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SKETCHES OF SERMONS.

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SKETCHES OF SERMONS

PREACHED IN

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“So they read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.”

NEHEMIAH viii. 8.

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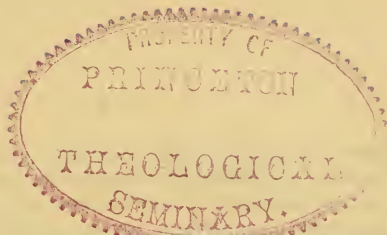
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SKETCHES OF SERMONS.

I. ORIGINAL SIN.

GEN. iii. 13.

“The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.”

THE origin of things is frequently involved in darkness; and the more remote the period of their commencement, the greater mysteriousness envelopes their origin. Things seen at a distance, are usually seen indistinctly; and facts are often related without the pomp of circumstance. This is exemplified in the subject before us. The text is a brief narration of one of the most awfully portentous acts which was ever perpetrated upon earth; to this source we may trace back all the crimes, in their endlessly diversified circumstances, which have inundated the world; and here we see the germination of a seed, which has taken deep root, and filled the earth with poisonous fruit. Had the fact recorded in the text been merely of a speculative character, it might even then have excited curiosity, and elicited inquiry; but as we have all reaped a harvest of ills, from the seed sown on that fatal occasion, it cannot be an unprofitable exercise, to spend a few moments, in recalling to mind what we know of this transaction. Two things claim our attention,

I. THE ACT OF THE SERPENT. He “beguiled me.”

II. THE ACT OF THE WOMAN. “I did eat.”

But who, or what was the serpent? In the first verse of this chapter, the serpent is represented, as a “beast of the field:” but to suppose that any beast of the field, would of his own accord, and at his own instigation, beguile the woman, and seduce her to sin, would be an absurdity too palpable to be

admitted; as it would imply, that the serpent was superior to the woman in intellectual endowments; and that he meditated her ruin by carrying into effect a most mischievous design. But as God made every thing very good, and as all animals were inferior to the human pair, we must refer to some other cause for the existence of this act.

The most common opinion is, that the devil animated the body of the serpent, and spoke to Eve through his organs. In reference to this, he is called the "old serpent," Rev. xii. 9. And St. Paul said to the Corinthians, "I fear as the serpent beguiled Eve," 2 Cor. xi. 3; but he could not fear that that "beast of the field," described by Moses, would corrupt the Christians at Corinth. That the devil can so far possess human, or animal bodies, as to act upon them and speak through them, is most satisfactorily proved from the legion who possessed the poor demoniac, and said to Jesus, "What have we to do with thee?" &c., Matt. viii. 29; and then entering into the bodies of the swine, &c. And this enemy possessed every qualification for managing the deep-laid plot which he had so artfully devised. He was endowed with extensive knowledge. Angels possess amazing powers of intellect, and though fallen angels lost all moral excellency by their fall, yet they most probably retained much of their original vigour of understanding. Satan knew in what part of the universe to find the original pair; he knew their circumstances—the law they were under—the misery that would ensue on the violation of that law—and probably the mischievous results in reference to posterity. He also possessed the most consummate wickedness. He is called the "wicked one," and "an evil spirit." The devil is a being replete with wickedness: and this was the most wicked scheme that was ever devised. What wickedness to mar such beauty, and blight so much excellence, as creation presented when adorned in all its pristine glory! What wickedness to involve innocent and holy beings in guilt and misery! beings who deserved no such treatment, and merited no such conduct! Oh how many are there in the world who too successfully imitate this arch fiend! who are wise to do mischief: who employ their exalted powers of mind in imposing on the credulous, and ruining the innocent! But how did the serpent beguile the woman?

1. *By attacking her when alone.* I infer this, not only on

the ground of a commonly received opinion, but from the narrative itself. Here we see the whole of the conversation carried on between the serpent, and the woman; Adam had no share in it. The devil must have known that Adam was the superior, from the circumstance of his being first formed, and Eve being made a "helpmeet for him." Had Adam been present, they would most probably have taken sweet counsel together, on a subject of so much consequence. How wise is it in affairs of great moment to pause, and hesitate, and deliberate, and take advice of our superiors.

2. *By directing her attention to the prohibited object.* There was much in the garden of Eden to admire, and much to enjoy; one tree only was prohibited: to this object the serpent directed the attention of the woman, and induced her to look at it, talk of it, and desire it. We have many prohibited objects. These we should fly from; never trust our eyes to gaze on objects which are likely to excite desires of an unholy nature in our hearts. "Abstain from the appearance of evil." Oh had Eve done this, how effectually would she have broken the snare of the devil!

3. *By a prospect of advantage on eating the forbidden fruit.* Nothing weighs so much with a human being as profit. What will not a man sacrifice for the distant prospect of gain? Eve expected to be like the gods, that is, as the angels. Eve must have known that there were such beings as angels. Who can doubt but what they made their appearance to our primitive parents in paradise, as they appeared in after times to Abraham, Lot, &c.? And it is not improbable, but what they assumed a glorious appearance; the idea of being like them, produced a most fascinating effect on the mind of Eve. But this was all mere artifice with the tempter, who knew that instead of being as Gods, they would be more like fiends, by partaking of the forbidden fruit. How many of the sons and daughters of Eve have been lured by the tempting bait of ambition, and who by aping their superiors, have plunged themselves into an abyss of misery!

4. *By plausibly reasoning with her on the subject.* He knew that nothing could be done by open attack; that every thing must appear plausible and imposing; he therefore began by questioning Eve, "Hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Here was just enough to excite curiosity.

Hath God said such a thing? Is this reasonable? What could such fair fruit be created for, but to be eaten? It is highly probable, that more conversation ensued, than is here recorded. How forcibly does this teach us to resist the first temptations to evil, to hold no parley with the enemy!

5. *By confidently asserting, that it was a mistake, under which Eve was labouring.* "Ye shall not surely die." He first tempted her to doubt, by an awful insinuating question: and then to disbelieve, by a bold, daring, mischievous lie,—the first lie that ever was uttered upon earth. This is the usual process by which he carries on his dark designs, exciting men to question the truth of established opinions, &c. Confident assertions have often great weight with innocent and unsuspecting minds. 'Goodness thinks no ill, where no ill seems.' Here was not only a bold contradiction to the truth of God, but an artful and base insinuation, that he had prohibited this fruit through some sinister design. "For God doth know," &c., Gen. iii. 5.

II. THE ACT OF THE WOMAN. "I did eat." This was the original transgression. Here sin entered into the world, and we learn,

1. *That the sin of Eve was a personal act.* "I did eat." Whatever blame might be imputed to the serpent, still the act of eating was all her own. The sin of the tempter was a totally distinct thing from her sin. Here was no force, no constraint, nor over-ruling power to compel her to eat; the concurrence of her will—the taking of the fruit—and the eating of it, were personal acts for which Eve only was accountable. *Our sins* also are personal. Temptations we all have, and innate tendencies to evil; but these are not imputed to us as sin, till we give them the concurrence of our wills, and sanction them by indulgence.

2. *The sin of Eve was a carnal act.* "I did eat." Here was the sin, it was in *eating*. The temptation was presented to the senses." "The woman saw that the tree was good for food." It is difficult to say, how she could *see* this, unless we admit with Milton, that she had seen the serpent eat of it. What if it *were* good for food? she needed not food; there were trees in abundance all around her, laden with fruit as fair and good as that which she coveted. "And that it was pleasant to the eyes;"

but must every thing be eaten that is pleasant to the eye? And “a tree to be desired to make one wise;” here “lust conceived, and brought forth sin.” Most of our temptations come to us through the medium of our senses, and sin is chiefly gratifying as it affects the animal part of a man. Sinners are nominated carnal men, that is literally, fleshly men; men who are in the flesh, who live after the flesh, and who sow to the flesh: and though sin is deeply seated in the mind, yet the members of the body become its instruments.

3. *The sin of Eve was a prohibited act.* It was a direct violation of a plain, known, positive law. The law was as plain as language could make it: It was known; for though God gave it to Adam, prior to the formation of Eve, yet God, or her husband, had revealed it to her; her whole conversation with the serpent, evinced that she knew it: and it was positive, “Thou shalt not eat of it.” All our sins are of a similar character, as they are transgressions of laws, plain, known, and positive.

4. *The sin of Eve was a presumptuous act.* In eating of the fruit, she must have presumed that God was insincere in what he said: that his words were not the words of truth; that the death with which she was threatened would not be inflicted; that she would escape the punishment though she ventured on the sin. Such is the presumption of sinners generally: they do not dare to give the lie to God, by any verbal protestation, but they act as if they believed that God was insincere in what he has said, and many of them are given up to strong delusions to believe a lie.

5. *The sin of Eve was a ruinous act.* She no sooner became a sinner than she became a tempter; she gave unto her husband, and he did eat also; and thus ruin was entailed on their posterity. Whether Adam would have eaten without the seduction of Eve, is uncertain. Adam was not deceived, he knew better: but such is the force of bad example, that Adam, intelligent and holy as he was, plunged himself into sin and misery, to follow the example of his wife. Sinners are not satisfied with standing alone; they press others into the snares by which they themselves are entangled.

From this subject we learn,

First, *The true character of original sin.* Man was created

holy, but not immutable. How far immutability can be an attribute of any created being, I must leave. God gave our first parents a law, plain, positive, and easy to be kept. Could any thing be more reasonable? A being subject to no law, is subject to no government, and accountable to no superior; and to suppose that God should make a being capable of obeying him, and yet give him no law as the test of his obedience, is absurd.

Secondly, *How much ought we to be on our guard against the attacks of enemies!* If Eve in paradise met with an insidious foe, who beguiled her, how can we hope to escape temptations? 'We should suspect some danger nigh where we possess delight.' "Watch and pray."

Thirdly, *That God will call us to an account for our conduct.* Eve little suspected, while feasting on the interdicted fruit, that God was near to judge her. Let us live with eternity in view, and bring every thing to bear on the day of reckoning.

Fourthly, *To adore the mercy of God.* Man was spared, a Saviour was promised, and the designs of the devil were frustrated.

BETA.

II. THE EXCELLENCY OF ISRAEL'S ROCK.

DEUT. xxxii. 31.

"For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies them selves being judges."

GRATITUDE, which is in itself a happy temper of mind, is at once the duty and the privilege of pious souls. A recollection of past mercies, while it may support us under present trials,

may also fortify us against coming temptations, and preserve us unhurt, when the enemy would seduce us from our duty, and rob us of our peace. It will, moreover, serve as a powerful stimulus to holy and praiseworthy exercises, and make devotion to our highest benefactor, not only easy but delightful.

From these and similar considerations, God taught Moses, and Moses the Israelites, the song contained in this chapter. Here the Israelites were reminded of the unceasing kindness of Jehovah towards them; a kindness to which their conduct gave them no manner of claim. And in our text, Moses strikingly exposes their folly, in going after heathen vanities, and departing from the God of Israel, by saying, in the language of challenge and of triumph, "For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." This passage may teach us, that,

I. JEHOVAH IS SUPREMELY WORTHY OF OUR CONFIDENCE AND DEVOTION. He is our best and most valuable friend and benefactor; "our Rock," whom we should esteem and on whom we should rely. The word *tsoor*, generally translated *rock*, has had two different, though not opposite ideas [attached to it; the first, that ascribed to it by the Jewish critic, Maimonides, who says that it means. 'origin, fountain, first cause.' This sense seems to be supported by ver. 4 and 18; where God is spoken of as an originator, or producing cause. The second, that of firmness, strength, or stability, affording *protection*, &c., as a rock has often been used as a place of defence. Thus the Psalmist, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress," &c. Ps. xviii. 2. Perhaps this idea may be countenanced in ver. 15; by "the Rock of his salvation." In both senses, therefore, the word applies to the Divine Being; in opposition to the gods of idolaters, "their rock in whom they trusted," ver. 37. To the Israelites he was, and to us he is the source of *being*, and of *blessing*; and therefore deserves our confidence, &c.

1. *The source of being.* "The Rock that begat thee," ver. 18. To this purpose the Psalmist's observation, "It is he that hath made us," &c.; and that of the apostle, "We are the offspring of God," Ps. c. 3, Acts xvii. 29. Whence it follows that he is the supporting as well as the producing cause of created existence. None of his creatures are independent, or equal to

their own support. But “*in him* we live, and move, and have our being,” Acts xvii. 28.

2. *The source of blessing.* As to the Israelites, so to ourselves : to them of deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, by the hand of Moses ;—to us, of redemption from a worse slavery, by the hand of Jesus, Matt. i. 21 ; Luke i. 74. For them he provided continual sustenance ; “the increase of the fields—honey out of the rock,” &c., Deut. xxxii. 13, 14. For us he causes “rain and fruitful seasons ;” as well as the richer supplies of his grace. ‘All our blessings are divine.’ To them he imparts all needful instruction, v. 10—12 ; to us also, “the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding.” For the Bible—and for a faithful ministry—and for ability to read, and hear, and understand, we are indebted to Him. To Israel he was the source of *safety* ; “He kept him as the apple of his eye.” So he preserves our souls from death, by disease, accidents, or enemies, Ps. cxvi. 8. And, finally, as he had provided for their future welfare, “in the land which they went to possess,” (v. 47) so for us has he provided “a better country,” with an able leader, and grace to prepare for everlasting glory, Heb. iv. 8—16. From all these considerations it will appear, that,

3. *God deserves our most humble and hearty respect and confidence.* He is “our *Rock*,” in whom we may trust. This chapter exhibits the forbearance and unchangeableness of him, who deigned to be a “father” to Israel. Moses records his past kindness, ver. 6—9 ; his present concern for them, ver. 29, 30 ; and his gracious purposes for the future, ver. 36—43. And even now, “his hand is not shortened,” &c., and, “he is without variableness,” &c. Therefore, “Trust in the Lord at all times.—God is a refuge for us.”

II. JEHOVAH’S GRACIOUS DEALINGS FURNISH A PROPER THEME FOR HIS SERVANTS’ PRAISE. This language of exultation, “For their rock is not as our Rock,” is part of a *song*, in which the LORD intended that his goodness should be celebrated from generation to generation. To this purpose he commanded, “write ye this song for you, and teach it to the children of Israel, chap. xxxi. 19. And accordingly, Moses wrote it, and taught them, ver. 22 and 30. And how much reason for grateful praise God’s people have, will appear if we consider, that,

1. *Their* benefit only *is intended*, not God's, in his dispensations towards them. This is the case in respect of his choice of Israel, ver. 8, 29, 30. "Because the Lord loved you," &c. chap. vii. 7, 8. So in respect of us, his intention in his greatest gift is, "that the world through him *might be saved*," John iii. 17.

2. *They only are benefited*, not God; who, absolutely perfect and happy, needs nothing; and who can receive no favour from them. On this ground, Eliphaz justly asks, "Can a man be profitable unto God," &c. "Is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect?" Job xxii. 2, 3. And our Lord pronounces us to be "unprofitable servants."

3. They *deserve not* such benefits, either in whole, or in part. On the contrary, they have merited the heaviest censure and punishment; and are, therefore, indebted to the full amount to Him, who "passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage," &c. Mic. vii. 18, 19.

4. They can make no adequate return to cancel even the smallest part of their obligation; but are becoming daily more and more indebted; and are spared, and blessed, and saved by grace only. Therefore,

5. Gratitude is their proper feeling; and praise the proper expression of that feeling. Such the sentiments of Ps. c. See also Ps. xxxiii. 1—4, and 1 Thess. v. 16—18.

III. JEHOVAH'S EXCELLENCE EXTORTS, AND SHALL EXTORT, THE HOMAGE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF EVEN HIS ENEMIES. "Our enemies themselves being judges." In point of fact, the gods of the heathen are "dumb idols." And we know that an idol is nothing in the world. Our Rock is "the living God." Theirs are "new gods, that are come newly up," ver. 17. Ours is "the eternal God," chap. xxxiii. 27. And whereas their idols have neither wisdom nor power, the God of Israel is *omniscient* and *almighty*. There can be no doubt, that apostate spirits have exerted all their craft and influence to support idolatry, and to set up and establish imaginary tutelary deities, in opposition to the Most High. But the votaries of those divinities have often been brought to confess that, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun," chap. xxxiii. 26. Hear what is recorded in the case of the Egyptian magicians, Exod. viii. 18, 19, and ix. 11; of Pharaoh, Exod. ix. 27, 28, and x.

16, 17; of Pharaoh's host, Exod. xiv. 25; of Balaam, Numb. xxiii. 7, 8, 18—24; of the Philistines, 1 Sam. iv. 8; of Baal's worshippers, 1 King's xviii. 39; of Nebuchadnezzar, Dan iii. 29, and iv. 28—37; of Darius, Dan. vi. 26, 27.

Additional evidence on this subject is furnished by avowed infidels; when, in danger or in death, (as in the cases of Volney and Voltaire,) their principles fail them; and by wicked or careless worldly professors of Christianity, whose lives have contradicted their profession.. To such, amidst the wreck of worldly hopes, death is often "the king of terrors;" and their fears and agony serve, by way of contrast, to shew the value of the true believer's foundation, laid of God in Zion, and which supports in death as well as in life, 2 Cor. v. 1, 2 Tim. i. 12.

And such shall be the confession of all impenitent sinners in that awful day when they shall behold, 'A God in grandeur, and a world on fire;' and wish that rocks and mountains could cover them "from the presence of him that sitteth upon the throne," &c. Rev. vi. 16, 17. "For thus saith the LORD, Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, &c.; your covenant with death shall be disannulled," &c. Isa. xxviii. 15—18.

IMPROVEMENT.

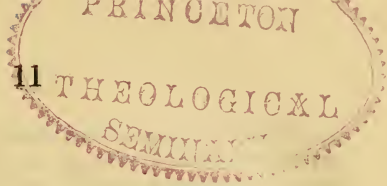
1. The subject suggests *serious inquiry*. Is the Rock of ages our Rock? Do we esteem him, trust him, devote ourselves to him? &c. It is of importance to be right here. For,

2. The subject offers *serious admonition*. "He is a God of truth and without iniquity," &c. ver. 4. Not like the cruel, unrighteous, unchaste divinities of heathenism. He says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Hence,

3. The subject gives us *a solemn warning*,—against rebellion, ver. 32—35; against indifference, ver. 46, 47; against apostacy, ver. 15—25.

4. The subject encourages *humble confidence* and *invigorating hope*. "Rejoice O ye nations with his people," &c. ver. 43. and chap. xxxiii. 25—29.

ZETA.



III. PREPARATION FOR DEATH ESSENTIALLY NECESSARY.

2 KINGS, XX. 1.

“ Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.”

