursing on this subject, I propose,

First, To shew what is implied in Christ's turning sinners from their iniquities.

Second, That one of the objects for which Christ came into the world, was to turn men from their iniquities. And,

Third, That this is a great blessing.

On the *first* of these it will be unnecessary for me to detain you long, in shewing you what it is to be turned from your iniquities. Every one knows what it is to turn from the practice of sin; and it is only necessary, farther, that you turn from the love of it in your hearts. For this is the source of all evil—the corruption that is in us—the evil dispositions of our hearts. To be turned from your iniquities, you must not only give up evil practices, but labour to get sin subdued in the soul, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. Until this be done, you can never be effectually converted—you can never promise on any good purposes of amendment. Upon every occasion, the passion that is unrestrained will break out; upon every occasion, you will be

reduced to the commission of sin, and a repetition of your former follies. You will return with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

Every day's experience may convince you of this. Reflect upon your own conduct, or take a survey of that of others. How often have both of you resolved and promised to do better; to put away the evil of your doings from before God's eyes; to restrain an inordinate passion; to break off an evil habit; to give up every foolish or hurtful practice in which you are prone to indulge, and yet you are not reclaimed; and upon every returning occasion your good purposes vanish as the morning cloud, or early dew, which soon pass away.

What, we may ask, is the reason of this? It is because the seeds of evil are still within us. Our love of sin is not subdued; our evil desires are not altered; we have the same unchanged and unrenewed souls. There must be a change, then, wrought upon the inward man, in order to our turning from our iniquities; and to do this, God raised up his Son, and sent him to bless us, and to sanctify us, and to make us new creatures. And in this respect there is an evident necessity for a Divine interposition. It is only the Spirit of God that can reach the inward man. It requires the skill and power of a Divine physician to remove and cure the diseases of the soul; and, according to his mercy, God saves us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.† But when I speak of the necessity of a Divine power to produce

* 2 Peter, ii. 22.

† Titus, iii. 5, 6.

this change on the inward man, you will easily believe that I do not speak of such an agency of God on our minds as either does violence to the rational powers which God has given us, or as supersedes the necessity of our own endeavours in the business of religion and the concerns of our souls. On the contrary, I speak of such an influence of God's Spirit as perfects our natures, as conducts us to wisdom, and both inclines and enables us to exert ourselves in the performance of those duties which he requires of us, and which, without him, we cannot accomplish. Of ourselves, as of ourselves, we can do nothing, but our sufficiency is of God. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

This is what is clearly implied in God's raising up his Son Jesus, and sending him to bless us, in turning every one of us from our iniquities. It was Christ the Son of God who alone was equal to the work. Him God raised up, commissioned, and authorized, and furnished with the spirit, which was not given to him by measure.† "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek."‡ In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. All power in heaven and in earth is given to him. He is the way, the truth, and the life. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me—for without me ye can do nothing."§

Second, I am to shew you that one end for which Christ came into the world, was to bless us, in turning us from our iniquities. "Unto you first, God, having

* Philippians, ii. 13.

† John, iii. 34.

‡ Isaiah, lxi. 1.

§ John, xv. 4, 5.

raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

Now this will appear, if we consider the doctrines which he taught, the precepts which he enjoined, and the holy life which he led.

The doctrines which he taught us, may shew us that one end of Christ's coming into the world is, to turn us from our iniquities. In the gospel, life and immortality are brought to light, and a future state of rewards and punishments ascertained, and cleared of all the fable and uncertainty in which it had so long been obscured. In the gospel, the whole counsel of God is unfolded with respect to the recovery of man; and God is held forth as reconciling a guilty world to himself in Jesus. In his name, repentance and remission of sins are preached unto all nations; and there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. Eternal life is promised to them who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.* But indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, against every soul that doth evil.

The resurrection of Christ from the dead is another doctrine, put beyond all doubt in the gospel, which also tends to the same end. To those who have just views of God, it cannot appear a thing incredible for God to raise the dead. This possibility can be no longer doubted, since Christ himself was raised as the first-fruits of them that sleep. And he has, in express words, assured us that “there is an hour coming, in which they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth, they that have done good, to the resur-

* Romans, ii. 7.

rection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation.”* And such a doctrine, taken in connection with the impartial account that shall be required of all men, in the great day of the Lord, cannot fail to have an impression on every reflecting mind to deter it from sin. “I have a hope,” says Paul, “that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust;” and the effect which this hope had upon him immediately follows, “And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.” † Has God appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness? has he given assurance of this unto all men, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead? and will not this assurance awaken the most secure sinners, and rouse them, by repentance, to prepare for judgment?

Need I speak of the doctrine itself in the text, of the love of God in the appointment of Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, raising him up, as is here expressed, and sending him forth to accomplish the salvation of the world, by a life of suffering, and by a bitter and cruel death, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself?” ‡ This love of the Father toward us cannot fail to excite in every sincere Christian the most earnest desire to abstain from every sin that is displeasing to so good and gracious a God. If then, there be any ingenuousness in our breasts, if any gratitude to God, if any consolation in Christ, or any impression of his loving-kindness, our hearts must glow with love, and rise in devout affection, and kindle into ardour and zeal, in the service of God, and in a conformity to the whole of the Divine law.

* John, v. 29. † Acts, xxiv. 15, 16. ‡ Hebrews, ix. 26.

But it is not only the doctrines, but likewise the precepts, which Christ has given us, that are designed to bless us, by turning away every one of us from his iniquities. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."* That this is the design of all the laws which Christ has given us, is evident beyond any doubt. There is not one of them that is not intended either to prevent the commission of sin, or to advance the practice of holiness.

There is no vice that is not guarded against, there is no evil that is not forbidden, in the laws of Jesus—all unrighteousness and injustice, all violence and oppression, all guile and deceit, all calumny and evil-speaking, all blasphemy and profane swearing, all lying and drunkenness, and whatever debases and dishonours the nature of man, and opens the sources of misery and distress, are all discouraged, discountenanced, and prohibited. For the end of all the laws of Jesus is the happiness and perfection of man; to prevent the misery to which he is subject by his vices; to deliver him from the power of his passions, and to diffuse serenity and peace in the inner man. The Christian must put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, with all malice; passions which continually disturb the peace of society, and distress the mind, as well as degrade the conduct of the man in whom they dwell.

And as the gospel forbids those vices which render us unhappy, so it advances the practice of that goodness which adorns and perfects the nature of man. And it is not only in the general scope of the gospel that this is set before us, but there are many particu-

* Psalm, xix. 8.

lar passages of the scriptures which give us a comprehensive summary of duty. Our Saviour's sermon on the mount, is an instance of this. How blessed would the world be were it observed as it ought, where every Christian grace is enforced upon us from the special blessedness with which each is attended. How comprehensive also is the Apostle's direction, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."* Read to yourselves, in your retirement, with this view, Peter's exhortation, contained in the first chapter of his second Epistle, in which he directs Christians to join to their faith, in embracing and professing the Christian doctrine, those moral and intellectual graces without which all profession is but a shadow and semblance of religion. Consider how Paul sums up the whole duty of Christians, as prescribed by the gospel, in the three great articles of temperance, righteousness, and godliness. "The grace of God hath appeared unto all men, teaching us to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."† We must exercise a constant government over ourselves, and all our desires and passions, so as neither to indulge in any thing unlawful, nor, in things allowable, ever to exceed. This is to live soberly. In relation to others, justice must direct all our actions; which must not be confined to mere acts of righteousness, but take in those too of mercy and humanity, which it is just in us to shew, and which others may even consider as their due. And, what dignifies the whole, we must exercise ourselves to godliness,

* Philippians, iv. 8.

† Titus, ii. 12.

and pay to God that divine honour which is due, in the veneration of our minds, the subjection of our wills, the love and gratitude of our hearts, the obedience of our lives, and a serious and rational regard to his glory in the conscientious performance of all righteousness.

But it is not only the doctrines and the precepts, but also the life of our blessed Saviour, that is calculated to bless us, by turning us from our iniquities. The influence of example on our lives is agreeable to the analogy of nature. It is from the model which the artist has formed in his own mind that he executes the noblest performances in painting and poetry, but his mind is furnished by attending to nature, and copying after her. Even here the analogy may be seen; but it holds more fully when he seeks to attain to excellence by studying the works of the greatest masters. For this is entirely agreeable to what takes place in morals, where we rise towards perfection by aspiring to conformity to the most distinguished examples. It is a trite observation, that example is better than precept. Precepts can only enjoin us our duty, but example stimulates our exertions, excites us to emulation, and kindles our ardour and desire to excel. Now, in the life of our blessed Saviour, we have the most perfect pattern of all grace and virtue. The examples of men like ourselves are imperfect; and if we implicitly follow them, we may be in danger of falling into error; for there are many infirmities that cleave to the best of men. In taking them for examples, therefore, we must be on our guard that we be not led by them into weaknesses and vices which have often tarnished the lives of great men. But, in following the example of Christ, we are in no danger of doing wrong; for he had no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. He was holy, harmless,

undefiled, and separate from sinners. In his life we see wisdom without guile, simplicity without weakness, sincerity directed by prudence, perfect patience, unprovoked meekness, love to men, zeal for God, modesty, humility, candour, and truth. The nearest way to perfection is to walk as he also walked, who left us an example, that we should follow his steps. He despised the power, the riches, the honours of the world, to teach us to despise them, and to seek for happiness and excellence in higher objects. He sustained sufferings, to shew us how to bear them, and endured the contradiction of sinners that we might not be weary or faint in our minds. Let then the same mind be in us which was also in him; and let us shew forth the virtue of him who has called us to his kingdom and glory. I am,

Third, To shew you the greatness of this blessing—that as Christ came into the world to turn us from our sins, this was effectually to bless us. Yes, Christians, to turn us from our iniquities is most effectually to bless us and to do us good. For what is the source of all our misery and distress? Whence come pains of body and anguish of mind? Whence the evils that are done us by others? Whence the evils we do to ourselves? Whence much shame and dishonour, and little respect and estimation, among men? Whence the loss of God's favour, and our being subjected to his just displeasure?—All is owing to our sins; and to deliver us from them, is to deliver us from the greatest evil, and the bitter source of misery to man.

For, consider what sin is. It is the violation of the Divine law—a transgression of the commands of that God who made us, and who made us to be happy—who made us capable of felicity in his favour and the light of his countenance. It is to offend that God who

gave us his laws, not merely to assert his sovereignty over us, far less to oppress us, and tyrannize over us, and to restrain us from any true enjoyment or real good; but to restrain us from that evil which he knew would hurt us, would sap the foundations of happiness, and expose us to bitterness, and sorrow, and misery, in a thousand shapes. Surely God best knows where our happiness lies, in what way it is best to be attained, enjoyed, and secured. He knows what laws are good for us, and he has given us commandments, in the keeping of which there is a great reward.

But if the observance of God's laws is so pleasant—if the knowledge of them enlightens the mind, and enlarges our souls, and rejoices our hearts—if our actings under their direction afford us comfort, and satisfaction, and peace, on looking back upon them—if they secure us the approbation of men, and, through the faith of Christ, the favour of God;—what must be the bitter consequences of neglecting these sacred laws, and willingly or obstinately continuing in the transgression of them.

The mind, in this case, is bound in darkness, ignorant of those Divine truths that direct and comfort the heart. The passions then bear rule in the breast with an impetuosity that will not be controlled; the affections become sordid and sensual, sunk in depravity and vice; and the conscience becomes seared and callous—dead to all the feelings of good and evil, of justice, of humanity, and the fear of the Lord.

But, to set this matter in another point of view, that the greatness of this blessing may appear more fully, let us consider that it is a blessing which we owe wholly to God, to the grace and goodness of that gracious Being whom we are called to serve. The world

had long lain in wickedness before God raised up Christ and sent him forth to bless us, by turning us from our iniquities. Though God left not himself at any time without a witness, and though the things that were not made were clearly seen, being understood by the things that were made—even his eternal power and godhead—yet a very general ignorance of God soon spread over the world. Men lost sight of the true and living God, and bowed down before gods whom they had made for themselves—“and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things”—“and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.”* Having thus got unworthy notions of God, their actions could not be long worthy of men. Superstition filled their minds instead of real religion; and, instead of sound morals, they substituted idle and frivolous observances, which tended to pacify their consciences without bettering their lives. This was the natural effect of their want of knowledge of the living God; and this corruption of their hearts soon overspread the faculties of the mind; and all sorts of iniquity received countenance even from their religious observances; and God, in just judgment, “gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.”†

In this situation of things, how was the world to be recovered out of that depth of darkness and wickedness into which it was sunk? Had not God preserved a church to himself on earth, had he not chosen a people to whom he gave laws, and statutes, and command-

* Romans, i. 23, 25.

† Romans, i. 28.

ments, and, by a variety of interpositions, preserved them from the idolatry and corruption of the world, the mind of man, by its own vigour, could never have restored mankind to just views of God, and those relations we stand in to him as the objects of his care, the subjects of his government, and the workmanship of his hands; and, whatever progress philosophy may have made in the more civilized states, it never could have been able to have established morals on their proper foundation, and to have either diffused the general knowledge, or secured the universal observance, of them.

What do we learn from the history of the most enlightened nations in this respect?

From the study of man and of God, inquiring minds began to see the absurdity of the popular superstition, and the impiety of its unhallowed rites, and to form ideas concerning the one Supreme Being, the Creator and Governor of the world, more rational and just than the rest of mankind. But, so limited and feeble are the powers of the human mind to form adequate ideas of the perfections and counsels of the Supreme Being, that in all the theories concerning them, of the most eminent philosophers in the most enlightened nations, we find a lamentable ignorance and error.

In this situation of things, what an inestimable blessing have we in Christ Jesus, whom God has raised up, and sent to bless us, by turning us from our iniquities. And this we owe wholly to the goodness and grace of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to the purpose of his grace, which is given us in Christ Jesus, who has brought life and immortality to light in the gospel. Him God has raised up, and sent him, "a light to

lighten the world, that whosoever followeth him might not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”* He feared not to discover the hypocrisy of the Jewish teachers, to correct their errors, to combat their passions, to counteract their prejudices, and to overturn the whole system of false religion amongst them. He has given us the most rational views of God, the most perfect conceptions of our duty, the most powerful motives to exertion, and the most encouraging aids to assist us in the performance of it. He has laid open the great plan of salvation for sinners—that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem; and that he who was delivered for our offences was raised again for our justification. “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”† This was that Son of God that was raised up, and sent to bless us, by turning every one of us from his iniquities. This is he of whom his forerunner said—“He that cometh from above is above all.”‡ “For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.”

Let me conclude this subject with one or two reflections, as its proper improvement. *First*, then, it is evident, from what has been said, that saving grace gives no encouragement to sin, and no one need embolden himself in the love or practice of it, because grace abounds. The design of Heaven, in the plan of salvation, was to recover man from its power and dominion; and, accordingly, all the promises of pardon

* Luke, ii. 32.—John, viii. 12.

† Matthew, xi. 27.

‡ John, iii. 31, 34.

and salvation, through the faith of Jesus, are made to such as repent and believe the gospel. The mercy of God offers forgiveness only to penitent believers that turn from sin to obedience. We are commanded “to repent and be converted, that our sins may be blotted out.”* And heaven is the result of persevering obedience: “To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality,” there is promised “eternal life.” †

Second, We may see the great excellence of the Christian religion. The great design of the gospel is expressed in the words of our Saviour to Paul, when he sent him to the Gentiles, “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” ‡ It is intended to make men holy as the angels of God, that they may resemble them in blessedness in heaven. And this of itself is a proof of its truth. Certainly, without being indifferent about the prevalence of righteousness and holiness among men, we could not wish to disbelieve it. He degrades himself from the dignity of which his nature is susceptible who refuses to be a Christian. Let us be exhorted then to comply with the design of the gospel; let us lay aside every weight and the sins that most easily beset us; let us walk as becomes the disciples of Jesus; let us shew forth the graces and virtues of a good life; and be holy as he is holy, and pure as he is pure.

Third, But great as the advantages of the gospel are, it is not enough that we be born of Christian parents, and live under the Christian institutions, and make a profession of the Christian faith. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircum-

* Acts, iii. 19.

† Romans, ii. 7.

‡ Acts, xxvi. 18.

cision, but a new creature.”* Men are disposed to congratulate themselves that they are not born in an infidel country, or brought up in the errors of Popish superstition. They profess the reformed religion, and they are disposed to rest in this profession. But, surely, the purer their religion is, the better also should be their lives. “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” † Many in words confess Christ, but in their works deny him. These are not Christians indeed. For what is said of the hearers is true also of the professors of the gospel: that “not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” ‡ Our Saviour himself tells us, that “not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” § Many name the name of Christ, and yet depart not from iniquity.

Nor is a formal and strict observance of the external duties of religion sufficient. Many run the round of religious observances that yet never felt the power of grace renewing their hearts. Men may pray long, || and fast oft, ¶ and hear gladly,** and offer a multitude of costly sacrifices, †† and yet remain strangers to this gracious work.

Men may externally observe a fast such as this day is, and yet, as the prophet alleges, they may fast for strife and debate, and that they may smite with the fist of wickedness. †† But this is not such a fast as God has chosen. §§ The fast that he has chosen is to “loose the bands of wickedness; to undo the heavy burdens;

* Galatians, vi. 15. † 1 Corinthians, iv. 20. ‡ Romans, ii. 13.

§ Matthew, vii. 21. || Matthew, xxiii. 14.

¶ Luke, xviii. 12. ** Mark, vi. 20. †† Isaiah, i. 11.

‡‡ Isaiah, lviii. 4. §§ Isaiah, lviii. 5.

to deal thy bread to the hungry ; and to bring the poor that are cast out to thy house ; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him ; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.” *

True conversion consists in a thorough change both of heart and life—a turning of the whole man from sin and wickedness, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God—a change of the inward temper and disposition of the heart, and of the outward tenour and course of the life. It is a “ putting off the old man, and being renewed in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” † Let us be careful so to keep this fast that the love of sin may be subdued, and its power broken in our souls, that we satisfy not ourselves with mourning over our sins, even with a godly sorrow ; but that our penitence may be accompanied with amendment ; that a change may take place upon our conduct, as well as in our temper ; and that we may be fitted to become partakers of the blessings of the gospel by its power turning us from our iniquities. May God grant that the faith and repentance which are essential to prepare us for its blessings, may be fulfilled in us, to prepare us for its solemn observances. Amen.

INTERMEDIATE PRAYER.

O LORD our God, we come again before thee to adore thy great and glorious name, and to confess our

* Isaiah, lviii. 6, 7.

† Ephesians, iv. 22, 23, 24.

own unworthiness in thy sight. Thou art the great and everlasting God, whose existence is from eternity, and who art invariably and immutably the same. Amidst the various events of time, by which all things in this world are altered, by which this great globe itself has undergone mutation, and by which it shall finally be consumed, thou alone art unchanged—from everlasting to everlasting, God over all, blessed for ever.

Whilst, O Lord, we revere thy immutability and unchangeableness in thyself, we adore thy providential administration of this lower world. All things here below happen by thy appointment; and whilst thou art independent of thy works, thou dost not cease to superintend, to regulate, and to guide them.

We bless thee for the manifestation of thy grace to the children of men, in all that thou hast done for them. We adore thy goodness in our creation, in preserving the human race when the world was overwhelmed with the waters; and, notwithstanding our manifold provocations, in sparing us in life to bless thy holy name. Above all do we adore thy grace and mercy in the scheme of our redemption through Jesus Christ thy Son. We bless thee for the propitiation which he has made for our transgressions by the sacrifice of himself. Herein, indeed, is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And we thank thee that, in order that we might be made partakers of his redemption, he was sent forth to bless us, by turning every one of us from our transgressions. May his divine atonement be blessed to us with this happy effect. May we be turned by it from the love of sin in our hearts and the practice of it in our lives. May a saving change

be wrought by thy gracious Spirit on the dispositions of our souls, that we may turn from our sins to the practice of holiness, that thus, in heart and in life, we may become new creatures. For this blessed purpose, enable us to contemplate those elevating and sanctifying doctrines which Christ has taught us; and let the consideration of them animate us with an ardent zeal in thy service, and fill us with a fervent desire to obtain thy favour in the great day of judgment. In the observance of his precepts, may we be led to purify ourselves from all corruption of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in thy fear. May the example of Christ conduct us in all the paths of grace and goodness. May the same mind be in us which was also in him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

And do thou forbid that we should abuse the doctrine of thy mercy to encourage ourselves in sin; or that, because grace abounds, our hearts should be set in us to do evil. But may the goodness of God lead us to repentance.

In laying hold of Christ as the propitiation for our sins, may we accept of him both as our Saviour to atone for our sins, and our Sovereign to give us laws for the regulation of our conduct. May a principle of spiritual life be implanted in us, that we may be prepared to shew forth our Saviour's death. In coming to that service, may we dwell upon the contemplation of our Saviour's love to us, that our hearts may be warmed with love and gratitude to him; and that we may bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in high places in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But while we seek to attain to true repentance of our sins, do thou forbid that we should hope to be justified

in thy sight by our works, or by the deeds of the law which we may have performed. But do thou give us that humble disposition which will shew us our unworthiness in thy sight, that we may be led to embrace the Redeemer as all our salvation and all our desire.

Do thou forbid that we should rest the acceptance of our religious services on mere external observances. But whilst we keep the institutions of the gospel, according to thy appointment, may our souls be filled with that holy spirit which breathes in these institutions themselves. And may the previous services that are appointed to us in thy church, prove effectual in giving us those just views, and that proper preparation, which are essential to the service. For this purpose do thou follow with thy blessing the exercises in which we have already been engaged, and give us thy divine aid in the services that yet await us, and to thy name be the praise and the glory. Amen.

SERMON.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN SENDING HIS SON TO BE A PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS.

1. JOHN, iv. 10.—“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

THERE is no truth of so great importance to man, or so comforting to sinners, as the word of reconciliation that is committed to us, “to wit, that God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their

trespasses unto them.”* And surely there never was such an expression of love, as God’s sending his own Son into the world, “by him to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross.” † Well, therefore, might the Apostle say, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance; ‡ and well might the Apostle exult in the text—Herein, indeed, is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.

I shall not occupy your time in detailing to you the contents of this chapter. I shall only notice that the beloved Apostle, John, having in the seventh verse exhorted to brotherly love, from this consideration, that love is God, and that every one who loveth is born of God and knoweth God, in the eighth verse asserts plainly, “that he that loveth not, knoweth not God”—is utterly unacquainted with the nature, and perfections, and laws of the Supreme Being, and is a stranger to the spirit and genius of the religion of his Son. “For God,” says he, “is love.” It is the essential excellence of the Deity, and he has evinced it in all his dispensations to the children of men. In the verse preceding the text, he condescends on the astonishing dispensation of mercy and love which is exhibited in the plan of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. “In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him;” and, being deeply affected with a sense of this love of God, he farther illustrates and amplifies this surprising instance of love in the words of the text—“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.” It might have been expected that rational

* 2 Corinthians, v. 19. † Colossians, i. 20. ‡ 1 Timothy, iv. 9.

beings, such as God has formed man—contemplating God in his works, and discovering his goodness in all things, and to all the creatures whom he has made, and to himself in particular, whom he has so highly distinguished in this part of his creation—it might have been expected that such beings, on perceiving the immense beneficence of the Supreme Sovereign of the world, would have been wrapt in enthusiastic astonishment, and been led to revere, love, and serve him with their whole souls. But such is the degeneracy of man, that he neglects his God, perceives him not in his works, knows not the happiness that results from his connection with God, and lightly esteems the hand that made him. “God is love,” says the Apostle. He is the first great and eternal benevolence, the original source of being and blessedness. Now, herein is love, not that we loved God—as might have been expected of so distinguished a being as man is on the earth—but that he loved us, when we were not solicitous of his favour, and when there was nothing in us to deserve his love, but everything which deserved his displeasure. Yet he overlooked our provocations, and manifested his love to us by sending his Son that we might live through him. This is an illustrious display of the love of God, that he sent his Son—called in the preceding verse his only begotten Son—and sent him not only into the world, but in that world to suffer and die in our room and stead, to be a propitiation for our sins. In these words there is a plain allusion to the expiatory sacrifices under the law which were offered up in the stead of transgressors, and by which the offender’s guilt was supposed to be taken away. The Son of God suffered as a sacrifice, substituted in the room of those who were offenders, that so he might make

expiation for their sins, and obtain for them pardon and remission. Or, as the Apostle to the Corinthians expresses it, "God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* This is the great truth that is asserted in the text; and, in discoursing from it, I shall shew you,

First, What that love of God is, with which he is here said to have loved us.

Second, In what instance his love has displayed itself—here said to be in sending his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.

Third, I shall lay before you the improvement we should make of this subject.

I am *first* to shew you what the love of God is with which he has loved us. This should seem to be the more necessary, because it has been objected to this doctrine of the atonement, that if God so loved us as to send his only begotten Son into the world, as is asserted in the ninth verse, then it appears that, previously to the coming of Christ, God had a high love for mankind; and, consequently, that there was no necessity that Christ should suffer death to reconcile God to man.

Now this seeming objection is easily removed by distinguishing betwixt a love of benevolence and a love of complacency and delight. The first of these is that which moved God to send his Son to be a propitiation for our sins; that, without prejudice to his justice and other perfections, he might confer pardon and all spiritual benefits upon us. The other is that by which he delights in us when we are reconciled to him, and renewed according to his image.

This love, then, spoken of in the text, is not that

* 2 Corinthians, v. 21.

love of complacency which would supersede the necessity of a propitiation, as if God had been already well pleased with man. None can be thus loved of God, but either such beings as have never offended him, or those who are reconciled by the blood of the Cross, and again renewed in the spirit of their minds, made partakers of the divine nature, and on whom the image of God is thus, in some measure, restored by his converting and regenerating grace. Therefore the Apostle here says, that this love of God, of which he speaks, was extended to us when we loved not him; but, on the contrary, were actuated by enmity against him. And it were altogether inconsistent with the perfect rectitude of God, and with the spotless purity and holiness of the divine nature, to imagine that in this state of enmity we could be objects of his complacency and satisfaction.

But this love with which God loved us is a love of compassion and benevolence, which is quite consistent with the other perfections of the divine nature, and particularly with that spotless purity and justice with which the other affection of love seems most to interfere. For the great God may look with an eye of compassion on creatures, as they are the workmanship of his hands, while he is displeased and offended with them, considered as enemies to him in their minds, and rebels against him by wicked works. And thus this love of pity may well be supposed to excite him to find out an effectual expedient to secure his own honour, and yet to save his ruined and perishing creatures. God may hate an enmity and rebellion against him, and yet, at the same time, compassionate the miseries to which we are thereby exposed; and it is possible to conceive that his bowels of compassion may so yearn towards us, as to engage his infinite wisdom to contrive a way of reduc-

ing such rebellious creatures to a dutiful submission to the sovereign Lord, that they may again become the objects of his approbation and delight. Now, it is of this love of compassion and benevolence that the Apostle is to be here understood as speaking when he says, Herein indeed is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.

Second, I am to shew you in what way this love of God was manifested towards us, expressed here by God's sending his Son to be a propitiation for our sins. This is the great truth which I have proposed to illustrate. The phrase, as we have already noticed, refers to the propitiatory sacrifices under the law, by which the sinners' guilt was supposed to be taken away, and the offended Deity appeased. Thus, God the Father, in the fulness of time, sent his Son to be a sacrifice in the room of sinners, that he might thereby make atonement for the sins of the world. Accordingly he is said "to be *delivered* for our offences,* even as the sacrifice under the law was delivered up at the door of the tabernacle to propitiate God for the sins of the offerer."