SUCH was the message brought by Isaiah the prophet to Hezekiah, king of Judah; a message of such solemn and awful import, as could not fail to make a most deep and serious impression. To us, indeed, no prophet has been sent to announce the time of our dissolution, yet, without such a messenger, we know that that event rapidly approacheth.

Death is an enemy, and one which we *must* meet. We *may* meet him with *confidence* or with *terror*. The latter is generally the state of those who have lived without God in the world; and the former, of those who have renounced the pomps and vanities of the world, with all the sinful lusts of the flesh. To the one, death is the gate of heaven; to the other, the avenue to eternal perdition.

But though we must all die, and though death stands so intimately connected with our eternal state, yet it is a fact that few subjects occupy so small a portion of the attention of the generality of mankind. Such conduct is not only neither wise nor proper, but highly censurable. Let us in future avoid it; and to assist us in doing so, let us devote this evening to a few meditations on death, and the preparation necessary thereto.

I. WE MUST ALL DIE.

1. *We MUST all die.* The decree is gone forth. “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,” Gen. iii. 19;—a decree which has been executed upon all our predecessors, with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, who were translated, and which will continue to be executed upon the whole human race, whether princes or peasants, philosophers, or idiots. He will “bring us to death, and to the house appointed for all living,” Job xxx. 23. *When, how, and where* we shall die, are wisely concealed. A state of uncertainty as to the *time* of death is

best suited to those who owe duties to both worlds. Were the time known, and were that time *distant*, it would furnish a strong temptation to neglect all preparation for eternity, and induce us to become the mere creatures of appetite and passion, Matt. xxiv. 48. Were that time *near*, it would utterly incapacitate for all attention to the necessary concerns of this life, for in its immediate prospect every thing temporal would appear perfectly insignificant. But the *thing* being certain, and *time* uncertain, we are at once preserved from the *destructive* influences of the present evil world, and the *overwhelming* realities of eternity.

We MAY die soon. Some *must*, according to the ordinary course of things, *die soon*. Such are the aged, who have arrived at, or gone beyond, their threescore years and ten. And such also are the subjects of those diseases which usually baffle the skill of the physician, and bid defiance to the healing art.

But whilst these *must*, all *may* die soon. *No age exempt from death*, whether infancy, childhood, youth, or manhood. *No situation exempt*, whether seated on a throne, or grinding in the mill, dwelling in a palace or in a garret. *No description of person or character exempt*, whether strong or weak, beautiful or ugly, wise or foolish, witty or dull, Christian or infidel. All exposed to death both from disease and accident; for

‘Dangers stand thick through all the ground,
To push us to the tomb;
And fierce diseases wait around,
To hurry mortals home.

3. *Death terminates all our present joys and sorrows.* The pleasures of the present life are derived from various sources: from *riches*, the miser’s God; from *the unlimited indulgence of appetite and passion*, the paradise of the sensualist; from *honour*, the heaven of the ambitious; and from *friendship*, that

‘Mysterious cement of the soul,
Sweetener of life, and solder of society.’

Reverse the medal, and you have the chief sources of present sorrows. But death terminates them all: it alike puts a period to the joys of health, and opulence, and power; and to the sorrows of affliction, and poverty, and captivity, Job. iii. 18, 19.

4. *Death ends our probation for eternity.* The present life stands intimately related to the life to come. Here we are candidates for heaven or hell. This is our only seed time; eternity is the harvest, where we shall reap both in kind and quantity according to that which we have sown, Gal. vi. 8; 2 Cor. ix. 6. Here we are stewards; there we must give an account of our stewardship. Here we are required to run a race, and to war a good warfare; there, if we have run the Christian race, and fought the Christian fight, we shall be crowned with glory, honour, immortality, eternal life; but if not, we shall be doomed to endure the vengeance of eternal fire. Our character after death cannot undergo any alteration. He that is holy, shall be holy still, and he that is filthy, shall be filthy still, Rev. xxii. 11. Time is the mould in which we receive an impression for eternity; and that impression, whether of sin or holiness, we shall bear for ever.

II. TO BE PREPARED FOR DEATH IS A DUTY SOLEMNLY INCUMBENT ON EACH OF US. This preparation respects both worlds.

1. *It respects the present world.* We should always have our affairs so set in order, that were we to be suddenly taken away, they might not occasion any thing embarrassing or painful to our successors. For want of this, and through persons dying intestate, the peace and harmony of many families have been destroyed; and that property which would have made them all comfortable, has been squandered in law. In this sense it is the duty of every one possessed of property to *set his house in order.*

2. *It respects the world to come.* To be happy *there* implies previous preparation. This is comprised in two things:

(1.) *In pardon.* If unpardoned, God will not receive us to glory. The necessity of pardon is founded in personal guilt; but we are personally guilty. We cannot blot out our own sins, nor the sins of others. *Time* will not efface our transgressions; for though we may forget them, God does not. But though we cannot pardon our own sins, the Lord can pardon them all, through Him whom he "hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," &c. Rom iii. 25.

(2.) *In holiness.* This consists in a separation from sin, and a dedication of ourselves to God; in the total destruction of the rebellious principle, and the having the soul filled with love to God; in the divine illumination of the mind, the purification

and elevation of the affections, the rectitude and complete subjection of the will, and the entire consecration of all our powers to the Lord. Such is "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," Heb. xii. 14. Such a preparation commends itself to the reason of every man; for in order to happiness, in any situation, there must be a fitness between the taste of the individual, and the place, society, and employments. Such a fitness is there between the subjects of holiness and heaven, with all its inhabitants and employments, and with the great object of their ceaseless worship.

CONCLUSION.

Remember, 1. That whether prepared or not, you must die.

2. That however unprepared at present, you may yet obtain a preparation;—a wedding garment is provided.

3. That should you suffer life to pass away without a preparation, you will be undone for ever.

OMEGA.

IV. THE CHARACTER AND PRAYER OF JABEZ.

1 CHRON. iv. 9, 10.

"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, because I bare him with sorrow, &c."

IN all the book of God, nothing is recorded of Jabez but what we find in these two verses. The account thus given of him, however, though short, is full, and sufficient to preserve him in everlasting remembrance.

It appears that he was one of Judah's tribe—a son of sorrow—a man of conflicts—a favourite of Heaven—and a subject of honour. In a word, that he was a true son of Israel; one that had power with God, and with men, and prevailed. "And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren," &c. In improving these words, let us consider,

I. SOME PARTICULARS RESPECTING JABEZ HIMSELF. As
 1. *His name*;—*Jabez*;—which signifies *sorrow*, or *sadness*.
 “His mother called him Jabez, saying, because I bear him with
 sorrow.” By the example and experience of this good woman
 we are taught—the propriety of recording our past sorrows—and
 that our best enjoyments may and do sometimes result from our
 greatest afflictions. We should, like her, commemorate our
 former sorrows. To deepen our humility, by recollecting the
 desert of sin, Lam. iii. 19—22. To cherish hope of support
 under future trials. Lam. iii. 21, 24; Psalm lxxvii. 9—11. To
 inspire us with gratitude, for God’s past mercies, Lam. iii.
 22—25. To perfect our patience, by teaching us to wait for
 God, Lam. iii. 26. And to qualify us for acting as advocates for
 God; by enabling us to shew the kind design of God in all the
 afflictions which he appoints to mankind, Lam. iii. 32, 33.
 Thus acting like her, we shall find, like her,—*That our best
 enjoyments may, and do sometimes result from our greatest
 afflictions.* Jabez, whom she bare with sorrow, was the son by
 whom she was most highly honoured. This is frequently the
 case with pious characters; “Unto the righteous ariseth a light
 in the darkness.” They can sing both of mercy and judgment;
 knowing that all God’s judgments are right, and that in faithful-
 ness he afflicts them. Holiness, a capacity for usefulness, and
 eternal glory, are certainly the best enjoyments of pious charac-
 ters; and their sanctified afflictions render them more holy, Heb.
 xii. 10, 11; more useful to others, 2 Cor. i. 4, 6; and more
 glorious in the heavenly world, 2 Cor. iv. 17. Respecting Jabez,
 let us proceed to observe,

2. *His character*;—*He was more honourable than his bre-
 thren.* This he certainly was, because he was more *pious*;
 for he called on the God of Israel. This teaches us that piety
 is honourable; for by humility and the fear of the Lord are
 riches, and honour, and life,” Prov. xxii. 4.—Piety is honour-
 able, as it engages us in the most glorious employments. It
 leads us to glorify God, by the consecration of our persons to
 him, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; and to serve our generation by his will,
 Acts xiii. 36; Gal. vi. 10. These employments render us like
 God himself; in mercy, and universal benevolence, Ps. cxlv. 9;
 Acts x. 38.—Piety is honourable, as it interests us in the most
 glorious privileges: as the ministry of angels, Heb. i. 14; Ps.

xxxiv. 7; and the favour and friendship of God, cxlvi. 8; John xv. 14.—Piety is honourable, as it interests us in the most glorious rewards: in a throne, Rev. iii. 21; a crown, Rev. ii. 10; and a kingdom, Luke xii. 32; Matt. xxv. 34. There is great goodness both wrought for the pious in this world, and laid up for them in the next, Ps. xxxi. 19. Of this Jabez was fully assured; and encouraged himself in the Lord his God, by confidently asking all that his various exigencies required. Hence let us consider,

II. HIS PRAYER;—“AND JABEZ CALLED ON THE GOD OF ISRAEL,” &c. In this prayer it may be profitable to notice,

1. *The object of his worship;—the God of Israel.* The God of Israel, and no other; he was not an idolater. That God who had ever been the friend of Israel:—he was *grateful*. That God who proved himself able to redeem Israel from all evil, Deut. xxxiii. 29; he confided in God’s all-sufficiency. That God who was his God by covenant engagement, Gen. xvii. 7:—he was faithful in rendering him due worship and service. Hence learn the properties of acceptable devotion. Like that of Jabez, it must be voluntary. God must be deliberately chosen by us: as our Portion, Deut. xxx. 19, 20; Lam. iii. 24; as our Guide, Ps. 48, 14; as our Strength and our Redeemer, Ps. xix. 14. It must be sincere. We must worship God alone; renouncing all sin, all subjection to Satan; and all self-confidence, Matt. iv. 10. It must be grateful: attended with recollection of God’s past favours, Ps. l. 14, 15. And it must be fiducial; attended with confidence in God; in the mediation of Christ, as the only way to God, John xiv. 6; in God’s almighty power, enabling him to save us, Isa. xxvi. 4; and in his inviolable truth, engaging him to save us, Isa. xxv. 9; Heb. vi. 18. For our further instruction, let us observe,

2. *The contents of his prayer; or what he asked.* He implored *God’s blessing*: “O that thou wouldest bless me indeed!”—the enlargement of his territory; “and enlarge my coasts:” the hand of God with him; “and that thine hand may be with me:”—and God’s protection; “and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.” Such also should be our requests, with respect to our spiritual concerns:—Implore God’s covenant blessings: those which he en-

gages in the gospel covenant to bestow ; even the pardon of sin, and conformity of heart and life to God's laws, Heb. viii. 10, 12. These are blessings indeed ! for they are ever productive of true blessedness, or solid happiness, Ps. xxxii., 1, 2, and lxxxix. 15, 16, James i. 25.—Implore enlargement of heart, by the entire subjugation, and utter destruction of every evil propensity, Deut. xxxiii. 27. Ps. cxix. 32.—Implore God's hand with you, to direct and lead you in all your difficulties, Job xxvii. 11 ; Heb. viii. 9 ; Ps. cxxiii. 2 ; to supply all your wants, Ps. cxlv. 16 ; to support you under all your trials, Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24 ; and to keep you in all your exercises, Isa. xli. 10.—Implore protection from all evil, Matt. vi. 13 : and from the evil of malignant assaults, Ps. xvii. 7 ; and from the evil of all afflictive events, Ps. cxxi. 7 : Prov. xix. 23. That we may be encouraged in our addresses to the throne of grace, let us observe,

3. *The success of his prayer.*—"And God granted him that which he requested." The success of Jabez teaches us—That prayer is necessary to our salvation. God bestows on mankind only that which they ask. His promises are made only to evangelical suppliants, John xiv. 13 ; Luke xi. 9 ; Ezek. xxxvi. 37.—That our prayers should be copious and unlimited. Ask all that God promises, Ps. lxxxix. 10. Even his choicest blessings, Rom. viii. 32 ; the most complete enlargement, Eph. iii. 16—20 ; the most ample supplies, Phil. iv. 19 ; and the most secure protection, Deut xxxiii. 3 ; for God gives his people all that they request, Ps. cxlv. 18, 19.—That pious suppliants may expect gracious favours ; from God's never failing kindness to others, Luke xi. 10 ; and from his faithful promises to us, Rom. x. 12, 13 ; 1 Pet. v. 10.

V. AN EXAMPLE OF EXCELLENT PIETY.

NEH. vii. 2.

"He was a faithful man, and feared God above many."

IN the epistle to the Hebrews, we are exhorted not to be slothful, but to be followers, or imitators of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The promises here mentioned, are the promises of glorious rest and happiness, which are made by God to his approved servants. These promises are inherited by all who have died in the Lord; and it was in the way of faith and patience that they were brought to enjoy this inheritance. The examples thus left us are both instructive and encouraging: they instruct us respecting what we must believe, and seek, and do, that we may glorify and enjoy God; and they encourage us, as they were set by persons who laboured under all the disadvantages to which we can be subject, and who were favoured with no means of grace, but what we also most abundantly enjoy.

Among those characters, whose memories God declares shall be blessed, and whose examples are recorded for our imitation, Hananiah, the person mentioned in our text, is certainly included. That he was an honourable man, is evident from the offices which he sustained, being the ruler of the palace, and governor of Jerusalem; and that his honours were justly merited by him, is incontestible, for "He was a faithful man, and feared God above many."

I. HE WAS A FAITHFUL MAN. This teaches us that in order to our fearing God, and serving him acceptably, we must be faithful. We must be faithful,

1. *By believing what God has revealed, on his testimony,* 2 Chron. xx. 20.—Without this faith, we shall never come to God for salvation; through ignorance of what we ought to seek; and through want of encouragement in seeking God, Heb. xi. 6.—To the exercises of this faith we are urged by the best example; as that of Abraham, Gal. iii. 9, Rom. iv. 20; and that

of Barnabas, Acts xi. 24.—Under the influence of this faith, we shall be led to seek God in the way he prescribes. Thus believe, and you will seek the blessings which God calls you in his gospel to enjoy; even his pardoning mercy and restoring grace, Hos. xiv. 1, 2. Thus believe, and you will seek God's favours, as he wills and commands you to seek them. You will seek them, not in the course of licentiousness, superstition, self-confidence, nor luke-warmness; but by seasonable repentance, Acts iii. 19; by entire affiance in the merit and mediation of Christ, John xiv. 6; Eph. ii. 13; by fervent persevering prayer, Heb. iv. 16; by confident expectation, Heb. x. 22; and by unwearied application, till you are crowned with glory, Rom. ii. 7. We must be faithful,

2. *By conscientiously performing those duties which arise from our relations to God*; as his servants, stewards, and soldiers. As his covenant-servants, we must devote ourselves to his service, Jer. 1, 5; 1 Cor. iv. 19, 20.—As his stewards, we must employ his gifts for his glory, 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11. This faithfulness is required in stewards, 1 Cor. iv. 2. As his soldiers, we must be valiant for his revealed truth, Jer. ix. 3; by courageously defending it against all hostile attacks, Eph. vi. 16; by carefully guarding it from all erroneous corruptions, Jude 4; and by zealously endeavouring to extend the knowledge of it in the world, Ps. lxxvii. 1, 2; Mark xvi. 15. We must be faithful,

3. *By steadfast adherence to the required worship and service of God*—Like the church at Pergamos, we must not deny Christ through fear of suffering for righteousness' sake, Rev. ii. 13, and xvii. 14.—Like Moses, we must not suffer the allurements of this world to entice us from our allegiance to God, Heb. xi. 24—26.—Like Job, we must remain unwearied in God's service, and patiently wait for the recompence of reward, Job xiv. 14; Heb. x. 35, 36; Gal. vi. 9. We must be faithful.

4. *By seriously realizing the invisible things of God*, Heb. xi. 1.—We should realize God's presence with us, as our Master, Helper, and Observer, Ps. xvi. 8; xlvi. 1; Heb. xi. 27.—We should realize the general judgment, when we must all appear before Christ, 2 Cor. x. 7, 9, 10.—We should realize the glory promised to all the faithful followers of Christ; com-

prising a glorious rest, Heb. iv 9; Rev. xiv. 13; a glorious inheritance, 1 Pet. i. 3—5; a glorious throne, Rev. iii. 21; a glorious crown, Rev. ii. 10; and glorious happiness, Matt. xxv. 21. Of Hananiah, who thus instructs us by the example of his faithfulness, it is also said,

II. AND HE FEARED GOD ABOVE MANY.

1. *By the fear of God, in this place, is meant the whole of personal religion*; including the principles and practice, the dispositions and the conduct of its subject or possessor. In this extensive sense, it is frequently spoken of in the oracles of God. See Ps. xxxiv. 11, and cxi. 10; Prov. xix. 23; Eccl. viii. 12.

2. *He feared God above many.* This implies that there are *different degrees* of piety, among those who truly fear *God*.—This *difference* in pious attainments is evident from God's word. It is supposed by Solomon, in his description of a good wife, Prov. xxxi. 29. It is intimated by our Lord, in his parable of the sower, Matt. xiii. 8. It is admitted by St. Paul, in his doctrine of future rewards, 2 Cor. ix. 6.—This difference in pious attainments is also evident from the present state of the religious world. Of some eminent Christians, who are now the salt of the earth, and the lights of the world, it may be said with great truth, that they fear God above many. This is manifest in their habitual deportment; for they are more conscientious than many, in the improvement of their time, Eph. v. 15, 16; they abound more than many in *secret* religious duties; they search the Scriptures, pray, meditate, and examine themselves, more than many, Ps. i. 1, 2, and cix. 4; they *acknowledge God* more than many in their secular concerns, Prov. iii. 6; Phil. iv. 6; they are more careful than many to allow themselves in those recreations only which are consistent with, and favourable to their advancement in holiness, 1 Cor. x. 31; they *converse* more *spiritually* and *profitably* than many, Eph. iv. 29; and they are more *zealous* than many, in employing all their talents for God's glory, and the benefit of mankind, Acts xiii. 36.—This difference in religious attainments may generally account for the various distinctions which are observable among different religious professors.—With respect to *steadfastness*: some never disgrace their profession by any visible deviation from rectitude; and may with propriety say with the Apostle, Phil. iv. 9, "The things," &c.; while others, through instability, too often exemplify the same

Apostle's caution to the Hebrews, Heb. xii. 15. "Looking diligently, lest any man fail," &c.—With respect to *reputation*; some have a good report from them that are without the church; while the good that is in others, is evil spoken of, through their indiscretions.—With respect to *usefulness*; some are general blessings to their respective connections; while others are not visibly instrumental in bringing scarcely any souls with them to Christ and heaven.—And very frequently with respect to *divine* consolations: some living near the fountain head of blessedness, are found almost always rejoicing in the Lord; while others, following Christ with unequal steps, are almost always complaining that the consolations of the Lord are small with them.

3. *The honourable mention of Hananiah's distinguished piety should excite us to imitate him, by endeavouring to excel in piety also.*—To excel in piety is our *privilege*: for the most exalted religious enjoyments are certainly attainable by us. This is incontestible, from the prayers which the Holy Spirit has dictated for our adoption. See Ephes. iii. 14—21; 1 Thess. v. 23, 24; Heb. xiii. 20, 21.—To excel in piety is our *interest*; for this will be conducive to our greater happiness, Isa. xlvi. 18;—to our greater safety, 2 Pet. i. 10; and to our greater glory in the eternal world, 2 Pet. i. 11; 1 Cor. xv. 58.—To excel in piety is our *duty*: for God calls us to this, 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. God will hereby be glorified, John xv. 8; and he will herewith be pleased, Ps. xxxv. 27.

ALPHA.

VI. DELIGHT IN THE LORD.

JOB xxii. 26, 27.

"For then thou shalt have thy delight in the Almighty, and shall lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows."

THAT religion secures the best interests of mankind, is a manifest and consoling truth. This is equally evident, from the

dignity of its origin—the purity of its character—and the efficiency of its influence. It is eminently “the kingdom of God” in the soul, producing all the gracious fruits of “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” It discovers the utter incompetency of the creature as the source of happiness: and leads its participants to grasp the all-sufficiency of the Creator, as “the fountain of living waters.” It saves from the guilt and ruin of sin, and is “profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” And hence Eliphaz assures Job in this chapter, that by returning and acquainting himself with God, he would infallibly secure every necessary blessing, both temporal and spiritual. And though he was greatly mistaken in his views of the character and case of this deeply afflicted saint; yet many of his sentiments and observations are highly important and interesting in their general application. This is particularly the case in the text and context, in which he exhorts the pious sufferer to trust in the Lord Jehovah, as the only way to be delivered from all his calamities, and restored to the abundant and permanent consolations of religion; “For then thou shalt have thy delight in the Almighty,” &c. These words describe the sacred pleasures of piety, or, delight in the Lord, as it regards—the sublimity of its nature—the divinity of its origin—and tendency of its influence—Observe,

I. THE SUBLIMITY OF ITS NATURE;—“Then shalt thou have thy *delight* in the Almighty.” As a complex being, man is capable of enjoying different kinds of pleasure, which, according to its respective objects, may be denominated sensitive, rational, and religious; or the pleasures of *sense*, *reason*, and *faith*. The last is by far the most excellent and desirable. In the text, it is called “*delight* in the Almighty,” in whom all the saints supremely rejoice as the object of their adoration, and the “donor of every good and perfect gift.” They delight,

1. *In the saving knowledge of God.* They are taught by his word and Spirit, and made wise unto salvation. They know him as “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent” as their Saviour, John vi. 45. Their knowledge is not mere mental speculation, in the theory of religion; but is personally embodied in the enjoyment of salvation, and practically displayed in its hallowing influence, 2 Cor. iii. 18; 1 John ii. 3, 4. It is invariably accompanied with unspeakable joy in the devout and

habitual contemplation of the perfections, works, word, and will of the Lord, Ps. iii. 3; Jer. ix. 23, 24. This knowledge is inestimable in its value, and affords the most *sublime, substantial, and perpetual* delight, Phil. iii. 7, 8. To cultivate it, is therefore both the duty and felicity of rational beings. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee."

2. *In the present enjoyment of God.* He does "in very deed, dwell with man on the earth;" and makes his special abode with "the humble and contrite ones," Isa. lvii. 15. They are not only intimately acquainted with him as their God; but they also actually enjoy him as their *portion*. They are the happy subjects of his approving favour—moral likeness—indwelling Spirit—and abiding presence, Isa. xii. 1; John xiv. 23; Eph. ii. 22; chap. iv. 24. They richly participate spiritual union and fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; in all the sacred privileges and duties of pure and undefiled religion. They are blessed with all blessings in Christ, and filled with all the fruits of the Spirit, to the praise and glory of God. They enjoy a lively interest in the divine perfections and promises, and greatly rejoice in his grace, mercy, and peace. Their religious enjoyments inspire ineffable delight in the Almighty, who declares, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

3. *In the future anticipation of God.* The present consolations of religion, are only imperfect foretastes and pledges of its more glorious and endless felicities in the world to come. Now we know only in part, and see through a glass darkly; but hereafter we shall know as we are known, for "we shall be like him, and see him as he is." And though now the believer has to pass through tribulation, as a stranger and pilgrim on the earth; yet by faith he looks beyond this vale of tears, and rejoices in hope of the glory of God, 1 Pet. i. 8. The cheering prospect of a blissful immortality in the presence of the Lord is productive of those sacred pleasures which no language can describe; and which can only be enjoyed by the truly pious. Like Moses, they "endure as seeing Him who is invisible," having a believing and joyous "respect unto the recompense of reward," Heb. xi. 24—27. The superiority of this hallowed, spiritual, and immortal delight, is evident from,

II. The DIVINITY OF ITS ORIGIN;—"Then shalt thou have delight *in the Almighty.*" Happiness is the universal object of desire and pursuit. It is, however, by no means generally possessed, because it is chiefly sought in the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world, in which it can never be realized, 1 John ii. 15—17. The essential requisites of true felicity are suitability, sufficiency, and perpetuity; and these can only be found in "the God of all grace."

* 1. *The Almighty is suited to our capacities.* Nothing finite can satiate the immortal soul. It cannot feed on the empty husks and vanities of this world. Its nature is too noble, and its powers too exalted, to be satisfied with the perishing trifles of time and sense. As the immediate offspring and image of the Divine immortality, it can find rest only in its original source, for whom it was made. Misguided by sin and Satan, it ransacks all the resources of nature; but finding no suitable resting place, it incessantly wanders from one object to another, *defiled* and *dissatisfied*, without centre or portion, Isa. lvii. 20, 21. The eternal Jehovah, as an infinitely wise, holy, and gracious spirit, is the only central point of bliss to the soul, in whom his people enjoy "perfect peace, which passeth all understanding," Ps. cxvi. 7, cxix. 165.

2. *The Almighty is adequate to our necessities.* He is both a suitable and satisfactory portion. The world is not only totally unsuited to our moral capacities, but also utterly defective and insufficient in its supplies. This is a truth solemnly taught in the Scriptures, and universally confirmed by experience, Eccl. i. 2. But the *Almighty*, whose sacred name signifies *God all-sufficient*, possesses all possible good, as a Being of infinite glory and perfection. In him all fulness dwells, which is infinitely more than sufficient to supply the innumerable necessities of all his creatures. We can feel no want but what he can satisfy, nor any desire but he can fulfil; for "all our sufficiency is of God," who is the inexhaustible "fountain of light and life," Ps. lxxxiv. 11; Phil. iv. 19.

3. *The Almighty is durable as our existence.* All terrestrial objects are finite and perishing, and therefore can only be enjoyed for a very limited and uncertain period. And hence they can afford no real happiness to man as a responsible and prospective being, destined to exist for ever, either in consummate

misery or ineffable bliss, Matt. xvi. 26; Luke xvi. 25. But God is immutable, and is able to administer every needful supply, in every stage and mode of our being; for He is neither enriched by withholding, nor impoverished by giving. Our dependence upon him is absolute and invariable; and whatever is not parallel with our immortal existence, can never be a perfect source of happiness to man; for only 'a perpetuity of bliss is bliss.' Now this can only be found in the Almighty, who is evidently the appointed, infinite, and eternal portion of the saints, who supremely delight and "rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation," Ps. xlvi. 14. The text also represents delight in the Almighty, as it respects,

III. THE TENDENCY OF ITS INFLUENCE;—"Then shalt thou *lift up thy face unto God,*" &c. The effects which accompany spiritual joy, distinguish it from mere enthusiastic delusion; and demonstrate both the genuineness and efficacy of experimental religion in them that believe. According to the text,

1. *They exercise confidence in God*,—"Then shalt thou *lift up thy face unto God.*" This mode of expression is peculiarly appropriate and significant. Contrition for sin wounds the spirit, saddens the countenance, and deeply humbles the soul, Ps. xl. 12; Luke xviii. 13; but a lively sense of pardoning mercy, cheers the mind and emboldens the believer to "lift up his face to the Almighty" with joy, and confidently exclaim, "*My Lord and my God,*" Rom. viii. 15, 16. When the Most High thus "lifts up the light of his countenance upon us, and puts gladness into our hearts," we are encouraged to look to him with filial affection and confidence, and "trust in his name for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength," Ps. xlii. 11.

2. *They enjoy communion with God*;—"Thou shalt make thy *prayer unto him,* and he shall *hear thee.*" They feel their entire dependence upon him, and expect every blessing from him. They have received "the spirit of grace and supplication." and live in habits of spiritual devotion, Ephes. vi. 18. They have daily "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," by the intercession of the Holy Ghost, Rom. viii. 26, 27. In this sacred exercise, the saints find unutterable pleasure and profit, Ps. vii. 17; Ps. xl. 3. Their prayers are not in vain,

for the Lord will hear and answer them according to his word, Matt. vii. 7, 8; 1 John v. 14, 15; we are divinely encouraged to “ask and receive, that our joy may be full.”

3. *They maintain obedience to God*:—“And thou shalt pay thy vows.” They not only readily acknowledge that “the vows of the Lord are upon them”; but they also, by divine grace, fully surrender themselves to his service, Psalm cxvi. 12—14. Their solemn professions and engagements to the Almighty are secretly kept in mind; and practically fulfilled, “in all holy conversation and godliness.” All intelligent beings are under innumerable obligations to “the Father of mercies;” who justly demands our entire obedience, both of heart and life, Prov. xxiii. 26. Let us, therefore, as professing Christians, supremely delight and confide in his name; and faithfully pay our vows and present our sacrifices on “the altar that sanctifieth the gift and the giver.” From these observations we may infer, 1. The vanity and unsatisfying nature of worldly objects; 2. The supreme source and donor of present and eternal happiness; and, 3. Sacred consolations and felicity of genuine religion, whose “ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”

ETA.

VII. THE RESTORATION OF THE SOUL, BY MEANS OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE.

PSALM xix. 7.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.”

THE word *conversion* is much used in the Christian world, and applied in a variety of cases; but not always with judgment and propriety. What passes for conversion among some men, will not be admitted by the all-seeing God, it being only the adoption of religious opinions, conformity to forms of devotions, attendance at the places of public worship, assuming a name, as contradistinguished from others among the professors of religion, zeal in defending and propagating creeds, or some peculiarity of sentiment. Having thrown out these hints concerning spurious conversions, let us,

I. INQUIRE WHAT IS MEANT BY CONVERSION IN THE TEXT.

In the margin we meet with a deviation from the translation, and instead of converting, read restoring the soul; which we shall adopt as the true reading. This restoring the soul, is from its fall in Adam, to its salvation by Christ.

1. *From the darkness of ignorance, to the light of divine knowledge.* Ignorance is general where the means of knowledge are not realized. Reason left to itself is a lamp without light. We have ample proof of this truth among the heathen nations. The labours of missionaries of the present day have given a development of the mental condition of the heathen, superior to any thing we ever heard of at any former period. The light of divine knowledge, employing and enriching the understanding, is essential to the restoration of the soul. The first Christians were brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel, 1 Pet. ii. 9. God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined in their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. iv. 6.

2. *From the oppressive weight of contracted guilt, to a state of conscious acceptance with God.* This transition is wonderful. The moral incumbrance is thrown off, and the soul rises into liberty. Its slavish fears are instantly banished, and it enters into a state of joyful assurance of the divine favour. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," Rom. v. 1.

3. *From inward depravity, derived from our first parents, to a conformity to the moral image of God.* The removal of guilt from the conscience, and the being "sanctified, holy," (1 Thess. v. 23.) are distinct attainments in the Christian life, and the latter is posterior to the former. "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and (sanctified) by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11.

4. *From a state of misery, to the possession of real happiness.* "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," Isaiah. lvii. 20, 21. How can men but be miserable in sin? A broken law, a reproving conscience, a sting in death, a fear of fiery indignation beyond the grave, are so many dreadful cataracts, pouring wrath and misery

upon them. But knowledge, peace, purity, and love, are so many celestial fountains, communicating streams of divine consolation to restored souls. "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever," Isaiah xxxii. 17.

II. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS RESTORATION OF THE SOUL IS EFFECTED:—by the *perfect law of the Lord*.

In the margin for *law* we read *doctrine*; by which is meant, the whole revealed system of evangelical truth, as contained in the sacred Scriptures relative to the redemption and salvation of mankind by Jesus Christ. This doctrine is perfect.

1. *It is divine in its origin.* It did not proceed from the courts of princes, the authority of legislators, the wisdom of sages, or from the remotest antiquity; but from God himself. The Bible is his own book, stamped with his own signature, and containing doctrine which only himself could reveal.

2. *It is pure in the means of its communication.* Though the sacred writers were fallible men, yet they were under an infallible inspiration in writing the sacred pages. "Prophecy came not at any time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," 2 Peter i. 21. Thus "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Tim. iii. 16.

3. *It is harmonious, and well adapted to the condition of man, in all its parts.* Though written at different periods, and by persons residing in different parts of the earth, yet it does not furnish one single instance of contradiction. And it is exactly suited to the condition of fallen man, presenting an effectual remedy for all his physical and moral diseases; it comforts and supports him amidst privations and sufferings in this world, and cheers him by the prospect of glory and felicity in the eternal state.

4. *It is energetic in its operations;* penetrating into all the inmost secrets of the minds, being attended by the Holy Spirit. St Paul says, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," 1 Thess. i. 5. St Peter says, "Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit:—being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever," 1 Peter i. 22, 23.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Ministers must understand the doctrine of the Lord, before they can make it known to others. "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch," Matt. xv. 14.

2. Ministers must be restored by it themselves, before they can feel a lively interest in propagating it in the world. St. Paul says "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again," 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

3. When ministers, know, enjoy, and preach the truth, as it is in Christ, then the Holy Spirit will set to it his seal, and the effect produced will be,—the secrets of the hearts of the hearers will be made manifest, and so, falling down on their face, they will worship God, and report that God is in his ministers of a truth, 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

4. By such ministers, God has in all ages been carrying on his own work of restoring souls, especially in the present time, at home and abroad. "The Lord has given the word, and great is the company of those that publish it," Psalm lxviii. 11. Still there is need to attend to the words of our Saviour, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest," Matt. ix. 37, 38.

5. The doctrine of the Scripture being a perfect means of restoring souls, we see the necessity and utility of countenancing and assisting Bible Associations, and Missionary Societies, according to the extent of our ability and influence; that "the word of the Lord may run and be glorified," 2 Thess. iii. 1.

THETA.

VIII. ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE PIOUS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL.

PSALM I. 15.

"And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me."

THIS Psalm is descriptive of the majesty of God in his church, v. 1—6; of his displeasure at mere ceremonial performances, 7,

13; and his high approbation of praise and prayer, 14, 15; hence the words of our text are calculated to encourage the pious in the time of trouble; let us therefore notice, the speaker, the persons addressed, the duty suggested, the declaration made, and, the grateful returns required.

I. THE SPEAKER. "The mighty God, even the Lord," ver.

1. The God of gods, Jehovah; the supreme governor of heaven and earth, the lawgiver and judge of men and angels; possessing,

1. *Boundless knowledge.* "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do," Heb. iv. 13. He knows your persons, abode, and circumstances, Acts x. 5, 6. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered," Matt. x. 30.

2. *Infinite goodness.* He is "good unto all," Ps. cxlv. 9. but especially to those who fear and love him, Ps. ciii. 13. cxlv. 19; cxlvii. 11. His goodness is unlimited as the eternal mind.

3. *Omnipotent power.* He has only to speak and it is done, Ps. cxlviii. 6. What his wisdom contrives, and his goodness wills, his power can perform. He is never at a loss for means to execute his designs: let us therefore notice,

II. THE PERSONS ADDRESSED. These words apply,

1. *To those who fear and love God.* Our text is not an appeal to one estranged from God, neither does it apply immediately to one under condemnation, though seeking mercy, but it evidently alludes to those who are in covenant with God: who under the influence of the Spirit have repented of sin, and believed to the salvation of the soul—who fear God and work righteousness, of whom the apostle says, "all things are yours," &c. 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

2. *Who are subjects of trial.* "In the day of trouble." Piety does not exempt its possessors from suffering. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," Heb. xii. 6; neither does religion blunt the feelings, or metamorphose man into a Stoic. The godly are subject to the same casualties as the other members of the human family; in some sense one event happeneth to all, Eccles. ii. 14. But as the all-wise God not unfrequently *tries*, or *permits* the trial of that grace which his own hand has planted; the pious have troubles peculiar to themselves, so that in addition to pain of body, losses in business, fluctuations in trade, and the bereavement of friends, they have temptations, persecutions, &c. Suffering is perfectly consistent with a state

of probation; and the Lord *afflicts* or *suffers* his people to be afflicted: not for his pleasure, but for their profit, Heb. xii. 10. The Scriptures invariably design man as the subject of trial; and the period of conflict is here designated, "a day." This may be short, or protracted; hence we may notice,

III. THE DUTY SUGGESTED. "Call upon me," &c. When trouble comes, do not endeavour to avoid, or extricate yourselves by any sinful contrivance; neither depend on the creature; but "call upon God in the day of trouble." This appeal to God, however, must bear the character of,

1. *Humility*. Instance the case of Job i. 20, 21; xlii. 6. When he heard of his sufferings, he fell down upon the ground and humbled himself before God. If in affliction we say unto God, Why hast thou done this? instead of humbling ourselves, prayer will be unavailing.

2. *Sincerity*. If in trouble we are more concerned for our own comfort than the glory of God, and are more desirous for a deliverance *from* trial, than a sanctified *use* of affliction, it shews that we are not sincerely seeking the will of God.

3. *Confidence*. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord," &c. Isa. l. 10. In calling upon God you must exercise confidence in his wisdom, goodness, and power,—in his promises and declarations, Isa. xli. 10; xliii. 1, 2.

4. *Consistency*. If you seek deliverance from temptation, keep out of the way of it;—if from persecution, take care you do not elicit it, but demean yourselves towards friends and foes, as prudence and piety direct. If you are in poverty, be diligent, active, and frugal. You cannot expect the end without the means; if any one would reap, he must sow.