On this subject of the atonement, we must observe the part ascribed to God in this great transaction; that God, God the Father, sent his Son, his only begotten Son, to be the propitiation for our sins. This was the sole appointment of the Father. He "made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself,"† according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ. The whole plan of salvation originated with God only; for God only can forgive sin. And in appointing this substitution of his Son in place

* Romans, iv. 25

† Ephesians, i. 9.

of sinners, he acted as the supreme sovereign of the world, who only can dispense with the execution of his laws. Just as, in human governments, inferior judges cannot dispense with the law, but must give sentence according to it; but the sovereign is invested with the power of issuing pardon in such a way as may not encourage offenders or disturb the good order and interest of the state. Now, in order that God, as the Sovereign of the universe, might forgive sinners so as not to weaken the authority of his law or the honour of his government, he sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins. The scheme of the atonement was the appointment of God, who alone can relax his own law: it was the appointment of God, who alone could declare what atonement he would accept. Hence the Apostle blesses “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” having predestinated us “unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”* Him “God hath *sent forth* to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.”† He has *foreordained him*, as it is in the margin—appointed him, in his eternal purpose, to be an atonement for the sins of the world. Hence he is called in the Revelations “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”‡ When the fulness of time was come, the Apostle tells us, “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”§ And when he suffered on the cross, it was “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.”||

* Ephesians, i. 3, 5. † Romans, iii. 25. ‡ Revelations, xiii. 8.
§ Galatians, iv. 4, 5. || Acts, ii. 23.

Thus the whole scheme of salvation was the appointment of God. The Son was called to his office by the voice of his Father from heaven. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* And this is the excellence of the new covenant, and the sure foundation of our hope, that the surety was provided by God himself—that by him the Saviour was commissioned for the great work. For him "hath the Father sealed."† And our great High Priest was constituted by a solemn oath that "we might have strong consolation" in God.‡ "The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec."§

Whether God, assovereign of the universe, could have pardoned sinners without a satisfaction, is a question which we need not attempt to solve, and which is rather curious than useful. Some have maintained that, as justice is a necessary perfection of God, and has an unchangeable respect to good and evil, it was not possible for sinners to be pardoned without an atonement; that the righteous Lord loveth righteousness and hateth evil; and that, as the divine goodness is necessarily exercised towards beings perfectly holy, so justice is no less necessarily exercised in punishing the guilty, unless a satisfaction be made for sin.

But whatever there be in this, it is certain that, considering God as the supreme governor of the world, who has given laws to his creatures, if punishment is not to be executed on the transgressors of his laws, it must be upon such terms as must be consistent with the ends of government. Either God must punish the guilty, or if he shall forgive them, it must be in such a way as may secure the honour of God, the authority of

* Matthew, iii. 17. † John, vi. 27. ‡ Hebrews, vi. 18.

§ Hebrews, vii. 21.

his government, and the public good and order of his creatures. Had no satisfaction been required to justice, we should have been led to think that sin is not so offensive as we now know it to be to God. Offenders would have been emboldened by impunity, and the perfections of the Divine nature would have been obscured. The holiness of God would have been dishonoured, for want of a testimony of his love to goodness and his hatred of sin. The wisdom of God would have been impeached, as if the sanctions of his laws had not been established on just grounds. The Divine power might have been called in question, as not able to vindicate the rights of heaven; and if, after denouncing a threatening against the breach of his laws, it had not been inflicted, the sacredness of his truth would have suffered. In this view it is obvious that the honour of God, and the authority of his law, and the glory of the Divine perfections, alike required satisfaction to justice, that mercy might be extended to man. For this purpose God sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins; and that this was the end of God's sending him into the world, appears both from the nature of his sufferings and the express declaration of scripture upon the subject. He suffered the accursed death of the cross, to redeem us from the curse of the law, "being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."* His agony in the garden was not the effect of his apprehension of the severity of his bodily sufferings, for these he could have endured; but it was the hiding of his Father's countenance from him, when he stood in our room and stead, charged with our sins and transgressions. We have seen that he was delivered by the

* Galatians, iii. 13.

determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The cruelty of his persecutors was but the instrument in the hand of God. The Father could not deliver him to death but for the greatest purposes, and what these were this text informs us.—All we like sheep have gone astray, and turned every one to his own ways, and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. And so the Apostle Peter tells us “that he bore our sins in his own body on the tree—by whose stripes ye were healed.”*

The Jews thought him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted, punished by the just judgment of God for impiety and blasphemy; but, instead of that, “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him.”†

He himself says that “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”‡ For the word used by our Saviour signifies the substituting of one thing for another; that is, to die as their ransom, in their room and stead. So the word is used in other passages of scripture. If a son ask a fish, will he for, or instead of, a fish give him a serpent?§ And it is said, “Archilaus did reign in Judea, in the room of his father Herod.”|| The plain sense, then, of our Saviour is, that he came to give his life, and to die for sinners, that is, in the room and stead of sinners: not merely for their benefit, or for the confirmation of his doctrine, (for this he could have done as effectually by coming down from the cross, as by dying on it,) but as a ransom to redeem us unto God by his blood, or, as it is here expressed, by being a pro-

* 1 Peter, ii. 24. † Isaiah, liii. 5. ‡ Matthew, xx. 28.

§ Luke, xi. 11.

|| Matthew, ii. 22

pitiation for our sins. He is the one Mediator between God and man, “who gave himself a ransom for all.”* Him God has sent forth to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, that he might be just, and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus. In the death of Christ, as a sacrifice for sin, he has given the highest possible declaration of his justice, that he would not pardon sinners without subjecting his own Son to death, even the accursed death of the cross. By setting forth his Son as a propitiation, he has declared that he is infinitely just, and will not suffer sin to pass unpunished; and yet he is the justifier of them that believe, and, by a true faith, receive Christ for pardon.

Thus Christ, our passover, was sacrificed for us; and, through the name of Jesus, whosoever believeth in him shall have remission of sins. He “suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.”† He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.‡ Christ “loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour.”§ “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly;” || and in what sense he did so is put beyond all doubt by what immediately follows—“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” ¶

It has been objected that this doctrine of a satisfaction to justice lessens the freeness and richness of God’s love in pardoning sinners. The Apostle did not so

* *Αντι πολλων.* 1 Timothy, ii. 6. † 1 Peter, iii. 18.

‡ 2 Corinthians, v. 12. § Ephesians, v. 2. || Romans, v. 6.

¶ *Ibid.*, 7, 8.

consider it. On the contrary, he mentions it as an astonishing instance of the love of God, that he sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins. And Paul entertained similar views when he tells the Romans, that we are “justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God sent forth to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;” * and when he says to the Ephesians, that “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace.” † The love of God was the original source of the plan of mercy. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;” and though, by satisfying justice, Christ has given believers a claim to pardon, yet it was free grace that appointed the Saviour, and accepted of the propitiation which he made for sin. Therefore, we are properly said to be justified freely by his grace. And the grace and mercy of God are more illustriously glorified in this plan of salvation than they could have been had sinners been absolved without a satisfaction; for it exalts instead of lessening the riches of free grace, that, rather than permit sinners to perish, God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.

I need only farther remark on this subject, that in this great work the Son of God is represented in scripture as freely undertaking the business of our redemption through his blood. As “God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son for their salvation,” ‡ so “Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and

* Romans, iii. 24, 25. † Ephesians, i. 7. ‡ John, iii. 16.

sacrifice to God ;” * and this was necessary to complete the plan of salvation. As Christ’s sufferings would have been in vain had they not been appointed by the Father, so the Father’s design could not have availed unless there had been a consent on the part of the Son, who, before the world began, had his delights among the sons of men. The counsel of peace was between them both ; wherefore, when he came into the world he said, “ Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me : in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure : Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.” † Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep. “ No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.” ‡ It is everywhere represented as his own act. “ He gave himself for our sins.” § “ He gave himself a ransom for all.” || “ He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.” ¶

Third, I am to lay before you the improvement of this subject. And, first, after what has been done for the redemption of the world, we may see how inexcusable we shall be if we die in our sins. God the Father has devised a way to pardon us in perfect consistence with his justice, the honour of his government, and the glory of all the divine perfections. Nothing, then, is now wanting to accomplish our salvation but our own faith and repentance. Christ has shed his blood for sinners, and God the Father has accepted of the expiation ; and now the matter rests with ourselves. If we will not believe and repent, and come to Christ in the exercise of these graces, that we may receive the

* Ephesians, v. 2. † Hebrews, x. 5, 6, 7. ‡ John, x. 17, 18.
§ Galatians, i. 4. || 1 Timothy, ii. 6. ¶ Titus, ii. 14.

pardon which he has purchased, we must perish in our sins, and upon ourselves must rest the blame of our final ruin. Salvation is offered us upon simple and easy terms; and if we refuse to comply with them, if we will not abandon those sins which he is ready to pardon, if we will not submit to his authority who is willing, on that condition, to receive us into his favour, how inexcusable is such folly! And who can impeach that gospel that saith, he that believeth not is condemned already?

Second, The propitiation of Christ assures us that God is willing and ready to forgive us. The conscience, awakened to a sense of sin, can never have entire confidence in the mere mercy of God; hence the convinced sinner is anxiously solicitous to know how to recover the Divine favour: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old?—Shall I give my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"* Blessed be God that the cruelty of the heathen sacrifices is now at an end, and that even the value they received, from the reference which they had to the sacrifice of Christ, is now no longer of avail; for Christ, by one offering of himself, hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified. There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.

Third, We see in this doctrine that it is the duty of all who expect any benefit from Christ to lay hold of him as a propitiation for their sins. Whilst you do not so, you lie open to God's wrath, and all the fatal consequence of your sins. You are under a sentence

* Micah, vi. 6, 7.

of condemnation; for he that believeth not is condemned already. Hence the force of the declaration of John the Baptist—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."* But, on the other hand, if you will come to Jesus, you may believe that God will receive you into favour, and your sins shall be forgiven. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; and the offers of mercy in him exclude none from forgiveness who do not, by their impenitence, exclude themselves.

Let me, therefore, suggest to you, that if you have not come to Christ, and are not willing to receive him both as a Prince to give you laws and a Saviour to atone for your sins, you are not worthy to partake of the memorials of his death; for the ordinance of the Supper, for which you are now preparing yourselves, supposes a principle of spiritual life to be already implanted in those who partake of it. And while you have not accepted of Christ as he is offered in the Gospel, you are spiritually dead; and if you come to the Lord's table, you will but profane the ordinance, and eat and drink judgment to yourselves. Convinced, then, of your need of a Saviour, see that ye lay hold of his atonement for your acceptance with God, and submit to his sceptre as the head of all principality and power. Devoutly dedicate yourselves to his service; and, counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, study to be "found in him, not having your own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." †

* John, iii. 36.

† Philippians, iii. 9.

In the *last* place, The love of God is a proper subject for your devout contemplation on the evening of this day of preparation for the Supper of the Lord, that it may beget in you the highest degree of gratitude and love to God and the Redeemer. It is especially necessary to draw forth this grace into lively and vigorous exercise, when we are to commemorate that amazing love of his Son in dying for us, that we might live through him. Oh, then, let our hearts be warmed with love to God and the Redeemer, that we may be able to say with the Apostle, "Whom, having not seen, ye love;"* and with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."†

PUBLIC, OR CONCLUDING PRAYER.

O LORD, thou art the great and everlasting God, who alone livest, and reignest, and hast immortality. Thou art the Creator of all things, and the Father of all flesh, and we rejoice in the knowledge of thy grace and favour.

We bless thee for the communication of thy mercy to us, in Jesus Christ thy Son. We rejoice that he who is the Saviour and Redeemer of men is appointed heir of all things, and that through eternity he lives and reigns, observing, upholding, and governing all thy works. Keep us mindful, we pray thee, that he who is

* 1 Peter, i. 8.

Psalm, lxxiii. 25.

thus the Sovereign and Saviour of men is also appointed to be the Judge of the earth.

Enable us, we pray thee, thankfully to acknowledge the goodness of the Lord, in giving us so great a share of his blessings as we possess. May we frequently meditate on thy great kindness, and the rich effects of thy providence and grace; and may we feel a right sense of them leading us to make mention of them with cheerfulness, and gratitude, and praise.

We pray that we may be filled with the knowledge of thy will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that we may walk worthy of the Lord to all well-pleasing, giving thanks unto God, who hath translated us out of darkness into his marvellous light, and out of the power of death into the kingdom of his dear Son.

We thank thee, O Lord, for thy great grace and mercy in sending thy Son from heaven to save us; by his death, to make atonement for our sins; and by his resurrection and ascension, to prove that that atonement was accepted of the Father. May he deliver us from the power of sin, as well as from its guilt and condemnation. May he bless us, by turning every one of us from our iniquities. May we not only be turned from the practice of sin, but seek to subdue it in our souls. May a saving change be wrought on our hearts by the faith of Jesus. May he sanctify us, and make us new creatures. May his doctrines shew us the evil of sin, and may their influence upon our hearts wean us from its love and attachment. May we have a hope that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust; and may we be thereby led to exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence both towards God and man. May the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teach us that, denying all ungodli-

ness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world.

Send, we pray thee, O Lord, the word of the truth of the gospel unto all the world; and let it bring forth fruit, as it has done in these lands since the day we heard of it and knew the grace of God in truth. With the knowledge of the Lord, let religion and liberty fill the earth as the waters cover the channel of the sea. Let thy glory be great among the Gentiles; and, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, may thy name be hallowed among the nations.

Remember, we pray thee, thine ancient people the Jews. Remove their prejudices, enlighten their blindness, and let the recovery of them be as life from the dead.

Visit with thy special favour the whole Christian world. Put an end to idolatry and superstition, and the tyranny and corruption of the Church of Rome. Reform the reformed churches more and more: remove out of them all error, all impiety and profaneness, all offences and divisions, all animosity and pride. Let Christians walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, with all lowliness and meekness, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Bless the kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland. Pour down thy best and richest blessings on the head of our Royal Sovereign the Queen, her Royal Consort Prince Albert, the Prince of Wales, the Princess Royal, and all the branches of the Royal Family. Bestow upon them such gifts of thy good spirit as may fit them for all the duties of their exalted station. Let mercy and truth preserve the Queen; and let her throne be upheld in mercy. Direct the high court of Parliament

in all their deliberations, to the advancement of thy glory, the honour of our Sovereign, and the welfare of these kingdoms. Guide all inferior rulers employed in the execution of government and justice in the State. Bless thy servants in the ministry of the Gospel for thy service, and the good of souls committed to their charge.

Bless the whole body of the people. Give them thy favour, which is life, and thy loving-kindness, which is better than life.

Bless this parish and congregation; be especially gracious to them in their present situation. Prepare them for a right approach to thy presence at the table of the Lord. Give them a just sense of the evil nature of sin, which brought such sufferings on the Son of God, as they are so soon to contemplate; and enable them to repent of their transgressions, that they may not crucify him afresh, or put him to open shame. Bless them in all their interests, temporal and spiritual. Be to them a protection from danger—a support in every sorrow; their hope and consolation in the hour of death; and after death their exceeding great reward.

Bless a young and rising generation. May they be trained up in thy fear; may they be instructed out of thy law; may they be established in truth and righteousness, that they may be useful in their day and generation, and be enabled, in maturer age, to act their part, in all the interests and duties of life, with propriety and faithfulness.

Take us all, we beseech thee, under thy powerful and gracious protection. Guard us by thy good providence from everything that is evil. Guide us by thy good spirit in all the ways of religion and holiness; and con-

duct us to the possession of that eternal happiness which thou hast prepared for thy faithful servants.

Send us from thy presence at this time with thy peace and favour; and accept of us in thy beloved Son, in whom only we have hope. And to thee, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed the honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

ADDRESS

ON THE FAST DAY.

WE have now, my friends, the near prospect of celebrating the commemoration of our Saviour's sufferings and death, in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. And though we would cheerfully invite, and earnestly entreat, every true Christian to this sacred service, yet we would not have them to be rash with their mouth, nor to suffer their hearts to be hasty to utter anything before the Lord. The work is solemn, and should be gone about with the greatest caution and consideration. The Apostle to the Corinthians, in the passage in which he gives a narration of the institution, points out the great duty of Christians with respect to this ordinance; and our Shorter Catechism has enlarged upon its nature. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." The time that now intervenes betwixt this and the communion sabbath is but short; but, if we carefully em-

ploy it, it may be sufficient for serious self-examination, if the exercise of that duty has been hitherto neglected. Retire, then, Christians, this evening from the world, into your secret places, and there commune with your own hearts. Call up your lives in an impartial review before you, with prayer to God that he may help you to know your own hearts; to see how it is with you, and how matters stand betwixt God and your souls. Search, then, into your spiritual condition, and try whether you be yet in a state of nature or a state of grace. If you are in an unregenerate state, and so long as you continue in that state—in love with your passions and attached to your sins—you are unworthy to come to the Lord's table.

Let the devout Christian, then, seriously question himself—Can I witness any change in my spirit, or do I feel any purer desires, any more heavenly affections, than I was once wont to entertain? Can I say that, whereas I was once unconcerned about my sins, now I see that I am indeed miserable, and undeserving, and guilty; whereas I was once dead, now I live; whereas I was once blind, now I see. I saw no comeliness or beauty in the Saviour why he should be desired, now I have got a spiritual view of his fulness, his transcendent beauty and glory; and whereas I was once obstinate and thoughtless, negligent of the great salvation, and turning away mine ear from Him who spake from heaven, now my will is renewed and bent into a compliance with the will of God, and I desire to embrace Christ as he is offered in the gospel?

Search yet farther, Christians, and ask what is the nature of the choice you have made. Have you indeed chosen God for your portion, Christ for your Saviour, holiness for your path, and heaven for your everlasting

inheritance? What is the nature of your desires? In what are your affections centred? What do you think of Christ? Is he the chief of ten thousand in your esteem; and are your desires towards him and the remembrance of his name? What is your estimate of God's ordinances? Are his tabernacles amiable in your eyes? Do you love the place where his honour dwells? And are your souls longing, yea, fainting for the courts of the Lord and the presence of the living God?

Ask yet farther, Christians, and answer impartially the question—What is the nature of your conduct, and the tenour of your life and practice? “He that doth righteousness,” says the Apostle, “is righteous.” What, then, each may ask himself, what is the nature of my deportment? Dare I, in compliance with the world, or in obedience to my own vitiated desires, sacrifice my reason and my conscience to any impetuous passion? Dare I, on any account, allow myself, in any known and deliberate sin, to neglect the worship of God with the indifferent and careless; to drink to excess with the drunkard; or, with the openly profane, to take the name of the Lord in vain? If this be my life, I am yet a stranger to the life of God. But if my conscience bears witness to my sincerity—if herein I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men—if I have a respect to all God's commandments, and make it my daily care to frame my life according to them—and if, when at any time I am betrayed into sin, I am pierced with sorrow, and arouse myself to a stricter guard over my deceitful heart, and to greater watchfulness and diligence in life—then may I hope that, though I have not attained, nor am yet perfect, there is yet a good work begun in me, which may be carried on till the day of Christ.

Once more, inquire, Christians, what is the design you propose to yourselves in coming to this ordinance. Do you come there in mere compliance with the customs of men? Do you come to preserve your character and reputation, and to appear to be religious to others, whilst yet you have little or no religion in your hearts? Do you come in the hope of concealing from men, and, perhaps, of disguising to your own view, those passions which you are yet disposed to indulge? or, Can you be guilty of the impiety of hoping to atone, in the sight of God, by this religious observance, for the commission of some favourite sins which you are not yet willing to forsake? If any of these should be your motive for coming to the table of the Lord, you will but deceive yourselves, and can derive no benefit from the service. You must be induced to come there from pure obedience to your Saviour's last injunction—to do honour to the memory of your dying Redeemer, and to celebrate the triumph of his cross: to engage yourselves to his obedience and service: to seal your union to him, and your title to the heavenly inheritance; and through him to renew your covenant with God, and, in the blood of that covenant, to ratify your solemn engagements unto the Lord. If this be your design in coming to this ordinance, then may you come rejoicing in the Lord. You may cast away all slavish fear, and come with a holy boldness; for he, whose death is there shewed forth, now liveth, and is able to subdue all things to himself. And come in the exercise of a lively faith. Seeing we have such an high priest over the house of God, we should draw near to him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

And may the good Lord himself bring you forward with these views ; and, through the strength of his grace, keep it ever in the purpose and resolution of your hearts to make good your engagements, and preserve you by his Spirit from returning to sin and folly.

COMMUNION SABBATH.

MORNING PRAYER.

O LORD, we desire to prostrate ourselves at the footstool of thy throne, with sentiments of the deepest reverence and godly fear. Thou art worthy to receive all blessing, and homage, and adoration. And blessed be God that there is access to a throne of grace for such frail and guilty creatures as we are, to make our supplications and requests known to God, the hearer of prayer and the father of mercies. O Lord, make us to perceive, and fully to understand, the honour thou doest us in permitting us to present our persons and our prayers before thee, to hold communion with thee the Almighty, and to be taken into covenant with thee, in the body and blood, and through the merits, of thy well-beloved Son—we who, by our ingratitude and transgressions, have deserved to be banished for ever from thy presence. But we pray thee, O Lord, to give us thy spirit of prayer and of supplication, for of ourselves we know not what we should pray for as we ought, or in any respect how to worship thee aright. Take thou, O Lord, possession of our hearts and of our spirits. Let thy spirit help our infirmities. Hear thou the prayers which shall this day be offered up before thee, if they shall serve thy glory and our salvation; but,

above all, refuse us not, this day, thy presence, thy grace, thy fear, and thy love—thy blessing, thy peace, and thy glory.

O Lord, our Father and our God, thou seest us this morning humbled before the throne of thy supreme majesty, to render thee our religious homage, to confess our sins unto thee, and, in the name of Jesus Christ thy Son, to implore their forgiveness—the acceptance of the solemn service in which we are to be engaged—and such measures of thy grace and spirit as shall direct and govern our spirits—afford us comfortable fellowship with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and satisfy us with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

O Lord, we acknowledge before thee our nothingness and our unworthiness. What are we, O Lord, that thou deignest this day to invite us to thy holy table, and to the marriage feast of thy Son? And how, O Lord, shall we dare there to appear before thee? Thou art the Holy One of Israel, and we are pollution itself; thou dwellest in light inaccessible and full of glory, and we are darkness and guilt. From the crown of the head to the sole of the feet, there is no soundness in us; from the moment of our birth to this day have we continually offended thee; always insensible to thy goodness; always ungrateful for thy favours; always hardened against thy chastisements; always the slaves of our passions; always immersed in sin; we, thy creatures, thy workmanship, thy subjects, and thy children, unmindful of our Father and our God, how shall we present ourselves before thine eyes? Our faith has been weak, our repentance still more feeble; our hearts have never been touched with godly sorrow; our sins, though without number, have never affected us as they

ought. We have not been afraid of thy judgments, we have not been awed by thy justice, we have not been moved by thy mercy, we have not revered thy Word, and we respect not, as we ought, that august and solemn ordinance to which thou hast this day called us. Great God, what shall we do in this state? Shall we approach thy sacred mysteries with polluted hands? Shall we touch the Holy One and the Just? O Lord, our sins fill us with fear and trembling; but thy mercies, which are infinite, give us hope, and fill us with joy and peace in believing. We plead the merits, we profess our faith, and trust in a crucified Saviour. See God our shield. Look upon us in the face of thine anointed. Have mercy upon us, and forgive us our sins. Wash us in the fountain opened for uncleanness, and let that blood of atonement which we are to commemorate, as shed for the remission of the sins of many, be available for our pardon, procure us thy favour and acceptance, and purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God. Give us thy spirit, which may increase our faith, which may support our hope, and which may inflame us with the true love of God. Tear from our hearts all love of sin and of the world; crucify that old man within us which crucified the Lord of glory; banish from our breasts all malice, all envy, all hatred, and all revenge; sanctify our souls, and make them fit habitations for thy Son; open thou our hearts that the King of Glory may enter, and that there may be nothing in us to offend so divine a guest—that we may be nourished by his flesh, that we may drink of his blood and spirit, and receive from him the assurance of his peace, the pledges of his love, and the foretastes of that immortality he has purchased for us by his death.

Give us, O God, thy blessing in all the exercises and

duties preceding the great and solemn work of communion; vouchsafe to us thine especial presence and assistance in the duty of speaking and hearing from thy Word, with the view of preparing our hearts for receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. May our thoughts be deeply fixed on the work in which we are to be engaged, that they may not wander after the vanities of life. Be present with us, and assisting to us in these duties, that they may be performed with becoming solemnity, in the strength of divine grace, and for our profit and preparation; and to thy name be the praise and the glory. Amen.

SERMON.

THE DUTY OF WASHING OUR HANDS IN INNOCENCE IN PREPARING TO APPROACH GOD'S ALTAR.

PSALM xxvi. 6.—“I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord.”

THERE are two errors into which men are apt to fall with respect to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper which we are this day to commemorate. The one is that of those who neglect this sacred ordinance altogether; the other is that of those who partake of it without any due sense of its nature, or the sacred obligations it lays upon them. The great maxim that ought to regulate the Christian life, with respect to this ordinance, is, not to separate two things that are strictly united in truth; the one, that Jesus Christ commands

us to partake of it; the' other, that he forbids us to receive it unworthily: the one, that his body is meat indeed, the food of the divine life; the other, that this food is dangerous to one in a state of sin. He, therefore, who sees and knows his state to be evil and sinful, ought not to approach this solemn festival; but neither ought he to think that, in abstaining from it, he has performed his duty. He ought to be persuaded of another principle, likewise, no less essential—that there is a sacred obligation upon him to quit that state that has withheld him from the Table of the Lord, that he may be qualified to obey his precept—“This do in remembrance of me.” The Sacrament ought to be a motive to urge upon him the necessity of conversion; and the nature of the institution should lead him to true repentance, that he may be qualified to approach it. This is the disposition of which, if he understand his duty, a Christian should be possessed; and of this disposition will he be possessed, if, with the Psalmist in the text, he say, “I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord.”

In discoursing at this time from these words, I shall,

First, shew you what it is to wash our hands in innocency.

Second, I shall state the import of compassing God's altar. And,

Third, I shall shew you the necessity of the one in order to the other.

First, I am to shew what is meant by washing our hands in innocency. It is evident that, when David speaks of washing his hands, he has some reference to the legal purification; but, as he speaks of washing his hands in innocency, we may conclude that he has a regard also to *spiritual* purity. I will wash

mine hands, would he say, not only ceremonially, with water, but spiritually, with the water of God's grace and spirit, in innocence and purity. Of the washing of hands in token of innocence and purity, we have instances both in the Old and New Testaments. When Aaron and his sons came into the tabernacle of the congregation, they were to wash their hands and their feet in water that they might not die.* This was to point out their natural impurity or unworthiness to touch any holy thing, or to come into the holy place. And, when Pilate consented to our Saviour's condemnation, he washed his hands before the people in testimony of his innocence.† “I am *innocent* of the blood of this just person : see ye to it.”

Now we know that this washing did typify or represent the cleansing of the conscience from sin by the blood of Christ. In allusion to all this, therefore, we may suppose that, when David says “I will wash mine hands in innocency,” he has a reference to inward as well as outward purification, as is clear from the seventy-third Psalm, where he uses the cleansing of his heart and the washing of his hands in innocency as equivalent expressions.‡

But whether David had this spiritual view of washing his hands in innocency or not—of which, however, I have no doubt—it is obvious that, in appropriating the the expression to us—legal washings being now abrogated—this spiritual sense is the only signification in which it can be applied.

But when he says “I will wash mine hands in innocency,” we are not to imagine that David, more than

* Exodus, xxx. 19, 20.

† Matthew, xxvii. 24.

‡ Psalm lxxiii. 13.

others, could promise on an unspotted innocence in life. "Mine iniquities," says he, "are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me."* He had been guilty of such sins as bowed him down greatly, and made him go mourning all the day long. He had the same corrupt heart with that of others—"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."† But he never pleaded this as an excuse for any sin of which he had been guilty. He regarded it as an evil which had to be cured—as a stream against which he had to struggle. "I will take heed to my ways," says he, "that I sin not with my tongue;"‡ and, in the text, "I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord."

To wash our hands in innocency, must therefore imply our taking up a serious resolution to forsake every sin in heart and life. Many think themselves innocent because they are free from many grievous crimes to which others are subject, while yet their own peculiar sins bear rule in their breasts, unmortified and unsubdued. They are not carried to the same excess with others in intemperance, irreligion, and impiety; but there are other sins that more easily beset them, and rule uncontrolled in their souls. They are not abandoned to an avowed contempt of God and an open disregard of his plainest laws; but they are strangers to that religion which must pierce into the heart and govern within the breast.

But, would we wash our hands in innocency, we must depart from *all* iniquity; we must mortify every passion that bears rule within the breast; we must crucify every affection that wars against the soul; we must reform

* Psalm xxxviii. 4, 6.

† Ibid, li. 5.