5. *Importunity*. The Most High suffers himself to be importuned with. Cease not to call on the name of the Lord: imitate the example of the widow with the unjust judge, Luke xviii. 1—8; and the Syrophenician woman, Matt. xv. 21—28; and forget not,

IV. THE DECLARATION MADE. "I will deliver thee." *He* speaks who cannot lie, *his* word is sure. He will deliver,

1. *At what time he sees best*. You must not impatiently spurn the cup from you, nor like Jonah, be angry, ch. iv. 9; but rather say with Job, xxxiii. 10, "He knoweth the way that I take," &c. Your heavenly Father "will not suffer you to be

tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it," 1 Cor. x. 13. Leave your case in his hands ; this is your day of trouble, and you shall not have one trial more, or one moment's exercise longer than is needful.

2. *In what way he sees best.* "His ways are not as our ways," Isa. lv. 8. And though God may not grant an immediate deliverance, yet he always gives seasonable support under trials ; instance the case of Paul : he had a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, for this he *besought* the Lord *thrice*, that it might *depart* from him ; the Lord answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee," &c. ; the apostle said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmity," &c. 2 Cor. xii. 7—10. At other times he delivers by removing the cause of trials. See Job, last chapter.

3. *By what means he sees best.* A rod was the instrument in the hands of Moses, Exod. xiv. 16 ; ravens in the case of the prophet Elijah, 1 Kings xvii. 6. The immediate interposition of Providence in the rescue of Daniel and the Hebrew worthies, Dan. vi. 18—22 ; iii. 21—25. "The Lord knoweth *how* to deliver the godly out of temptations," 2 Pet. ii. 9 ; "He will deliver." "He cannot deny himself." 2 Tim. ii. 13 ; it remains therefore,

V. TO NOTICE THE GRATEFUL RETURNS REQUIRED.

"And thou shalt glorify me."

1. *By a devout acknowledgment of the divine goodness.* Ps. xxxiv. 1—4. We should be careful not to ascribe that to human agency, which is immediately the work of God.

2. *By unreserved devotedness to him,* Rom. xii. 1. Give up yourselves to his service, and glorify him with body and spirit, which are his, 1 Cor. vi. 20.

2. *By promoting his interests.* Let your time, your talents, your influence, be employed for God. Think of the mighty debt you owe ; your best returns are small. Present them through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. They can only be acceptable while you do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, and to the glory of the Father.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. *To those who love and fear God.* How blessed is your

state! you have a friend in need. The Lord is your God, call upon him.

2. *To those who are humbly seeking God.* Though this text does not immediately apply to you, take encouragement; Jesus says, "Come unto me," &c. Matt. xi. 28.

3. *To those who are living without God.* How awful your state! The blackness of darkness awaits you. What are your present sufferings, compared with that tribulation and wrath which you have treasured up; Rom. ii. 5. "Awake to righteousness, and sin not," 1 Cor. xv. 34.

KAPPA.

IX. THE GOOD MAN GRATEFUL FOR DELIVERANCES.

PSALM LXVI. 16.

"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

THE translators of the Bible have ascribed this psalm to David; but in an earlier English version it is found without any such denomination; nor does there appear to be any particular reason why it should be attributed to him. Some eminent modern critics suppose it to be a celebration of the deliverance of the Jewish people from their captivity in Babylon, and date it from the return of that people to Jerusalem. This opinion is probably correct, as no deliverance ever given to that nation, after its *first* and *great* deliverance from Egypt, was so likely to revive in them the recollection of that event, or by them to be compared with it. Animated by a consideration of the magnitude of this mercy, the psalmist calls on his countrymen to unite with him in praising God for *holding* or *preserving*, or, as the original word imports, putting their soul, as it were, into a *new life*, ver. 8, 9. With a view to excite in them the most lively feelings of the mercy vouchsafed to them, the pious author employs a strain of highly metaphorical language (see ver. 10—12,) when speaking of this great interposition of Jehovah. And that he might the more readily prevail on them

to join him in celebrating the praises of their deliverer, he invites all the godly to meet him, most probably in the temple, (now rebuilding,) and promises them an exposition of his own views and feelings on the occasion, ver. 13—16. Observe,

I. EVERY DELIVERANCE OF OUR LIFE OUGHT TO BE ATTRIBUTED TO GOD.

It may be necessary to remark, that the word rendered "soul," in the text, signifies our breath, or rather that life which results from the union of the soul and body. There is surely no one but will ascribe the original grant of his animal life to God. We have indeed heard of some who have attributed their being to chance, to fate, and to such like things; but we may well doubt whether that person ever yet existed, who did not ascribe his existence to an intelligent First Cause: for even those who talk most of fate, chance, &c., do, in fact, admit of such a cause. And having once admitted that our existence is derived from God, it will be difficult to deny, or even to doubt, whether or not its preservation should be ascribed to him. Unbelieving and worldly men usually trace their deliverances no higher than *second causes*: but we would ask such, 'Is there any thing unnatural in asserting, that so long as the Divine Being can consistently prolong our animal life, he is more concerned for its preservation than we can possibly be?' So much do we love life, and such is our concern to perpetuate it, that were we possessed of a sufficiency of foresight to discern, and of power to resist every assault made on it, we certainly should preserve it inviolate. Such perfection, however, belongs to God alone. Since, therefore, he is more concerned for its preservation than we are, and as he alone possesses the power to preserve it, is it not most reasonable, and an evident duty, to ascribe its preservation to him at all times? Nor is this doctrine in the least invalidated by the intervention of second causes, seeing all their fitness to produce these effects is entirely of God. And this doctrine receives the most ample support from the oracles of God. In them we find Joseph unhesitatingly ascribing the preservation of man's life to God; see Gen. xlv. 5; the psalmist ascribing the preservation of man and beast to him, Ps. xxxvi. 6; Job tracing up the preservation of his own life in particular to him, Job xxix. 2; and the author of this psalm giving him the glory of his own preservation and deliverance, as well as that of

his nation, in and from the captivity of Babylon; see verses 9, 16.

And if none but Jehovah can communicate animal life and preserve it in existence, certainly he only can put us in possession of the divine life, and preserve that life in us when given. Here the work immediately points to its Author. It is true, there are those who deny God's agency in the soul of man; but such would do well to consider man as the descendant of a fallen head. They ought also to consider the very limited influence of all human operations on such a creature, in reference to his salvation. We may "teach the young idea how to shoot;" we can with certainty give him the knowledge of scientific truth; we can also place before him a system of ethical truth. And perhaps we can do all this independent of the revelation of God; but certainly we cannot bless him with one solitary ray of evangelical truth, independent of that revelation. And now that truth is imparted, we can neither give eyes to see, nor ears to hear, nor a heart to feel and to repent. This is all of God, who teacheth men to profit, Isa. xlviii. 16, 17: who gives men repentance, Acts v. 31; and who gives them salvation from first to last by Christ, 1 Cor. i. 30. And as Jehovah alone can give this life, so he alone preserves it. This may be inferred from the directions given to us for our safety, Eph. vi. 10—13. It may also be inferred from the praise ascribed to him, Jude 24. As also from the prayers addressed to him, Eph. iii. 14—21; 1 Thess. v. 23; 1 Pet. v. 10, &c.

Since, therefore, it is God alone who can preserve our animal and divine life, not to give him the glory of our preservation, would be to give his glory to another. We observe therefore,

II. THAT EVERY DELIVERANCE FROM TEMPORAL, STILL MORE FROM SPIRITUAL TROUBLE AND DANGER, WILL SO AFFECT THE GOOD MAN'S MIND AS TO EXCITE HIS GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF IT.

The language of the whole psalm demonstrates the mind of the psalmist to have been deeply affected with the deliverance afforded to himself and his countrymen. No wonder that such events make a deep impression; for who is there that can think he has made so good a use of life as to merit its prolongation; and who among us does not see so many imperfections cleaving

to the best expressions of his piety, as to shrink down into nothing when he thinks of God's mercy and condescension to him? And the deeper the impression is, which such expressions of the Divine goodness make on us, the more strongly shall we be impelled to acknowledge them, ver. 13, 14. And the same feelings which prompt us to acknowledge the goodness of God at all, will urge us to do it in the most public and effectual manner: see ver. 5 and 16. Nor are there any consequences following such an acknowledgment, that can check or damp our ardour in making it; as, the more open it is, the greater scope will be given to our gratitude, and the greater the revenue of glory brought to God. Nor is there any reason which should cause us to prefer the making a declaration of his goodness in one place, or to one person, rather than another, except that of a greater prospect of doing good: and this should influence us. For observe,

III. THAT WHILE THE DEVOUT MAN WAS ANXIOUS TO STIR UP THE WHOLE NATION TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE DELIVERANCE GOD HAD GIVEN TO IT, HE WAS MOST DESIROUS TO ADDRESS HIMSELF TO THOSE WHO POSSESSED THE FEAR OF GOD. "Come and hear," &c.

But there is no evidence that he desired to *confine it wholly* to them. Nor did he prefer making it to these, thinking they would scrutinize it *less*, or that it contained nothing calculated to be of service to the ungodly. But as the wicked, for the most part, are unwilling to be persuaded to what is good, and therefore proportion the resistance which they make to all persuasion to the light and force which accompany it;—hence, if declaring to them what God hath done for us, is not casting pearls before swine, it is, to say the least, sowing seed by the *way-side*. On the contrary, all that fear God, because of the reverence they have for God's work, the pleasure they derive from a declaration of it, and the use they make of such declarations, ought to have his work made known to them; as hereby the more ignorant among them will be *instructed*, the doubting will be *established*, and the more confident and cheerful will be led to *triumph* in the God of their salvation. But although the man of God will be most desirous to declare the work of God in his soul, where he can do it to the greatest advantage; yet will he not despise neither leave unimproved any opportunity

that may present itself of doing this with any prospect of success, however small.

To conclude:—

1. What has God done for our souls?—any thing? Oh yes! he has given us a distinguished mode of being, and has often put us, as it were, into new life, after dreadful sicknesses, dangers, &c. He has also given to some of us a better, even a divine life, and has often renewed it to us.—Surely gratitude should actuate us.

2. But in what manner have these expressions of God's goodness affected us? Have we acknowledged them *openly, ingenuously* and *piously*? or have we in an ungrateful and cowardly manner kept silent for fear of man?

3. So far as any of us have walked *unworthy* of the divine goodness of God, in not having published it to others; and so far as we have trampled on this goodness, in neither having sought nor suffered ourselves to be put in possession of the divine life; so far ought we to be ashamed and abased before God, to pray to him, &c. And,

Lastly, It is our mercy that a due improvement of the present opportunity may yet lead to the most glorious results, as Jehovah will not turn away the prayer of the penitent, nor yet hide his mercy from him, ver. 20.

IOTA.

X. A CORRECT ESTIMATE OF HUMAN LIFE.

PSALM XC. 12.

“ So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

OF all the blessings which the adorable Author of our being has conferred upon man, there are few more important than that

inestimable boon which we denominate *time* ; because it is that on the continuance of which infinite wisdom has rendered every other good in some measure dependent. Yet, alas ! notwithstanding the vast importance of our fleeting moments, how few are there who attach to them a proper estimate, and improve them according to their value. This lamentable abuse of time appears to have been commensurate with the existence of moral pravity, for the apostle Paul, in two of his epistles, reminds the churches of the importance of “redeeming the time,” Eph. v. 16 ; Col. iv. 5. And the devout author of the psalm before us, evidently conscious of the proneness of man to neglect and abuse time, raises his pious ejaculation to heaven, and prays, “*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*” As the same disposition in the human heart is still in operation, let us endeavour to counteract its influence by considering,

I. THE MEANS OF ASCERTAINING A CORRECT ESTIMATE OF HUMAN LIFE.

II. THE PARTICULARS OF WHICH THIS ESTIMATE CONSISTS.

III. THE IMPORTANT EFFECT WHICH IT TENDS TO PRODUCE.

I. THE MEANS OF ASCERTAINING A CORRECT ESTIMATE OF HUMAN LIFE.

The pious psalmist was deeply sensible of his dependence upon God, and hence he “gave himself unto prayer.” Prayer was the means which he used ; and this powerful instrument is universally necessary, and universally applicable. This will appear if we proceed to notice,

1. *The natural indisposition of man to improve the fleeting moments of life.* This humbling and lamentable truth forces itself upon us, supported by all that weight of evidence which personal experience and daily observation regularly furnish. Multitudes of our unhappy fellow creatures are devoting their passing hours to purposes decidedly hostile to those for which time was originally designed ; whilst others, in some degree persuaded of the vast importance of time, are nevertheless deferring its proper occupation and use to some uncertain future period ; and thus year after year steals into eternity unimproved,

charged with an awful report to the throne of the final judge, Luke xii. 16—20; Acts xxiv. 25. Even the Christian, acting in some measure under the influence of that estimate of life which the volume of inspiration furnishes, has reason to mourn over many blanks and vacancies which occur on the pages of his history. Hence, all have need to pray, "So teach us to number our days," &c.

2. *The sovereignty of Jehovah over the human heart.* That omnipotent Being who is the sole object of prayer, has the entire control of man; for he reigneth in the armies above, and on the earth beneath. He can instruct the most ignorant mind; subdue the most turbulent passions; and conquer the most obdurate heart. By a thousand means, unknown to erring man, he can effectually impress a true estimate of time upon the human mind. The boisterous winds—the tumultuous ocean—and the hearts of the children of men, are equally subject to his almighty dominion, 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 12, 17—19.

3. *The direct appointment of infinite wisdom.* "The Father of lights," from whom proceedeth "every good gift," has in his infinitude of wisdom appointed and sanctioned prayer as the medium between heaven and earth; and whatever blessings we may need at the hands of our beneficent Creator, we are taught to expect them only through the lively exercise of fervent prayer. This momentous truth is supported by the testimony of the sacred Scriptures, and by the experience of the truly pious in every age of the church, Ezek xxxvi. 37; Matt. vii. 7, 8; James i. 5, 6, iv. 2, 3.

4. *The tried efficacy of prayer.* If prayer were an untried experiment, then we might entertain some doubts respecting its influence, and should have a plausible reason for hesitancy in resorting to it; but doubt is precluded, and hesitation superseded by that overpowering strength of evidence with which the efficacy of prayer is supported. Myriads of witnesses of its power encircle the throne of Jehovah in the regions of immortality; and myriads more, still on earth, are daily feasting on the bounty of their God, through this admirable medium of divine intercourse. But we need not ascend up to heaven for evidence in support of this truth; nor need we wander to distant parts of the earth to collect convincing proofs: our re-

searches need not exceed the limits of the present congregation ; here doubtless we have many witnesses that

‘ Prayer ardent opens heaven, let down a stream
Of glory on the consecrated hour
Of man in audience with the Deity.’

Exod. xxxiii. 18—23, xxxiv. 5—7 ; James v. 16—18.

II. THE PARTICULARS OF WHICH THIS ESTIMATE CONSISTS. By “ numbering our days ” we are not to understand the psalmist to mean that it is the duty of man to ascertain the period of his mortal existence ; this is one of those “ secret things which (exclusively) belong to the Lord.” That estimate of human life referred to in our text doubtless includes a correct idea of its importance, together with a conscientious improvement of its parts. In thus “ numbering our days,” it will be necessary to consider,

1. *The smallness of their number.* The life of man is circumscribed in its limit ; and though we may mark its progress by certain periods, and thus divide it into small portions, yet, generally, threescore years and ten will terminate our mortal story, and consign the most athletic to the “ house appointed for all living.” This is a very narrow limit, compared with its antediluvian extent, and with the important work which ought to be effected, viz. the gloom of ignorance dispelled—the oppressive load of guilt removed—and the deep-fixed stain of moral pollution washed away, Ps xxxix 5 ; James iv. 14.

2. *The rapidity of their flight.* Human life is not only limited in its duration, but also fleeting in its progress. The several portions of which it is composed steal away in rapid succession ; and all the boasted power and wisdom of man are insufficient either to impede their progress, or to recal them when they have passed away. The Holy Ghost has made choice of the most fleeting objects in nature, in order to impress the human mind with a correct idea of the rapid course of time, and excite the sons of Adam to the proper occupation and improvement of their fleeting moments, Job vii. 6 ; ix. 25 ; Ps. xc. 10.

3. *The uncertainty of their continuance.* Although man is capable of understanding an extensive variety of interesting subjects, yet the termination of his mortal existence is a point

which he can never expect to ascertain, This solemn period infinite wisdom has concealed from the most prying curiosity. This is one of those prerogatives which Jehovah has exclusively reserved to himself. The mouldering moss-grown annals of the dead in our grave yards, together with the daily occurrence of human mortality, sufficiently establish this humbling truth, Job xxi. 21, 23—25; Luke xii. 19, 20.

4. *Their influence on our eternal destiny.* The present state of man is probationary in its nature, and decisive in its influence upon his eternal condition. It is in time that the character is formed for eternity. Earth alone is the scene of operation for that mercy which is exercised through the amazing provisions of the gospel of Christ, and which is of essential importance as a preparation for participating the felicities of the heavenly world. The unhappy being who, "driven away in his wickedness," quits the stage of life without this gospel meetness for the skies, has

'No patron! intercessor none! Now past
The sweet, the clement, mediatorial hour!
For guilt no plea! to pain no pause! no bound!
Inexorable all! and all extreme!'

Dan. xii. 2, 3; Matt. xxv. 31—46; 2 Thess. i. 7—10.

III. THE IMPORTANT EFFECT WHICH IT TENDS TO PRODUCE;—"That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." "Wisdom" is a term very frequently used, and variously applied in the sacred Scriptures; viz, to mechanical genius, Exod. xxxi. 2, 3; general literature, Acts vii. 22;—natural instinct, Job. xxix. 17,—that prudence which enables a man to discern what is proper to be done, Eccles. x. 10;—and to true religion, Psalm cxi. 10; James iii. 17. To the last two ideas or senses alone our text seems to direct our attention. 1. The term "wisdom" sometimes describes that prudence which enables a man to discern and perform those actions which accord with the fitness of things. If the days of man be so few, so fleeting, so uncertain, and so momentous, it certainly is highly proper to seize the passing moments as they fly, and conscientiously devote them to those purposes which will produce the greatest possible benefit. Preserving them with a miser's care, from being associated with unprofitable, unnecessary, and (much less with) ungodly actions. It is the distinguished prerogative of man,

————— ‘To raise
A royal tribute from the poorest hours;
Immense revenue every moment pays.’

Much time may be saved by guarding against unnecessary sleep—useless commixion with ungodly men—unprofitable reading—and, in short, every exercise and pursuit which cannot be engaged in to the “glory of God,” 1 Cor. x. 31. The advice of an eminent divine of the last century on this point, is worthy of being engraven upon our hearts: “Never be unemployed a moment. Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time.” 2. “Wisdom” is sometimes applied to true religion. The application of the heart to this, is the great end of life; and no man has his heart properly influenced with the shortness, uncertainty, and importance of time, who does not make this the grand business of his life. It is very possible to apply the *head* without having the *heart* influenced. The man, who under the influence of a proper estimate of time, is the subject of this important application, has experienced a general renovation of his moral nature; he is “renewed in the spirit of his mind;” he experiences a lively union with God through faith in Jesus Christ; and he is solicitous to “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, and be filled with all the fulness of God.” Influenced by a spiritual principle, he is the subject of a spiritual enjoyment, and gives proof of the whole by holiness of practice, Gal. v. 22—25.

This subject tends,

1. To detach our affections from earthly objects.
2. To excite us to diligence in our Christian calling.
3. To alarm the trifler, and awaken in him a lively sensibility of his awful condition.

OMICRON.

XL. PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD RECOMMENDED.

PSALM cxxii. 6.

“ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”

GENUINE piety, under every dispensation of grace, has uniformly been characterized by a fervent attachment to the church of God, and a corresponding solicitude for its prosperity. And this pious zeal has generally presented an interesting variety in its operation; the heaving sigh; the streaming tear, Psalm cxix. 136; Jer. ix. 1; the solemn appeal, Psalm cxxxvii. 6, 7; and the importunate pleadings of intercession, have usually been associated with the more active and laborious exercises of holy affection. And not unfrequently this pious solicitude has assumed the powerful language of earnest entreaty; and thus endeavoured to stimulate the energies of those who were less alive to the interests of Zion: hence in the Scripture before us the pious psalmist exhorted the men of his generation to fervent prayer in behalf of the Jewish church. If the devoted author of our text, in the dim twilight of an inferior dispensation, was so zealously concerned to promote the interests of Zion, surely we, upon whom the “ Sun of Righteousness (has arisen) with healing in his wings,” ought to be doubly alive to the important interests of our vastly superior economy. In order to promote this desirable object let us proceed,

I. TO DISCUSS THE DUTY HERE INCULCATED.

II. ASSIGN A FEW REASONS FOR ITS PROMPT PERFORMANCE.

I. IN DISCUSSING THE DUTY HERE INCULCATED, we shall have to notice—*the pious exercise enjoined—the subject to which it is directed, and the interesting object which it proposes.*

1. *The pious exercise which is enjoined.* A more interesting exercise than the one here recommended cannot be addressed to the attention of man. Prayer is the intercourse which man holds with his Maker, the converse of a worm with his God; and may be considered divine in its institution, Ezek. xxxvi.

37; Matt. vii. 7, 8; universal in its adaptation; suited to all the widely varying situations, circumstances, conditions, and necessities of the great family of man, Psalm xxxiv. 4, 5, 6; Dan. vi. 10; Mark x. 47; efficacious in its operation, 2 Kings xx. 2—6; James v. 16—18. The kind of prayer enjoined in our text has sometimes been denominated intercession; and its practice is supported by the examples of antiquity, Gen. xviii. 23—32; Exod. xxxii. 10—14, 31—33; the express appointment of Jehovah, Job xlii. 7, 8; and the success with which it has been crowned, 1 Kings xvii. 21—23; 2 Kings iv. 33—35.

2. *The subject to which it is directed*;—"Jerusalem." Jerusalem is a term which was originally and literally used to designate the metropolis of Judea, long the seat of government for the nation of Israel. This city was peculiarly favoured of God, being the residence of his glory, 1 Kings vi. 13; Psalm xlvi. 1—the depositary of his testimonies, 1 Kings viii. 4—9; and the distinguished scene of Jewish festivals, Luke ii. 41; John vii. 2—14. The term Jerusalem has not only a literal but a figurative acceptance, and is thus impressed into the service of Christianity. Hence the apostle Paul designates the church of Christ by this term, Gal. iv. 26; Heb. xii. 22; and the faithful and true Witness himself has used it in a similar manner, Rev. iii. 12. Therefore the exhortation in our text may very properly be applied to the Christian church.

3. *The interesting object which is proposed*;—"Peace." This refers to *external quiet*. Notwithstanding the character of the church of Christ is of such transcendent excellence, that it ought to elicit the approving testimony of every beholder, yet, alas! such is the depravity of the human heart, that opposition, violence, and blood have marked its progress, and deeply stained the pages of its history: "Kings and rulers have taken counsel against the Lord, and against his anointed;" and satanical malevolence has exerted all its influence in order to augment and diversify the sufferings of the magnanimous followers of the Redeemer. As the personal happiness of the Christian, and the general prosperity of the cause of God, are involved in a freedom from persecution, it is the duty of every friend of Christian truth, to pray for the external quiet of the church, Matt. x. 16—40. *Internal union*. A diversity of principles,

constitutional, educational, and habitual, conspire to impede that union which ought to characterize the church of Christ; hence lamentable divisions present themselves on the pages of its history. Against these the zealous Christian prays, watches, and labours, knowing that discord in the church is the triumph of devils, but the affliction of saints; by which the Holy Spirit is grieved, ministerial efforts enervated, and the progress of divine truth in the earth retarded, John xiii. 34, 35; 1 John iii. 14. *General happiness.* This is an idea which we are accustomed to associate with peace, and one which, in reference to the Christian church, is supported by facts of daily occurrence; the favour of God is enjoyed, personal holiness is promoted, numerous trials are averted, and the felicity of heaven is anticipated, Acts ix. 31. *Increasing prosperity.* This is usually the pleasing result of public tranquillity, and implies the illumination and conversion of the ungodly, the arousing the lukewarm from their supine state, the reclaiming of the wandering backslider from the path of error, and general extension of the boundaries of Immanuel's kingdom, Ps. cxviii. 25; Heb. iii. 2.

II. ASSIGN A FEW REASONS FOR THE PROMPT PERFORMANCE OF THIS DUTY. Reasons in support of this highly important duty may be deduced from principles of *gratitude, obligation, consistency of character, and personal interest.*

1. *Of gratitude.* All the enjoyments of the Christian flow through the channel of mercy; the exalted character of these enjoyments, together with the freeness of their communication, suggest the propriety of some grateful return being attempted. The glory of God is connected with the prosperity of his church: therefore to promote this prosperity, is (at least) to attempt some feeble return for the inestimable favours which have been received, Ps. cxvi. 12, 13, 17—19.

2. *Of obligation.* The omnipotent Creator of the universe is no dependent upon feeble erring mortals for the accomplishment of his purposes in the earth; but he has condescended to use human agency for the execution of the grand designs of mercy in the gospel of his Son. This divine appointment renders it our duty as ministers, as minor officers in the Christian church, and as private members of religious society, to labour, by prayers and pious exertion, to accomplish those objects for

which we are the duly authorized agents ; and we cannot neglect them without being unfaithful to that trust which is reposed in us, 1 Cor. i. 26—30.

3. *Of consistency of character.* As Christians, we profess to love God, to be united to Christ, the “living vine,” to be concerned for the salvation of man, and zealous for the universal diffusion of the gospel of the Redeemer. To maintain consistency in these professions, we must “pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Jam. ii. 14—20 ; 1 John iii. 16—18.

4. *Of personal interest.* Infinite wisdom has inseparably associated the duty of man with his privilege. Our own peace is involved in the harmony and tranquillity of the Christian church ; therefore to promote the one, is to advance the other. Prayer, whether offered up for ourselves, for our fellow-creatures, or in behalf of the cause of God, tends to increase our faith, strengthen our union with Christ, and augment our personal felicity ; this is strikingly evident from the latter part of the verse before us.

This subject,

1. Stimulates to examination with regard to the past ; and,
2. Excites to diligence in reference to the future.

OMICRON.

XII. LOVE TO THE CHURCH OF GOD.

PSALM CXXii. 6.

“ They shall prosper that love thee.”

THE gospel of Jesus Christ, with its amazing amplitude of provision, is unquestionably the offspring of Divine mercy. Yet such is the wonderful condescension of Jehovah, and such his regard to man, that he has uniformly associated the ideas of

reward and punishment with his overtures of mercy; and our moral obligations are very frequently enforced by a reference to their bearing upon our personal interests. In the psalm before us, the author urges the duty of fervent attachment to the church of God, by asserting the advantage which infinite wisdom has connected with this pious disposition. In this portion of Scripture our attention is directed to,

I. THE SPECIFIED OBJECT OF PIOUS AFFECTION.

II. THE DISTINGUISHING EVIDENCES OF ITS EXISTENCE.

III. THE DECLARED ADVANTAGE RESULTING FROM IT.

I. THE SPECIFIED OBJECT OF PIOUS AFFECTION. The preceding part of this verse distinctly specifies the object of pious affection to be the church of God. Here we include the whole body of believers, united under Christ their common head, together with the ministers, officers, laws, regulations, immunities, and designs of the Messiah's kingdom, Ephes. iv. 11—16. This holy attachment is founded on the most reasonable basis.

1. *Uniformity of character.* The learned Dante has somewhere said, 'Conformity of character is the bond of friendship.' Whatever may be thought of this maxim in its general application to human nature, it certainly is strictly true when applied to the Christian, in reference to his affectionate attachment to the cause of truth. The church of God is holy in its constitution—progressive in its prosperity—and extensive in its benevolent designs. This is all in exact accordance with the general cast of the Christian's character; he is "renewed in the spirit of his mind"—holiness is the constant object of his emulation—and the promotion of human happiness is the distinguished object of his ardent desire, Acts ii. 42—47.

2. *The exhibition of the divine perfections.* The church of Christ presents to our view a luminous display of the attributes of Jehovah; his wisdom in its origin, organization, and means of extension, Rom. xi. 32, 33; 1 Cor. i. 20—29; his power in its formation, defence, and amazing prosperity, 2 Cor. iii. 5; iv. 7; Rom. i. 16, 17; his goodness and mercy in its privileges and beneficent effects, Acts iv. 32—35; and his faithfulness and truth in his unwearied care over it, Isa. xl. 11; xliii. 1—7.

3. *The invulnerable security of the church.* "No weapon formed against it shall prosper," for the "Lord God omnipotent is King of Zion." He will preserve it from the effect of Satanic

malevolence, Matt. xvi. 18; and from the combined energies of all its enemies, Ps. ii. 1—4; Isa. xl. 25, 26.

4. *Its encresing prosperity and final glory.* Notwithstanding the opposing cavils of scepticism, and the bewildering sophisms of infidelity, together with the various grosser operations of human pravity, the church of Jesus Christ steadily continues its course of prosperity; and its final glory will infinitely transcend the most ardent wishes, and enlarged anticipations of its warmest friends, Ps. xxii. 27—31; Isa. lx. 15—22, lxvi. 10—13, 22; Rev. xxi. 10—27.

II. THE DISTINGUISHING EVIDENCES OF ITS EXISTENCE. Wherever a warm affection to any object is experienced, there generally are manifestations and evidences of a corresponding character displayed. So in reference to the Christian church.

1. *Sorrow in the time of calamity* bears testimony of the sincere affection of the friends of Zion. Various calamitous periods have occurred in the history of the Christian church; persecution from her enemies—divisions among her members—the supineness of professed friends—and the treachery of hypocritical adherents, have been so many prolific sources of calamity and distress, Ps. cxix. 136; Jer. ix. 1; Lam. i. 2, 16; Phil. iii. 18.

2. *Pious exultation in the day of prosperity.* When the breaches in the church are repaired—her wounds healed—her enemies confounded—her interests extended—and her children multiplied, the righteous rejoice, and are glad; and thus they evince their love to God, and their zeal for his glory, Isa. li. 3; lii. 9, 10; Acts xi. 18—23.

3. *Zealous effort to promote the interests of the church.* Those who are sincerely attached to the church of God, are not satisfied with weeping over her calamities, and exulting in her prosperity, but they also labour to extend her boundaries in the earth, by the diffusion of gospel light—the administration of affectionate reproof—the repetition of earnest entreaty—the breathing of fervent intercession—and the communication of pecuniary assistance, supported by a due consistency of character. These are so many additional proofs of pious affection, Jer. xxvi. 12, 15; 1 Cor. ix. 19—23; Exod. xxxvi. 4—7; Neh. iv. 15—23.

III. THE DECLARED ADVANTAGE RESULTING FROM IT;—

“They shall prosper.” This interesting assertion requires *qualifying* and *explaining*.

1. *Qualification*. By this prosperity we certainly are not to understand the accumulation of wealth, the acquisition of worldly honour, nor the proud possession of titled splendour. Nor yet does it imply an exemption from the common physical evils of life, nor a freedom from those trials, temptations, and various painful exercises which are inseparably associated with our present probationary state, Psalm xxxiv. 19; 2 Cor. xi. 23—27; Heb. xi. 36—40.

2. *Explanation*. “They shall prosper” in their reputation. Their ardency of affection—their deep humility—their unwearied patience—their unbending integrity—and the general consistency of their character, procure for them the esteem of all who are like-minded, and very frequently even the approbation and confidence of unconverted men, Acts xxvi. 28; xxvii. 43. In their spiritual enjoyments: their capacities are enlarged—their faith increased—their union with Christ strengthened—and their anticipations of heavenly felicity multiplied, 1 Tim. vi. 6—8. In their benevolent enterprises: their children and households instructed and regenerated—the harmony of the church promoted—the progress of impiety and profaneness impeded—and their ungodly neighbours and friends converted from the error of their ways, Psalm i. 3. In their temporal pursuits: although the religion of Jesus Christ does not warrant the expectation of opulence and grandeur, yet it secures to its adherents a regular supply of necessary things, Ps. xxxvii. 25; Luke xii. 31.

This subject teaches,

1. That our professions of religion are of a very suspicious character, if unaccompanied with a corresponding zeal for the cause of God.

2. The folly of lukewarmness in matters of a religious nature, Rev. iii. 16.

3. That genuine piety tends to promote the general welfare of its possessor, 1 Tim. iv. 8.

OMICRON.

XIII. A SKETCH FOR CHRIST'S NATIVITY.

ISAIAH ix. 6.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace.”

OUR text is an ancient prediction of Christ's nativity, and a comprehensive outline of his glorious character, both in his humanity and in his divinity. After the lapse of many years, this prophecy was accomplished at Bethlehem in Judea. There the Messiah appeared as a child, and as the mighty God; for while he was laid in a manger, angels came down from heaven to adore him, Heb. i. 6. Let us join the Christian church in a cheerful and pious commemoration of that astonishing event; let us, on this glad day, call to mind the condescension of our blessed Saviour, and examine, with modesty and humility, his character and designs. This fine passage of Scripture will furnish our thoughts with rich materials: let us consider it in the order it stands before us.

I. UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN.

1. The prophet had an eye to the child Jesus, whose birth, in many points of view, *was an exact accomplishment of ancient prophecy*. It had been foretold that he should be born of a virgin, and he was born of the virgin Mary, Isa. vii. 14; Matt. i. 22, 23; that he should come forth out of Bethlehem, and there he was born, Mic. v. 2; Matt. ii. 1; that he should appear in low and mean circumstances, or “as a root out of dry ground,” and he was born in a stable, because there was no room for Joseph and Mary in the inn, Isa. liii. 2; Luke ii. 7.

2. *Remarkable circumstances attended his birth*. He was made known by an angel, to poor shepherds, who were watching their flocks by night, Luke ii. 11;—his birth was celebrated by a song of angels, chap. ii. 13, 14;—and the world, when the Prince of Peace came into it, was in a peaceful, tranquil state.

3. But the most important consideration is, *he was born*

unto us, and for our salvation ; for though this was spoken by a Jewish prophet, to the Jewish nation, yet we are assured, that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed, Gen. xii. 3. “ He took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham,” Heb. ii. 16. Good angels did not need his mediation, and bad ones were not allowed to share the benefits of his redeeming love ; but he became man, that he might redeem and save sinners of the human race, 1 Tim. i. 15.

II. UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN.

1. *Our blessed Saviour was the Son of God.* He is called the Son of God in reference to his miraculous conception in the womb of Mary, Luke i. 35 ; he was the Son of God by commission, being sent of God, John x. 36,—he was declared to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead, Rom. i. 4 ;—and he is the only begotten Son of God in his divine nature, John iii. 16 ; Heb. i. 1—3.

2. *Unto us this Son was given ;* and he was the greatest gift that heaven could bestow on man, Rom. viii. 32. He was given to enlighten the world, John viii. 12 ;—to be a propitiation for sin, 1 John ii. 2 ;—to make reconciliation for iniquity, Dan. ix. 24 ;—to save the world, John iii. 17 ;—and to bring many sons unto glory, Heb. ii. 10.

III. THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER.

1. This does not refer to the *political government* of the Jews. In their depraved state, they expected worldly grandeur, and in their pride and vanity, they desired a great temporal king ; but the kingdom of Jesus, which had been foretold by the prophets, was not of this world, John xviii. 36.

2. *The spiritual government* of the church, in all its vast and weighty concerns, was laid upon his shoulder ; he is the head of the church, Eph. iv. 15 ; Col. i. 18 : and his faithful followers dare not acknowledge any other Lord or master, Matt. xxiii. 8.

3. He is *able to bear the weight of government*, having all power both in heaven and in earth, Matt. xxviii. 18 ; he is sufficiently wise to manage and direct all the affairs of this spiritual kingdom, for in him are hid “ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” Col. ii. 3 ; and he now rules, and ever will rule, in righteousness, Heb. i. 8.

IV. AND HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED WONDERFUL.

1. *He shall be what his names import.* The Hebrews gave

names which expressed the qualities of things, and the characters and offices of persons. Thus Jesus was called "Immanuel, which being interpreted, is, God with us;" and for this plain reason, he was God with men, Matt. i. 21.

2. He was *wonderful* in his *person*: a child born, and yet the mighty God; the offspring of David as a man, and the root of David as God, Rev. xxii. 16; the son of David in his human nature, but the Lord in the divine nature, Matt. xxii. 45. He was wonderful in his love, 1 John iii. 16; and wonderful in all his undertakings, Who can comprehend his nature? Who can fully understand his great and merciful designs? Why do we ask after his name, and attempt to pry into inconceivable mysteries? Gen. xxxii. 9; Judges xiii. 18. Oh let us stand, and wonder, and adore!

V. COUNSELLOR.

1. *A revealer of secrets.* He revealed the gospel which is called the counsel of God, Acts xx. 27; the hidden wisdom, 1 Cor. ii. 7; but is now made manifest to all nations for the obedience of faith, Rom. xvi. 26; "even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to his saints," Col. i. 26. He is called the **WORD OF GOD**, because God speaks by him to the sons of men, Heb. i. 1.