‡ Ibid, xxxix. 1.

every practice that religion discommends ; and we must especially refrain from and correct that sin to which habit has given strength, or to which we are more particularly addicted from the temper and complexion of our minds. We must sacrifice the most pleasing gratifications and the most enticing allurements of sin ; were they dear to us as a right hand, or valuable as a right eye, they must be cut off and plucked out.

But it is not sufficient that we forsake every sin in heart and life ; in order to wash our hands in innocency we must have a serious endeavour after sincere and universal holiness. Sin is not only a transgression of the law of God, but a want of conformity to it. It consists not only in doing evil, but in neglecting to do good. He is not innocent then who neglects to do his duty, more than he who openly transgresses it. Would we wash our hands in innocence, then, we must not only forsake sin, but practise goodness. We must abhor that which is evil, and we must cleave to that which is good. We must purify ourselves from all corruptions of the flesh and spirit, and we must perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Religion requires not only that we abstain from sin, but that we aspire after positive goodness. The direction of the Apostle to Timothy consists of both these branches—" But thou, O man of God, flee these things ; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness ;"* and again, " Flee also youthful lusts : but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."†

I am, in the *second* place, to state the import of compassing God's altar. The expression has an evi-

* 1 Timothy, vi. 11.

† 2 Timothy, ii. 22.

dent reference to the practice of the Jewish priests in going round the altar when they offered sacrifices, and is therefore supposed by some, to mean that he will go to God's altar with sacrifices. But, as legal sacrifices are now at an end, it is obvious that, in its application to us, it cannot be understood to have this meaning; but, in place of these abrogated sacrifices, there has come another sacrifice, even that One sacrifice, which, in the fullness of time, was offered up, and which we are this day to commemorate.

Now in our compassing the altar of God, then, there is implied a placing of ourselves, in an immediate manner, in the presence of God. And how awful and solemn a duty is it to approach that sacred presence which no man can see and live—to draw near to that God whose glory dazzles the angels of heaven, and whose justice makes the devils to tremble in hell—to worship him whom angels adore, covering their faces with their wings, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is full of thy glory, and every day sheweth forth thy praise?

There are none who are not convinced that God is to be adored. He claims our adoration because of the excellence and glory of his nature, and because of the blessings which he sheds continually on his people; and it is God alone who can be the object of adoration. Adoration does not consist so much in the homage of the body as in the effusions of our souls. He alone, therefore, can be the object of our adoration who alone searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."* And to worship him it is not now necessary

* Matthew, iv. 10.

to go up to Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim. "Woman," says our Saviour, "believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."* The whole universe is his temple; and we may lift up everywhere pure hands to God in the heavens. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."†

Again—To encompass the altar of God implies an appeal to God concerning our sincerity in our approaches towards him. "Judge me, O Lord," says the Psalmist, in the beginning of the Psalm, "for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For thy loving kindness is before mine eyes; and I have walked in thy truth."

An appeal to God, concerning our sincerity in our approaches towards him, is implied in all religious worship. There are some, indeed, who mock God in their service. They approach him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him; they have an appearance of piety, but are destitute of its power; they tread the courts of the Lord, but they trample his ordinances under their feet; they go up to the temple, not to render their homage to God, but to procure the favour of men; they partake of the Sacrament, not to withdraw them from their sins, but to conceal those they have committed. To behold them, they seem to be good Christians; but unmask them, and they are hypocrites. How great is the folly of such presumption! as if God did not know their hearts, or as if his arm were not strong to

* John, iv. 21.

† Ibid, 23.

punish. In endeavouring to deceive others, let us not thus deceive ourselves; but, in all our approaches to God, may we, like Nathaniel of old, be found to be Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile; that thus having had true faith here, and having with Enoch walked with God, we may, like that holy patriarch, see the truth of his promises in the heavens.

I am, in the *third* place, to shew the necessity of washing our hands in innocency, in order to our compassing the altar of God. Consider, then, whose altar it is that we are to encompass. It is the altar of God. Of a God so pure, that the stars are not pure in his sight; so holy that, when an angel fell, the heavens were shaken, and hell opened its unfathomable abyss to put an eternal separation betwixt him and sin. If, then, we have the faith of the Divine presence in the temple, we will be filled with a religious reverence in entering his sanctuary; we will approach his altar as Moses did the sacred bush, or as the Israelites did the mountain when it thundered. Feeling all the power of the presence of God, we will be ready to exclaim with Peter, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”* When we approach his altar, he will look into our hearts—he whose eyes are a flame of fire—and will he discover there nothing unworthy of the sanctity of his presence? When he shall appear in the clouds of heaven, with majesty and great glory, then shall all the tribes of earth tremble before him. And shall he not be in his sanctuary as on a cloud of glory? On his invisible tribunal, shall he not sit in judgment on mortals? Shall he not cast a discerning eye on the multitude of worshippers that fill his temple? Shall he

* Luke, v. 8.

not separate the sheep from the goats, the righteous from the wicked; and imprint upon their foreheads, with an invisible hand, the indelible marks of his approbation or displeasure? And while, perhaps, he is condemning us, shall we presume to approach his altar? Whilst he is casting us out of his presence, shall we appear with confidence before him? While he is opening the abyss beneath, there to mark the place of our abode, shall we place ourselves with security at his table? and, While he is numbering us with the children of his wrath, shall we rank ourselves with the children of his love?

We are informed that God smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they looked with irreverence into the Ark of the Lord.* It was not permitted the Israelites of the desert even to approach the mountain where God gave the law. Thunder and lightning guarded the access; terror and death everywhere went before the God of Jacob. And is not the God whom we adore the same holy and jealous God? And shall we not encompass his altar with hands washed in innocence, because the earth does not now open to take us, like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram,† down quick into the pit? or, because fire does not break out in our sanctuaries, to consume the irreverent and profane in the act of worship, shall no reverence or respect accompany us to the altar? Shall we be irreligious only because the God whom we adore is not always terrible in his judgments?

Again, consider what those sacrifices are which we offer upon the altar of God. They are the sacrifices of a broken and contrite spirit—"For thou desirest not

* 1 Samuel, vi. 19. † Numbers, xvi. 32.—Deuteronomy, xi. 6.

sacrifice, else would I give it ; thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”* We profess, then, to encompass the altars of God with hearts broken, contrite, and penitent for sin ; but are our hearts penitent, if our hands be still unclean, if our lives be still vicious, if our passions be still unmortified, if our sins be still unforsaken ? No, Christians, that God whom we worship will enter into our hearts, and will discover there the reality of our contrition : he will trace our penitence to its first beginning ; he will discover the principle that gave birth to our repentance ; he will see whether we be grieved for sin because it is odious in the sight of him who is infinite purity, or only because, on some solemn occasions, it disturbs the peace of our minds ; he will see whether its source be dried up within us, or whether its course be only diverted for a season.

We must not think that we have washed our hands in innocency because we have felt some remorse for sin, and because, on some solemn occasions, we entertain better purposes, and are more on our guard against our prevailing vices. If, when the solemnity is over, everything thall return to its former course, and we be no more on our guard than ever ; if, when the cares of life return, and business again engrosses our attention, the world shall take possession of our hearts ; if, when our passions are again awakened, the same opportunities and the same temptations shall find us the same weak and unguarded men, we shall deceive ourselves. These returns to our former practices—that course of the passions which is not interrupted but during the so-

* Psalm li. 16, 17.

lemnity of encompassing God's altar—that monstrous mixture of sacred and profane—will be a sad evidence that our repentance has been superficial, if not false—that our sorrow has been the sorrow of the world, which worketh death, not that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of.

Again, consider that, in compassing God's altar, we offer up in emblem the sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus. “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come.” If Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands in water when they came near to the altar to offer the sacrifices of bulls and of goats, how much more ought we, with clean hands and pure hearts, to commemorate the sacrifice of the Son of God. It is the body of the Son of God that is there represented as broken; it is the blood of the Lamb, without spot, that is there represented as poured forth; and he will not have any to partake of these sacred emblems but such as have not polluted their garments, or have washed them in the blood of deep repentance. Did the Jews go up to Jerusalem to purify themselves before the passover? * With how much greater care ought Christians to purify themselves, when they partake of the gospel passover? Were they to put away leaven out of their houses? † Ought not we much more to purify the old leaven out of our minds? Was the presumptuous soul that eat of unleavened bread from the first day to the seventh to be cut off from Israel? ‡ Judge ye what the condemnation of those should be who bring to the altar of God all their passions yet ruling in their minds; their affections unmortified; their hatreds

* John, xi. 55.

† Exodus, xii. 15.

‡ 1 Corinthians, v. 8.

unextinguished ; deceit still lurking in, or envy still tearing their breasts. “ Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”* Jesus Christ will keep the feast only with his disciples ; † but to be his disciples we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow him. Have we, then, crucified the flesh with the affections thereof ? Is the same mind in us that was also in Jesus ? Do we study to walk as he also walked ? To be his disciples, we must love one another. Have we, then, put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, with all malice ? or shall any come to a feast of love while his bosom burns in secret with hatred against his brother ? “ Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” ‡ Let us, therefore, keep the feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice nor of wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Let us, then, be persuaded to look into ourselves, and see what that leaven is that still swells our hearts, and what those passions are that still corrode our minds. Have we laid aside every weight, and the sins that most easily beset us ? Have we, in good earnest, returned from those attachments so long fatal to the innocence of our hands, so often confessed, but never forsaken ? Have we put away those passions that debase the mind ; that covetousness which is idolatry ; that envy which grieves at the prosperity, that hatred which rejoices at the adversity, of a brother ? Thus let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread and drink of this cup.

* 1 Corinthians, v. 8. † Matthew, xxvi. 18. ‡ Ibid, v. 24.

It is not pretended that a perfect innocence of hands and purity of heart are exacted of us in coming to the Table of the Lord. If we should say we have no sin, our own hearts would condemn us; should we say we are perfect, even that also would prove us perverse. The sacrifice we are about to commemorate supposes we are guilty, and was appointed as a mean of turning us from our sin; but it will surely, therefore, be expected of us that we are satisfied in ourselves that the power of sin is, at least, broken within us; that we have weakened those passions which once reigned uncontrolled; that we have reformed those practices of which we are now ashamed. We must not think it enough simply to confess our sins, if we find that we have not at all forsaken them. We must not trust to some sudden emotions, some remorse, some sorrows, some desires, awakened only on some solemn occasions: there must be some good fruit from all this in the life. Let us ask ourselves, then, Have we withdrawn ourselves more carefully from all occasions of sin? Have we set before our eyes those duties, those cares, those exercises of devotion, which we have hitherto so much neglected, and which are yet so essential to our washing our hands in innocency? Thus let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

To encompass the altar of God is not the business of one day nor of one solemnity, our whole lives ought to be a preparation to it. All our actions ought to be as the steps which lead up to the altar, and all their fruits afterwards as the smoke that arises from the altar and ascends to heaven.

There is nothing that should make us tremble more than the danger of encompassing the altar of God

with unwashed hands. As religion knows not a greater crime, so there is not a greater condemnation, than that of those who are guilty of the body and blood of Jesus. The profanation of the Sacrament is a sin that hardly leaves hope of a recovery. It is the bottom of a deep abyss from which there is scarce a passage that leads to the light of day. Not that there is no forgiveness for the profanation of the Sacrament; not that there is no room for repentance; but that they who can be guilty of such a sin have attained to such a hardihood in wickedness, that they have scarcely left any room to hope that they shall be willing to repent. Their consciences are laid asleep, and they are given over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.—What shall we say then? Shall the water of life be forbidden us? Shall the bread of consolation not be broken for us? No! God would not have us refrain from encompassing his altar; but he would have us to wash our hands in innocency that we may be qualified to approach it. He does not refuse us the bread of children; but he would not that, by our impenitence, he should be obliged to present us with a stone in its stead.

Let us avoid, then, this great evil. Let us prove ourselves before we compass the altar of God. Let us carry thither the sentiments of godly sorrow and contrition of spirit; and let us not come to increase the measure of our condemnation there, where we ought to find a source of virtue and an earnest of immortality.

O Lord, prepare in every heart a habitation worthy of thyself. Let thy Spirit be thy forerunner to prepare thy ways in our souls. Fill us, O Lord, with thy grace, that we may eat and drink of the symbols of Christ's body and blood worthily, and that we may live eternally with thee. Amen.

INTERMEDIATE, OR SPECIFIC PRAYER.

O LORD, we humble ourselves again before thee, in filial reverence and godly fear, to adore the greatness of thy grace and mercy manifested to the sons of men. Thy goodness is the source of our existence in this world, and of our hopes in the world to come. Had it not been for thy goodness we had never been in existence; and had it not been for thy further goodness we might have been of an inferior order of creatures, destitute of the knowledge of thy existence, and incapable of receiving thy communications. But great, O Lord, as thy goodness is in our creation, thy grace in our redemption far exceeds it. Hadst thou left us to perish in our sins, the glory of thy perfections would have remained untarnished, thy blessedness undisturbed and perfect, and thy praises would have been sung by the heavenly host. Hadst thou communicated thy grace and mercy to us, when thou didst decree to save us, by the revelation of thy will from heaven with circumstances of awe and terror, amidst thunder, and lightning, and tempest, justly might we have admired thy grace and mercy, and, in gratitude and thankfulness, have received the merciful declaration. But blessed be God that he has sent his Son into the world, in the likeness of man, to proclaim to us the message of peace and reconciliation. Herein, indeed, is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for us. Let this love of God, we pray thee, fill our hearts. May we dwell on the contemplation of it; may it be continually in our thoughts and meditations; but, may it especially fill our souls, when we this day come to commemorate that death by which

our Father has been propitiated and our sins forgiven. In the symbols of our Saviour's broken body and shed blood, may we receive the communication of thy grace to sanctify us and to save us from our sins. Do thou fit us for performing the solemn service now before us with acceptance. When we receive the sacred elements of bread and wine, may we receive the Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts, and may we have pardon and eternal life sealed to our faith in his blood. Do thou grant that nothing within us may render us unacceptable guests at thy table, or deprive us of thy favour and blessing. In performing this service, may our hearts be purified from sin and sense, our affections elevated towards heaven, and our souls enlarged and inflamed with thy love. Give us, we pray thee, the preparation of the heart. Enable us to search and try our ways. Do thou thyself search us, and try us, and see if there be any evil in us. Shew us that which is amiss in our conduct, and lead us to repent and forsake it.

Follow with thy blessing the service in which we have already been engaged. Do thou bless it for our preparation for this day's more sacred work, that we may go about it with suitable solemnity and composure; that our thoughts may be collected and fixed upon it; and that we may rejoice and glory in God our Saviour. And to thee the Father, and to the Lord Jesus Christ our Redeemer, and to the Holy Ghost the Comforter, be ascribed the praise and the glory. Amen.

FENCING OF THE TABLES.

I COME now, my fellow Christians, in the course of the business of this day, to one of the most delicate

tasks that falls to the share of a minister of the gospel in the discharge of his official duty. I am to set a fence around the Table of the Lord, and to declare what persons are not fit to partake of this solemn ordinance, and who they are who will be welcome guests at the Lord's Table. The discipline that is exercised in our Church authoritatively keeps back from this ordinance all who are openly profane and irreligious, or who have discredited the profession of the gospel by any flagrant violation of its laws. But men may be regular and decent in their external deportment, and yet may not have that religious attainment, or that Christian frame and disposition, that will fit them for becoming welcome guests at this table.

It is not, indeed, for man to enter into the heart of his brother, or to declare in what light his character may appear in the sight of an omniscient God; nor can any one pronounce of another, whose character and deportment are decent and Christianlike, that his internal views and dispositions are such as would render the partaking of these sacred elements a profanation. The directions I am to give you can, therefore, be only of a general nature, leaving it between God and your own hearts to judge how far any of you may come under the description.

I am, therefore, not only authorized, but required to declare to you, that all who are ignorant of the truths of religion are prohibited from coming to this table; who have the understanding darkened, and are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their hearts. Where knowledge to discern the Lord's body is wanting, the Sacrament will be mere bread and wine, and can afford no spiritual strength or nourishment to the soul. In-

deed, it is impossible that they should remember Christ to any saving purpose who are ignorant of his nature as God and man—capable, as man, of dying in our stead, and, as God, of expiating our sin; who are unacquainted with his offices as a Prophet to teach, as a Priest to atone, as a King to reign over his people: who are ignorant, in fine, of the nature of the ordinance of which they are to partake, and who know neither the end for which it was instituted nor the disposition with which it should be received. Here ignorance must be a total bar; it is that darkness which comprehendeth him not; it is that evil so severely condemned in Scripture, of “not discerning the Lord’s body.”

But men are not fit for approaching this table, if, though well acquainted with the truths of religion, they do not believe them. This description will comprehend all infidel, unbelieving, atheistical, incredulous men; all who scorn the obligations of religion and ridicule the promises of God. It is impossible that they can partake of this ordinance to any valuable or saving purpose. Can they commemorate the dying love of the Redeemer who are not convinced that he laid down his life for their souls? Can they profess their trust in that blood that taketh away the sins of the world who are not convinced of the efficacy of the cross and the need they have to be saved? Can they declare their faith in Christ who are not convinced that he was the Son of God? Or can they receive the symbols of his body and blood to whom his cross is a block of stumbling? All who disbelieve the doctrines of religion, and deride its promises and expectations, would profane by their presence this sacred festival; and against such the gates of the temple must be closed.

But there is another class of men, more numerous,

perhaps, than either of the former, who must be debarred from coming to this holy table ; all, namely, who, though they be neither ignorant of the truths of religion nor yet disbelieve them, yet do not regulate their lives according to their faith. This description comprehends all wicked, profane, or abandoned men ; all who habitually indulge themselves in any sensual gratification ; all who cherish in their hearts any favourite sin ; all who live in the neglect of any known duty. But, above all, it contains those who, while they cherish a love of sin in their hearts, would impose themselves on mankind as friends of religion, by partaking of this solemnity. All those would profane by their presence these sacred mysteries ; and, by coming to this ordinance, instead of deriving any saving benefit to their souls, would but increase their condemnation.

This will serve to shew you that all who live in the habitual neglect of any of God's commandments, are warned not to approach this sacred table ; all who habitually neglect the worship and service that are due to the one living and true God ; all who worship false deities, or bow down before molten or graven images ; all who take the name of the Lord in vain, and indulge in the habit of uttering unhallowed oaths ; all who break and profane the Sabbath of the Lord ; all children disobedient to their parents, all parents careless of the education, the religion, or morals of their children ; all who bear hatred or enmity against their brethren ; all who indulge in licentiousness and impurity ; all who steal or rob, or defraud their neighbours of their property ; all who bear false witness against another, either in judicial proceedings or in the common intercourse of life ; and all who covet the property of their neighbour.

That you may see the authority by which I say these things, you may read with me the Word of God in the Epistle to the Galatians, the fifth chapter, from the nineteenth to the twenty-second verse, where the Apostle points out the works of the flesh, which he had previously shewn to be inconsistent with the liberty of the gospel.* Read also the Epistle to the Hebrews, the sixth chapter, from the fourth to the seventh verse, where the Apostle points out to us those who crucify afresh the Son of God, and put him to an open shame.* Read, once more, in the first chapter to the Romans, from the twenty-eighth verse to the end, where the Apostle points out to us those who, in the judgment of God, are worthy of death.*

But that no sincere or penitent believer may be discouraged, I am called to open wide the gates of the temple, and to invite the friends and disciples of our Lord to come as welcome guests to his table. In the same name and authority, therefore, I invite all who have given up their former lords and masters, with grief and sorrow of soul that they should have been so long under their dominion, and are resolved to have to do with them no more; all who are sincere and steadfast in the faith of Jesus; all whose hearts are pure, and whose hands are clean, being purified in soul by the Spirit of the Lord; all who are poor in spirit, convinced of their own utter unworthiness, and are willing to rely upon Christ for the supply of all their necessities; all who hunger and thirst after righteousness and wish to come to the waters of life, of which he that drinketh shall not thirst again; to all these the invitation is addressed, Ho, ye that thirst, come to the waters. The Spirit

* Here the passage is read.

and the Bride say, Come. Let him that is athirst come, and take of the waters of life freely. The table is spread; all things are ready. Come ye to the feast, and ye shall find peace and comfort to your souls.

But that you may see also the ground on which I say this, let me again read to you from the Word of God. First, in the fifth chapter of the Gospel by St Matthew, from the third to the thirteenth verse;* and, next, let me read to you from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, from the twenty-second verse, where, in opposition to the works of the flesh formerly quoted, the Apostle points out the fruits of the spirit.*

(A Psalm is here sung, and, while it is singing, the Minister descends from the pulpit, and, the Psalm being finished, he reads the words of the institution, as his authority for administering the ordinance, from 1 Cor., xi., 23—30, the elements having, in the meantime, been set upon the table by the Elders.)

FIRST TABLE SERVICE.

HEREBY perceive we the love of Christ, because he laid down his life for our souls. Greater love has no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friend. But herein God commendeth his love towards us, that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He died not only as a martyr and a witness to the truth of the doctrine which he taught—not only to

* Here the passage is read.

set us an example of those excellences which shone so conspicuously in that great event—but he died to take away our sins. He suffered to free us from the consequences of our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities that we might be healed by his stripes. He died for our sins that we might be redeemed by the price of his blood. And, having overcome the sharpness of death, he has opened the kingdom of heaven to believers.

To perpetuate the memory of this dying love, our blessed Saviour has instituted this feast of the Supper, to be observed till his second coming, commanding all his faithful disciples to do it in remembrance of him. Having met with his disciples the night in which he was betrayed into the hands of men, he instituted this feast of the Supper; and, having taken bread, we are told that he blessed it. We are not, indeed, informed what were the precise words which our Saviour used on this occasion, otherwise we should be furnished with a perfect model on which to form our supplications; but let us hope that, while we lift up our hearts in sincerity and truth to him who is the hearer of prayer, we shall be graciously heard by him who accepteth according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.

CONSECRATION PRAYER.

Glorious and ever blessed Lord God Almighty, who wast, and who art, and who art to come! What shall we render unto thee for all thy benefits, and for all thy gracious manifestations of love and beneficence to the sinful sons of men? Our souls would magnify the Lord, and all that is within us be stirred up to

praise and bless thy holy name, who satisfiest us abundantly with good things, who redeemeth our lives from destruction, who crowneth us with loving kindnesses and tender mercies.

We bless thee, O Lord, for those adorable discoveries which thou hast made to us of thy tender regard and compassion in sending thy Son into the world to redeem us from sin and misery ; and, by suffering in our nature and dying in our stead, to purchase for us eternal life. " Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for us." We bless thee, O Lord, with the warmest affections of grateful hearts, for this adorable interposition in behalf of thy miserable creatures.

And, in an especial manner, we praise thy wise and condescending goodness for this institution of the holy Supper, which Christ our Lord, with his dying breath, has appointed to be, through all ages, a lasting memorial of his dying love, and a refreshing stream of comfort to the weary soul of man. And now, O Lord, that this table is spread for us, richly furnished by the Master of the feast, we lift up our souls to thee, and implore a Father's blessing upon the children's bread. Bend, O God, the heavens and come down, and let this be a solemnity acceptable to the Saviour, and solacing to the souls of thy people. Sanctify with thy blessing so much of the elements as shall be used on this occasion, that, as the symbols of the Saviour's broken body and shed blood, they may prove refreshing, comfortable, and strengthening to every serious and devout receiver. And, while we beg thy blessing on the elements to be used, we would implore thy presence with those who are to receive them. Bring forward the communicants meet guests to their Master's table.

While they are receiving the blessed pledges of redeeming love, may their faith be in lively exercise and their souls breathe heavenly and divine desires. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so may their longing souls thirst after thee, O Lord, and be filled from the wells of everlasting salvation. Let new life and spiritual strength be conveyed to them in this ordinance; and may they receive the pledges of redeeming love and the memorials of His blessed passion with such lively faith, with such abounding hope, and with such exceeding joy, as may transform their whole souls into love to God and the Redeemer—that, from praising and serving thee here, they may be translated to the presence of thy glory, and join with the heavenly host in more sublime and exalted praises to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Saviour having blessed the bread, as we have now endeavoured to do after his example, brake it and gave it to his disciples, as I to you, saying—Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. In the same manner, after they had supped, he took the cup and gave it to his disciples, saying—This cup is the new testament in my blood: drink ye all of it. For as often, adds the Apostle, as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come again. When you thus hold in your hands the memorial of your Saviour's broken body and shed blood, let your communion be with the Father and with the Son; and let no words of mine disturb your sacred meditation.

(Here there is a pause, while the elements are handed round in solemn silence.)

When you have thus seen our Saviour's blood poured forth, and his body broken before you, let us recall to our remembrance the tears, the agonies, the sorrows, he underwent in one uninterrupted series, from the first breath which he inhaled till he bowed his head in accomplishment of our salvation. He was born in poverty and cradled in a manger. Poverty and disgrace, hatred and persecution, contempt and disregard, were the concomitants of his birth, the constant attendants of his infant days, and the familiar companions of his riper years. During the whole course of his public ministry how was he harassed by perpetual hatred, by repeated reproaches, by the most cruel and injurious treatment that rage or malice could inspire. If ceaseless calumnies, if malicious accusations, if the most flaming persecution from the hands of those whom he had perpetually obliged, if the keenest malice, poured forth in the most notorious insults, if any, if all of these be grievous sufferings, what period of life could be said to be easy to him?

But now the fatal time draws nigh, when he must be condemned as a malefactor, and put the finishing hand to the great design which brought him into the world. Behold him in his agony in the garden—under the mighty sense of being forsaken of his Father, and the near view of his impending wrath—covered with a great sweat which rolled in drops of blood to the ground. Behold him accosted by a wicked traitor, and seized like a lawless malefactor; dragged like a felon before a merciless tribunal; deserted by all his followers and

friends, even by those who had seen most of his glory, and made him the strongest professions of attachment and regard. Behold him mocked, scourged, reviled, buffeted, falsely accused, and unjustly condemned. Behold him led to execution, like a lamb to the slaughter, sinking under the weight of his cross—surrounded by a giddy and inconstant rabble, who had been frequently fed by his bountiful hand, and but lately had led him triumphant into the city, making the air resound with acclamations in his praise. But what heart can conceive, what tongue can express the sequel? Behold him stretched upon the cross—his joints miserably tortured, his hands and feet pierced through with nails, the blood trickling down from his wounds, and these still lacerating wider as he hung on the accursed tree. Hear him, in extreme agony, exclaiming, “My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” See him drinking off the bitter cup of Divine vengeance; see him bowing down his holy head; see him giving up the ghost, and, say, was ever love like this? Be astonished, O ye heavens! Stand amazed, O thou earth! Adore, O thou my soul! The Prince of Life is given over to death, and the King of Glory crucified upon a tree.

When, then, my friends, you are representing these things to yourselves—when you are receiving the pledges of this divine love, and the symbols of this blessed passion—what is the suffering you would refuse to undergo—what is the enjoyment you would hesitate to renounce—that you may keep yourselves obedient to his will? Can you refuse to bear contentedly the slighter evils of life for his sake who graciously condescended to accept of a cross for yours? Can you behold him divesting himself of his heavenly splendour,

and cheerfully clothing himself with the rags of mortality, without feeling your hearts humbled in the deepest resignation, and inspired with the most vigorous resolution to abandon the sordid pleasures and splendid trifles of this world, in obedience to his will? Ought any suffering or affliction—ought any reproach or calumny—ought persecution itself seem grievous to be born in testimony of your love and attachment to him, when you consider what a bitter cup he cheerfully drank for your sakes? Ought life itself to be reckoned too dear to resign, if it ever should be our unfortunate lot to be exposed to death for his sake? Blessed be God, persecution is past, and we have not now such dangers to fear. We enjoy in safety the blessings of the gospel, and make a public profession of our most holy faith, with none to make us afraid. Is there nothing, then, which we ought to renounce for the sake of Christ and his cross? Is there nothing in our hearts inconsistent with his love? Is there nothing that we regard which he requires us to abandon? Yes, my friends, we have favourite passions—we have vicious inclinations—we have unhallowed desires—which must all be subdued. These are inconsistent with love to him; and these we must subdue, how much soever we may regard them. With what heart could you act against the mournful tragedy you have this day witnessed?—crucify afresh the son of God, and put him to open shame? Away, then, every sinful passion—away every unhallowed desire. It is only Christ whom your souls love; and his love constraineth you thus to judge, that if one died for all, then are all dead; and that he died for all that we, who live, might not henceforth live to ourselves, but to him who died for us, and who rose again.

Go from the table of the Lord with these sentiments on your hearts, and the praises of God in your mouths.

(The 103d Psalm is generally sung during the time the tables are filling, as containing sentiments very proper to be expressed by those engaged in this solemn service ; but some clergymen give out a passage to be sung at the end of every table. The former has always been the author's practice.)

SECOND TABLE SERVICE.

WHAT is it, communicants, that your Saviour requires of you in coming to this sacred table? Is it that you should make yourselves poor and of no reputation for his sake, as he has done for yours?—Is it that you should deny yourselves to the innocent amusements and lawful employments of life?—Is it that you should retire from the world to the pathless desert, to spend your time in severe austerities, in the midst of frightful solitudes? If he had done so, considering the infinite obligations that we owe him, it would have been no more than he was entitled to have enjoined, and all would have been short of that immense return of gratitude which we owe him. But how simple the precept, how easy the commandment, “ This do in remembrance of me.” And ask not, communicants, why Christ bids you eat this bread and drink this cup in remembrance of him. Can you or dare you deny that you are ready to forget him? and does not every day's experience fatally convince you, how common, how easy

a thing it is for you, amidst the cares, and the amusements, and the delights of this vain world, to lose all thought, all grateful remembrance of your Redeemer? Adore, then, O Christian, the kind condescension of your Lord, who neglected not, even in his most afflicted hours, to provide against your natural tendency to forget him. And let this too fill your hearts with gratitude and enlivened praise, that though he intended this ordinance to do honour to his memory, and to be a lasting memorial of him to all generations, yet it was not so much for his own sake as for yours that he is desirous of living in your remembrance. He stands in no need of your honour; he dwells in the glory of ineffable majesty, that cannot be heightened by your most exalted service. How insignificant the honour to him, had he not designed your advantage in it, to have his name recorded among those who dwell in cottages of clay, or transmitted from generation to generation of creatures that are crushed before the moth, when the exalted sons of light, in adoring multitudes, surround him, and make his honour the subject of their everlasting songs. But this is the honour which he covets—this the joy for which he endured the cross: to bring many sons and daughters to glory; to rescue you from the ruin of sin; to train you in the paths of wisdom and virtue; and to fit you for a glorious and happy immortality. And for this end he calls you to remember him, and to come to this ordinance, to have your languishing graces revived and strengthened, your love of goodness increased, your hatred of sin rivetted and quickened, your repentance enlivened, and your good purposes invigorated and confirmed, and, by sealing your solemn engagements in the blood of the covenant, to keep a sense of religion alive in your

hearts, and good impressions tender and awake in your minds. This, then, communicants, is your solemn work ; while you shew forth your Saviour's death in the symbols of bread and wine, in the same pledges of forgiving love to swear fidelity to your Lord and Saviour, and to seal a covenant with the God of Jacob.

Be this, then, communicants, the language of your hearts—" I am not mine own. Thou hast made, thou hast redeemed me. Truly, Lord, I am thy servant—truly I am thy servant ; thou hast loosed my bonds. I have sworn, and cannot repent, that I will keep thy righteous judgments."

Trusting that these are now the sentiments with which you have seated yourselves at this holy table, it is with confidence that I put into your hands the consecrated memorials of your Saviour's death. On the night on which he was betrayed into the hands of sinful men, he instituted this feast of the Supper ; and, having taken bread and blessed it, as has now been done by his servant in his name, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, as I to you, and to you, and to you all, saying, Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. These elements, communicants, which you now hold in your hands, are the consecrated memorials of your Saviour's death ; and, whilst you are receiving them, may his dying love occupy and fill your whole souls.

(A pause, whilst the elements are served, and, when the last communicant has received them, the address again proceeds.)

The design of this ordinance, my friends, is to make you consider and remember your Saviour. And who is there among you that would forget so great a benefactor? Which of you is there that would not remember so gracious a Redeemer. His name and his love are worthy to be remembered to all generations. This do ye, then, in remembrance of him. Now that you are seated at his table, remember Christ, your absent friend—because he is absent remember him, and because he is absent in your cause, remember him with gratitude and love. Remember that love that brought him from heaven—the seat of bliss and glory—that veiled him in human nature, that clothed him with mortality, that exposed him to the severest sufferings, that delivered him over to death. Remember the gracious errand on which he came; that, by dwelling among us, he might fully instruct us in the method of reconciliation, and shew us the way to eternal life; that he might take us, as it were, by the hand, and lead us in the way everlasting; that, by living among us and conversing with us, in the nature of man, he might become a human, and, in some respects, an equal and familiar, an imitable and encouraging example of innocence and goodness, of meekness and humility, of a divine and heavenly conversation; that, by his bitter passion, he might not only set us a pattern of meekness and patience under the greatest provocations and the severest sufferings, but that he might make expiation for sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, and purchase eternal redemption for us; that, by death, he might destroy him who had the power of death, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lives subject to bondage. Remember Christ and the errand on which he came with wonder and admiration.

What was it that he could see in sinners that was lovely or desirable, that his compassion should flow so largely towards them; that he should expose his sacred person and his holy soul to the awakened sword of Divine vengeance, that its edge might be turned from us; that he should drink so deep of the cup of affliction, that our joy might be full?—Remember him, and the errand on which he came, with joy and gladness of heart. Let your souls magnify the Lord, and your spirits rejoice in God your Saviour. How should the remembrance of him and of his salvation raise and revive your spirits, and inspire you with the devoutest joy and gratitude to this great friend and lover of souls? Holy men of old were transported with joy at the remote prospect of this great salvation, at a mighty distance, Abraham saw his day and was glad.* How, then, should we be moved with joy to whom the Son of God, the blessed Saviour of the world, has actually come? Ages ago has he come, and has enlightened the whole earth with his glory. Yea, he has even come to you—to you has this great light come; and the salvation which he has wrought out is not far from any one of you. How, then, should your praises be multiplied and your thanksgivings increased, even according to the joy of the harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

You have been eating, my friends, of the body—that is, of a sensible representation of the body. You have been drinking of the blood—that is, of a sensible representation of the blood of Jesus; and I trust you have been remembering him more than bread, and his love than wine. You are now to retire from this service

* John, viii, 56.

and to return to the world. Bearing along with you these lively thoughts of Christ as your Redeemer, remember him still, and forget him not. This will fortify you against all ingratitude and all unthankfulness for so great a salvation. Remember, then, your Saviour's love, and let your souls retain constant and lively impressions of it, that you may be no more conformed to this world ; that your hearts may be purified and your lives refined ; that you may love God your Saviour with a fervent love, and hate sin, which crucified him, with a perfect hatred ; and that you may take up firm and steadfast purposes of a new life ; that henceforth you will not live unto yourselves, but unto him who died for you, and who rose again.

Go from the table of the Lord with these purposes and resolutions in your minds, and may the grace of God ever keep you in his love, and present you, through his merits, faultless and blameless at his second coming.

THIRD TABLE SERVICE.

WHEN the Jews, my friends, had put our Saviour to a cruel and ignominious death ; when they had crucified him betwixt two notorious thieves ; when, by inflicting on him the death of a slave, they had exposed him to public ignominy and contempt, they flattered themselves that they had made all men afraid or ashamed to own him as their Lord. And, indeed, it was the most likely means which human wisdom could devise for accomplishing their nefarious purpose. But how com-

pletely were their hopes baffled; how little did their vain devices avail against the eternal counsel of God. This very mean, which to human wisdom seemed the most likely to bring about their malevolent design, was the very mean appointed by infinite and eternal Wisdom for accomplishing a contrary purpose. This very lifting up of Christ from the earth was the very thing which drew all nations unto him; and the cross of Christ soon became the boast and glory of Christians. They thought it no reproach to their blessed Lord that he was treated in so base a manner by a blinded and furious people; for had they really known with whom they dealt, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. They thought it no stain on their religion that its author was crucified upon a tree; nor to their own characters that they had taken their religion from one who had been condemned to a death which the law pronounced accursed. On the contrary, the once mournful cross of Christ soon became their greatest rejoicing; and in nothing more did they glory than in Christ Jesus and him crucified, to the Jews, indeed, a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Let the prejudiced Jew, then, in scorn and derision, call him the man that was condemned. Let him say that it stumbles his proud reason that the Messiah should be crucified and slain. We, who know what noble fruits have sprung from that cursed—shall I call it that blessed—tree, on which the Son of God expired, that, under the banners of the cross, all nations have been brought to the obedience of the faith; we who know that by this cursed death he has triumphed over all the powers of earth and hell, we will glory and

rejoice in him, and never be ashamed to say, "Lo, this is he, the Lord our Redeemer; we have waited for him, and he will save us."

Are you, then, communicants, among the blessed number of those who glory in the cross of Christ? Are you now seated at this table to shew forth his glorious death, and in the Sacrament of the Supper to declare your faith, and trust, and reliance upon him; that you are neither afraid, nor ashamed, nor averse, on any account, to own him as your Lord? In this you witness a good confession; and, in confidence of it, I proceed, after the example of the great Author of this ordinance, to distribute to you the sacred memorials of his death. It was on the night on which he was betrayed into the hands of men, that he took bread, and having blessed it, as has already been done by his servant in his name, he break it, and gave it to his disciples, as I to you, saying, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner, when they had supped, he took the cup, and gave it to his disciples, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: drink ye all of it. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come again.

(A pause, while the elements are serving.)

Communicants, you have now been eating of the gospel passover, and what an exalted privilege have you been enjoying? and how glorious is that salvation in memory of which you have been feasting? May you not now exclaim with Jacob, "This is none other than the house of God, this the gate of heaven."

Communicants, ye have now followed your Saviour

to the foot of Calvary ; you have seen him crucified on an accursed tree—his lifeless body taken down by Joseph from the cross, wrapped in a clean linen cloth, and laid in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock. But think you it was left there to see corruption ? Twice had the sun descended on the yet peaceful and silent grave of Jesus ; but scarcely had the reddening beams of the morning tinged the top of that sacred mountain, at the foot of which the Saviour lay entombed, than the bands of the grave were burst asunder ; and you, who have just seen his body broken before you, may now, with the devout women, approach his empty sepulchre, instead of myrrh and frankincense, bringing with you praise and thanksgiving, and, looking in, perceive the body to be gone. You may listen with them to the voice of the angel from heaven, “ Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified ; he is not here, for he is risen as he said : come, see the place where the Lord lay.” You may accompany him in his few mysterious appearances to his disciples during his forty days’ continuance on earth, and listen to him as he speaks to them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. You may even follow him as he leads them out as far as Bethany, and behold him, as he was lifting up his hands to bless them, gradually rising from the earth, till a cloud receives him out of their sight.—How different now is your Saviour’s fate from what it appeared to be when the Jews had accomplished on him that cruel death which you have this day witnessed. He who was dead is now alive ; he who was possessed of nothing, now appears to be heir of all things ; and he who was despised and rejected of men, is received with the acclamations of angels’ songs. Communicants, let your

hearts and affections rise from this table, where you have seen him put to an ignominious and cruel death, to that place where he now lives and reigns in power and glory. And let this contemplation raise you above the corruptions and the vanities of life—an attachment to which can but retard and obstruct your entrance into that blessed presence. Let your thoughts dwell on the glory of which he is now possessed, that you may be animated with an earnest desire to become partakers of it, and that you may be raised to a resemblance, remote, indeed, and distant, to his divine and heavenly life, as the means of preparing you for the participation.

Communicants, you have now to go down from this holy mountain, to set your faces towards the heavenly Canaan, and to pursue your journey through the wilderness of life, in the strength of this heavenly meal. How long your journey may be, no one can tell. Your sojourning here may be near an end. None of you can be assured that his term of probation shall be lengthened out. To some of you, it is certain that the period of your trial is near. This may be the last time you may be permitted to sit down at this holy table; and you may, perhaps, no more drink of this cup till you drink it new in your Father's kingdom. To such, it must be consoling, that you have this day professed your faith in the saving efficacy of your Saviour's death, and that your souls have been here refreshed with the waters of life. And if, to some of you, the journey of life shall be prolonged, this ought to be your comfort, that this table shall be again spread for you, where you may feast with gratitude and joy. But, communicants, remember that, whether your pilgrimage shall be long or short, you may lay your account with

hardships and dangers by the way. You travel in an enemy's country, who will beset you on the right hand and on the left. The cares of the world may engross you; the pleasures of life may allure you; temptation will often assail you; your own corruption will be ready to betray you; and you have always a cunning adversary, who will continually pursue you, that, if possible, he may overtake and overcome you. But be not cast down or dismayed. The Lord is thy strength and thy shield, and has also become thy salvation. The Lord—at the blast of whose nostrils the waters stood upright as an heap, till the children of Israel passed over—he is thy God; and the same right hand is still terrible in majesty. The Lord will be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Wherefore, gird up the loins of your minds; put your shoes on your feet; take your staff in your hand, and go on with cheerfulness on your journey. Keep your view stedfastly fixed on the glorious reward of your toil, which your Saviour has purchased for you, in the kingdom of the Father. Be ye stedfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as you know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Wait upon the Lord, and ye shall renew your strength. And though youths shall faint and grow weary, and young men shall utterly fail, yet they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint. Go now from the table of the Lord, and may the God of love and peace be with you.

FOURTH TABLE SERVICE.

HEREIN is love unprecedented, unparalleled, and beyond compare—not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for us—to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and to die for us, that we might live through him. And is it not surprising that the everlasting, the blessed, the glorious, and holy God, should thus regard and love us, his frail, his miserable, his wretched, and sinful creatures—the proper objects of his wrath—vessels of hot indignation, meet for destruction.

Hereby, also, perceive we the love of Christ the Son, because he laid down his life for us. And was it not adorable condescension, astonishing humility, and inconceivable regard, that he who was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with him, should take upon him the form of a servant, and become obedient to death, even the death of the cross. The everlasting Son of God became the Son of man, that the wretched sons of men might become the sons of God; and the Prince of Life was crucified and slain, that we, who were dead in trespasses and in sins, might be quickened by the spirit of grace, and raised to everlasting life; for, as God spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, so the Son himself as cheerfully, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself, without spot, a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour.

You are now, communicants, set down at the table of the Lord, to commemorate the dying love of the Redeemer; and I hope your hearts are now rising towards him with feelings of true and devout affection

—that all the desires of your souls are towards him and the remembrance of his name. In this hope, I proceed in the name, and after the example, of the great Author of this ordinance, to distribute to you the sacred memorials of his death.

“The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread : and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Here is bread to strengthen and wine to make glad your hearts. Eat, O friends ! drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved !

(A pause, while the elements are serving.)

In this ordinance, my friends, the love of your Redeemer appears in all its glory. It was a love eternal as himself, conceived before the world began, and which has since been manifested to all generations. When God had reared the arch of heaven and stretched his compass over the face of the deep ; when he had spread the clouds above and established the earth below ; when he had given the sea his decree and strengthened the foundations of the waters ; even then his rejoicing was with the inhabitable parts of the earth, and his delights with the sons of men. Long before you had a being ; before you had opened your eyes to behold the light of day ; ere ever you had breathed the breath of life ; his affection flowed largely towards you, and his love to you inspired his breast. No sooner was it

moved in the eternal counsels of the Godhead that fallen man should be redeemed, than he, with cheerfulness and alacrity, undertook the work; and that, too, on such terms as shall be the everlasting wonder of saints and angels, and enliven the eternal praises of his people. Lo, I come; in the volume of thy book it is written of me; to do thy will I take delight. "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted."*

Here, then, communicants, is distinguishing love; come, behold it and admire. Behold this love in all its freeness. There was nothing amiable in us to excite this love, or meritorious to deserve it; and none of our services could be, in any respect, a recompense for it. It could be excited by nothing but our utter wretchedness, and the sovereign compassion of our Lord.

Behold in this ordinance the love of your Redeemer in all its strength, strong as death, and more powerful than the grave. He travelled in the greatness of his strength, when pursuing the great purposes of his love to a lost world. The strength of his love bore him up under all the sufferings he had to undergo, and gave a relish to that bitter cup that was put into his hand.

Behold in this ordinance the love of your Redeemer in all its liberality, and the rich fruits that spring from it. The pardon of sin, reconciliation for iniquity, peace with God, and life everlasting, stream from this full and overflowing fountain. Free and full remission is now the privilege of every sincere and devout receiver. Who, then, shall be able now to lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he

* Isaiah, xlix. 13.

that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. There is, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

Behold, then, communicants, what manner of love is this. Seemeth it to you a light thing to be called the children of God? or is it an indifferent display of love that a backsliding generation, children of wrath and disobedience, should become the adopted children of the King of kings? If sons, then heirs—heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; heirs of an inheritance uncorrupted, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; heirs of God, of all the glories of his heavenly kingdom, and joint-heirs with Christ.

And now, my friends, what are the affections that should stir in your hearts when you remember these things? Does not love call for love again? and the highest instances of love surely demand its highest returns. But was ever love like to that with which Christ loved the sons of men? Had the meanest attendant of the heavenly court been sent to publish abroad the glad tidings of salvation, we ought to have received it as a message of unspeakable regard. But how should our hearts melt under the excessive burden of love when we behold the Son of the Most High engaged in this work, putting on him the human nature, with all the infirmities—the shame, the misery, the pain that attend it—and at last falling a sacrifice on earth, by the hands of those for whose sake he had left the mansions of heaven? Who shall separate us, is now, I hope, the language of every one among you—who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?

No! In all these we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us.—Is this then, indeed, the language of your hearts; and need I call upon you to evince your love by your walk and conversation? This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. The natural and proper effect of this love, as well as the most certain evidence of it to others, is a most sincere and universal obedience to the Divine laws; and, since ye that love the Lord should hate evil, let me only farther beseech you to love your brethren of mankind, with a sincere, a cordial, and brotherly love. For, if you love not them whom you have seen, who will believe that you love him whom you have not seen? For Christ himself has made this the distinguishing character of his disciples—A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another.* Go from this feast of love, then, with full purpose of soul that you will love one another. Go, and see that you fall not out by the way—go in peace and love, and may the God of love and peace go with you.

FIFTH TABLE SERVICE.

COMMUNICANTS, you are now to shew forth your Saviour's death, and celebrate the memorials of his blessed passion, when he made his soul an offering for sin; and how easy and delightful is your task? The severe, the hard, the bitter part was his. He bore our

* John, xiii. 34, 35.

sins in his own body, and his soul was poured out an offering for transgressors. It might have been our part to have borne the punishment of our transgressions, and we might all have now been lying under one universal and irremediable sentence of condemnation. But behold the height of your Saviour's love and compassion : he bent the heavens and came down ; he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows ; and, rather than that mankind should perish, he made his soul an offering for sin, an expiation and atonement for transgression. This wonderful, this transcendent, but this mournful scene, you are now to contemplate and revolve in your adoring thoughts. Behold, then, communicant, the eternal Son of God, the object of his Father's love, despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Behold him in his agony in the garden, wrestling in anguish under the pressure of his Father's wrath. Hear his desponding speech—" My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Listen to his strong and fervent prayer—" Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Follow him, though it be far off and at a distance, to the foot of Calvary. See him stretched a naked spectacle upon the cross, stripped even of the mockery of royal raiment ; and, in the bitterness of derision, refreshed with vinegar and gall. See those hands that were never stretched out but in doing good to mankind, or in supplicating the Father in their favour, pierced by the stern executioner ; the feet that trod all the paths of mercy and peace, nailed in cruelty to the accursed tree ; and, as in the extremity of nature, his head dropped in agony on his breast, hear his sacred lips muttering that hallowed prayer—" Father, forgive them ; they know not what they do." And was

all this, communicant, submitted to for you? Was it your iniquity that wounded him; for your transgressions was he bruised? Yes! even for yours; and all this that, if you be but sincere and faithful to him, you might be healed by his stripes—Inquire, then, communicant, Do you indeed believe in Jesus? Have you seen your sin and your danger? Are you ready and willing to sacrifice your sins for him who sacrificed his life for you? Have you committed yourselves to him, to be saved by him on his own terms? Then may you join with the Apostle, and speak in the language of faith—“He loved me, and hath given himself for me.” That, therefore, your joy in him may be full, I shall distribute to you the memorials of his death.

“The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” And now, communicant, meditate on the sorrows and agony of your Redeemer, and may your meditations be refreshing to your soul.

(A pause, while the elements are serving.)

Communicants, have not your bowels been moved within you, and your repentings kindled together, when you traced your Saviour in all the scenes of his sufferings and sorrows, through the whole of his life, till it terminated in the last sad scene which you have now witnessed? Or is there one of you that has a heart of stone, that it can behold his agony and not melt within you? Hast

thou no tender feelings, that your soul does not bleed for such anguish and such sorrows? Blessed Jesus, smite this stony heart, that it may pour out fresh streams of repentance and gratitude. O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain Redeemer of men!

We were dead, and the Son of God gave himself to death in order to raise us up to life. We were enemies and condemned rebels, and he sustained the arrows of the Almighty to reconcile us to the Father, and turn away his hot indignation. He interposed himself to ward off the blow of Divine vengeance that ought to have fallen on us; and he fell at last a sacrifice to justice, that our guilt might be forgiven and cancelled for ever. Reflect, O communicant—meditate, study, contrive—what wilt thou render unto the Lord for such amazing, such unheard-of kindness? Greater love, he himself tells you, hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend; and you are his friends, if ye do whatever he commands you. And what does he require of you but to keep those garments clean which he has washed in the fountain of his blood? And will you ever wilfully indulge the practice of sin again, and thereby return to your old defilements? Have you not seen the dreadful evil and dangerous consequence of sin, in the agony and death of your Redeemer; and do you not tremble to indulge it a moment longer, lest a worse thing, if possible, should befall you? Shall this soul of thine, which was redeemed at so dear a rate from the slavery and condemnation of sin, return again to its former bondage? Has thy guilty and polluted spirit been washed in so precious a fountain as the blood of the Son of God, and will you defile yourself again, O sinner, and return with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire? It

was sin that cost thy Redeemer so dear—that exposed him to agony and death; and wilt thou hug in thy bosom the hated murderer of the Lord of Glory? Will you, by your renewed provocations, renew his passion, and crucify afresh the Son of God? “God forbid,” I think I hear you now say—“God forbid that I should thus return to folly! No, I will bring forth my most favourite and cherished lusts and slay them at the foot of thy cross, by which the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world. Forasmuch as I am redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, I will pass the time of my sojourning here in the fear, the love, the faith, and the obedience of Christ. Here I devote myself, my life, my flesh, and spirit, and all my powers and faculties, to his obedience, and the purposes of his glory. Blessed Jesus! accept my oblation, and save the soul that thou hast so dearly purchased.” Retire, communicant, with such purposes as these. Stand steadfast to thy resolutions. Commit thyself to the care of your Saviour, whose blood has redeemed you, and his spirit will sanctify you and preserve you to his heavenly kingdom. Amen.

The Table Service being finished, a Psalm is sung to the praise of God, after the example of our Saviour, in the original institution of the ordinance, as recorded by the Evangelists, Matthew, xxvi. 30, and Mark, xiv. 26, when the Minister gives his

EXHORTATION, OR CONCLUDING ADDRESS.

You have this day, my friends, been doing honour to the Saviour in the memorials of bread and wine, the symbols of his broken body and shed blood; and you

yourselves have been receiving high honour in being admitted into covenant and communion with God by the blood of sprinkling—in being entertained at the table of the King of kings—in having the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel sealed unto you—and in having an earnest given you of the eternal inheritance which the Saviour has purchased by his blood, and which he has gone before to prepare for you. And now may your souls magnify the Lord, and your spirits rejoice in God your Saviour. When you were representing at the table the mournful tragedy of his sufferings, your souls were, no doubt, moved within you, and your spirits mourned over his sorrows. But when you consider the blessed purchase of his cross—that the cup of affliction which he drank was a cup of consolation to you—how may your souls rejoice in him, and in the great love with which he has loved you? This is a frame of spirit no less suitable to communicants in retiring from this ordinance than that of mourning at the rehearsal of his sufferings. They should go from this feast as the people went from Solomon's feast of dedication, "Glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had shewed—to Israel his people."* They that sow in tears may, in this case, reap with joy, and they that came doubtful of their faith, may go away abounding in the love of Jesus. Has God here lifted up the light of his countenance upon you? This should put gladness into your hearts more than in the time that their corn and wine increased. Have you here lifted up your souls to God, and joined yourselves with him in an everlasting covenant, how should you rejoice and triumph in the relation?

* 2 Chronicles, vii. 10.

Retire, then, communicants, within yourselves. Reflect upon this solemnity. Review the workings of your souls at the table. See with what sincerity you have acted in this solemnity, and what tokens you have got of the Divine presence and acceptance in this ordinance. If you have transacted sincerely with God, though your affections have not been so elevated or your faith so lively as you could wish, yet may you have reason to solace yourselves in God, and to say, Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with you. But if, upon examination, you find cause to suspect that all has been done by you in hypocrisy, then have you reason to let your soul tremble, for its condition is sad and dangerous. If you have been professing to join yourselves in a covenant with God whilst you continue in league with the world and the flesh, or pretending to receive the pardon of your sins, when you have neither repented of them nor designed to forsake them, you have but deceived yourselves, and have reason to fear lest you should perish with a lie in your right hand. While conviction, then, is fresh in your minds, arise, awake unto life, and repent. Take the advice of Peter in this case :—If thy heart hath not been right in the sight of God, repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*

Again—Ask your souls, communicants, what sensible tokens you have had of God's gracious presence with you in this ordinance. Have your graces been here kindled and drawn into lively exercise? Have your hearts been melted into sorrow and mourning for sin? Have you seen the dreadful evil of it in

* Acts, viii. 21, 22.

the sufferings and death of your Redeemer? And has it pierced you to the heart that you have so long and often pierced him with your sins, and wounded him with your transgression? Or, has a holy flame of love been rekindled in your breasts, and your hearts made to burn within you on the rehearsal of the love with which he loved you, and gave himself for you, that you might be redeemed by the price of his blood? Or have your doubts and fears been dispelled, and have you heard the Spirit witnessing with your spirit:—"Fear not, the Lord is thy salvation, and thy God thy glory?" "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee; for Christ has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." These, communicants, are great things of the Lord, and marvellous in our eyes; and, if you have had any such impressions borne home on your hearts, I beseech you labour to keep up this lively and spiritual frame of mind, and beware of loosing the things you have received. Exercise a continued and holy jealousy over yourselves. Cherish a lively faith in Christ the blessed Saviour. Entrust the keeping of your hearts to him, and he will keep that which is committed to him till the great day.

Above all things, let these foretastes you have here had of the goodness of God's house excite in you an earnest longing after the upper house, where the feast is full and the communion perpetual and without end. The best comforts of the lower table are small when compared with the consolations of the upper table which shall never be drawn. What is a sacramental feast here compared with the marriage supper of the Lamb? What is drinking of the fruit of the vine at the Lord's table to drinking it new at the Father's kingdom? If communion with God in grace be so

refreshing to the soul, what will the fulness of joy be in God's presence, where are pleasures for ever more? If a day in his courts—if a few moments at his table—be so delightful, what will an eternity be within the veil? Here we see Christ held forth only under sensible signs; but there we shall see him as he is, and with open face behold the glory of the Lord. Here we complain with languishing, and mourn our frequent and fresh revolts; but in heaven no tongue shall complain and no heart mourn: our joy shall be full, uninterrupted, and perpetual, and all tears shall be wiped away from every eye.