2. *One who gives counsel,* Rev. iii. 18. Jesus gave counsel to men in the days of his flesh; and he now gives counsel by his Holy Spirit, by his written word, and by his faithful ministers. His counsel is *safe*; may be had on *easy terms*; James i. 5; and, if followed, will guide us to glory, Ps. lxxiii. 24.

VI. THE MIGHTY GOD.

1. The *titles* of God are given to Jesus. He is called God, John i. 1; the great God, Tit ii. 13; the true God, 1 John v. 20; and Lord, or Jehovah, Isa. xl. 3.

2. The *attributes* of God are ascribed to him. Eternity, Micah v. 2; omnipotence, Rev. i. 8; omnipresence, Matt. xviii. 20; and immortality, Heb. xiii. 8.

3. He *created* all things. The visible world, John i. 3; the invisible world, including thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, Col. i. 16.

4. Divine *worship* has been paid to him: by angels at his birth, Heb. i. 6; by Stephen, the first martyr, Acts vii. 59; by

baptizing in his name, Matt xxviii. 19; and by heavenly hosts, Rev. v. 13.

VII. THE EVERLASTING FATHER.

1. This clause in the *Septuagint*, is, *the Father of the age, or world to come*; and in allusion to this, the gospel dispensation, under the reign of the Messiah, is called *the world to come*, Heb. ii. 5.

2. Jesus is a *Father to his people*. As a father, he *loves* them, *protects* them, and *supplies* their wants, He is the author of salvation to all who obey him, Heb. v. 9; he was the founder of the new and eternal age; he is the Father of a new race, the head of a new family which will never be extinct; and all believers are his seed, or children, Isa. liii. 10; for by his obedience to the law, the atonement which he made, and the influences of his Holy Spirit, they are brought into life, and into a new state, Gal. ii. 20.

3. And he will be the *everlasting* Father of his people. Earthly fathers die; but Jesus says, "I am alive for evermore," Rev. i. 18; and he will be as a Father to them, and they will be as sons and daughters to him in the eternal world, Rev. xxi. 7.

VIII. THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

1. Our Lord is a PRINCE. He is the Prince of the kings of the earth, surpassing them in all that is great and excellent, Rev. i. 5; and by him "kings reign, and princes decree justice," Prov. viii. 15. He is the Prince of life, or the author of all life, whether temporal, spiritual, or eternal, Acts iii. 15; for he created us at first, is the Author of our new creation, and conducts us safely to eternal life, Eph. iii. 9; ii. 10; John x. 27, 28.

2. But here he is called the "PRINCE of *peace*." By him all who believe have peace with God, Isa. xii. 1; Rom. v. 1; he plants peaceable dispositions in the hearts of his subjects, James iii. 17; his government promotes peace in the world, Heb. xii. 14; and when the nations of the earth bow down to him, and acknowledge him as their Sovereign, they shall learn war no more, Isa. ii. 4.

INFERENCES.

1. Admire and adore the Saviour of the world; and instead

of prying into the profound mysteries of his nature, bow the knee to him, and pay him homage, Ps. ii. 12; Phil. ii. 10.

2. Trust in him with an unshaken confidence for pardon, peace, holiness, and heaven, Matt. xii. 21.

3. Look to him in all difficulties and dangers for counsel and support; and ever give him the glory that is due to his holy name, Isa. xliii. 2, 3; John v. 23.

4. Honour him, especially on this festival, by temperance and sobriety, by praise and thanksgiving, and by acts of charity to his suffering saints, Gal. vi, 10.

5. And lastly, commit to his care your bodies and souls, your families and friends, and all your affairs; that he may have you and yours in his holy keeping against that day, when he will "judge the world with righteousness, and the people with equity," Ps. xcvi. 9.

SIGMA.

XIV GLORYING IN THE LORD.

ISA. xlv. 24, 25.

"Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength; even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

CONCERNING the scriptures of the Old Testament, as well as those of the New, it may be said that, "Holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And as all scripture is from the same Author, so both the Old and the New Testament were evidently given with the same intent—to shew the weakness and the unworthiness of man, and the kindness and love of God, and his willingness to help his needy creatures. The humble Christian, therefore, is authorized to gather encouragement, not only from that part of divine revelation which speaks of Jesus as "*having suffered* for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God," but also from that in which the prophets,

through the Spirit that was in them, "*testified beforehand* the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." And it is matter of thankfulness, that even from the gospel of the Old Testament we may derive an answer to the interesting inquiry, "How can a man be just with God?" for (not to mention other passages) our text declares, "Surely, shall one say," &c., and thus directs us at once to the believer's source of salvation and happiness, and his humble and becoming acknowledgment,

I. THE BELIEVER'S SOURCE OF SALVATION, &c.;—"In the Lord have I righteousness," &c. This text contemplates man as *sinful*, i. e. *polluted*, *weak*, and *guilty*; accordingly it describes the Lord as being,

1. *The source of his "righteousness."* The word "righteousness" sometimes refers to an *inward principle* of uprightness, or rectitude; at others, to the *practice* which results therefrom. Both the principle and practice originate in the grace of God. In reference to *the principle*, David seems to speak of "sacrifices of righteousness," compare Ps. iv. 5, with xvii. 1. So Solomon tells us that "the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way," Prov. xi. 5. See also ver. 8, and 23 of the chapter in which our text is found. Here survey the case of a sinner naturally *dark*, (Eph. iv. 18.) *dead*, (Eph. ii. 1.) and *careless*, (Deut. xxxii. 29.) but who has been *enlightened* to see the turpitude of sin, the beauty of holiness, &c. 2 Cor. iv. 6. Eph. v. 8;—*quickened* to feel desires after excellence, Eph. ii. 4, 5; *prompted* to seek "a clean heart, and a right spirit," Ps. li. 10; to "hunger and thirst after *righteousness*," Rom viii. 26; and, finally, *receiving* the blessings he seeks, Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26. And we perceive that in every stage of the process, "salvation is of the LORD," who "worketh in us to *will* and to *do*." This view of the subject is supported by our Saviour's representation, John xv. 1—6,—"I am the vine," &c. In this vital union with "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS," (Jer. xxxiii. 16.) "the new man is after God created in righteousness and true holiness," Eph. iv. 24. And hence, the fountain being purified by the grace of God, he is to be regarded as the author of all the purity which the streams possess. As his operation makes the tree good, "the fruits of" *practical "righteousness"* which are produced, are "by Christ Jesus to the glory and praise of God," Phil. i. 11. Agreeably to this, the prophet confesses, "Thou

hast wrought all our works in us," Isa. xxvi. 12. In this language the believer addresses the Lord as being also,

2. *The source of his "strength."* There is a wide difference between *perceiving* what is right, or even *desiring* to act aright, and actually *performing* the will of God. And man, with all his fancied and boasted mightiness of power, is, when brought into contact with spiritual realities, a poor 'feeble thing of nought,' unable to perform the duties, sustain the burdens, or conflict with the foes, which he has to encounter. But "in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength;" and he imparts the energy by which we *do* his will, Phil. iv. 13; the fortitude by which we suffer his will, Rom. v. 3—5; and the persevering and unconquerable firmness with which we sustain the attacks of our enemies, Rom. viii. 37. On these accounts we are exhorted to trust in him, Isa. xxvi. 1—4. The exhortation is supported by *promises* of strength, suited to our feebleness, ch. xl. 29: and proportionate to our exigencies, Deut. xxxiii. 25. Isa. xli. 10; and these promises are verified by the experience of the faithful; 2 Sam. xxii. 40; 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. Thus the believer is "strengthened with might by *his* spirit," who is moreover,

3. *The source of his justification*;—"In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be *justified*." If by justification we were to understand a proof of personal and perfect innocence, then the thing would be impossible; "for all have sinned," &c. Rom. iii. 23. But in the New Testament view of the case, those are said to be justified whose iniquities are *forgiven*, and whose sins are *covered*, Rom. iv. 2—7. In this sense, therefore, justification is that state which results from forgiveness or pardon of sin. And of this also "the LORD" must have the "glory;" inasmuch as he, against whom our transgressions have been committed, and who only has the power to forgive our offences, has provided the means of pardon, Isa. liii. 6; Rom. iii. 25. He propounds the *terms of pardon*, John iii. 16; Rom. iii. 26. He bestows that grace by which we obtain pardon, Eph. ii. 8; Col. ii. 12. He grants the pardon desired, Rom. iii. 24; viii. 33; Col. iii. 13. He blesses with a sense of pardon, Gal. iv. 4—6. And, finally, he will *attest* their pardon, in a public justification of his servants at the last day, Rom. ii. 4—10. Then shall he even pronounce them innocent of evil actions, and of evil motives, which may have been laid to their charge by wicked men, or by

the "accuser of the brethren;" and before assembled worlds shall justify both their principles and their practice, Matt. xxv. 34—40. Thus our text seems to express, in general, that the LORD shall support the pious, and vindicate them and their "righteous cause" against all opposition, ver. 21, 22. Whence,

II. THE BELIEVER'S HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT;—"Surely, shall one say, *In the LORD* have I righteousness," &c. This is the language of *humble confession*; of weakness and inability. "*In the Lord*," &c., 'of righteousness, strength, &c. the source is not in myself. I cannot renew myself, Job xiv. 4; cannot atone for myself, Rom. iii. 19, 20; cannot defend myself,' Eph. vi. 10—13. "All my springs are in thee." Our text may refer to the *past* and the *present*; and then this is the language of *humble gratitude*:—of gratitude which should rise and prevail in proportion to the value of the pardon, renovation, support, deliverance, happiness experienced. Or the text may respect the *future*; and then, by way of anticipation, this is the language of *humble confidence*: 'My enemies are powerful, and my weakness cannot withstand; but in him I have strength, 2 Cor. i. 10; temptations threaten; but he is faithful, 1 Cor. x. 13; 2 Pet. ii. 9; and although my nature is inclined to the wrong, yet he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and shall perfect what he has begun.' *This is also the language of humble but exulting triumph*, and exhibits the high privileges of the Lord's redeemed, Isa. li. 9—11. "In the Lord shall the seed of Israel glory," as the author of their salvation, the centre of their felicity, through *life*, Rom. viii. 35—39; in *death*, Ps. xxiii. 4; 1 Cor. xv. 55; in *judgment*, Rom. ii. 7—10; 2 Thess. i. 10; and *for ever*, Prov. iii. 35; Rev. i. 5, 6; iv. 11; v. 12. *This language is rendered the more striking by contrast*. "All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed; shall be confounded at their stupid infidelity, their rancorous opposition and blasphemy, their presumptuous rejection of the methods appointed by Infinite Wisdom for the recovery and happiness of man. On account of their cause and their company, their folly, their wickedness, and their irreparable disgrace and ruin, "shame shall be the promotion of fools."

The text also furnishes the natural and obvious IMPROVEMENT of the subject.

1. "To him *shall* men come." We *must* all stand before his judgment-seat, Rom. xiv. 10—12. The wicked shall there tremble with horror, and dismay, and confusion, Dan xii. 2; Rev. vi. 16. Wherefore,

2. To him *should* men come, in the way of humble prayer, of suitable application for mercy, while mercy may be found. Mark the *necessity* of the case, Acts iv. 12; and the *encouragement* afforded, Isa. xxvii. 13. Matt. xi. 28; "He will in no wise cast out;" &c. "Behold, now is the accepted time." &c.; for "the Spirit and the Bride say Come," &c.

ZETA.

XV. GOD'S CONDESCENSION IN DWELLING WITH MEN.

ISAIAH lvii. 15.

"For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and lofty place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the the heart of the contrite ones."

It was asked by Solomon, when desirous to express his admiration of the circumstance, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth?" This is a question of great interest to man, whose happiness or misery hangs entirely upon it. The works of nature seem to say, their Maker is too great in majesty to do this, Ps. viii. 3, 4. Some parts of revelation apparently carry the impossibility of such condescension still farther. Thus, how can the *high* and *lofty* One stoop *so low*? How can he who inhabits eternity connect himself with a creature of a moment? How can he whose *name is Holy*, and who dwells in the *high* and *holy place*, make abode with *polluted man*? The more we reflect on the greatness of these contrarieties, the greater does the impossibility of his dwelling with man appear to be. And yet there are some scriptures, among which the text holds a

conspicuous place, which bring to men's ears and hearts the interesting intelligence that Jehovah *can* and *will* make their hearts his residence. These words contain,

I. THIS CHEERING DECLARATION, THAT JEHOVAH WILL DWELL WITH CONTRITE AND HUMBLE SOULS.

II. AN EXPOSITION OF HIS GRACIOUS PURPOSE IN MAKING THEM HIS RESIDENCE.

1. *The cheering declaration, that Jehovah will dwell with contrite and humble souls.* The word *dwell* means to continue or remain in any place *perpetually*, in opposition to one's passing through it without halting; or to our *sojourning* in it, which signifies a short stay; or to our *abiding* in it, which means a somewhat longer continuance. To dwell, therefore, in any place, necessarily supposes that we have a fixed habitation there. But dwelling implies *locality*; hence, whenever this term is applied to God, it is always to be understood figuratively, as his presence is essentially every where, where creation is, Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. Yet by a figure of speech, some sort of locality may be given to the presence of the Divine Being. Thus we say that his *glorious presence* (by which we mean the most *illustrious* and *constant* displays of his perfection) is confined to that part of the universe that forms the habitation of those intelligent beings who have passed acceptably through their probationary states into heaven. Thus again we say that his *gracious presence* (those *less constant* and *illustrious*, nevertheless *felicitating* and *transforming* manifestations of his excellence, that are afforded the obedient and believing probationers,) is confined to this earth which is their residence. Whenever therefore we speak of the Most High as dwelling with men on earth, we always refer to his gracious presence. Thus he dwelt symbolically with the Israelites, by the pillar of cloud and fire, see Exod. xiii. 21, 22. Afterwards he assumed *an habitation* among them, first the tabernacle, then the temple, and dwelt amidst his people in these, by the emblem of a luminous cloud, see Lev. xvi. 2, compared with 1 Kings viii. 10—12. He now no longer dwells with men in a *visible habitation* as among the Jews, but in the *invisible church*, composed of all believers in Christ, Eph. ii. 21. Nor does he any longer dwell among his people *emblematically*, but by his *Holy Spirit*, Eph. ii. 22. And since it is by his Spirit that he now dwells in men on earth.

hence those who have not the Spirit, whatever else they have, enjoy nothing of his presence. Nor can any justly pretend to have the Spirit, who are strangers to the gracious qualities specified in the text. As,

1. *A contrite spirit.* The word *contrite* denotes an object *broken to pieces*, Ps. lxxxix. 10; *crushed*, Isa. iii. 15; *bruised to a pulp*, Isa. liii. 10. Hence by a figure of speech it is used to signify a person who has been brought into *distress* and *anguish* by the severer operations of grace, having been made to see his corruption as great, his danger of punishment as imminent, and all but unavoidable; by reason of which, horror has seized his spirit and overwhelmed him. But those who have the Spirit, have,

2. *A humble spirit.* The term we render *humble* denotes any thing low in situation, condition, &c.; hence metaphorically it signifies one who thinks meanly of himself, having nothing of his own of which he can *glory*, but much of which he ought to be *ashamed*;—who expects nothing from God, but on the ground of *mere mercy*;—and who is disposed to submit to any terms on which God shall grant his favour. Nor is this *submission* more from *necessity* than *judgment* and *gratitude*. In a passage parallel to this, (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2,) those in whom the Eternal dwells, are characterized by,

3. *Trembling at God's word.* This feeling arises from a conviction of the reasonableness of its requisitions, and a perception of our danger of transgressing them. And the more we reflect on the greatness of that authority which supports and sanctions these requisitions, and on the strength of those propensities which urge us to their violation, the more will this feeling be heightened. Under the influence of this we are ready to say with the disciples, "Who then can be saved?" We repeat it, that no one can justly pretend to have the Spirit who has not these qualities in him, seeing that he is an enlightening, quickening, and purifying Spirit. And wherever these qualities *exist*, and especially where they are *increasing*, they not only demonstrate the Spirit to *have been* there, but that *he is there still*; and as he is there, God is there. But why does Jehovah dwell in these? We reply,

II. IN EXPOSITION OF HIS GRACIOUS PURPOSE IN MAKING THEM HIS RESIDENCE, "To revive the spirit of the humble,

and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." The word which is rendered revive, literally means to preserve alive, to reanimate; and refers to the dejection which some of the Jews felt at the prospect of their captivity, and which others were to experience during that event. Aware of the dishonourable and mischievous tendency of this dejection, if cherished to excess, the prophet is directed to give them these assurances of the divine interposition which might serve to keep alive and to reanimate their hope of deliverance. And to convince all to whom these words shall come, how unwilling and how incapable he is of distressing his creatures unnecessarily, and of the pleasure he has in returning to a milder treatment of them after adopting a more severe, he doubles the word revive. He cannot favour those who persist in folly, Hab. i. 13; nor can he suffer them to proceed with impunity, Ps. vii. 11, 12. But no sooner does the sinner's spirit bow under his stroke, and fear and fainting seize his heart, than his relentings kindle and his hand is stayed, Jer. xxxi. 18—20. Nay more; the repetition of the term revive, is doubling the declaration of the most important and delightful truth that ever was uttered, to encourage us firmly and confidently to expect his interposition and blessing. Had he assured us of his dwelling in contrite souls, without saying anything about his reasons for so doing, yet, even then we could not have construed his ultimate design to be anything else than the good of the person inhabited. But now that he hath informed us wherefore he dwells in men, viz. to revive them, we cannot but look on his dwelling in them, as a demonstration that their obligation to punishment is cancelled, and as a pledge that he will communicate to them every good.

To conclude,

1. Are any of you impenitent and under this rod? Oh turn, or he will break you! Think of his great power, think of his judgments, and tremble.

2. Are any of you penitent? Think of his declaration, and take courage. Are these words of course? Or is he unable to fulfil them? Can he then, and will he verify them? Oh then look for him to do this now!

3. But does he dwell in you? Oh then beware of every thing that would deprive you of his presence! Rather seek to abound in grace, that it may be secured to you for ever.

IOTA.

XVI. THE CHARACTER, EXCELLENCE, AND ESTIMATE OF THE PIOUS.

LAM. iv. 2.

“The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter.”

IT was the lot of Jeremiah to live in times of great national trouble. Jerusalem had been destroyed, the temple laid in ruins, and Israel carried captive into a land of strangers. And in this book of “Lamentations,” the prophet bewails in an endless variety of affecting imagery, the degradation and misery of his people, with their priests and prophets and principal men, and more especially the overthrow of their religious state and polity. “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out on the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion,” &c. Our text leads us to notice, the characters described, their excellence, and the estimation in which they are too generally held.