Let me conclude with one word of congratulation and encouragement to those young friends who have this day publicly brought themselves, for the first time, under the engagements of the Christian life, professed their faith in Christ, and entered into covenant with their God. I congratulate you, my young friends, on the wisdom of the part which you have chosen. You have indeed done well in choosing the good way of the Lord. It is graceful in itself, and acceptable to God, that the youthful heart should be devoted to him whilst it is free from the contamination of the world. Our Saviour has an especial favour for those who thus early devote themselves to him:—"I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me." And this early dedication of yourselves to God, as it is peculiarly acceptable to him, so the recollection of it may be especially useful to you; you may be able in after life to resist sin, or fortify yourselves against temptation, by the recollection that you have thus early dedicated yourselves to God; and that which is now your present gratification may become the confidence of your future years: but, for this purpose, you must

study to act suitably to the profession you have this day made. Always remember the necessity of living a good life in order to approve yourselves to the favour of God. Be on your guard against the least allowance of any known sin. Let no gain of the world, let no temptation to vice, let no sinful passion, ever prevail over you, to transgress the law of God, or do that which is evil in his sight. The comfort that will accrue to you will be great, if you study, seriously and uniformly, through life, to walk as those who have dedicated themselves to the Redeemer. Having, therefore, named the name of Jesus, be careful to depart from iniquity. Read much, and study carefully the Sacred Scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation. Strive to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour. Be faithful in the work of the Lord, to which you have this day engaged yourselves. Increase in the knowledge of God; and, forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forward to those that are before, press toward the mark of the high calling of God. And may the Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even the Father, give you peace by all means, and may the Lord be with you all.

PRAYER AFTER THE COMMUNION.

O LORD, we rejoice in that grace by which we are saved. Thou hast made thy wonderful works to be remembered. Thou hast sent redemption to thy people. Thou hast commanded thy covenant for ever; holy and reverend is thy name. Blessed be the Lord

God of Israel, for thou hast visited and redeemed thy people, and raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of thy servant David, as thou spakest by the mouth of thy holy prophets, which have been since the world began. Thou hast performed the mercy promised to the fathers; and in the fulness of time sent forth thy Son to save and redeem us. In him may we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. Delivered from the power of sin, do thou grant that we may serve thee in holiness and righteousness before thee all the days of our lives. Justified by faith, may we have peace with God; sanctified by grace, may we have our fruit unto holiness; and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, may we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, and be preserved blameless to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We praise thee, O Lord, with our whole hearts, that thou hast this day allowed us to partake of thy holy mysteries, and to feed on that bread of life that giveth life to the world. Follow, O gracious God, the solemn work in which we have been engaged, with thy rich and effectual blessing; and let the good fruits of it be seen many days hence in the lives of thy people. O let not this holy ordinance turn to the condemnation of any, but by it may the salvation of every soul be advanced and secured. May the awakened soul be comforted; the serious heart established; the weak strengthened; the wounded healed; and every mind enlarged in running the way of thy commandments.

Maintain, we pray thee, on our hearts lasting impressions of what we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled, of the word of life. O Lord God of Abraham, keep these for ever in the imaginations of

the hearts of thy people. Give them a perfect heart to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes. Thy vows are upon us, O God, we will render praises unto thee. Thou hast delivered our souls from death, deliver now our feet from falling, that we may walk before God, in the light of the living. O grant that the great sacrifice which thy Son has offered on the cross, and which we have been commemorating at the table, may atone for our past offences and establish us in future obedience.

Be gracious to those young persons who have this day, for the first time, brought themselves under the vows of God, at their Master's table. Accept of that surrender which they have made of themselves to thy service. Preserve upon their minds a lively sense of what they have this day seen of the goodness of their God. May those pious and elevated affections which they have this day breathed before thee, be kept alive in their breasts. Strengthen in them vigorous purposes of future obedience, that their whole lives hereafter may be suitable to the vows they have now taken on them.

Let thy hands be about all the communicants who have this day been at the table of the Lord. They have been eating the bread of their Father's house; O let them not return to feed on the husks of the world. As they have received the Lord Jesus, so may they walk in him, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in us.

Pardon, we pray thee, the presumption of those, if there be any such, who have made a rash approach to thy presence. Open their eyes to see their guilt. Awaken them to a just sense of all sin, which alone can

render them unworthy of thy favour, that with broken and contrite hearts they may grieve and repent of all their former iniquities, and for ever forsake them. For the future, may they steadfastly purpose to lead a new life, that then they may seal a covenant with God, and live henceforth as those who are devoted to thy love. Make us all steadfast in our purposes to serve thee in the performance of every duty, and in the careful abstinence from every known sin. Make us vigilant against all occasions of, and temptations to, iniquity, and prudently to avoid them. And do thou so assist us, by that spirit that proceeds from grace to grace, that we may perfect holiness in thy fear. Do thou enable us at this time to sing to thy praises with devotion. Dismiss us with thy blessing. Be with us during the interval of public worship. Come forth with us to the service of thy house in the afternoon. Grant thy presence and assistance to thy servant who is to conduct our devotions, and open to us thy Word. May he receive of thy spirit, that he may communicate thy message to thy people, that the good impressions which have this day been made upon them may be deepened, and the sacred purposes which they themselves have formed, rivetted on their hearts, that the fruit of this day's service may be seen many days hence in their lives; and do thou accept of us, and hear and answer these our prayers, for Christ's sake. Amen.

SERMON.

THE DUTY OF BEARING ABOUT IN THE BODY THE
DYING OF THE LORD JESUS.

2 CORINTHIANS, iv. 10.—“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

IN preaching the gospel, the Apostles of our Lord discovered the greatest candour and disinterestedness, without any hidden design, or the most remote view of any secular interest. From this Paul argues boldly and forcibly, in the third verse, that, “if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost : in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.” For, says he, “we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord ; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.” That is, we have no earthly interest in what we do, we seek not to raise ourselves to fame and reputation, or to obtain power and authority over you ; we preach Christ Jesus, as the supreme Lord and Head of the Church : and, instead of setting up ourselves for your masters, we profess to be your servants for Jesus’ sake, not declining the most laborious offices, that we may do you good by promoting your eternal interests.

And that this was not mere assertion, might be evinced from facts. In publishing the doctrine of salvation they were exposed to continual hardships and sufferings. From their love to men, and their desire for their salvation, they encountered these evils. And in the execution of their duty, they were supported by

God. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

In discoursing from these last words, I shall,

First, lay before you some observations on the dying of the Lord.

Second, I shall shew you what is implied in bearing this about in the body.

Third, I shall explain the end or design of carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord, as set before us in the last words of the verse, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

First, I observe that the Lord Jesus died as a public person, and in a public capacity. He was cut off, but not for himself. In dying on the cross he died in our stead, and he bore our sins in his body on the tree. He had no crime of his own to subject him to punishment. His judge himself declared his innocence—"I have found no fault in him."* And, washing his hands before the multitude, said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it."† He had done no violence, neither was guile found in his mouth. He went about continually doing good. His life was spent in the open view of men. He associated continually with his friends, and scrupled not to enter the houses of those who were enemies to him, and to the truth of the doctrine which he taught. His measures were leisurely carried on in the face of the world. All his works, even his miracles, were performed in open

* Luke, xix. 4.

† Matthew, xxvii. 24.

day; and he took no pains to conceal his operations or stifle the consequence of his actions. On the contrary, it was his desire that all should see him, and have the advantage of examining his proceedings. "I spake freely to the world," says he, of himself, "and in secret have I done nothing."* "And these things," says St Paul "were not done in a corner." All descriptions of men had thus an opportunity of observing the purity of his morals and the integrity of his conduct. And, as his life was openly and publicly spent, and his measures leisurely pursued in the sight of the world, so also did his death take place in the face of day. It took place in an open and public manner, in the sight of all men—that, having beheld his death, they might be convinced of his resurrection when they saw him appearing again in life, and thus be prepared to believe his doctrine. For, if his death had taken place in a clandestine manner—had he suffered in secret, or been suddenly dispatched—it would not have attracted the notice of the world, the fact of his death could not have been so distinctly proved, and, how veritable soever his sufferings might have been, there would have been room for scepticism and doubt. Thus would his religion have been deprived both of the irrefragable evidence which it now possesses, and of the glory which his divine deportment, under such bitter affliction, has so illustriously cast upon it. But by the hatred which the people bore him after being so exalted in their favour—by the importunate desire of the multitude to have him crucified—by the mock formality of his trial—by the rash and inconsiderate imprecation of his persecutors, that his blood might be on them and on their children—by the remarkable

* John, xviii. 20.

declaration of his judge, that he could find no fault with him, and his deprecation of the consequences of his condemnation—and by the unparalleled atrocity of a judge giving up to death a person whom he himself declared to be innocent—by these and similar circumstances the eyes of mankind were directed towards our Saviour, and the attention of the world rivetted on the scene exhibited on Calvary; and thus was our religion furnished with an evidence in proof of the fundamental facts of its history which no scepticism could doubt nor infidelity gainsay.

Second, I observe that the death of our Saviour was voluntarily submitted to by him; and this obviates the objection that the righteous God could not punish his innocent Son. It is true that no one can be obliged to discharge the debt contracted by another, nor can an innocent person, without injustice, be compelled to submit to punishment. But any one may voluntarily take upon himself to discharge a debt which another has contracted, and of his own free will incur an obligation that may expose him to suffering. Now the death which Christ underwent for us was of this kind. It was freely and voluntarily submitted to by him. He was willing to discharge the debt which we had incurred; and he himself entered into an engagement with God to undergo the sufferings to which we should have been subjected. It is said that “he gave himself for us,” * to express his willingness to die in our stead. And he is said, in the Galatians, to be he “who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father :† “ Therefore,” says he, “doth my

* Titus, ii. 14.

† Galatians, i. 4.

Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." * And this last observation—that he had power to take it again—shews that it is no objection to the substitution of Christ, that no exchange is allowed in criminal cases among men; because no man has absolute power over his life as Christ had. He has no right or power to give his consent to or enter into such an exchange. By the law of his creation, he is obliged to serve at the post which God has assigned him so long as He sees fit to continue him in the present state of trial; for otherwise his probation would not be complete. And when once he submits to death, his power over his life is annihilated, and the connection between his soul and his body in this world finally destroyed. But Christ had power not only to dispose of his life, but to resume it again; to re-animate the body which had been wrapped in the silence of the tomb, and to appear in flesh and blood, discharging all the functions of human life. And in all this he acted as mediator according to the commandment of God—"I have power to lay it down," says he, "and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." There was no constraint forced him to make his soul an offering for sin. The sole cause was his free compliance with his Father's will and his tender compassion towards men. Thus, as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many shall be made righteous.

Third, The death of Christ was of sufficient efficacy

* John, x. 17.

for answering the important purposes for which it was designed. And here it is proper to observe, that, in undertaking to discharge an obligation which another has contracted, and which he is unable to fulfil, it is not absolutely necessary that it be precisely of the same kind, or rise to the same amount, with that which was originally incurred; it is sufficient if it be of such a nature as satisfies the party to whom it is due and by whom it is exacted. In this view, I might argue that it is sufficient to render Christ's death efficacious, that it was submitted to in obedience to the will of God, and that God was pleased to accept of it as a ransom for his people. But, I farther observe, that, the efficacy of Christ's death arises from the dignity of his person, which gives an infinite value to his sufferings. It was the Son of God, in all things equal to the Father, and who thought it no robbery to be equal to him—the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person—who, by himself, has purged away our sins. The efficacy of Christ's blood is, therefore, ascribed to his Divine nature, when the Apostle to the Colossians says, "In whom we have redemption through his blood—who is the image of the invisible God."* And hence arises the *superior* efficacy of Christ's sacrifice above the sacrifices under the law. The latter were sacrifices of *inferior* animals, which could not at all be sensible of the nature of the offences for which they were offered, and which, therefore, could make no atonement for them. They could neither perceive the obligation which the offerers had transgressed, nor were capable of taking on themselves the penalty; nor, if they could, was the atonement which they were

* Colossians, i. 14.

able to make sufficient to compensate the fault of the offenders. For how could it be possible that the death of an irrational creature could be a sufficient penalty for a crime that inferred the death of a rational one; or that the sufferings of a creature whose existence is terminated with its life should atone for those of one which is destined to live for ever. Accordingly, the great merit of these sacrifices arose from the reference which they had to the One great sacrifice which was in the fulness of time to be offered up. But in the sacrifice of Christ the circumstances are completely reversed; instead of an inferior creature being sacrificed by an offender for his own sins, it is an infinitely superior being that voluntarily undergoes the punishment that ought to have been inflicted on an inferior; and his sufferings are the more aggravated that, in order to encounter them, he stripped himself of the most exalted felicity, in which from eternity he was associated with the Father. That felicity he might have continued to have enjoyed had he not been moved by compassion for the perishing sons of humanity, who could not in their persons have undergone the punishment to which they were exposed without complete destruction. And this superiority of the sacrifice of Christ over those of the law is set in the most forcible light, and with admirable emphasis, in the Epistle to the Hebrews:—"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* God, as the supreme Sovereign of the world, had power to

* Hebrews, ix. 13.

accept of a vicarious satisfaction. "He substituted the Son and sealed him"—that is, he commissioned him for that work; and the Son voluntarily entered upon it. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God."* And as he thus expresses his willingness in coming into the world, so, in the prospect of leaving it, he addresses his Father in these remarkable words:—"I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."†

Second, I am to shew you what it is to bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

And, first, it is to maintain constant impressions of his dying love on our hearts. Christ has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour. We ought never to be forgetful of this great event. He gave himself to death for the life of the world, and a sense of our obligation to him should be continually impressed upon us. While, then, we reflect upon our preserved and redeemed lives we should remember his death. This would preserve us his dutiful people and his faithful disciples. Man needs much to be reminded of his obligations to God and the Redeemer. Immersed in the cares of life, or carried away with its amusements, he often loses sight of the relation he stands in to Heaven, of his business and duty in the world, and of his interest and happiness in

* Hebrews, x. 5—7.

† John, xvii. 4, 5.

another. To call to mind that we are creatures spared by the special kindness of God in a Saviour—that by his dying we are delivered from a present evil world—and that life and immortality are thereby opened up to our view—this will be a powerful means of awakening us to a sense of our great and true interest. It will warm our love to the Saviour as our best friend, and engage us to follow out those great views of eternal existence and happiness which he has set before us, and for which we were originally designed.

When we consider these bodies that are so fearfully and wonderfully made, and so graciously preserved amidst the precarious events of time—when we remember the evils and dangers to which we are exposed, the pains and diseases to which we are subject, or which we may be suffering under—we should reflect on what he suffered in his sacred person that we might be the objects of the Divine care, supported and upheld by God, and either comforted in our distresses or delivered out of them, or have them made the means of preparing us for another and a better state, where we shall rest from our labours, and know evil no more.

When we attend to those precious and immortal souls with which God has endowed us, we should let the impression of the inward agony and sorrow which he felt on our account be fixed deep upon our minds, and affect every faculty and power. His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death. He prayed fervently—Abba, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Let our thoughts dwell on this agony of the Redeemer. Let our understandings contemplate the mental agony he endured for us, and let our affections go out towards him in the devout exercise of hope, and trust, and love, and joy. Let our memories recollect his personal excel-

lencies and the high obligations we are under to him, and let our wills cheerfully choose him as our Lord and Master, whom we will faithfully serve and dutifully obey even unto death; and let such exercises be constant and habitual with us. Let us say with Paul, “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”*

Again—To bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, is to exhibit in our life the power and virtue of his death. We ought to let this intention of it be attained in us, and to let it thus appear that we share of its saving effects; and, particularly ought, the death of Christ to be to us the death of our sins:—“Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin—but walk in newness of life.”† “He bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.”‡ The death of Christ furnishes us with the most powerful considerations for determining us to mortify our evil dispositions and desires. It illustrates the perfections of God—his holiness, and hatred of sin; seals to us the promise of the new covenant; and purchases the Holy Spirit for us. Let not sin, therefore, reign in our mortal bodies that we should obey it in the lust thereof; but reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The dying of the Lord Jesus should also reconcile us to the Divine will, whether it be for life or death. If he submitted to become man—to take upon him our nature, with all its sinless infirmities—to undergo the

* Galatians, ii. 20.

† Romans, vi. 6.

‡ 1 Peter, ii. 24.

unmitigated hatred of his enemies—the treachery of one of his disciples, and the desertion of all his friends—to meet with the most grievous calumny and the grossest insults—can we expect to be exempted from sorrow or affliction in the world, or secured from the assaults of misery and distress. This consideration should raise us above the love of life and the fear of death. When we regard our Lord committing himself to him that judgeth righteously, the virtue of his pattern should inspire us with a like temper of mind. One great design of the dying of our Lord, is to excite in us an indifference about the present world, so as to induce us not to forego higher considerations for its sake, and to make us look for happiness in a future state. An inordinate attachment to the things of this life has very hurtful consequences with respect to religion. It withdraws our attention from more important interests, and makes us willing to sacrifice higher considerations to the gratification of inferior desires. To prevent this, let us bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Let the power and virtue of that dying be exhibited in the peace and tranquillity of our minds, by our retaining the undisturbed serenity of our temper in every circumstance of suffering or affliction, and by resting content in the measure of its possessions and enjoyments which God has been pleased to bestow. Let us taste of its gratifications, and partake of its delights, only within the bounds of moderation and virtue; and let not its indulgences destroy our relish for those higher and more exalted satisfactions which are both attended with a richer and purer relish here, and will be our constant felicity hereafter. We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son: let us improve this comfortable doctrine for our consolation and encourage-

ment. We are delivered from the wrath denounced against us, and every accusation is fully answered—we should therefore be inspired with vigour and alacrity of mind. Our hopes and expectations of felicity should be animated and quickened, and should inspire us with new vigour in the exercises assigned us. They should excite us to firm resolutions and determined endeavours to yield unreserved and universal obedience to God in all things which he enjoins us, and make us resolve to sacrifice everything to preserve that favourable regard which we have thus so undeservedly received from God.

I am, in the *third* place, to explain to you the consequence of this practice of bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, as it is expressed in the last clause of the verse, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies. And here it will be necessary to take a view of our Saviour's life, and to consider how it may be manifested in our bodies.

The life of our Saviour, then, was a life devoted to the glory of God. He sought not his own glory, but the glory of him that sent him. When about to leave this world, he could say, upon the most unquestionable grounds, in the passage which I have quoted with another view, "Father, I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." All, indeed, that he did and suffered had this tendency, and were directed to this end. By sin we had withdrawn the tribute of praise and honour that was due to our Creator, but he who was our surety gave a compensation for our guilt, by magnifying the Divine honour, and putting a due respect on the Divine law and government. Let this part of the life of our Saviour be manifested in our bodies. True, indeed, it is, that

we cannot promote the glory of God in any way or manner as our Saviour did—we cannot compensate either for our own guilt or that of others—we cannot atone for a single breach of the Divine law, nor repair the injury done to the Divine honour and government; but we are held as promoting the glory of God when we do nothing inconsistent with it; when we are careful to observe the Divine precepts; when we give him the sincere tribute and adoration of our hearts; and when, in our several spheres and capacities, we seek to promote his interest in the world. Whatever we do, therefore, let us do it all to the glory of God. This is our duty in our different stations; and this the Lord expects of us. For this we were created, and furnished with powers and privileges above the other creatures; and to this we are required to have a respect in all that we do, and in all our approaches to a throne of grace.

The life of Jesus was a life spent in stated and habitual converse with God. Often he retired to pour out his soul before God. In the gardens, and in the mountains, and in the fields, he sought for solitude to hold intercourse and communion with him. He improved every occurrence for addressing his heavenly Father. Do his disciples tell him of their success? he rejoices in spirit, and gives thanks to the Lord of heaven and of earth, who had hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes. Do his enemies exult over him in his sufferings? he turns his thoughts from their indignities, overlooks their insults, raises his soul to God, and supplicates him to forgive them. He who now presents the prayers of the saints in his golden censer, did himself send up many petitions to the throne of grace for himself and others. Let this part of the life of the Saviour be manifested in our bodies. Let us be engaged to live near to God,

to maintain constant intercourse and communion with him, to perceive his hand in every event, and to make every circumstance the means of increasing our gratitude to God, and of raising our thoughts to him in every circumstance and condition of life.

The life of our Saviour was a life employed in doing good offices to men. His appearing in our nature in the world was itself on the most gracious and merciful design. It was for us men, and for our salvation, that he came into the world, not to destroy men's lives, but to save them, and he went about continually doing good. All his works, even his miracles, were instances of kindness and beneficence to men, as well as of authority over the powers of nature. He was full of compassion for the miserable, of pity for the sinner, of commiseration for the afflicted, of relief to the souls and bodies of men. Let this part of the life of our Saviour be manifested in our bodies. Let us abound in love to our fellow creatures. Let us cherish a sincere regard for all mankind, and, to the utmost of our power, promote their welfare. Let us pity the miserable. Let us soothe the afflicted. Let us comfort the sick. Let us relieve the distressed. And for those whose calamities our power cannot reach, let us supplicate the blessing of Him whose goodness is continually new unto them, and whose tender mercies are over all his works.

PUBLIC, OR CONCLUDING PRAYER.

O LORD, we desire again to come before thee with the voice of supplication, imploring thee to follow with thy blessing the whole of this day's religious and solemn

service. Thou, O Lord, art the searcher of hearts, and knowest the sincerity with which we have engaged in this day's work ; yet, O Lord, we confess that we have not performed it with all that elevation of spirit, that singleness of heart, and that exclusive sacredness of purpose, which is becoming the solemnity of the service. Search us, O Lord, and try us, and shew us what has been amiss in our conduct. If there be any sin yet lurking within us, of which we have not been convinced, or which we have not in heart forsaken, O Lord, lead us to the knowledge of it, and dispose and enable us yet to mortify and subdue it. If there be any grace wanting towards perfecting our natures—if even in this service we have not received its largest communications—Lord, do thou yet pour it out upon our hearts, and enable us to cherish and confirm it, till our souls be perfected with everything truly excellent, and made meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Fulfil in us all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us, and we in him. And we lift up our eyes unto the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ of whom the whole family of heaven and earth is blessed, that he would grant us according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man—that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith—that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the height, and the depth, the breadth, and the length, of the love of God which passeth knowledge.

We offer up our supplications to thee, in the name of that Saviour whom we have this day confessed, in behalf of the whole human race. In imitation of thine

own extensive mercy, we pray that all men may be brought to the knowledge of the truth. Enlarge, we pray thee, the bounds of the Church of Christ; and, in thine own good time and way, send the light of the gospel to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Let Israel, according to the flesh, look unto him whom they have pierced, and return unto the Lord their God; and, with them, let the fulness of the Gentiles believe and glorify thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. Visit with thy abundant loving kindness all who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Purify, unite, preserve, and defend, the Church universal. Vouchsafe thy more immediate protection and blessing to the churches of Great Britain and Ireland. Prosper and long preserve the National Church established among us. Deliver her from all internal discord, division, and schism. Avert the visitation of wrath which the sins of our people may justly have deserved. Pardon our manifold and aggravated transgressions, and incline and enable professing Christians to shew forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into thy marvellous light. We pray for thy blessing upon our Royal Sovereign the Queen of these realms, her Royal Consort Prince Albert, the Prince of Wales, the Princess Royal, and all the branches of the Royal Family. Watch over them for good. Preserve them from all danger, public or domestic, and establish them in thy fear. Give the spirit of wisdom and of counsel to our Queen's counsellors, and all employed in the administration of government and justice in the state.

We again implore thy blessing on this parish and congregation. May the solemn work of this Communion Sabbath rise as pure incense before thee, and

be accompanied with the fruits of faith, and righteousness, and peace, in every serious and devout receiver. Go with them from this house to their respective families and places of abode, to preserve alive the good impressions that have this day been made upon them. Confirm, and strengthen, and carry forward the good resolutions they may this day have made at thy table. Let not their holy purposes speedily pass from their minds, or be effaced by the temporal avocations in which they may subsequently be engaged; but may they rather sanctify all their pursuits, and elevate and purify all their designs and meditations.

We pray for thine assistance in what yet awaits us of our duty at this time. Be with us in singing to thy praise, and enable us to retain melody in our hearts. Give us thy blessing in departing from this house, where we have this day witnessed so much of thy grace and glory. Be our God and protector through the whole of our future lives. And when at last we must depart out of this world, O let the faith of Christ support our spirits, and his merits obtain for us thine everlasting acceptance. And may the glory and the praise be to thy holy name. Amen.

ORDINATION SERVICE.

MORNING PRAYER.

O LORD, thou art a great God and a great King—the only self-existent and eternal God—who alone didst exist before the world was—and whose existence is subject to no mutation or change. Thou art the Creator of all the ends of the earth and the former of all flesh. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee and glorify thy name, for thou only art great and doest marvellous works. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth. The heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord—thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints; for who in the heavens can be compared unto the Lord; or who among the sons of the mighty can once be likened unto our God?

O Lord, we revere thee as our Creator and our God. We bless thee for the rank assigned us in thy creation. Thou hast made us rational beings, and endowed us with immortal souls, capable of spiritual and eternal existence with thee in the heavens. We bless thee for the advantages of our birth and education, that we have been born in a land of light, where the gospel of Christ has shone in its splendour, and not in heathen darkness and ignorance. And now, O Lord, that we are this day met for the purpose of setting thy servant

apart to the work of the ministry, that he may shew that light to this people, we lift up our eyes unto thee, the Father of mercy and the God of all grace, and implore thy gracious acceptance of us, and thy presence with us in the service. With thee is the fountain of life, in thy light may we see light. O Lord, we pray thee, for the sake of that Jesus whom thou hearest always that thou wouldest provide for this people instruction in spiritual things, and that thou wouldest give to thy servant, who is to be set over them, the knowledge of Divine truth, and thy spirit without measure. May he be enabled to perform the sacred services of this place with fidelity and diligence, that this people may be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and that thou mayest make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasure. We pray that thou wouldest have respect to the prayers and supplications which he may put up for this people. When thy people shall meet together and shall pray unto thee, hearken thou unto the voice of their supplication. Hear them from thy dwelling-place, even from heaven, and, when thou hearest, forgive them. If thy people should at any time sin against thee, and he should be the instrument in thy hand of awakening them to a sense of their danger, and bringing any of them back to thy love, thy obedience, and service, Lord, make them glad in the light of thy countenance, let their soul be joyful in the Lord, and rejoice in God their Saviour.

When thy people shall meet with him in this place, and they shall pray and lift up their hearts unto thee, do thou hearken unto the voice of their supplication, and hear them from thy dwelling-place, even from heaven, and, when thou hearest, forgive; may thy ears be

open to their cry at all times, and do thou receive and accept all that religious homage and service in which they may be engaged together, whether in their public meetings or their more private associations.

When thou correctest any of them for their iniquities, or visitest thy people with thy righteous judgments, if they pray unto thee through the mouth of thy servant, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin when thou afflictest them, then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants. Encompass them about with songs of deliverance, and teach them the good way wherein they should walk.

If there be in our land famine—if there be pestilence, disease, and death—whatsoever plagues, whatsoever sickness, there be—what prayer soever, or supplication, he may present before thee in their name, and accompanied with their spirits—then hear thou in heaven and forgive, and remove that calamity, that thy people may fear thee all the days that they live, and praise thee in the gates of the daughter of Zion.

If thou speakest peace to any afflicted soul—if thou removest the pains of a diseased body, or healest the afflictions of a distempered spirit—if they shall worship in thy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving kindness and thy truth, because in the day they cried thou answeredst them—then do thou hear in heaven, thy dwelling-place, and accept of the praises of their mouths, and the gratitude of their hearts, which he presents before thee; and do thou establish them in thy love, a people saved by the Lord.

Vouchsafe thy presence with thy servant in dispensing the Sacraments of our holy religion to this people. Let that baptism seal them unto Christ, which is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer

of a good conscience towards God. Let the cup of blessing which he blesses be the communion of the blood, and that bread which he breaks, in the holy supper, be the communion of the body of Christ.

In attending in this house to the instructions of thy word, do thou cause thy people to hear with a willing ear; let them mix faith with the hearing; and enable them to hear it, not as the word of man, but the word of God with power. Thus may they bless thee while they live; may they lift up their hands in thy name; may their souls be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and their mouths sing praises to thee with joyful lips.

And now, O Lord, we beseech thee, let thy eyes be open, and thine ears attend unto the prayer which we have made before thee. Be graciously present with us, and assisting to us in the whole of this day's service; and to thy name be the praise and the glory.

SERMON.

RELIGION, OR THE FEAR OF THE LORD, THE ONLY PRINCIPLE OF A GOOD LIFE.

PSALM xix. 11.—“Moreover, by them is thy servant warned.”

THIS Psalm contains the meditation of David upon the works and providence of God. He begins with a description of the material world and the system of the universe. This he treats in that short and rapid manner which is peculiarly suited to the genius of poetry. From the contemplation of the works of nature in the visible

world, the Psalmist, by a very beautiful and poetical transition, rises to consider the justice and excellence of those laws which God has appointed as a rule of action to his reasonable creatures. On these he delights to dwell, as more beautiful in themselves, and subservient to a higher order of things, than those other laws, which have only a tendency to preserve the symmetry and proportion which take place in the material world. He then, in the text, comes to consider their usefulness as a rule of action, and that great and signal advantage attends the observation of them: "Moreover," says he, "by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them is there great reward."

I do not intend to occupy your time in explaining to you the different significations in which the term, the "judgments of God," are taken in sacred scripture. Suffice it to say that, in this as in several other passages of sacred writ, it signifies those laws which God has appointed as a rule of action to his reasonable creatures. What, therefore, I propose, in speaking from these words, is to shew you the insufficiency of every other principle but a principle of religion to regulate the conduct of mankind.

We might be ready to imagine that, as we are endowed with reason, and capable of perceiving right and wrong in action, our interest would lead us to prudence and discretion, and preserve us from sin and folly; but it must be allowed that the voice of reason is often little attended to when the passions are engaged. These must therefore be subdued by some higher power, and counteracted by some stronger considerations, than any that the best reason of man can suggest.

If reason alone were sufficient to preserve us from evil and direct us to good, how was it not sufficient to

do it in the heathen world before our Saviour made his appearance on earth? About the time of his appearance, learning and knowledge, especially on moral subjects, had attained to their greatest height. Many great philosophers arose before him, very eminent indeed; yet where were the philosophers that were able to direct the conduct of mankind or to refine their manners? The philosophers were surely those who were best able to determine the nature of virtue and vice, and suggest the motives that should excite to a worthy behaviour. They had leisure for speculations of this kind—they had abilities that have not been surpassed in more modern times—yet we find that they were unequal to the task. They were ignorant of many important truths in religion, which have the strictest connection with our comfort and the most powerful influence on our duty. Their knowledge on other points was dark, imperfect, and uncertain; and, on the most interesting, they had endless differences of opinion, which left those who would have chosen to have been directed by them in endless uncertainty and doubt. Nor was this all. It may farther be observed, that these philosophers, who should have been guides to virtue in their age, on the contrary taught such doctrines as directly tended to encourage vice and wickedness in the world. Such were the notions which some of them entertained of Providence, of the Supreme Being—as in no way concerning himself with the affairs of the world. Such were the opinions of others respecting good and evil—as having no foundation in the nature of things, but only in the laws and customs of the kingdoms of the earth. Such were the sentiments of others respecting fate, or men's doing everything by necessity and not by choice, which takes away all distinction betwixt good and evil, and leaves

no room either for rewards or punishments. Indeed, such is the insufficiency of reason to be the guide of life, that we find practices of the most corrupt nature maintained, and such vices as ought not to be named among Christians, defended by the greatest philosophers and most famous of the heathen sects; and these men, who filled people's heads with fine notions and exalted speculations, left them at full liberty to indulge in such practices as degrade human nature and embitter and destroy the dearest connections of human life.

But if the dictates of reason and lessons of philosophy, we will be told, are not sufficient principles of virtue, the laws of man will come in aid to them, and guard the virtue and good behaviour of men. The directions of philosophy, it may be said, are but addressed to our reason or our feelings: they may either be neglected or observed as we choose; but the laws of our country leave us not our choice. They must either be observed or we must incur and suffer the sanction of them. Assuredly the blessings of a good government, and of good and equitable laws, are, beyond all doubt, inconceivably great; and, under such a government as the British nation has long enjoyed, not to value our blessings, would be ingratitude to God, by whose favour we, through the laws, enjoy so great security in our lives, our liberties, and our rights. But it is, however, true that the laws of man cannot preserve the virtue of man, nor guard even the state against the designs of the turbulent and ambitious. Neither the private virtue of individuals nor the public tranquillity and peace can be altogether secured by the wisest regulations of a nation nor the most vigorous exertion of its laws. Religion is essential to all governments; without it they cannot subsist. Human laws

can only reach outward actions: they can give no laws to the sentiments, opinions, and affections of the heart. They can only lay hold of overt acts: they cannot punish the most dangerous purposes or the most profligate imaginations of the heart of man. And, as out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, it is obvious that those laws which cannot reach it, nor regulate its dispositions, must be very inadequate to the great purposes of regulating men's actions or guarding the dispositions of their souls. The truth is, that it is only the religious principle that can regulate the actions of men. That law which is written in God's word, which is written there by his inspiration, and carried home upon the heart by the influence of his gracious spirit.

Men of speculation, indeed, will tell us of the beauty and excellence of virtue, as a sufficient principle of virtuous conduct; and, indeed, we will very readily allow the beauty of virtue—that it is very amiable and comely to behold; but to found on this alone would be to build upon a very narrow bottom. This can never be a sufficient motive to it with all men, nor even with any man in all cases. How many are there who have no eyes to behold this beauty of virtue—who have no notion of it—who have no taste nor relish for it? How many are there who acknowledge its amiableness, who never think fit to embrace it, or follow after it? and how many are there who think they love it and take pleasure in it, who are only captivated with some particular beauties that suit their taste, and have pleasure only in some particular virtues, for which their *temper*, and *constitution*, and, perhaps, their *education*, have given them a liking? Where there is no regard to God, there never will be found a liking to all virtue; and a delight in some vir-

tues to the neglect of others, can never form a virtuous character before God, whatever it may do towards a name among men.

But I go farther, and add, that the beauty of virtue can never be a sufficient motive to it with any man in all cases. They who love it only for its own sake, can exercise it only for the pleasure they have in it. But, suppose their pleasure lies at any time another way, what becomes of their virtue? When they are tempted by the *pleasures* of sin, yielding to them is but choosing *one* pleasure before *another*, which they who have no religious principle will very readily do. And, as pleasure is their motive, they will very readily plunge into such *vices* as they have a liking to, upon the very same principle, and for the very same reason, that they perform some virtues because of the pleasure they have in them. It is easy to conceive a thousand beautiful ideas concerning virtue, but it is a very different thing to reduce them to practice; and they who have said the finest things of it, have not always been the most remarkable for their virtues. And the reason is obvious: it is because these fine notions about it are not able to withstand the violence of any one impetuous passion. In the calm hours of reflection, when the passions are laid asleep, the mind is entertained with the beautiful representations of virtue; but when the passions of our corrupt hearts are awakened, and there is most need for the exercise of virtue, then all our fine notions about it vanish commonly into air, as a dream when one awakens. But if men at that time call in the aid of religious considerations, then, whatever become of present advantages, future and eternal interests are more than sufficient to counterbalance all the evils and inconveniences to which inflexible virtue may expose us. When the soul is at

ease, it may be amused by the beautiful representations of virtue, as the eye is pleased with beholding a fine piece of painting; but as a man in the agony of pain has no relish for the most beautiful pictures, so, when the soul is under the pressure of trouble or adversity, it can no longer be amused with these beautiful representations of virtue, which are more owing to the enthusiasm of a warm fancy than the suggestions of cool reason, which never separates the beauty of virtue from its usefulness. An uneasy sensation will always be too hard for a fine, delightful idea, because it will not give it entrance. It engrosses the whole mind itself, and will not suffer any such thing to be heard. No consideration can support the mind of man under adversity but a sense of that God who never afflicts willingly, nor grieves the children of men; who never exacts anything of us as a duty by which we will be losers upon the whole; and who, however our happiness and duty may seem disjoined, will unite again the streams, and make them flow for ever in the same current. They who admire virtue as men do a fine piece of painting—for its beauty—will very readily part with it when reduced to sufferings, to purchase the ease, the comfort, and the enjoyment of their souls; as men, reduced to poverty, would part with the most valuable painting to purchase the conveniences and necessaries of life. But they who regard it as a source of everlasting happiness, will find it a support suited to all occasions—like God himself, a present help in time of trouble; whilst every other principle, like false friends, will ever forsake us when we have most need of them—in the hour of trial and day of adversity.

Others again propose the present advantages of virtue, as a sufficient principle of virtuous conduct; and

indeed, many and great advantages attend upon it. The health of the body and the pleasure of the mind, peace and tranquillity within, and the favour and regard of all good men about us, naturally follow a religious course. But this alone can never be an adequate principle of a good life ; because, if men are but willing to forego these advantages of it, where is the obligation upon them to preserve it ? If men have once thrown off their regard to God, they are accountable to none but themselves ; and if they choose to take the road to vice, it is but submitting to those inconveniences which we every day see men willing to hazard for the gratification of their passions. Besides, how often do men indulge in guilt, and yet are artful enough to conceal it, and preserve both their reputation and their interest ? The influence that virtue has upon their interest or their happiness may preserve them from those vices that would prejudice that interest or that happiness, but what would preserve them from those which they can follow without hurting their interest or their ease ? On the other hand, how often do men's very virtues expose them to many temporal inconveniences, by exciting the malice and envy of an ill-natured world ? And how often do the vices of others take advantage of men's virtues to injure them in their tenderest interests ? Nay, are not the interests of the world—profit, pleasure, and honour—often more certainly obtained by the crooked and sinistrous ways of vice, than by the plain and open paths of virtue ? The consequence of all this evidently is, that, if men have a regard only to temporal advantages, virtue is no longer to be followed than men see it for their temporal interests to do so ; and whenever an inflexible adherence to it would subject them to any great inconvenience or hardship, this principle will ob-

lige them to deviate from it, and forsake it, and thus become a principle of vice instead of a pattern of virtue. But if we take into account the consideration of God and another world, then, whatever become of present advantages, future and eternal interests are more than sufficient to counterbalance all the evils and inconveniences to which inflexible virtue may expose us. He who pursues virtue for the sake of eternal interests will act invariably, because he goes upon the strength of a motive which nothing can outweigh; but he who pursues it for the sake of temporal advantages, must change his measures whenever it is his interest to do so. The rule of right reason in him who believes in no other state of existence would be to procure all the advantage he can in this; and thus, all the rules of what we now call virtue would be quite inverted. It would be reasonable to break through any or all of them, to make life happy when we could; and it would be reasonable to throw up life itself when we could not make it happy. Setting a regard to God aside, therefore, we should be so far from being under an obligation to live well, we should not be obliged to live at all.

But a regard to God will influence our conduct in every condition of life, and teach us to have a respect to all the commandments of God. There is no situation of life where a regard to God will not have its proper effect in public or in private life, at home or abroad, in prosperity or adversity, in light or in darkness; where no eye sees us but his to whom the night shineth as the day, and from whom the darkness hideth not; and this is a circumstance that secures our virtue against manifold dangers, and preserves it amidst the strongest temptations. Every different situation in which we may be placed has its peculiar trials; if we be in an

humble and low state, we may repine at others in a more exalted station ; if we be lifted up to power or honour, we may suffer pride to rankle in our hearts ; in prosperity we may neglect God ; in adversity be cast down and disregard him ; but, in every situation and in every circumstance, a regard to God will sustain us. Wherever it prevails in the heart it will have a universal influence. It will lead men to the exercise of all virtue, and a conscientious performance of every duty of life. This is the great failing of all other principles, that they have, at best, but a partial effect. A sense of the beauty of virtue, or the advantages that attend it, may excite men to particular acts of virtue that most suit their interest or their taste ; but it is a sense of God alone, and a regard to his will, that will make men universally and conscientiously good, and nobly aspire after all virtue. The commandment of God is exceeding broad, and the virtues which religion requires are of great extent. Whatsoever things are true, just, honest, pure, lovely, and of good report, these things are we to think of and to do. Such an extensive virtue can be secured only by a principle extensive as itself ; and such a principle is the fear of the Lord. Wherever it prevails it will lead men to universal goodness ; and, like David, they will esteem all God's commandments concerning all things to be right. Were this principle attended to, we should never have heard a contradistinction made betwixt gospel and moral duties ; as if we could perform all the duties of the gospel and yet neglect the obligations of morality ; or as if we could fulfil the whole extent of moral obligation and yet neglect the duty we owe to God, which lies at the root of it. If this principle were attended to, then, the man of religion, who professes to

worship God, to attend the service of the sanctuary, and to go all the round of religious ordinances, could not think himself at liberty to hurt or injure his neighbour, or defraud him of his temporal interests ; nor could the man of morality, who values himself upon his honesty, his generosity, or his benevolence to his fellow creatures, think himself at liberty to neglect his God, to despise his ordinances, and to live in the total neglect both of his public and private devotions. They would not thus dash the two tables of God's law one against the other, and content themselves with performing the duties of the one whilst they left those of the other wholly undone. Were this principle to prevail, and the fear of the Lord to rule in men's hearts, would men think it enough to abstain from some sins whilst they indulged in others? Would they think it enough to refrain from gross and scandalous crimes, which are branded with infamy and reproach among men, and yet allow themselves in others, which the world esteems trivial and light, but to which custom and fashion only have given countenance? Would they hold it a crime worthy of death to steal or rob their neighbour of his property, and yet think it no dishonour to rob the poor man's daughter of her innocence and virtue? Would lying lips be an abomination to them who yet take pleasure in wanton or malicious tongues? Or would they think it rude to give a provocation or offer insulting language to a worldly superior, and yet think it no evil to affront God to his face, and, on every trivial occasion, to take his sacred name in vain? No, my friends ; were a sense of God to dwell in men's hearts, it would make them universally and conscientiously good ; it would lead them to have a respect

to all God's holy commandments, to keep themselves pure and unspotted from the world, and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. There would, then, be no difference between fashionable vices and notorious crimes. Secret and hidden guilt would be shunned as conscientiously as bolder and more impudent vice. Even favourite inclinations would be subdued. We should lay aside every weight, and the sins that more easily beset us. We should subdue every irregular desire, and restrain every inordinate affection, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Thus have I endeavoured to shew you the insufficiency of every other principle but a principle of religion to regulate the actions of men. I have endeavoured to argue the subject on general and abstract grounds, in order to obtain the consent of your understandings to the great and important truth which I wish to impress on your minds; and that is, that religion being essential to the virtue and happiness of man, the institutions of religion are essentially necessary to preserve them in the knowledge of spiritual truth, and the practice of Christian duty. It is by these institutions, and especially by setting apart an order of men for the religious instruction of others in divine things, that the knowledge and profession of Christianity have been preserved and transmitted to us in this remote age and nation. Had it not been for these institutions, the Christian religion could not have subsisted for any considerable time, or to any great extent, in the world. We cannot believe that our Saviour's doctrine would have been propagated to distant and remote nations, after the cessation of miracles, if those measures had not been resorted to that were adapted to the circum-

stances and capacities of the great body of mankind. To the generality of men it must have remained in darkness, and the greatest part of the world, who have neither leisure nor inclination, by reading and study, to acquire a knowledge of ancient writings, however valuable and important, must have remained entirely destitute of any acquaintance with it. A few studious and contemplative men, of curious and inquisitive genius, might have attained to some competent knowledge of the doctrines of Jesus, and, from their native beauty and excellence, have given them the preference to the systems of the philosophers; but the rest of mankind must have remained ignorant of their nature, and perhaps never have heard of the name of their Author. It is by living instructors that men must be taught, and by such methods as, without much trouble to themselves, will insinuate truth into their minds; and nothing can be better adapted to this purpose than the observance of those external institutions of Christianity, for the performance of which a minister is this day to be ordained among you. Under his ministration, you may have an opportunity, every seventh day, of being instructed in the doctrine of Jesus. You may hear the principles of Christianity so plainly taught that the meanest capacity may be informed, whilst the most enlightened may be improved; so that, if anything will be effectual for preserving in the minds of men, and diffusing through the world the truths of Christianity, these institutions certainly must; and, on the other hand, a universal decay of all knowledge of these truths among you must be the certain and necessary consequence of the neglect or contempt of them.

If, then, you have any regard for the doctrines of religion, if you have any love for Jesus their author, be

persuaded to receive, obey, and reverence him who is this day to be set over you in the Lord, and attend carefully upon his ministrations in this place, that the truths of religion may be kept alive in your hearts, and that the word of God may have free course and be glorified. And may God bless these instructions for your edification.

The Sermon being finished, the minister intimates that A. B., (the person who is to be ordained,) having received a presentation from C. D., the legal patron, to the vacant Parish of —, and the Presbytery having made trial of his qualifications for the ministry, and being satisfied therewith, his call having been moderated, the edict for ordination having been served and returned, duly executed and indorsed, warning all persons having any objections against his being admitted minister of said Parish to lodge the same with the Presbytery, that they may be judged of and cognosed; proclamation to the same effect having also been this day made, at the most patent door of the church, and no objections offered—(or objections having been offered and disposed of as the case may be)—the Presbytery are now to proceed to his ordination as minister of this parish, by prayer and the imposition of hands. But, in order that they (the people) might be satisfied of his soundness in the Christian faith, he (the officiating clergyman) would now put to him the questions appointed by the Act of Assembly, to be put to ministers at their ordination. The minister then reads the customary questions, in presence of the congregation, the presentee standing up and returning the corresponding and appropriate answers.

The minister then descends from the pulpit to the place where the presentee and the members of Presbytery, and such other ordained ministers as may be present, are seated. And, the person to be ordained alone kneeling, and the whole congregation standing, he pronounces the ordination prayer. When the officiating minister comes to implore the Divine blessing on the person now set apart to the office of the ministry, he, along with all the ordained ministers now present, puts his hand upon the head of the person, who still continues kneeling.

ORDINATION PRAYER.

HOLY, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is full of thy glory, and every day sheweth forth thy praise. Who would not fear thee and serve thee, for thou only art holy?

We adore thee, O Lord, for all the discoveries thou hast made of thyself to the children of men. We bless thee for the promise which thou didst make to our fathers of old, that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. And we thank thee for those clearer and more distinct enunciations, given by the Prophets, of the time and circumstances in which this prediction should be fulfilled. We rejoice that thou didst early and distinctly foretell the coming of the Son of man for the salvation of the world; and we bless thee that, when the fulness of the time was come, thou didst send him forth, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that are under the

law, that we might see the salvation of our God. We bless thee, with the warmest affection of grateful hearts, for this wonderful interposition in our favour. Blessed be that God who contrived the amazing plan which proclaims pardon, and peace, and happiness, to such guilty creatures as we are. Blessed be that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which led him to bring down salvation from heaven to earth, and by suffering, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. Blessed be that Prophet who came a teacher down from God, to enlighten our benighted souls, and make them wise unto salvation. Blessed be that compassionate Priest who has made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. Blessed be that glorious Sovereign, who is able to subdue all things to himself, and make us a willing people to him in the day of his power.

We adore that inscrutable wisdom which so early made known this scheme of salvation to this distant isle, and that has transmitted it unimpaired to this remote generation. We bless thee that thou hast established in our land a National Church, distinguished by the purity of her doctrine and the soundness of her faith; that thou hast set apart an order of men amongst us, for preserving the knowledge of the truth, and impressing it on the hearts of thy people; that thou hast given some apostles, some prophets, some pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

And now, O Lord, that we are met together to provide a pastor for this people, we would lift up our hearts to thee, and implore thy blessing on the work in which we are engaged. Do thou let thy rich and effectual blessing descend on the head of him whom, by the im-

position of hands, we now set apart to the work of the ministry. Do thou thyself consecrate him to this sacred office. Prepare him, we pray thee, for the Master's service to which he is called. Enlighten him, by thy spirit, in the knowledge of the truth, that he may be able to take his doctrine out of thy word, and shew it to this people for their edification and encouragement. May he be instant in season and out of season. May he reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. May he not only teach this people the way of salvation, but himself be careful to walk in it, that he may win them to Christ both by his teaching and example.

May he be blameless as a steward of God. Not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the sacred word as he hath been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

Do thou hear these our prayers, presented in the name and through the merits of the Redeemer; and, when thou hearest, do thou grant us an answer in peace, for Christ's sake. Amen.

(The minister and all the clergymen present here give the person ordained the right hand of fellowship. The minister then returns to the pulpit, and addresses himself first to the minister and then to the people; the former standing during the time that the address to him continues.)

ADDRESS TO THE MINISTER.

Reverend and dear brother, you are now ordained to a very important and sacred office. You are called to be a minister in the Church of Christ, and to preach the doctrines and duties, and administer the hopes and consolations, of religion to this people. I trust you will therefore bear with me whilst, in the discharge of the duty which has been put upon me, I endeavour to lay before you some of the great outlines of the ministerial office, and remind you of the diligence and fidelity with which it must be discharged.

The great design of the ministerial office, the end and object for which you have been placed here, is to lead men to Christ, that they may obtain salvation through him. Now, in order that men may be brought to Christ for this end, it is obvious that they must be instructed both in the nature of that salvation and the means by which it is to be extended to them. The first aim of a Christian minister must therefore be to instruct men in the knowledge of that scheme of salvation which Christ has revealed—in all that must be known, and believed, and done, in order to salvation.

This, you will readily perceive, is a difficult and laborious task, and one that requires no common diligence and no ordinary acquirements. Considering, indeed, the nature and extent of the work, and the difficulties that are to be overcome in its execution; the blindness and perversity that fill the minds of some; the errors and prejudices that pre-occupy the hearts of many; the carelessness and indifference that, occasionally, at least, if not habitually, pervade the thoughts of

all, it might seem a labour beyond one's strength fully and effectually to discharge it. And, were we left to our own strength, justly might we have reason to despair. But we have abundant reason to be thankful to God that we have the assurance of the best and most effectual assistance. Our blessed Saviour himself, when he gave the eleven their commission to teach all nations, gave them this gracious promise—"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* But the labour and difficulty of the work should lead us to the most strenuous and vigorous exertions, both in fitting ourselves for the task and in discharging its duties, when they are laid upon us, with fidelity and success.

For this purpose, let me remind you, sir, that a minister of the gospel must study much the sacred writings, and meditate carefully on the divine truths contained in them, that he may be able to open them up and explain them to his people, and that, like a scribe well instructed, he may, according to the various wants and exigencies of his people, bring forth out of his treasure things new and old.

The better to enable him to understand these sacred writings, and that he may open up and expound more fully to others their true meaning and import—that he may more effectually illustrate their whole style and reasoning—it is requisite that he should have a competent knowledge of many ancient customs and opinions to which they allude, and which are to be learned from the histories of ancient ages. Especially will it be of importance to him to be well instructed in the original languages in which the sacred books were written. This will enable him to throw light on many passages

* Matthew, xxviii. 20.

which might otherwise appear obscure, and direct him to the true force and meaning of others, which, in translation, may not be so happily or justly expressed. Having enriched his mind with a thorough knowledge of the principles and doctrines of the Christian religion, by a careful study of these sacred writings, it should be his next care to store his heart with the best and purest sentiments, moral and divine, a rich variety of which is to be found in the same sacred writings; and, to replenish his soul to the full, he must gather from every other quarter whatever is pure and worthy—whatever tends to instruct the mind, to inform the understanding, and to convince the judgment—whatever goes to warm the heart, enliven virtue, or inflame devotion. For this purpose, he must study deeply the nature of man, and endeavour to attain a proper knowledge of the various dispositions and workings of the human heart, together with a competent acquaintance with the different characters and tempers of men, that he may know how to inform the understanding with agreeable and necessary instruction—how to touch the heart and warm the affections with a powerful and skilful hand—and how to correct and reprove the wanderings of inclination, without stirring the emotions of prejudice and passion.

But it is not enough for a minister of the gospel to enlighten and instruct his people—this must be but the ground-work of his operations; his next and great aim must be to incline and persuade men to embrace Jesus Christ. As the understanding must be enlightened, so the will and affections must be inclined. For this purpose, he must seek to make himself master of all the arts of persuasion and eloquence, to press home on their hearts the desire of salvation—to persuade them of the necessity and excellence of religion and godliness,

and to excite their indignation and horror against the turpitude and debasement of all manner of sin and iniquity. For this purpose, he must strive to insinuate himself into the hearts of men, whether by the mild and gentle arts of captivating their affections into the obedience of Christ, or overawing the more bold and hardened with the terrors of the Lord.

But the most effectual mean of recommending religion and righteousness to others is to practise them in your own life. For this purpose, a minister must seek to purify and refine his own heart, to cultivate those graces and virtues in his own life which he enforces on his people, and to cherish a warm feeling of those divine truths and Christian doctrines which he impresses on their hearts.

All this, no doubt, supposes that he is possessed of good natural powers, and, at least, of moderate talents and abilities of mind; for, where there is not a faculty to retain knowledge, and a readiness to bring it forth into exercise, the greatest assiduity of reading and study, and the deepest store of acquired knowledge must be unprofitable and useless.

The specimens of composition which you have given to the Presbytery, and the other trials which you have undergone, are an evidence and security to this people that, in point of talent and acquirement, you are well qualified for the high and important office to which you have been this day ordained. But you will permit me to remind you that the labours and studies which are to fit you for the useful discharge of the duties of this cure are now only to begin. The previous studies in which you have been engaged, and which are required by the rules of our Church of all candidates for the ministry, are to be regarded only as the preparatory exercises of your pro-

fession, calculated to store the mind with that variety of useful knowledge and general information, which you are now, by farther meditation and study, to draw forth into shape and form for the instruction and edification of your flock.

In preparing the discourses which you are to deliver to this people, let your great and leading theme be Christ, and Christ crucified, to the Jews indeed a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation. Preach to your people the great and leading doctrines of the gospel, and enforce upon their practice the great and leading duties of the Christian life. Remember that the gospel is not a mere speculative scheme, calculated to occupy and fill the mind with contemplations which produce no effect upon the heart and conduct; and, at the same time, never forget that it is not a mere system of morality enforcing the duties of life from the consideration of the peculiar advantages with which the practice of each is attended. Let it be your great rule that, when you treat of Christian doctrines, you make them the motive to Christian duties; and when you treat of Christian duties, you enforce them from gospel motives. Study to adapt your discourses to the circumstances and capacities of your hearers. Labour to awaken the more secure by setting before them the terrors of the Lord; but bind up the wounds of the broken spirit with a soft and tender hand. Study plainness and simplicity in your compositions, and avoid all inflated and flowery expressions, and the glitter of false eloquence; but think not that simplicity consists in the selection of vulgar and colloquial expressions. Avoid alike whatever is pompous and affected, and

whatever is mean and low, and beneath the dignity of your composition. Let it be your endeavour to fix the attention of your hearers to the subject of your argument with sincerity of heart and simplicity of manner, so as to convince all that you have no other object in view but to inform and improve them, and to stamp those pious and virtuous sentiments on their hearts which you feel in your own.

In the discharge of the office which you have now undertaken, you will be frequently called to converse with your people in private, and to visit them from house to house. In this part of your duty, it will be of special importance to you to study kindness and cordiality in your demeanour. You need not be afraid that you will descend from the rank of life in which Providence has placed you by any degree of familiarity and condescension with which you may treat even the meanest of your people in your domiciliary visits to them. Even the remonstrances and rebukes, which it may be your duty to tender them, may be embued with the spirit of affection and kindness. This will render them much more impressive and effectual than if they were administered with austerity and harshness. These, when they are exhibited in any undue degree, never fail to excite a certain degree of irritation, if not something approaching to aversion, very unfavourable to that mutual sympathy and cordiality which ought always to subsist betwixt a minister and his people, and which it should be your anxious desire to maintain. I do not mean that you should be possessed with an over-anxious desire of popular applause, or that you should have recourse to any arts that have no other aim or object than that of obtaining it; but a certain degree of acceptance is essentially necessary to professional usefulness;

and you should seek to obtain it by the faithful and conscientious discharge of every clerical duty, by the uniform kindness of your deportment towards your flock, and by the heartfelt interest which you take in all their concerns, but especially in their spiritual welfare.

As to your deportment in private life, let your conversation be pure and inoffensive, that the ministry be not blamed. The eyes, not only of your own congregation, but of society at large, will be upon you; the world expects a high degree of virtue and integrity from the ministers of the gospel;—you ought, therefore, to watch over yourself with a holy jealousy and caution. Indeed, we do but injure the interests of religion, if we do not exemplify in our own lives those virtues which we inculcate on others; for with what reason can we expect that men should follow our instructions, when we ourselves depart from them, and set an opposite example?

In a word; never forget for a moment the sacred character with which you have this day been invested, and let it be your endeavour, by a prudent and circumspect deportment, to maintain, not your own respectability alone, but the credit of the order to which you belong.