I. THE CHARACTERS DESCRIBED. “The precious sons of Zion.” The word “Zion” was the name of a mountain hard by the mount Moriah, on which the Jewish temple stood. Its elevation and form recommended it to the Jebusites as a proper place for a “strong hold,” 2 Sam. v. 7. And David was so much pleased with its “beautiful situation,” that he wrote in praise of it; and chose it for his residence, Psalm xlvi. 2, 12, 13; 1 Kings viii. 1. From what is said in this last cited verse of bringing “up” the ark of the covenant, and again in verse 4, that the priests, “brought up the ark,” it would seem that the mount Moriah, with the temple on its summit, was the highest elevation of the mountain which went by the general name of “Zion.” And hence the term was very easily and naturally applied, by pious Jews, to that which gave the mountain its greatest dignity and excellence—the sacred house in which the living God deigned to dwell. This place he had chosen, Psalm cxxxii. 13. “He loved the gates of Zion,” Psalm lxxxvii. 2; and here, in the devotions of the Old Testament

church, "praise waited for him; and the vow was performed," Psalm lxxv. 1, and lxxxiv. 7. Hence also, by an easy transition, the application of the term to the New Testament church, Heb. xii. 22; Rev. xiv. 1. We might observe, that a mountain is a fit emblem of the church, on account of its stability, elevation, salubrity, &c. To this title true believers had, and under the present dispensation true believers have, a claim: inasmuch as,

1. *Zion is their spiritual birth place.* "Of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her, Psalm lxxxvii. 5. According to Peter, (1 Ep. i. 23,) they are "born again—by the word of God," &c. By this word they were convinced of sin, and became, "mourners in Zion," to whom the ministers of the church are appointed to "proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord; to give them beauty for ashes," &c., Isaiah lxi. 2, 3. Being "begotten again," they have received the spirit of sons, Gal. iv 6; and now aspire after the "better country" to which the sons of Zion are entitled, Isaiah xxxv. 10; Heb. xi. 16. Agreeably to this, as grateful sons,

2. *They acknowledge their great and growing obligations to Zion.* As children are indebted to their parents for nurture, fostering care, discipline, instruction, &c., so they feel themselves indebted to the church—to its ministers, its members, and its ordinances, for the needful information, caution, reproof, encouragement, and various assistances they have received. And, consequently, they still respect that authority, and value those instructions, by which they have profited so much, Prov. xxxi. 1, 2; Mal. i. 6. Therefore, as dutiful sons,

3. *They are devoted to the interests of Zion.* Gratitude, piety, benevolence, prompt them to promote the prosperity of the church, by persuasion, &c.; and by their example, and their prayers, Psalm cxxii. 6—9; Isaiah lxii. 1; Matt. v. 14—16; Rom. xii. 1. Of course,

4. *They are entitled to all the privileges and immunities of Zion.* They are "free," Gal. iv. 31: "are fellow citizens with the saints," &c., Eph. ii. 19. And the unfailing word of Zion's King, secures to her protection, Isa. xxvi. 1; provision, Psalm cxxxii. 15; support, Isa. xxxv. 3, 4; comfort, Psalm cxxxii. 16; and eternal glory, Isa. lx. 14—20.

II. THE EXCELLENCE OF THE SONS OF ZION. 'They are "precious—comparable to fine gold;" in respect of its purity—value—utility—honour.

1. In respect of its *purity*;—"comparable to fine gold;" which is gold that has undergone a certain process of purification, to clear it from dross, and thus make it more fine, solid, strong, and useful. So the saints have all experienced "the renewing of the Holy Ghost," Tit. iii. 5; and their hearts are purified by faith, Acts xv. 9. Sometimes they are made to pass through "the furnace of affliction;" but, 'tis that they may be purified by the "refiner's fire," Job. xxiii. 10; Isa. i. 25; Mal. iii. 2, 3.

2. In respect of *its value*. Gold is of "the precious metals" the most precious, *i. e.* of highest price. The text speaks of fine gold, of the best quality; and therefore most valuable. In this sense Zion's sons are precious; possessing intrinsic excellence. They are partakers of precious grace, 2 Pet. i. 1; which they exercise on precious promises, 2 Pet. i. iv; which promises have respect to a precious Saviour, 1 Pet. ii. 5—7; by whose precious blood they are redeemed, 1 Pet. i. 19.

3. In respect of *its utility*. By this the value of a thing is to be estimated. From early ages, gold, as an article of commerce, and as a medium of communication between man and man, and between one nation and another, has promoted the general good of mankind. The true sons of Zion are greatly useful, on account of their *excellent principles*, of philanthropy, and social order, uniting the different classes and members of society, and promoting the welfare of the whole, 1 Tim. ii. 1—4. Whence results the *excellence of their practice*; as rulers, 2 Sam. xxiii. 1—3; parents, Eph. vi. 4; masters, Col. iv. 1; subjects, Rom. xiii. 7, 1 Pet. ii. 17; children, Eph. vi. 1—3; servants, Eph. vi. 5—7; doing evil to none, Rom. xii. 17; but good to all. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him," &c. And they are valuable also, on account of their *piety*, and *their prayers*. For ten righteous men Sodom had been spared. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

4. *In respect of its honour*. Gold has been employed in presents to the most honourable persons, 1 Kings x. 2, 10; Matt. ii. 11; and in the most honourable services; whether *civil*, Ps. xlv. 9, 13; or *sacred*, Ex. xxv. 11—22; 2 Chron. iii. 3—11. The pious are highly honourable in the estimation of those who are proper judges of what constitutes an honourable character. Though men may despise them, yet angels esteem it a privilege to wait on them, Heb. i. 14. And God himself honours them as members of his family, Rom. viii. 14—16; and heirs to a

crown, a kingdom, a priesthood, which they shall possess for ever, Dan. vii. 18; Luke xxii. 29; Rev. v. 10. They are his "jewels," and "precious in his sight" is their death, as well as life, Psalm cxvi. 15; Isa. xliii. 4. But very different from this is,

III. THE ESTIMATION IN WHICH THE SONS OF ZION ARE TOO OFTEN HELD. "How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers," &c.; as mean, worthless, despicable things! From the prophet's language here, one would suppose that he had his eye on the golden vessels, &c. of the sanctuary; with which *he* compares Zion's sons: while their enemies regarded them only as "comparable to" the vilest "work of the hands of the potter." This false estimate of the pious happens, because Satan employs all his craft and all his agency, to obscure the excellence of truth and piety; and to gild with a false and beguiling lustre, what is wrong and wicked. Under his influence, men "put light for darkness, and darkness for light," &c. over-rating what concerns the body and the present world, and under-rating what relates to the soul and to eternity. Hence it comes to pass, that when the precious sons of Zion are subjected to the opinion of such persons, their character suffers; inasmuch as,

1. *Their principles are misnamed.* Their humility is meanness; their forbearance and meekness, pusillanimity, weakness, &c. On the other hand, their zeal is rashness; their firmness, obstinacy; their piety, enthusiasm, &c. Agreeably to this,

2. *Their motives are suspected.* Most persons are disposed to measure others by their own standard. And as the ungodly are themselves strangers to genuine piety, or disinterested benevolence, they are reluctant to admit its existence in the case of real Christians; and therefore attribute to them motives which their souls would spurn with abhorrence. Of the Redeemer himself, it was said, "He is a bad man, and *deceiveth* the people." Whence also,

3. *Their conduct is misrepresented.* "Prejudice has neither eyes nor ears" to discover merit; but it whets the tongue of slander, to mangle, disfigure, and distort innocent actions; and then to inflict censure and condemnation. By such means, apostles, confessors, and martyrs have been esteemed pests of society, and treated as the filth and offscouring of all things. "Their life was madness, and their end without honour." Wherefore,

1. In our estimate of character, let us not judge from common report; but from our own observation.

2. Nor by the maxims of the world; but by those of God's word. Many "of whom the world was *not worthy*," have "wandered in sheep skins," &c.

3. Nor be solicitous of the honour that cometh from men; but "the honour that cometh from God only," John v. 41—44.

ZETA.

XVII. INSTABILITY IN RELIGION DANGEROUS.

HOSEA vi. 4.

"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

THE Israelites were united in one state till the time of Jeroboam, when two kingdoms were constituted, that of Judah, and that of Israel. Jerusalem was the capital of the former, and Samaria of the latter. By Judah and Ephraim, therefore, the prophet means the inhabitants of these two kingdoms, whose superficial piety and frequent departures from God are often re-proved. Had there been no such characters since the prophetic age, the selection of this text would have been unnecessary; but, alas! there are many, very many, in our day in similar circumstances; let us therefore,

I. PORTRAY THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHOSE GOODNESS IS AS A MORNING CLOUD.

II. NOTICE THEIR SIN AND DANGER.

III. IMPROVE THE SUBJECT BY SUITABLE REFLECTIONS.

1. PORTRAY THE CHARACTERS, &c. In doing which we may notice,

1. *Unfruitful hearers.* Such feel a pleasure in attending

the ministry of the word ; their passions are affected, the understanding enlightened, and they form purposes for amendment of life ; but the impression is momentary : such are “ like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass : for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was,” James i. 23, 24. Or, though the effect may not be quite transient, yet there is no decision of character ; they hear the word, they weep under it, they abandon certain vices, and their whole conduct for a season gives birth to pleasing hope that they will become distinguished for piety ; but, alas ! as the morning cloud and early dew vanish at the appearance of the sun, so their goodness passeth away !

2. *Transient reformers*, or those who under providential visitations have determined to amend their ways and live to God, but afterwards have relapsed into sin. These characters are numerous. Some in the season of imminent danger have cried unto the Lord in their distress, and solemnly vowed if he would deliver them they would serve him ; but no sooner has the sea become calm, the storm subsided, the fever fled, and the danger passed away, than they became wicked as ever. Or perhaps it was the loss of a friend, a partner, a parent, or a child, which led them to consider their latter end ; but no sooner had nature dried her tears, than they assumed the character in our text.

3. *Inconstant professors*. Such go farther than the former : for a season they make a public profession of the Christian religion, attend regularly the ordinances of God’s house, take up their cross to follow Christ, enrol themselves with his disciples, profess to be saved through faith in his blood, and zealously espouse the cause of God ; but through unwatchfulness, and a neglect of Christian exercises, their piety degenerates, their affections become cold, a longing desire for retirement is no longer felt, Christian communion loses its wonted sweetness, the word preached, its pathos, it is no longer food for the soul ; at length they have recourse to the fatal expedient of abandoning religion altogether. Unstable as water, fluctuating as the ocean, mutable as the sand, transient as the morning cloud, uncertain as the early dew, their goodness passeth away. Hence we may notice,

II. THEIR SIN AND DANGER. Such are guilty of the sin of,

1. *Unwatchfulness.* They were cautioned, warned, and admonished; they were reminded of the corruptions of the heart, the deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil; but instead of guarding the avenues of the soul, and repelling temptation, they were heedless and trifling.

2. *Unfaithfulness.* Had they walked in the light, obeyed the teachings of the Holy Ghost, and the dictates of conscience, their path would have been that of the just, Prov. iv. 18. They were placed in the most auspicious circumstances, had "line upon line," Isa. xxviii. 10; the Scriptures to read, a living ministry to attend, the ordinances of God's house, and Christian friends to commune with. With these advantages, their Lord said, "Occupy till I come," Luke xix. 13; but their goodness was as a morning cloud.

3. *Ingratitude.* They have not only shared heaven's gifts in common with the human family, but they have had signal displays of the divine beneficence. In affliction, when human aid was unavailing, the Lord spake the word, and they were restored;—when in danger, and they saw nothing but impending ruin, they cried unto the Lord, he heard and delivered them; but ah! base ingrates! are these the returns you make?—*blasphemy*, instead of praise?—*pride*, instead of humility?—*sin*, instead of holiness?—*hatred*, instead of love?

4. *Rebellion.* God has been striving with them in a variety of ways. His word, his Spirit, his providences, his ministers, have been messengers of mercy. They have been entreated in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God, 2 Cor. v. 20; yet their lives have been marked with instability and indecision; they have sometimes professed attachment to Christ, and then disowned him; in affliction they sought the Lord, and in health forsook him. Justice might have cut them down,—vengeance might have pursued them,—and the horrors of darkness overwhelmed them. Such has been their sin, and such the mercy of God; but the day of vengeance is at hand! let us therefore notice

THEIR DANGER. Their state is awful beyond description! The God of infinite wisdom seems almost at a loss what to do with such characters: *What shall I do unto thee?* These words import more than language can express. After all that God the Father hath done for you in creation and providence,—after all that God the Son hath done for you in redemption and grace,—

after all that God the Holy Ghost hath done in his aids and influences,—after all that ministers have done in private and public,—after all that Christian friends have done by their prayers, expostulations, and entreaties,—after all that heaven and earth have done to promote your salvation,—is your goodness still as a morning cloud, &c. ? then, how criminal ! how utterly inexcusable ! God asks, as the last act of forbearance, “ What *shall I do* unto thee ? ” You are on the eve of ruin ! not a moment must be lost ! Let us therefore,

III. IMPROVE THE SUBJECT BY SUITABLE REFLECTIONS.

1. *Let those whose characters are portrayed in our text, immediately surrender themselves to God.* He asks, “ What shall I do unto thee ? ” Let your hearts reply, “ Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions,” Ps. li. 1.

2. *From this subject we see the necessity of being decided in our religious character.* Transient devotions will not do: instability is dangerous. Give your hearts to God by a perpetual covenant. Whatever it may cost you, “ buy the truth, and sell it not,” Prov. xxiii. 23 ; since, “ he that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” Prov. xxix. 1.

3. *It suggests a caution to those who love and fear God.* “ Be not weary in well doing,” &c., Gal. vi. 9. “ No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,” Luke ix. 62. Take care that your piety be scriptural, deep, and growing ; that your love to Christ be fervent, sincere, and active ; that your conduct be uniform and regular.

4. *As instability in religion will not do, those who are totally destitute of piety cannot in such a state enter heaven* John iii. 3. “ Awake (therefore) thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light,” Eph. v. 14.

KAPPA.

XVIII. ISRAEL EXHORTED TO RETURN UNTO THE LORD.

HOSEA xiv. 1, 2.

“O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.”

THE conduct of God towards Israel, and Israel's conduct towards God, form the most interesting topics with which the Old Testament abounds. David declared that God had not dealt so with any nation; and as a confirmation of this, we need only review the series of wonders and miracles which adorn their whole history. And yet their conduct towards God excites almost equal astonishment, in the serious and contemplative mind. Their repeated murmurings, and abominable idolatries often provoked the Divine Being to pour out his indignation upon them, but in wrath he remembered mercy. He raised up prophets, and sent them forth as the ambassadors of peace, to warn the people of their danger, and call them to repentance. Hosea was a man of this description, who lived in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. An epitome of this general message we have in the text. “O Israel, return,” &c. We notice here,

I. AN AWFUL FACT STATED;—“Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.” The term *fall* is used literally, when we speak of a body descending from a higher to a lower situation; thus we say, the fall of a leaf, or the fall of a stone. But when the fall of angels or of men is mentioned, we understand the term figuratively: so we apply it in the text, “Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.” To explain this, we observe, God is a being of infinite dignity, and is called the Most High; not because he occupies the most exalted sphere in a local sense, but because he is above all in his natural and moral perfections. Holy angels and glorified spirits, being most like God in the purity of their natures, are considered as surrounding his throne, and standing

in his presence ; while the devil and his angels, who are farthest removed, from the moral rectitude, are most degraded, cast down to hell, into a bottomless pit of fire and brimstone. A state of sin is a low estate ; and when a man turns from good to bad, he is considered as fallen. Thus Israel had,

1. *Fallen from their allegiance to God.* There was a period in their history, when the Lord was their King, and they were under his immediate government ; “ but they rejected him, that he should not reign over them,” 1 Sam. viii. 7. “ They have set up kings, but not by me,” &c., Hos. viii. 4.

2. *Fallen from his worship.* “ They had their molten images of silver, and idols,” &c., Hos. xiii. 2. “ They sacrificed upon the tops of mountains,” &c., iv. 12, 13. And they were “ joined to idols,” iv. 17.

3. *Fallen from the enjoyment of his favour.* The Lord had a controversy with them, and was fixed to punish them, &c. Hos. xii. 2. “ They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind,” viii. 7. “ I will meet them as a bear bereaved of her whelps,” xiii. 8. “ Fallen by thine iniquity.” The iniquity by which they fell was personal. “ O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself,” xiii. 9. “ Israel is an empty vine,” &c., x. 1. It was mental. “ Their heart was divided,” x. 2. Whoredom and wine had taken away their hearts, iv. 11. It was practical. They rejected knowledge, forgot the law of God, practised swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery ; they had troops of robbers among them ; and there was no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land, iv. 1, 2, 6.

II. AN AFFECTIONATE EXHORTATION URGED. “ O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.” Here observe,

1. *The persons addressed ; “ Israel.”* A people once highly favoured, but now deeply degraded. Had the prophet used language expressive of their moral character, he might have designated them by the most odious epithets ; but he calls them “ Israel,” to remind them of what they once were, the import of their name, and the high honour which God had put upon them. What affectionate men were God’s prophets ! How faithful, and yet how kind !

2. *The nature of the address ; “ Return.”* This supposes previous wandering. The people of Israel had wandered like

a treacherous wife, who had forsaken her husband, Hos. ii. 5; they had gone after other lovers, but disappointment had attended them, verse 7. Now the prophet invites them to "return." Have we acted the part of Israel? Oh let us return—now—with all our hearts—in the spirit of faith and prayer.

3. *The object to whom they were to return*; "Unto the Lord thy God." The Lord, who has the sole right to rule and govern thee; "thy God," who calleth himself thy God, Ps. i. 7; who acted towards thee as a God, in defending thee in danger,—comforting thee in distress,—directing thee in difficulty,—and providing for thee in necessity. Gratitude, affection, justice, honour, safety, and comfort, should induce those who have wandered from God to return to him.

III. INSTRUCTIVE DIRECTION ADMINISTERED; "Take with you words," &c. Prayer may be offered unto God without words, 1 Sam. i. 13. But Israel were here directed to take *words*,—not bullocks or sacrifices; these we may not all have in possession, but words we have at will. Words of sincerity should be taken, when we approach to God, not speaking what we never mean: hypocrisy is hateful in his sight. Appropriate words, such as best accord with our feelings and desires. Words of humble confession, David, Daniel, and the prodigal, will furnish us with words of confession. Words of petition. These the prophet records; say unto him, "Take away all iniquity." Iniquity was the cause of their fall, and in returning to God they wery to pray for its removal.

1. *Take it away from our affections that we may no longer love it.* Sinners love sin; there is a bent and tendency towards it in the carnal mind. God alone can take that desire after sin from our hearts.