And may the labours in which you engage among this people, and the earnestness and affection with which you discharge your duty towards *them*, procure for you the gratifying assurance that you possess their confidence and affection; and may the zeal and fidelity with which you engage in your Master's service, procure for you the highest reward of obtaining for yourself and for them an interest in his merits and mediation, that thereby you may obtain the approbation of the Eternal Judge in the great day of the Lord.

ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE.

I have now, my friends, to address to you a few words, and I hope you will hear me with patience; for I can have nothing in view in what I have to say to you but your best interest, even your religious profiting here and your eternal salvation hereafter.

Every relative situation in which we can be placed in life has reciprocal and corresponding duties annexed to it, and every office performed to us by others lays us under an obligation of yielding to their relative claims. The duties of a minister to his people, you have just now heard, are numerous and binding; but there are also duties incumbent on a people to their minister, which are equally obligatory on them. The clerical offices and functions are, in this land of light and knowledge, pretty generally understood, and are, indeed, frequently made the subject of conversation. The duties of a people to their minister, and the corresponding obligation which the discharge of his functions lays upon them, are, perhaps, not so scrupulously regarded; and sure I am that they are too seldom considered in a religious point of view; and to this cause is, in a great measure, to be ascribed the little fruit of the ministry. Let me, therefore, remind you that, in order to the success of the ministry among you, you must receive him who is now ordained over you in the Lord, and listen to his instructions; and in order that these instructions may be profitable, you must be at pains to come to them, as a people prepared to the Lord. You could expect no increase from the seed which you cast into the ground on which no previous culture was bestowed;

neither can you hope for fruit from the incorruptible seed of God's word, when it falls on unprepared minds.

The first duty, therefore, that is incumbent on you, with respect to him who is now ordained over you, is to prepare yourselves for receiving his instructions, and, for this purpose, you must shake yourselves free of every prejudice and prepossession against him, if any such should lurk in your breasts. This is essential to him who is now ordained over you, that his usefulness be not endangered, nor his hands weakened in the work of the Lord. There is, I trust, indeed, little reason to entertain such apprehensions. There is the fairest prospect of his living amongst you in peace and harmony. But you will permit me to remind you that, in order that his professional labours may be successful among you, you must punctually attend on his ministrations, with a sincere desire to profit by them. There are many, it may be suspected, who resort to the church on the Sabbath, who scarcely know what they propose to themselves by doing so. They go there, perhaps, because it is the custom with those around them, just in the same way that others turn their backs on the ordinances of religion, because it is the fashion with those who are of the same rank with themselves. Others again resort to the house of God only to be seen of men, to preserve a good name, and to attract the regard of the world more than that of their Maker. Whilst others come there to be amused rather than instructed, to satisfy their curiosity rather than to better their hearts. No motives of religion bringing them to the house of God, and no sentiments of piety or devotion accompanying them, no serious impression can be made upon them, and they must return to their homes not much benefited by the temple services. If, then, you

would have the ministrations of your pastor successful amongst you, you must come to wait upon his instructions with a sincere and earnest desire that they may be profitable to you—that your souls may be edified by the word of truth—that your hearts may be bettered by the spirit of grace—and that your minds may be enlightened and made wise unto salvation.

For this purpose, you ought, on the morning of the Sabbath day, before you come up to the house of God, to enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you, and, on your bended knees, pray to the Father of Lights to grant you those eyes of the soul that may see his power and glory in the sanctuary, those ears of the heart which alone can hear his voice, and that heart which shall understand, and be converted, and healed.

And, while you pray for yourselves, forget not to offer up a petition for your minister, that, when he comes forth to you, he may come in the fulness of the blessings of the gospel of Christ. This is what the Apostle earnestly entreats again and again:—"Brethren, pray for us. Finally, brethren, pray for us." And, when exhorting the Ephesians to pray with all supplication for all saints, he adds, "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel."* Let it be your prayer, then, that that God who ministereth seed to the sower would furnish him with bread to feed the hungry, that none may go empty away.

Having thus prepared yourselves for the reception of the truth, let the instructions of your minister fall upon humble and teachable minds. You ought to keep it always in view, that it is not his own word that he

* Ephesians, vi. 19.

preaches. You ought to receive it, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, with power, which worketh effectually in them that believe. Ministers are but the ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you by them; they speak to you in his name, and only do the message of God in the language of men. In hearing the gospel, men often lose sight of this, and fall into the error of the Jews of old. They believe not the Eternal Word to be God, because the Word was made flesh and dwelt among them. And Christians receive not the word because it is delivered to them by those whom they see to be flesh and blood like themselves. True, indeed, it is, that we carry this divine treasure in earthen vessels; but it does not, on that account, lose anything of its heavenly nature or divine authority. God can make the poorest instruments accomplish the greatest works, and out of the mouths of babes and sucklings can perfect praise. Were an angel to deliver a message to you from heaven, the splendour of his appearance would, no doubt, strike you with awe, and you would hear him with reverence and attention. And yet the Apostle Paul tells you that though an angel from heaven should preach to you any other gospel than he preached, he should be to you accursed;* and the reason of this he assigns in a subsequent verse.† Because the gospel which was preached by him was not after man, for he neither received it of man, neither was he taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is not, then, our own doctrines, our own discoveries and opinions, that we preach to you. We do not lay before you maxims of our own framing, truths of our own investi-

* Ephesians, i. 8.

† Ibid, 11, 12.

gation, principles established by ourselves—but truths that have descended from heaven, maxims established by the Son of God, laws enacted by that one great Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy, objects of faith declared by the only begotten Son of God who is in the bosom of the Father. And when your minister opens up the doctrines of faith, and explains and inculcates the morals of the gospel, you ought to hear him with candid and unprejudiced minds, with humble and teachable spirits, willing to hearken to his counsels, and even his reproofs, and to receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to make wise unto salvation. Though doctrines may be taught which seem hard and difficult to your comprehension—though duties be inculcated which are contrary to your natural corruption—though threatenings be denounced which make you uneasy in your sins—your are not to murmur or be offended. But these doctrines must be embraced—these duties must be fulfilled—these denunciations must keep you in awe, because they are all the truths of that God who cannot lie, and who will not alter the thing that has gone out of his mouth. Incline, then, your ear to hear, and let no prejudice, no passion, no pride of erring reason, by which comes contention, bar your minds against the reception of the truth. Attend regularly and punctually, as you ought, on his preaching and exposition of the word, and seek the law from his mouth. Regard him as one best capable of instructing you, and qualified, by his studies and habits, for pointing out to you the way that leads to eternal life. I do not bid you follow him blindly, or implicitly believe every doctrine he may preach, if it be not founded on the word of God. You are commanded to try the spirits, whether they be of God; but you will fall into

an opposite and grievous error by setting up your own judgment as an infallible guide, by undervaluing the ministry as instituted in the Church, or thinking yourselves wiser than those appointed to be your teachers. Acquaint him with your difficulties, and seek the solution of your doubts from him. From him ask counsel in your distress—from him look for the comfortable application of the promises—and from him expect the awakening doctrines of the word, to quicken you in the work of the Lord.

PUBLIC, OR CONCLUDING PRAYER.

O LORD, thou art the almighty Creator and Governor of the world, who alone doth wondrous works, and whose name is the Everlasting and Holy One. Thou hast made all things by thy power, and with the counsel of thine own wisdom and goodness. Justly may we adore the mighty power, the wonderful contrivance, and the merciful design displayed in every one of them. Justly may we reverence these incomprehensible perfections, and render thanks unto thee for thine especial and distinguished favours, manifested to all the works of thy hand. But we, thy rational and intelligent offspring, are more particularly bound to offer up continual spiritual sacrifices unto thee, through Christ Jesus our Lord. We desire, O Lord, to bless thee, to praise thee, to declare thy greatness, and abundantly to utter the memory of thy great goodness. We bless thee for thy never-ceasing bounty towards us, especially that thou hast been pleased to send thy Son into the

world, that by his appearing in our nature, by humbling himself unto death, by his rising from the grave, and by his glorious ascending up on high, he might restore us to the blessed hope of thy favour to everlasting life. We bless thee that we have been brought to the knowledge of the truth, and that the gospel salvation has been published in our ears. We rejoice in the liberty of access which we have to the fountain of truth, to enlighten and instruct us in the knowledge of heavenly and divine things. We thank thee for the privilege which we enjoy of coming up to thy house—the place where thine honour delighteth to dwell—to worship in thy presence, to receive instruction out of thy law, and to have our religious impressions renewed and deepened on our hearts. We praise thee for the establishment of an order of men amongst us dedicated to thy service and devoted to the study of divine truth, that they may be the instruments in thy hand of conveying the knowledge of heavenly things to thy people, of keeping alive on their hearts, by the preaching of the word and the administration of the Sacraments, a sense of their obligations to God and to the Saviour Jesus Christ, that religion and righteousness may not perish from amongst us. We bless thee that we have this day been called to ordain a minister over this people, to supply the breach which the visitation of thy providence has recently made in their pastoral care. We bless thee that thou hast raised up one, in the course of thy providence, to take the charge of this flock, fitted, by his gifts and graces, to lead and guide them in the green pastures; to open up to them the treasures of thy word; to declare to them thy counsels for the salvation of men; to lead them to seek the influences of thy grace and spirit; to confirm their faith in Christ; and

to awaken repentance in their hearts. O Lord, do thou give him thy grace to fit him for these important services; to enable him to preach the doctrine of Christ in simplicity and purity; to lay before his people the interesting doctrines which they must believe, and the important duties which they must practise. May his own heart and his own life be under the influence of these doctrines and duties, that he may both save himself and those that hear him.

Give, we pray thee, an humble and teachable disposition to this people. May they receive him whom thou hast set this day over them in the Lord, and give a willing ear to his instructions. Remove from their minds every prejudice that may obstruct the entrance of divine truth. Dispose them to wait upon his public preaching and his private exhortations. May they listen to his admonitions and submit to his reproofs; and may his whole ministry be blessed to them for their edification, their comfort, and their devotion.

Bless, we pray thee, the court of thy Church with which he has this day, in Presbyterian parity and Christian brotherhood, been connected. We pray for all the members of that body in their individual and parochial capacity. Do thou bless them in their ministrations to their flocks. Enable them to take a word out of thy law and shew it to their people, that they may speak comfortably to Jerusalem. We pray for the whole of that National Church to which we belong. Do thou cherish this thine own vine; water it abundantly with the dew of heaven, that it may ever flourish and grow green, and that those who live under it may rejoice in the knowledge and favour of the Most High. We pray for our Provincial Synods and the General Assemblies of our Church. Give them a spirit of

faith. Give them a spirit of candour and mutual forbearance. Give them a spirit of zeal for thy true honour and service, and let their zeal be directed towards good and proper objects, and tempered with charity and love. Bring us all, we pray thee, to right views of the true ends for which we are associated in these different courts. Let there be but one mind and one spirit in them; and where differences arise—as they must amongst men of different views, who are conscientiously seeking thy true honour and service—may we differ with the spirit of humility and mutual forbearance; and may we be enabled to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Do thou thyself overrule and compose these varying views; and, seeing we are all striving for one great end, do thou dispose us to bring about that end by the best, the wisest, and most Christian means.

We pray for the National Churches of Great Britain and Ireland, and for the Church universal; may the spirit of grace and true faith fill the hearts of all men to whom the doctrine of the Saviour is preached; let superstition and idolatry, all impiety and profaneness, all manner of sin, in heart and in life, be abolished throughout the world; and may piety and righteousness, may Christian purity and holiness, flourish in their stead. We pray for those who are yet ignorant of the gospel; may they be speedily brought to the knowledge of the truth. Let thy son be given for a covenant of the people, and for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house, to give the knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.

We pray for our native land, the united kingdoms of

Great Britain and Ireland. Pour down thy best blessings on the head of our gracious Queen, her Royal Consort Prince Albert, the Prince of Wales, the Princess Royal, and all the members of the Queen's family; prolong our Queen's life and prosper her administration. Bless the high courts of Parliament; give them wisdom and understanding, that they may adopt those measures that will promote thy glory and the public good. Bless all inferior rulers and magistrates, that they may rightly discharge their duty, and that justice and mercy may prevail in our land.

We pray for thy grace while we sing to thy praise. Dismiss us from thy house with thy blessing. Go with us to our several homes and our various avocations. And let some portion of that good spirit which animates our religious devotions sanctify unto us all our secular pursuits. And all that we ask is in the name and through the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

ORDINATION OF ELDERS.

THE election of elders having taken place according to the rules of the Church, and the edict having been served, at least ten free days before, warning all persons who have any objections to the life or conversation of those who had been so elected to appear before the kirk session and state the same, the minister, in the face of the congregation, calls upon the persons elected by name, who, standing up in the elder's seat, the minister, in order that the congregation may be satisfied

of their soundness in the faith, puts to them the following questions, to which they must give their assent:—

1st, Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and the only rule of faith and manners? *2d*, Do you believe the Presbyterian form of worship and church government to be founded on, and agreeable to, the Word of God; and will you, to the best of your ability, maintain and defend the same against all heresy and schism? *3d*, Do you engage to be diligent and faithful in the discharge of the duties of the office of elders in this parish, and to administer, with impartiality, the discipline of the Church amongst this people? *4th*, Will you submit yourselves, in the spirit of meekness, to the admonitions and discipline of the judicatories of this church? *5th*, Do you own and adhere to the Confession of Faith of this Church; and do you declare your readiness now, or at any time when it shall be demanded of you, to sign the same?

In consequence of the answers which you have now given to these questions, I proceed to ordain you as Elders of the Church, by prayer and supplication, and your brethren in office will receive you into the kirk-session, by giving you the right hand of fellowship, immediately after the blessing is pronounced.

Let us pray.

O Lord, the fountain of our life and the author of our good, we bless thee for the light of the gospel of Jesus which thou hast caused to shine around us; for the gracious institutions of our holy religion which thou hast, in infinite wisdom, appointed for the perfecting of thy saints and the edifying of the body of Christ; and for the discipline exercised by the office-bearers of the

Church, for maintaining the integrity of the Christian life and the purity and regularity of Christian society. We look up unto thee, the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, and implore thy blessing and thy Spirit upon the labourers whom thou sendest forth to thy harvest ; and, while they plant and water according to thy appointment, do thou give a large and plentiful increase. And at this time we especially pray that thou wouldst pour down much of thy Divine Spirit upon thy servants whom we now set apart and ordain to an honourable office in thy vineyard, to join with us in the government of thy Church, the exercise of her discipline, the inspection of thy people, the care of the poor, and the reproof and correction of transgressors. As thou hast called them to the exercise of an important trust in thy Church, do thou bestow upon them all those gifts and graces which are necessary to fit them for the right discharge of it. Thou hast called them with us to the inspection of thy flock in this place, do thou give them grace dutifully to observe their steps, wisdom to bring back such as go astray, and prudence to apply with us proper remedies to those who offend and are ready to perish. Let them be full of faith, and of wisdom, and of the Holy Ghost. Give them all that strength of body and vigour of mind, all that fidelity and zeal, and all that compassion for the souls of men, that are necessary for the edification of the Church and the advancement of the kingdom of thy Son. Let it be as their meat and as their drink to do the will of their heavenly Father. Give them a holy fortitude to confound sinners, firmness to reprove and correct the vicious, and, above all, grace to set a pious and sober example before thy Church, that none may be able to reprove in them those sins

which they chastise in others—that thus they may bring down thy blessing upon themselves—may perform their duty with a good report—and finish their course with thy acceptance and favour. And do thou shed abroad thy grace upon the whole body of thy people, that they may ever act dutifully towards those who are this day set over them—esteem them highly in love for their work's sake—receive, in meekness, the admonitions they may be called to tender them—and render them that honour and respect which is due to those who watch for their spiritual welfare. Hear these our requests, O thou merciful Father; and to thee, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed the praise, world without end. Amen.

The congregation being seated, the intrants stand up upon the minister mentioning their names, whilst he addresses them :—

My Friends and Fellow-Labourers,

You are now called to an honourable and important charge in the Church of Christ. An elder is one who, joined with the ministers of the gospel, contributes, by his prudence, to the government of the Church, exercises her discipline along with them, and removes the disorders that happen among the people. In the discharge of these duties of your office, you are to trust to Divine strength; and, in the confidence of this support, and trusting to your moral courage only as an instrument, you are not to be dismayed by any opposition you may meet, nor ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. And although at no time men endure admonition with pleasure, yet it will be your business, without fear, partiality, or favour, to admonish, reprove,

direct, and exhort, with all long-suffering and patience. In the discharge of this part of your duty, you will do well to remember that mildness and gentleness of demeanour, joined with the requisite firmness, will be much more effectual for convincing and reclaiming offenders, than undue harshness and severity. The common and ordinary duties of your office will not require from you any very active interference in the government of the Church, or any enlarged views of ecclesiastical polity. But you may be occasionally called on to take a share in the deliberations of the higher courts of our Church; and, if time and opportunity permit, it may be of great importance, in such circumstances, for you to be acquainted with the theory of our church government, and with the laws and regulations on which it is founded. But a daily part of your office, which, however, requires rather good feeling and discreet judgment than high talent or uncommon attainment, is the administration of the charity of this congregation. And here the greatest demand that will be made upon you, will be only common and ordinary diligence in making yourselves acquainted with the situation and circumstances of the people, so as to discriminate the claims of real poverty from the clamours of vicious idleness and fictitious indigence.

The proofs which you have already given of prudence and discretion in the ordinary affairs of life are a sufficient warrant for the fit and proper discharge of the duties of this office; and, in the exercise of the same qualities, you may look, under the blessing of Providence, for the approbation and respect of the virtuous part of the community. And I pray that you may receive the grace of God for the encouragement, and his effectual blessing for the reward, of all your labours.

ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE.

My Friends—The men whom you have now seen ordained to the office of elders stand in an important relation towards you ; and that relation demands for them your respect and consideration, not for their own sakes alone, but also for the sake of the office with which they are now invested. That office brings to them no worldly profit, and no pleasure but that of doing good. It is, indeed, always an ill-requited, and, too often, but a thankless task ; but, if it be in its nature so wholly disinterested, it proportionally demands your gratitude and encouragement. The office they have undertaken is, indeed, important, and the right discharge of it will be productive of much advantage ; but the preceding observation will enable you to perceive that the advantage of it results not to them but to you. They share in the beneficial results of their own labours only as every individual is a sharer of the public sobriety and good order which these labours are directed to promote. Some of you they may be called upon to counsel and advise ; others it may be requisite for them to exhort or reprove ; but let not the exercise of these unpleasant offices—irksome even to themselves, and undertaken only from a sense of duty—excite your prejudice, or move your jealousy or hatred against them ; and think not that, in doing so, they are influenced either by any personal hostility towards you, or any arrogance and undue presumption on their own part. It will give them much more pleasure if they shall never have any occasion to tender you any such admonitions ; and you may be assured that they will never

be had recourse to but when the good of the individual, and the general interest require it. Though they be now placed in a situation of honour and respectability, and invested with a degree of inspection over you, yet you are not to imagine that, while they display more than ordinary prudence and propriety, there is any obligation upon them to evince uncommon moroseness and austerity ; and, while they are called upon to correct any glaring irregularities in your conduct, think not that you are justified in them by being able to point out some minor errors in their deportment ; much less ought you to let their advancement to this place of respectability be an occasion or a motive to you to set yourselves to find out something amiss in their conduct and demeanour. On the contrary, their appointment to this office of responsibility and labour should both lead you to treat them with the greater kindness and confidence, and should increase your caution in receiving any unfavourable impressions against them. The character which they have already acquired demands this at your hands ; and your acquaintance with them should lead you, not only to general confidence in them, but to rely on their fidelity in the discharge of their official duties. Especially should it lead you to confide in the impartiality and discretion with which they will administer your liberality to the poor ; and this confidence in the management of your bounty should lead you to enlarge your charitable contributions. Nothing which you give, you may be assured, will be applied either to encourage the inactivity of the idle and thoughtless, or foster the extravagance of the imprudent and dissolute. Their intimate acquaintance with the different districts to which they are appointed will enable them to discriminate accurately the real wants of the indigent and

needy from the fictitious claims which improvidence may put forward ; and the character which they have already acquired among you may be to you a guarantee for the fidelity with which this and every other branch of their office will be discharged.

If their gratuitous labours amongst you be met and encouraged by such confidence and support on your part, they will, and I trust and pray they may, be instruments, under Providence, of preserving the peace and good order of our parochial circle, of contributing to the comfort of our indigent brethren, and of promoting the edification of the Church.

BAPTISMAL SERVICE.

MORNING PRAYER.

O LORD our God, thou art very great ; thou art clothed with glory and with honour ; who coverest thyself with light as with a garment ; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain. Thou art God, even thou alone, of all the inhabitants of this earth ; for thou hast made both the heavens and the earth. Thou createdst the light, and thou formedst the darkness. Thou didst make all things by the word of thy power, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. The whole of nature is subject to thy control, and thy hand is seen in all its operations. Thou causest thy sun to shine on the evil and the good ; thou breathest, and thy influence is felt in the mildness of spring, in the luxuriance of summer, and in the maturity of the ripened year. Thou veilest the heavens with clouds, and it is winter ; thou scatterest thy hoarfrost and thy snow like wool, and thou sealest up the waters. Thou makest thy wind to blow from the four corners of the heavens, they are dissolved, and the earth awakens from her slumber. Thou utterest thy voice when it thunders ; thou scatterest thy lightnings over the extensive world ; thou makest the clouds thy chariot, and thou ridest on the wings of the wind.

Keep alive, we pray thee, O Lord, upon our minds continual and due impressions of thy being and greatness. As the Supreme Lord and Governor of the world, make us to perceive thee in thy works, to feel thee upon our hearts, to own and acknowledge thee the supreme and wise Sovereign of the world. May we honour, worship, and obey thee. May we love thee the Lord our God, and serve thee as we ought to love thee, with all our hearts, with all our strength, and with all our mind.

With humility, O Lord, we acknowledge before thee our forgetfulness of God, and our unmindfulness of all thy favours. We share every day of the bounties of thy providence, and live in safety under the shadow of thy wings; yet God is not in all our thoughts, and we do not regard thee as the fountain of all our blessings.

We lament before thee the iniquity and depravity of our ways. Our trespasses and sins have gone over our heads, and have reached even unto the heavens. We have sinned—what shall we say unto thee, O thou Creator and Preserver of men? We would lift up our eyes unto thee, the God against whom we have transgressed, and humbly implore that mercy for which the goodness of thy nature and the discoveries of thy grace have taught us and encouraged us to hope. With our souls we would bless thee that there is forgiveness with thee. Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him? Thou that spared not the angels that fell, mightest have cast us into chains of darkness to be reserved unto future judgment. Thou couldst have created other beings to have filled this world, which thou formedst to be inhabited. Thou couldst have furnished it with beings more capable of doing thee honour, and accomplishing the end of their creation; but thy delight has been with

the children of men. Thou laidst our help upon one mighty to save; and, in the fulness of time, sent forth thy Son to restore the fallen race of Adam, to redeem us from our sins and to recover for us the favour of God. Glory be to God in the highest, for peace on earth and good will towards the children of men!

O Lord, let it not prove to our condemnation that light has thus been sent into the world and that we have loved the darkness rather than the light, because our deeds are evil; but lead us to that Jesus who is the propitiation for our sins. In him may we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our transgressions; and as we can expect no forgiveness without repentance and better obedience, do thou teach us to hear him in all things whatsoever he shall say unto us. Teach us to submit to his sceptre as a sceptre of righteousness. Let his throne be established in our hearts, and make us a willing people to him in the day of his power.

We bless thee, O Lord, for thy grace and mercy to us in Jesus Christ thy Son. We bless thee that he came into this world to redeem us from our sins; and, by his sufferings and death in our room and stead, to render it possible for thee to receive us into thy favour and forgiveness. We rejoice in the propagation of his religion to this our distant isle, and in the security with which we are permitted to profess our faith in his name. We thank thee that, by the care of our parents, under the discipline of thy providence, we have been all dedicated to thy service in baptism. Let us never, we pray thee, forget the sacred obligation we thereby came under. Do thou vouchsafe to us thy blessing in the enjoyment of this and all the other means of grace under which we live. May we duly value, and pro-

perly improve, our religious advantages. May we be steadfast in the faith. May we be diligent in the reading and hearing of thy word. May a preached gospel amongst us have free course and be glorified. May we be faithful in the improvement of the religious ordinances that we enjoy, that in due time we may reap if we faint not.

Bestow upon us thy special presence and assistance in the service of thy house at this time. Be assisting to thy servant in declaring the truth to this people. May he take a word out of thy law and shew it to them for their edification and comfort; and do thou accept our imperfect service in the Beloved. Amen.

SERMON.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

MATHEW, xxviii. 18, 19.—“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

THESE words contain our Saviour's commission to his disciples for the propagation of the gospel and the establishment of a Christian Church. The commission is conferred upon them in consequence of the power with which he was invested. “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.” It extends to the conversion of men to the religion of Jesus; to the admission of them,

by baptism, into the Christian Church; and to the preaching to them the doctrines and precepts of the gospel.

The part of this commission that is to occupy our present attention is that which is contained in the nineteenth verse—"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The commission is remarkable, not only for the solemnity with which it is introduced, but for the striking circumstances in which it was given. Our Saviour had accomplished that death to which he submitted for the salvation of the world. He had evinced the acceptance of that sacrifice, which he had made once for all for the sins of men, by his resurrection from the dead. He had finished his instructions to his disciples concerning the nature of his kingdom on earth; and, being now ready to ascend to the Father, in virtue of the power which he had received, he gives this commission to his disciples, in order that a Church might be established to him on earth, and his doctrine preached to the children of men, and that they might be received into the Christian covenant by the Sacrament of Baptism. The institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper had been the last transaction of our Saviour with his disciples before his death; and the institution of the Sacrament of Baptism was effected in the last discourse which is recorded of him before he ascended to heaven. We are informed, indeed, that, when he was just about to ascend, he lifted up his hands to bless his disciples, but we are not informed of the particular expressions in which this blessing was conveyed; and the last words which this Evangelist records of him are contained in this striking passage—"All power is given unto me in heaven and

in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

In discoursing on this part of our Saviour’s commission, I propose,

First, To attend to the history of this Ordinance of Baptism.

Second, To explain to you its nature as a Christian Sacrament.

Third, To point out to you the obligations which the Sacrament lays upon us; and,

Last, To lay before you some improvement of the subject.

First, In attending to the history of this institution, it will be necessary to regard it as subsisting in three different periods—as it existed among the Jews, as it was administered by John the Baptist, and as it is enjoined upon us.

When our Saviour came into the world, he found this ordinance subsisting among the Jews. He availed himself of this circumstance by adopting it as the rite by which believers should be initiated into his Church; and we shall find that there was a peculiar propriety in the adoption.

The earliest trace which we find of this observance is in the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the office of the priesthood. When they were directed to be devoted to God in that office, Moses was ordered to wash them with water at the door of the tabernacle.* This was no part of the customary washings which the priests were wont to perform on themselves when they came into the temple; for it was performed upon them

* Exodus xxix. 4, and xl. 12.

only once, not by themselves, but by Moses. "And Moses said unto the congregation, this is the thing which the Lord commanded to be done. And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water."* The customary washing of the priests was not enjoined till the subsequent chapter of Exodus,† where the brazen laver, in which it was to be performed, was also directed to be made.‡

This washing with water of Aaron and his sons, has this resemblance to the Christian ordinance of baptism, therefore, that it was the rite by which, along with the anointing with oil, he and his sons were initiated into their office, and devoted to the special service of God in the priesthood, as the other is the initiatory rite by which Christians are devoted to his general service.

But, perhaps, a nearer resemblance to the Christian ordinance is to be found in the rite as practised among the Jews, by which Gentile proselytes were admitted into the Jewish religion. It was required of them that they should be baptized with water before they were received into the Jewish synagogue. Although circumcision was the rite by which the children of the Jews were admitted into the religious privileges of the nation; yet it seems to be agreed that, when proselytes came to them from among the Gentiles, they were first subjected to baptism before they could receive circumcision, or be admitted into the synagogue.

Immediately before the commencement of our Saviour's ministry, the rite of baptism, as practised among the Jews, underwent an alteration under the ministry of John the Baptist. We have seen that this rite had been previously confined to those who came into the

* Leviticus viii. 5, 6. † Exodus xxx. 19. ‡ Ibid 18.

Jewish Church from other nations ; but, under John's ministry, this restriction was done away, and its bounds were greatly enlarged, so that great multitudes of native Jews submitted to this rite. It appears, indeed, that all who heard John's personal ministry were anxious to obtain from him the administration of this ordinance. The Evangelist, Matthew, informs us that the whole city of " Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan," went out to him, " and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."* We find also, from the same Evangelist, that many of the Pharisees and Lawyers came to his baptism ; although it appears, from Luke, that they did not receive the ordinance from him.† We find also, that not only the people, but the publicans and soldiers‡—those whose characters and occupations were most unfavourable to religious impressions—came to him, anxiously inquiring what they must respectively do in order to receive the ordinance, or in consequence of having been subject to it. Under the Baptist, then, the ordinance seems to have possessed a distinctive character. It was neither the consecrative rite for the priestly office, nor the initiatory rite of Mosaic proselytes, which had previously existed among the Jews, and it could not be the seal of the Christian covenant, administered in the name of the Trinity, as enjoined upon us ; for we do not find that he baptized in the name of Jesus, and the Holy Ghost had not yet descended upon Christians. It seems to have been a preparatory ordinance for the one, founded upon the observance of the other. Accordingly, we find that those who had received the baptism of John were subsequently baptized by the

* Matthew, iii. 5, 6. † Luke, vii. 30. ‡ Luke, iii. 12, 14.

disciples in the name of Jesus. Thus, when Paul came to Ephesus, and found there certain disciples, to the number of twelve, who had not received the Holy Ghost, he asked them unto what they were baptized, and they said, "Unto John's baptism." On which Paul said, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."* The Baptist himself also seems to have had the same view, when he says, "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh—he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."†

There is another peculiarity in the baptism of John, in the circumstance of his administering the rite to our Saviour. We are told that John came preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. The ordinance could not be administered to our Saviour with this view as it was to others, for he had no sins to repent of, or to be remitted; accordingly, when our Saviour came to John for the purpose, John refused to administer baptism to him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?"‡ But, although the Baptist thought it too great condescension in the Saviour to receive the administration of this sacred ordinance from him, yet he himself thought it proper to practise all grace and all virtue, and that he should himself undergo that rite which he was afterwards to enjoin upon his followers as the seal of his profession; therefore he said, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

* Acts, xix. 4, 5.

† Luke, iii. 16.

‡ Matthew, iii. 14.

From this it is evident that, when our Saviour gave this commission to his disciples, to go and teach all nations—baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost—that he did not enjoin what was altogether new or strange to them or to the nation of the Jews; and that there was a peculiar propriety in his adopting, as the initiation of his religion, a rite to which they were accustomed, and for the institution of which they were prepared. For it appears, from the question which the Pharisees put to John—“Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?”* that the Jews expected that Christ would administer baptism to them; and it has been supposed that this expectation was founded partly on the promise of Zechariah—“In that day,” that is, in the time of the Messiah, “there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness;” and partly on the passage in Ezekiel which I shall afterwards have occasion to quote—“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”†

As the baptism of John was different from that which previously subsisted amongst the Jews, and as it has appeared to have been preparatory for that which was to be instituted by Christ, it might naturally be expected that another change would take place upon it, adapting it to the new circumstances to which it was to be applied; accordingly, we find, from the commission of our Saviour, that some new features were added to it by him, which it did not before possess, and these are pointed out to us in the words of our text.

* John, i. 25.

† Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25.

In the first place, the administration of this ordinance is, by this commission, made the initiatory rite of the gospel, by which all Christians are received into the Christian Church. This is not made apparent in the words as they stand in our translation, but is clearly brought out if we attend to the expressions made use of in the original language. The word here translated “*teach* all nations,” means, properly, *make disciples* of all nations. According to this meaning, then, our Saviour’s expressions stand thus—“Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” The meaning of the expressions in this form, evidently is, that the administration of baptism was the mean by which men were to be made his disciples; and the words, therefore, make this ordinance the initiatory rite of Christianity as clearly as words can do it.

In this particular, it is easy to trace some analogy betwixt this ordinance as appointed by our Saviour, and that which subsisted both under the Mosaic economy, and that intermediate and preparatory observance of it which took place under the Baptist. For though it was not the initiatory rite of native Jews, yet we have seen that it had somewhat of this character with respect to those who became proselytes from other nations; and it seems to have been the case with respect to it under the Baptist, that all those who received baptism from him became his disciples. Accordingly, we find John’s disciples complaining that Jesus also baptized, and drew more people to him, or made more disciples than their Master.*

But our text sets before us a particular in our Sa-

* John, iii. 26.

viour's commission to which the previous administration of the ordinance bore no resemblance. John preached the doctrine of repentance for the remission of sins; but Jesus commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Now there are several points that arise from this particular of the text. The very first is, that Christians are to be baptized by having the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, pronounced over them. This is properly to baptize them in their name. But it is not the only thing which the expressions convey. The words imply that they are to be devoted to the service of God, and entitled to the benefits of Christ's purchase; and, above all, they imply that they are to be baptized into the faith of the Trinity, as the great fundamental doctrine of Christianity. Whatever validity there may be, therefore, in the objections that have been made to the authenticity of the passage of John's First Epistle, concerning the three that bear record in heaven*—upon which it is beyond our province in any degree to enter—the doctrine of the Trinity, as an article of the Christian creed, does not depend upon it. For in this clear and undisputed passage, it is not only plainly and distinctly delivered, but is made the foundation of Christian privileges, and intimately blended with the admission of every individual into the pale of the Christian Church.

The history of this ordinance would be incomplete were it to stop here; but not only does the text set before us the institution of the ordinance of baptism by our Saviour, as a Christian Sacrament, but the promise, which, in the context, he annexes to the commission,

* 1 John, v. 7.

represents to us its future history. The baptism which is here instituted by our Saviour, was not intended to be a temporary observance, administered by his Apostles to those only who should be converted by them to the Christian faith; but, in the very design of the institution, it was intended to subsist to the end of the world. "And, lo, I am with you alway," says our Saviour, in the verse immediately succeeding the text, "even to the end of the world." These words evidently contain, not only a general promise of our Saviour's presence with his disciples in preaching the gospel, under every circumstance and on every exigence, but a particular promise of his blessing upon them in the administration of the ordinance of baptism which he had just instituted. That ordinance he, who has all power in heaven and in earth committed to him, will abundantly protect and bless; nor will the ceaseless numbers, that by it shall be continually added to the Christian Church, ever terminate, whilst that earth and these heavens shall endure.

So much of the nature of this ordinance has come out in the course of this historical discussion, that it becomes comparatively an easy task,

Second, To shew you the nature of baptism as a Christian sacrament. In order to this, it is necessary to attend to the nature of a sacrament. A sacrament implies the use of outward signs to represent an internal grace, of which they are the symbols, and which accompanies or goes along with them. This is essential to the notion of a sacrament, and is consistent with the account given us in our Shorter Catechism, which describes a sacrament as "a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and

applied to believers.” If it be so, then may we see, not only that baptism is a sacrament, but that there is only one other Christian sacrament, that of the Lord’s Supper, in the Christian Church; because there are no other external rites enjoined upon Christians in Scripture that come up to this description. Neither in marriage, nor in penance, nor in any other of the seven sacraments of the Romish Church, are there external signs made use of to represent to us Christ and the benefits of the Covenant of Grace. But, it may be asked, is there no passage of Scripture in which the number of the Christian sacraments is ascertained to be only two? One should think that it were a sufficient answer to this question, to say that there are only two institutions, enjoined in Scripture or instituted by Christ, that come up to the notion that is necessarily implied in a sacrament. But to those who are not satisfied with this, reference may be made to the passage in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, to which it is proper also to refer, in order to shew the use of external signs as representing an internal principle. “For,” says the Apostle, “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”*

In speaking of the nature of baptism as a Christian sacrament, it is impossible to avoid referring to the practice of infant baptism as practised among modern Christians. We know that, at the first institution of the ordinance, it was administered only to adults, and that it was required of them to profess their faith in Christ before they received its administration; but we

* 1 Corinthians, xii. 13.

may find the reason of the practice of the Apostles in what has now been said, and in the very circumstances of the case. When baptism was first administered to Christians, it could only be administered to those who had come to a mature age, for all who then came into the Christian Church were converts from other religions; and they could be brought into it only from a consideration of the evidence that was submitted to them in proof of our Saviour's divine commissions. But circumstances are now altered in this respect. There are comparatively few converts from other religions that now come into the Christian Church; and the great majority of those who are admitted to the ordinance of baptism are born of Christian parents. The admission of none but adults, therefore, by the Apostles, to this ordinance, is no rule for refusing the administration of it to the children of those Christian parents who engage for them that they shall be instructed in the faith of Jesus; and the expressions made use of by Mark, in recording this very commission, might lead us to this conclusion:—"Go ye," says he, "into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* From which it would appear that they were to preach the gospel, and administer the ordinance of baptism, even to children, not only because they may be understood to be comprehended under the denomination of *every creature*, but also because the reasoning irresistibly leads us to comprehend them in the injunction, otherwise we would be driven to the conclusion that no one could be saved if he departed this life before he arrived to such

* Mark, xvi. 15, 16.

maturity of reason as to be able to declare his faith in Christ, in order that baptism might be administered to him—a conclusion from which the heart of every Christian parent must recoil. Nor are there wanting other passages of Scripture that countenance the modern practice. The direction of Peter to the multitude who had been roused by his preaching, and inquired what they should do, is acknowledged to bear distinctly upon this question :—“ Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”* Now here the Apostle exhorts them to be baptized, because the promise is to them and to their children; and whether the expression, “ *the promise,*” is to be understood as referring to the remission of sins or to the gift of the Holy Ghost, can make no difference to the argument, because we know that both were consequent on baptism. The last part of the quotation, too, “ Even as many as the Lord our God shall call,” seems necessarily to imply that children must be embraced in the whole of the passage, unless we mean to limit the mercy of God, and to deny that our children, while they are children, can be called or elected by God.

It may be proper to observe, however, that an argument for infant baptism—perhaps not the least conclusive of those that have been adduced in its favour—arises from the analogy that subsists betwixt the Mosaic and Christian dispensations; and the reference which almost everything in the former had to something in the

* Acts, ii. 38, 39.

latter, either as a type or preparation. Now, baptism, as the initiatory ordinance of Christianity, has come in place of circumcision, the initiatory rite of the Jews; and as the Jew was devoted to God by circumcision on the eighth day, there seems to be no reason why the dedication of the Christian to the service of the same Great Being—the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—should of necessity be longer delayed.

In speaking of the nature of baptism as a Christian sacrament, it is impossible to omit referring to another particular, which has given occasion to much controversy, into which, however, it is not our province to enter. The administration of the ordinance of baptism in our Church differs, in one matter of form, from what was observed with respect to it in our Saviour's time. In the time of the Apostles, the ordinance was administered by the immersion of the body in water, whereas it is now effected by the pouring or sprinkling of water upon it. The account of this departure, in our Church, from Apostolic practice, is to be sought for in the nature of the sacrament itself. We have seen that the element made use of in this ordinance is merely employed as a sign to represent to us the spiritual or internal things that are conveyed to us in it, which constitute the principal part of the ordinance. The quantity of the element made use of, therefore, cannot affect the nature of the sign, or render it either more or less fit to represent the spiritual blessings which it is employed to express or point out. From this it is obvious that that which may be fitly and properly employed as a sign in some circumstances, may be unfit to be so employed in others, from the greater inconvenience that in these circumstances may attend the use of it. Now, in the countries where the Apostles first practised this rite, the immer-

sion of the body in water was attended with no inconvenience, but, from the nature of the climate, was rather healthful and agreeable. But the case is different in our country, or other northern latitudes, where such immersion would frequently prove in the highest degree inconvenient and prejudicial; and it could not be the intention of the Apostles that their example should be followed in a mere accessory of the ordinance, when such inconvenience would result from it. The great thing to be regarded in this ordinance is, that the spiritual meaning of it be attended to; and that the external sign do fitly and properly represent the spiritual objects signified under it. Now, in departing from the practice of the Apostles, there could not be a more fit or proper substitute than that of sprinkling the body with the element of which our Saviour and his Apostles had themselves made use; for this sprinkling was the sign which God himself had employed to represent the very same blessings. Thus the expression which God makes use of by the Prophet Ezekiel—"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you"—is generally understood as a figurative description of the blessings of Christ's kingdom. Some commentators, indeed, think, as I have already hinted, that the water here spoken of has a direct reference to the water used in baptism, and remind us that to sprinkle means to baptize. It is certain, at least, that to baptize means to wash; and hence St Mark speaks of the baptizing of cups and of pots, properly translated in our version, the washing of cups and of pots. † I am,

Third, To shew you the obligations which we

* Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25.

† Mark, vii. 4.

come under in the sacrament of baptism ; but, upon this head, important as it is, I must necessarily be very short. It is here necessary to observe that, God, having entered into a covenant with man, through Jesus Christ, it became necessary that there should be some ceremony, by the observance of which it might be evinced that individuals have entered into that covenant. The sacrament of Baptism being that observance, an engagement is necessarily entered into by those who come under it. A covenant implies an engagement on the side of both parties who enter into it. In this covenant transaction, then, God has engaged to bestow upon those who come under it, the forgiveness of sins, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, the assistance of his Holy Spirit for enabling them to lead holy and good lives, and everlasting life and happiness in another world. And there is, on the other hand, required of those who accept of this covenant, and come under the ordinance of baptism as its seal, that they should believe in Jesus Christ, through whom, and in whose name, the covenant has been made—that they should own him as their Saviour and Redeemer—that they should acquiesce in the truth of all his doctrines, as inspired by God and coming from him—that they should willingly and cheerfully obey all his precepts, and observe all his institutions—that they should renounce all trust and dependence upon their own merits or works for acceptance with God—and that they should look for salvation and forgiveness only through the atonement which he has made for them by his death upon the cross.

In the *Last* place, let me lay before you some improvement of this subject. And, first, we may make one general observation from what has been said, viz. That the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental doc-

trine of the Christian faith, essentially implied and asserted in the initiatory ordinance of baptism. Children are to be baptized, not only in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but into the belief of the divinity of these three as one God. The doctrine of the Trinity is not only an essential doctrine of Christianity, clearly and distinctly revealed in Scripture, but lies at the very foundation of it, and is interwoven in its frame; and yet it remains true that there is but one God. The nature of God is repugnant to plurality, and yet the nature of a satisfaction requires a distinction of persons; for he that suffers for the guilty must be distinguished from the person of the Judge who exacts the satisfaction. Now, no mere creature was capable, by his obedient suffering, to repair the honour of God, and make satisfaction for man. A divine person, assuming the nature of man, was alone capable of making that atonement which the gospel propounds; so that there is here a union and a distinction in the Divine nature. But what that union, or what that distinction is, we are not able perfectly to understand. It is, perhaps, hid from the angels themselves; but most certainly it must be hid from men, till God shall bestow upon us some new powers and faculties higher than what we at present possess. Therefore the Apostle justly exclaims, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh."* Yet there is no reason why we should not believe it. We must not think that everything which we cannot comprehend is impossible or incredible. Sense is no competent judge of those things about which reason is conversant; and reason

* 1 Timothy, iii. 16.

can only discourse of those things which are within its own sphere. Supernatural things, which we derive from revelation, and are purely objects of faith, are not within its territory and jurisdiction. The use of reason in matters of faith is, first, to consider those arguments which convince the mind that the Scriptures are of Divine revelation; and then to consider what doctrines are revealed in Scripture, and to draw from them the practical lessons which they are calculated to afford. And when once a doctrine is found to be clearly revealed by God, then does it become an object of faith, and we are bound to believe it.

Second, From what has been discoursed, we may see what a blessing it is that we are permitted to live under the institutions of the gospel. These institutions extend not to ourselves alone, but also to our children. As soon as God vouchsafes to bless us with these, they are immediately brought under the benefits of the gospel covenant; and, in the ordinance of baptism, are solemnly devoted to God, and entitled to all the blessings of Christ's purchase. So early a dedication of them to his service must, if duly and properly pressed upon them, be accompanied with the happiest effect in future life; and this leads me to observe—

Third, That we may see with what care and anxiety Christian parents should instruct their children in the knowledge of the truths of the gospel. They have come under the most solemn engagements in their behalf, and the nature of these engagements requires of them the most diligent and anxious instruction in things relating to their eternal interests. Parents are sensible enough, in these days, of the benefit of a good education to their children, because they know that

their success in life depends, in a great measure, on the degree of instruction they receive, and the progress they make under the tuition that is afforded them. But Christian parents ought to remember that their children can no more prosper in their spiritual interests without early instruction in Divine truth, than they can in the affairs of the world without secular education. A regard to their best and highest interests should, therefore, render parents solicitous properly to discharge their duty to them in this respect. I do not wish to represent to you that if their children should fail in the Christian life, and come short of salvation, that the responsibility must always rest with the parents. No doubt the perverse disposition of our nature, fostered by particular, and, perhaps, imperceptible circumstances, may sometimes take such firm hold of a corrupt heart as no parental care may be able to overcome; but where the neglect of the parent is the cause of the failure of the child, or if the want of early religious instruction should prevent the child from making that progress in the divine life which he might otherwise have reached, who is there that can say that the Christian parent is innocent? Let Christian parents then lay the early religious instruction of their children to heart, and be especially anxious to enlighten them in the knowledge of God's law, and, much of youthful depravity being prevented, a greater degree of progress will be made in the spiritual life.

Fourth, Christian parents should meditate on the nature of this ordinance, and of the obligations it lays upon them, before they bring their children to it. Without such meditation the responsibility it lays upon them will be in danger of being forgotten or lost sight of, even upon the supposition that they are previously

acquainted with it. They ought not to trust altogether for their knowledge of it to the views which may be set before them in its administration; but they ought to make it the subject of their private contemplation; and, in their retirement, seek to impress upon their souls a deep sense of those obligations which they are about publicly to take upon them. But meditation upon the nature and responsibility of the ordinance is not all that is required of them in preparing themselves for bringing their children to it. They ought to pray to Almighty God to fit them for its observance, and to give them, through the influence of his Spirit, and the serious perusal of his word, such views of it as may duly and properly influence them to the faithful discharge of all its duties and obligations. With such preparation of themselves for its observance, they may hope that, by the grace of God, it may indeed be for a blessing upon their offspring, and, through the blood of the new covenant, for their purification, sanctification, and redemption; and that it may be so to your children, whom you may have brought, or may yet bring, to this ordinance, may God, of his infinite mercy grant, and to his name be the praise. Amen.

This ordinance is commonly administered in the church, on the Sabbath, immediately after sermon; but, on some particular occasions, it is sometimes administered in private. In the latter case, it is always commenced with prayer; but when it is administered in the church, the usual practice is, for the minister, at the close of the sermon, to desire the parent to present his child for baptism, and whilst the latter holds the infant on his arms, the minister puts the question to

him of his desire to have it baptised, when the child is returned to the nurse, and the vows are laid on the parent. It is, however, the practice with some clergymen, to make the parent continue to hold the child during the whole of the first address; but this practice is occasionally attended with inconvenience, from the noise which the child sometimes makes. The former is the more ancient, and, perhaps, the preferable practice, and is adopted here.

Having desired the parent to present his child for baptism, the minister proceeds:—

You present this child unto the Lord, and it is your desire that he shall be admitted, by baptism, a member of Christ's visible Church, and receive the seal of the new covenant? Is not this your desire?

(The parent here returns the child to the nurse.)

Baptism is a sacrament, instituted by Christ, in which we are united to him by being made members of his visible Church, made partakers of the Covenant of Grace, and brought under the obligations of the Christian life.

It is the initiatory ordinance of the Christian faith, by which we are adopted into the great family of Him of whom the whole family of heaven and of earth is blessed. By this adoption, we obtain a right to all the privileges of the sons of God; we become heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. In virtue of this ordinance, we are taken into that covenant with God of which Jesus is the author, and which he has wrought out for us, by that death to which he submitted for our redemption. By the terms of this covenant, we are entitled to receive

the pardon of our sins, peace and favour with God, the assistance of the spirit of grace in the work of our calling, and the enjoyment of his presence and glory in the kingdom of heaven. And whilst we are thus made partakers of the benefits of the gospel, we are, by this ordinance, brought also under its obligations and engagements. We engage to receive and embrace Jesus Christ for salvation, to repent of the sins which we have committed, and to walk in his ordinances and commandments.

But as little children, on account of their non-age, are incapable of making these professions or entering into these engagements, you, the parent of this child, take these vows upon you on his behalf; and you engage to give him a religious and Christian education; to shew him his sinful state by nature, and the need he has of a Saviour; to acquaint him with this early dedication which you have made of him to God; and to use your endeavours to induce him to take these engagements upon himself, if it shall please God to spare him to you till he arrive at the years of discretion, by receiving the other sacrament of our Church, by seating himself at the table of the Lord in the Sacrament of the Supper of our Lord.

You, at the same time, make a profession of your own faith in the great truths of religion. You believe in God the Creator and Governor of the world; in the moral perfections of his nature, his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. You believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, whom he sent forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, in his resurrection from the dead, in his ascension into heaven, and in his coming again at the judgment of the great day. You believe in the Holy

Ghost, the Sanctifier, and the inefficacy of your own unaided efforts to do anything aright.

You promise that you will pray with and for this child; that you will teach him also how to pray to God; and that you will set before him, in your own conduct, a good, a pious, and virtuous example. These, and all other obligations incumbent on you as a Christian parent, you engage, through divine grace assisting you, to perform. Do you not?

Let us pray.

O Lord, to whom can we go but unto thee, for thou hast the words of eternal life. It is in thee that we live, and move, and have our being, and to thee we are indebted for all our blessings and all our favours. Early were we cast upon thy care, and thou hast watched over us with the affection of a father. Thou didst protect us in the infant state, when we could neither take any thought nor make any provision for ourselves. Thou didst guide us through the slippery paths of youth. Thou hast conducted us up to maturer years; and we trust thou wilt not desert us so long as we live. We desire to bless thee, O Lord, for all the ordinances and institutions of our religion; and especially for the ordinance of baptism, by which we are solemnly initiated into the Church of Christ, and rendered members of thy family on earth. We pray for thy blessing as we are at present engaged in administering this ordinance. Whilst we baptize outwardly with water, do thou baptize inwardly as with the Holy Ghost; and all that we ask, is for Christ's sake. Amen.

(The child is here brought by the parent to the minister, who sprinkles it with water, saying,)

I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God.

Let us pray.

Follow, we pray thee, O Lord, with thy blessing the religious service which we have now administered. Do thou receive the child, whom we have now baptized in thy name, into the number of those little ones whose names are recorded in the Lamb's book of life. Do thou spare him in a long and blessed life, and let a sense of the engagement, which he has now been brought under, live powerfully upon his heart, that it may regulate and direct his obedience. Do thou grant that he may advance in grace as he grows in years, and that he may be sealed by thy Spirit unto the day of everlasting life. Restore the mother, we pray thee, to complete health and strength. May she lift up her heart in gratitude to thee, because thou hast supported her in the hour of trouble, and given a living mother to behold a living child: Assist both the parents in a faithful and tender discharge of duty to this little child. May they be enabled to train him up in the way wherein he ought to go, that when he is old he may not depart from it—to imprint upon his heart the fear of his Creator in the days of his youth, that it may be the support of his advancing years, and the consolation of his declining days.

Enable us all, we pray thee, to remember that we have been brought under the same solemn engagements, and that these solemn engagements we have taken upon ourselves as often as we have seated our-

selves at the table of the Lord. Having there named the name of Christ, may we be careful to depart from iniquity. Do thou forbid that we should be amongst the number of those who draw back unto perdition. But may we rather make progress and advancement in grace and in goodness. May we forget the things that are behind, and look forward to those that are before and press towards the mark of the high calling of God in Christ, Jesus our Lord. May that God of peace who taketh away the sins of the world make us perfect in every good word and work. Amen.

MARRIAGE SERVICE.*

PRAYER.

O LORD, we adore thee as our Creator and our God, the author of all our mercies, and the giver of all our good. We thank thee, O Lord, for the nature which thou hast given us. We bless thee for our reason and understanding, for the faculty of conscience, and for our immortal souls. We bless thee, at this time, for our domestic and social affections, for those institutions which contribute to the peace and good order of society, and for the provision which thou hast made for the continuance of the human race, and the care and protection they require in their infant years. We bless thee that, having created man at first in a state of innocence and purity, when thou sawest that it was not fit that

* Before proceeding with the marriage service, the minister requires to see the certificate of proclamation of bans, at the foot or on the back of which he usually writes a certificate that the parties were that day married by him. The author has met with repeated instances of the advantage of such a certificate in facilitating the proof of the marriage upon the removal of the parties to a distance; and the adhibiting such a certificate, after the ceremony, ought never to be neglected by a minister.

man should live alone, thou didst make unto him an help meet for him. Look down, O Lord, from heaven, and countenance with thy blessing the ceremony which, in imitation of thy example, we are now about to administer, and render it the means of securing the peace, the comfort, and the loving communion of these thy servants, through a long and blessed life. And all that we ask is for Christ's sake. Amen.

Marriage is an ordinance of divine institution. When God had formed the woman, he brought her to the man, who then said, this now is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. Wherefore shall a man leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.

It is the duty of the husband to love and cherish his wife; to cultivate a kind and tender sentiment towards her, and to esteem her highly for the Lord's sake. Husbands love your wives, says the Apostle, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it. It is the duty of the husband, with solicitous and anxious care, to protect his wife from injury, to conceal her infirmities with tender affection, to be kind towards her, not bitter against her, giving honour to her as the weaker vessel. It is the duty of the husband to rule over and govern well his own household, and to preserve in it the fear and the worship of God. It is the duty of the husband to make provision of everything necessary for the support and comfort of his family, to give them kind counsel and affectionate admonition, and to walk with them in all the ordinances and commandments of God.

And as the husband ought to love the wife, so ought

the wife also to love the husband ; for this is a reciprocal duty, equally incumbent on both. As this is the foundation of that happiness which they propose to themselves in the married condition, they ought carefully to take every mean that may be in their power to cultivate and improve it, and avoid everything that may, in the least degree, weaken or impair it. As the husband is to rule well his own household, so will the wife find that much of the comfort of the family will depend upon the prudence and economy with which she may regulate and direct it. As the husband is to inculcate the fear of the Lord on his family, and be the organ of their family adorations, so, much of the piety of the family will depend upon the example of the wife, and, if God shall bless them with children, on the affectionate earnestness with which she instils devout sentiments into their hearts. And, as the husband is to make provision of everything necessary for the support and comfort of his family, so ought the wife also to bear her share of the burden ; for a virtuous woman looketh well to her own household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. In short, it is the duty of both mutually to assist, to comfort, and to encourage one another, to bear one another's burthens, and to be mutually helpful to one another.

Trusting that these are your sentiments, I proceed to join you in marriage, charging you, if there be any reason why you ought not to be so united, now to declare it.

(Here the parties are desired to join hands.)

You take this woman, whom you now hold by the hand, to be your lawful and wedded wife, and you pro-

mise, before God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to be to her a faithful and loving husband till God shall separate you by death. You take this man, whom you now hold by the hand, to be your lawful and wedded husband, and you promise, before God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to be to him a faithful, a dutiful, and loving wife, till God shall separate you by death. In the name of God, I now declare you to be married persons, and whom God uniteth let no man put asunder.

Let us pray.

We come again unto thee, O Lord, to worship and praise thee. We praise thee for thy great goodness unto us in giving us thy divine authority for an institution which contributes essentially to the domestic comfort and happiness of human life. Do thou follow with thy blessing the ceremony which, in obedience to thy authority, we have now administered. As thou hast called these persons together by thy providence, so do thou sanctify them by thy grace. Do thou fit them in every respect for that new state on which they have now entered. Enable them to bear the burdens, and enjoy the comforts, and perform the duties, of that condition, as becomes faithful friends and good Christians. Let their love abound more and more, and let their increasing acquaintance increase their mutual affection. Endow us all with thy heavenly grace. Pardon our manifold sins, and hear these our prayers, for Christ's sake. Amen.

The above form is adapted to the circumstances in which the ceremony is generally administered in the

ordinary ranks of life. But, although there ought to be no distinction of persons in relation to religious service, yet circumstances will occur, in the experience of every minister, where it may be left to the minister's own discretion to direct him to a more or less curtailed form of service.

THE END.

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