2. *From our conscience, that we may no longer labour under the burden of it.* Sin induces guilt, and renders us liable to the punishment; God threatens sinners with hell. Awakened sinners groan under the burden of sin, and say, "Take away all iniquity."

3. *From our lives, that it may not have dominion over us.* God has promised to redeem Israel from all his iniquities, Ps. cxxx. 8. "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" Rom. vi. 2.

4. *From our hearts that we may be dead to it.* This is the subject of the prayer;—“Take away all iniquity.” God can do this, for he is almighty; and because he directs us to pray for it, we may infer his willingness to answer our prayer.

“Receive us graciously.” This is another part of the prayer which Israel were directed to offer unto God.

1. *Receive our prayers graciously.* One of the heaviest judgments which God can inflict upon sinners in this world, is to reject their prayers. This he may justly do, and laugh at our calamity, &c. It is all of grace that he deigns to receive our prayer.

2. *Receive our persons graciously.* Receive us into thy family. Sin has rendered us aliens and enemies, and we are by our iniquities children of wrath; but receive us, and put us among the children. Receive us into thy favour. Our iniquities have rendered us liable to thy heavy displeasure; but oh forgive us! heal our backslidings. Receive us into union with thyself. Our iniquities have separated between us and thee; but cast us not off from thy presence. In the margin this is read, “Take away all iniquity, and give good.” God is good—all good; and he gives good; and “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

VI. RETURNS OF GRATITUDE EXPRESSED;—“So will we render the calves of our lips.” By this expression we understand the fruit of our lips, “giving thanks to his name,” Heb. xiii. 15. When the Jews received signal favours from God, they were accustomed to offer animal sacrifices, such as calves and bullocks, as returns of gratitude, 1 Kings iii. 4, 15: but “we will render the calves of our lips.” “Thou desirest not sacrifice,” &c. Ps. li. 16.

1. *Gratitude is a debt which all owe to God.* All the benefits with which our being is crowned flow from God, and flow freely, liberally, and constantly. Gratitude is the expression of obligation; and as our obligations to God know no bounds, our gratitude should know no end.

2. *Gratitude is a debt which gracious souls are ready to pay.* Fully to discharge this debt is impossible; but, like the woman in the gospel, they do what they can. When God takes away our iniquity, and receives us graciously, our first feelings are

those of praise, Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19. As a proof that we “render the calves of our lips,” let us render the homage of our hearts, and the actions of our lives.

Learn, 1. *That neither our civil nor religious privileges will preclude the possibility of falling by iniquity.* Who ever rose higher by the former than Israel? or who ever sunk deeper by the latter?

2. *That those who have fallen by iniquity should be induced to return to the Lord their God.* God invites them to return—promises to receive them—and gives directions by the prophet in the text how they should return.

3. *Those whose iniquity is taken away should individually say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” &c.* Ps. ciii. 2, 3.

BETA.

XIX. THE WAY IN WHICH WE MUST COME TO GOD, AND SERVE HIM.

MICAH vi. 8.

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

In the sacred writings we find the *favour of God* most strongly and justly represented as a most inestimable good. In one place they assure us, that “in his favour is *life*;” and in another place they pronounce “his loving-kindness is better than *life*.” This it certainly is: for without God’s favour, life itself is undesirable; but with it, all the evils of life are either averted or counteracted, and every thing in life, that can be justly considered good, is ensured and improved.

Hence, two important questions, highly interesting to all mankind, are plainly answered in our text. The first is expressed in the sixth verse of this chapter, “Wherewith shall I come before

the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High?" That is 'How can a guilty sinner *obtain* the favour of God?' To this the answer is, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good." The second question is implied in our text, and amounts to this, 'What doth the Lord require of me?' or, 'How may a pardoned sinner *retain* God's favour?' To which the answer is, "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Thus we are graciously instructed, both,—How we may come to God acceptably—and how we may serve him acceptably.

I. HOW WE MAY COME TO GOD ACCEPTABLY. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good." This answer connected with the question, plainly implies,

1. *That mankind by nature are alienated from God.* By alienation is meant our being withdrawn, and at a distance from God. So we are represented by God in his word:—we have *for-saken* God by voluntary transgression, Isa. i. 2—4, and liii. 6. Hence, as sinners, we are *far from God*: far from worshipping him with our hearts, Isa. xxix. 13; and far from serving him in our lives, Jer. ii. 5; Col. i. 21.—And *God is far from us*: by refusing to hold communion with us. "He heareth not sinners," John ix. 31; Prov. xv. 29; Isa. lix. 2.

2. *That while alienated from God we are destitute of good.* We are—destitute of *natural* good; being subjects of misery, Rom. iii. 16. Rev. iii. 17;—destitute of *moral* good; being wicked, Ps. xiv. 2, 3; and foolish, Job xxxiii. 27;—destitute of *prospective* good; being heirs of perdition, Ps. lxxiii. 27; and threatened with eternal torment, Matt. xxv. 41; Rom. ii. 8, 9.

3. *That of ourselves we know not how to come to God acceptably.* This is evident—from the testimony of God, Jer. x. 23; 1 Cor. i. 21.—From incontestible facts: witness the inventions of mankind to obtain the favour of God, such as multiplied burnt offerings, slaughtered hecatombs, and not unfrequently even human sacrifices; see ver. 6, 7, "Wherewith," &c.—And from the inquiries of serious penitents: as the Jewish multitude at the feast of Pentecost, Acts ii. 37; Saul of Tarsus, Acts ix. 6; the Philippian jailor, Acts xvi. 30; and the characters to whom our text is addressed.

4. *That what is good for man, is revealed by God.* "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good." This he does in his

word—by shewing us wherein the chief good of man consists : namely, in the enjoyment of God himself, Deut. xxx. 19, 20. In the enjoyment of his favour, Ps. iv. 6 ; of his image, Ps. xvii. 15 ; and of communion with him, Ps. lxxiii. 28, and xxvii. 4. He shews us what is good, by also teaching us how this good may be obtained by us. In doing this, he graciously instructs us how this good was procured for us, and must be appropriated by us. It was *procured* for us by the suffering and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Rom. v. 10 ; 1 Peter iii. 18 ; and it must be *appropriated* by faith in Christ : such a faith as implies an entire reception of Christ, John i. 12, and an entire affiance in him for salvation, Matt. xii. 21 ; Acts xxvi. 18. But the important blessings thus appropriated, lay us under strong obligations to God, and should induce us to learn from our text,

II. HOW WE MAY SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY. “What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?” Would you continue to please God ?—Then you must,

I. *Do justly* : by conscientiously practising righteousness towards all mankind. This comprises both relative and commercial justice.—Relative justice implies our rendering to all their dues, Rom. xiii. 7.—To all in *domestic* life : as husbands, Eph. vi. 4 ; Eph. v. 25 ; and wives, Eph. v. 22 ; parents, 1 Tim. v. 8 ; and children, Eph. vi. 1—3.—To all in *civil* life : as masters, Col. iv. 1 ; and servants, Eph. vi. 5—8.—To all in *political* life : as governors, 1 Pet. ii. 14 ; and subjects, 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14 ; 1 Tim. ii. 1—3 ; Rom. xiii. 1—6. Commercial justice implies strict equity in all our dealings with others. Equity requires us not to *injure* any one : neither in his person, by cruelty ; nor in his character, by defamation ; nor in his property, by dishonesty. It forbids our committing any injuries, either by violence, or fraud, or extortion : or by contracting debts, without a probability of discharging them ; or by neglecting to pay the debts we owe, Rom. xii. 17. Rom. xiii. 8. This justice is exemplified in all good characters, Ps. xv. 3 ; Acts xxiv. 16 ; and is the fruit of love, Matt. xxii. 39 ; Rom. xiii. 10. Equity requires us to make due *restitution* for any injuries we have done to others, Lev. vi. 1—7 ; Num. v. 5—8 ; to avoid all *falsehood* in words, Eph. iv. 25 ; and all *covetous desires*, Exod. xxi. 17. If you would please God, you must,

2. *Love mercy.* Mercy is free unmerited kindness : like that shewn by God to penitents, Isa. lv. 7 ; and the good Samaritan to his neighbour, Luke x. 33. Shew your love of mercy—by readily forgiving injuries, Eph. iv. 32 ; Col. iii. 12, 13 ; Matt. vi. 15 ;—by cheerfully relieving distresses, Rom. xii. 8. Luke x. 36, 37 ;—and by sympathizing with the afflicted, Rom. xii. 15. 2 Tim. i. 16—18. To render your character complete, you must also,

3. *Walk humbly with your God :* or humble yourselves, and walk with God.—*Walk with thy God.* In doing this you must resistlessly *seek* God as your God, Ps. lxiii. 1, 2, and xc. 14 ; you must *devote* yourselves to him as your God, Rom. vi. 13 ; you must *choose* the path which he prescribes, Ps. cxix. 30 ; and you must *persevere* in this way, Jer. vi. 16.—*Walk humbly with thy God :* or humble thyself in walking with him ;—by entire dependence on Christ for strength, Ps. xxviii. 7—acceptance, 1 Pet. ii. 5—and glory, Jude 20, 21.—By a candid acknowledgment of thy unprofitableness, Luke xvii. 10.—And by ascribing thy salvation to God's mercy : both what thou already *enjoyest*, Tit. iii. 3—7 ; and what thou still *hapest* for, 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

Our text most worthily claims our attention,

1. *As it contains a perfect directory to all serious inquirers after salvation.* In order to our salvation, all that we need to know respecting religion must relate to its *foundation* and *superstructure*. Do you therefore inquire, On what foundation must we build our hopes of salvation ? “ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.” “ Behold,” &c. Isa. xxviii. 16. This foundation is Christ crucified, 1 Pet. ii. 6. Through him as your Sacrifice and High Priest, come to God with confidence, Heb. x. 19—22. Do you inquire, What superstruction must we build on this foundation ? “ What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly ?” &c. Do this, and your work will abide to your eternal advantage, 1 Cor. iii. 12—14.

2. *As it shews the extent and utility of scriptural piety.*—The *extent* of it : requiring justice and mercy towards our neighbour, piety towards God, and purity in ourselves : for purity is inseparable from piety, James iii. 17 ; Matt. v. 8 ; 2 Cor. vii. 1. The *utility* of its being “ profitable unto all things,” 1 Tim. iv. 8 ; Phil. iv. 8.

3. *As it reproveth and corrects certain erroneous characters*

in the religious world. Particularly—*The self-confident philosopher*: for we must come to God aright, ere we can serve him aright, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9—*the ungodly moralist*: for we must walk with God, as well as do justly, and love mercy, Ps. ix. 17—*the immoral solifidian*: for justice, mercy, and fidelity, are as requisite as devotion, Matt. xxiii. 23; Tit. ii. 12. Indeed none can walk with God but the just and upright, Gen. vi. 9; Rom. i. 18. And *the arrogant Pharisee*, Rom. x. 3; for arrogance implies an impudent demand on God, as our debtor; as contrary to reason as to humility.

4. *And as it promotes the interests of practical piety.* This it does, both by the *duties* which it requires, and the *encouragement* which it suggests: for it assures us, that conformity to God's will is "good," and must, in its results, be beneficial to us. Prov. xxii. 21.

ALPHA.

XX. DIVINE COMPASSION TO SINNERS.

MICAH vii. 19.

"He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

THOUGH the Almighty is absolutely incomprehensible, and cannot be found out to perfection, yet he has explicitly revealed himself as a God "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and ready to forgive." And this propitious character of the Deity is peculiarly appropriate and interesting to mankind. As fallen and guilty sinners it is utterly impossible to be saved by "works of righteousness which we have done," or can do; for "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified" in God's sight. But infinite mercy has graciously provided a way of salvation, by faith in Jesus Christ, which is perfectly consistent with divine justice, and admirably suited to the necessitous circumstances of "the world that lieth in wickedness." This consoling doctrine was taught by Moses and the prophets to the children of Israel,

who were generally "a disobedient and gainsaying people." And hence the prophet Micah faithfully reproves them for their sins, and affectionately exhorts them to repent and return to the Lord of hosts, whose displeasure they had justly incurred by wickedly departing from his ways. And in the text and context he expresses an animating assurance, that the Lord their God would again have mercy upon them, as he formerly had pity on their fathers, and saved them from their enemies:—"He will turn again," &c. This is evidently the language of the sincere penitent and humble believer; in which we may notice—the blessings piously anticipated—their source distinctly specified—and the confidence devoutly expressed. Consider,

I. THE BLESSINGS PIOUSLY ANTICIPATED;—"He will *subdue our iniquities*," &c. It is probable there is an allusion, in these words, to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. As the Lord then *literally* subdued Pharoah and his host, the enemies of his people, so he will *spiritually* "subdue the iniquities" of his faithful servants, and by his pardoning mercy, "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The prophet therefore evidently anticipates,

1. *The absolution of the guilt of sin.* An inspired writer informs us that "sin is the transgression of the law," which is "holy, just, and good;" and hence, every violation of its precepts involves guilt, and renders the transgressor liable to suffer its awful penalties, Gal. iii. 10. And as "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," we must certainly either be pardoned or punished. But the glorious Being against whom all our sins are committed, is infinitely propitious, and "plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon him." When sinners return unto him with penitent and believing hearts, he graciously forgives their transgressions, and heals their backslidings, Jer. iii. 22; Hosea xiv. 1, 2, 4. By the sovereign act of pardon, the repenting sinner is delivered from the condemning sentence of the law of works, and is *reckoned*, or *accepted* as righteous, through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, the Mediator of the covenant of grace, 2 Cor. v. 19, 21; Heb. xii. 24. This inestimable blessing is variously described in the Scriptures; but in the text it is called, the "casting all our sins into the depths of the sea," which is a mode of expression that intimates both the extent and completeness of pardon. The

Lord will not only cast away some, but "all our sins," however accumulated in number, or aggravated in nature. He freely and fully justifies them that believe "from all things," and casts all their sins behind his back.

2. *The subjugation of the power of sin*; "He will subdue our iniquities." We are not only guilty, but depraved; and sin has awfully assumed dominion over us. It is therefore frequently personified in the sacred writings, and described as a vile usurper, and destructive tyrant, reigning in the hearts and lives of the disobedient, John viii. 34; Rom vi. 12, 13. The various principles and habits of vice are greatly strengthened by constant practice, and satanic influence; and they completely captivate and enslave the impenitent, Eph. ii. 2, 3; Titus iii. 3. And hence it is not only necessary that the guilt of sin be mercifully cancelled, but that its power be effectually subdued. Omnipotence alone is equal to this glorious achievement. All human efforts are utterly inefficient, and unaccompanied with divine energy, must invariably prove abortive. But the Lord our God is both able and willing, and has faithfully engaged to subdue and "destroy the body of sin," and redeem his people from all their iniquities, Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26. He principally accomplishes this work of grace by his Son, as the Saviour of sinners, 1 Cor. i. 30; by his word, as the instrument of salvation, Rom. i. 16; and by his Spirit, as the agent of personal religion, Tit. iii. 5. As closely connected with these blessings, we may observe,

II. THEIR SOURCE DISTINCTLY SPECIFIED;—"He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us," &c. The prophet, with a peculiar emphasis, attributes the pardon and destruction of sin to the Lord Jehovah. And this is a doctrine uniformly taught in the Scriptures, and experimentally realized by all the righteous.

1. *These blessings are divine in their origin.* God only can forgive sin, and save the sinner. To him we are all accountable as our Creator, Governor, and Judge; and against him we have sinned, and done evil in his sight. It is therefore his sole prerogative to absolve our crimes, and purify our souls. And he not only can, but he certainly will pardon and "subdue the iniquities" of them that repent and believe the gospel. And this perfectly harmonizes with the perfections of his nature,

through the glorious scheme of redemption which was devised by his infinite wisdom, and executed by the gift of his only begotten Son, Rom. viii. 32 ; 1 John iv. 9, 10. From him we should expect both mercy and grace, and ascribe all glory and praise to his name ; for “ salvation belongeth unto God which sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain for us.”

2. *These blessings are propitious in their medium.* Our sins have separated between God and our souls, and rendered us obnoxious to his wrath. We have therefore no natural right or claim to the divine mercies, and can only receive them by way of sovereign favour, “ through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” And for this purpose he assumed our nature—died for our sins—and ever lives to intercede for sinners, Isa. liii. 5, 6 ; Rom. iii. 25, 26 ; 1 John ii. 1. Thus through him who loved us, and gave himself for us, God, who is essentially merciful in his character, becomes manifestly “ faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

3. *These blessings are gracious in their bestowment.* As sinners, both by nature and practice, we cannot receive them on the ground of personal worthiness or human merit. Nor does the Lord require any previous goodness, or moral fitness, to render us worthy of the blessings of salvation, Eph. ii. 8, 9. He freely and graciously pardons and saves the truly penitent, for the glory of his name, through the merits of the Redeemer, Isaiah xliii. 25 ; Eph. i. 7. We need not then be discouraged by our unworthiness, for the Lord “ waits to be gracious, and will be exalted, and that he may have mercy upon us.” How profound and admirable is the method of salvation ! It eminently displays the wisdom and goodness of God, and infallibly secures the present and eternal happiness of the saints. How reasonable therefore is,

III. THE CONFIDENCE DEVOUTLY EXPRESSED ;—He *will* turn again, he *will* have,” &c. This is not the language of enthusiastic presumption, but of inspired and rational assurance. It was not peculiar to the prophet, but is the common privilege of believers, and is founded on,

1. *The character and covenant of God.* Though he is essentially holy and just, he is also infinitely propitious and merciful. He has no pleasure in the punishment of his creatures, but desires and seeks their salvation, Ezek. xxxiii. 11 ; 2 Pet.

iii. 9. In the covenant of grace, he solemnly engages to have mercy on the humble and contrite; for he will be "merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities he will remember no more." Judgment is expressly called "his *strange* work, because he *delighteth* in mercy," and "rejoices over his people to do them good," Isa. xxviii. 21; Micah vii. 18—20. We may therefore safely confide in the clemency and faithfulness of the Deity, who is "abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin."

2. *The atonement and intercession of Christ.* He became the propitiation for our sins, that God "might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." He magnified the law, fulfilled all righteousness, was made an offering for sin, and ever liveth to make intercession for sinners, Rom. viii. 33, 34. He was typically exhibited in the Jewish sacrificial system, as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," Heb. ix. 22. And "to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Having then such an high Priest over the house of God for ever, we may surely "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

3. *The doctrines and promises of the gospel.* The Scriptures afford the most ample encouragement to penitent sinners, Ps. cxxx. 7, 8; Isa. lv. 6, 7. Repentance and remission of sins are doctrines explicitly taught by Moses and the prophets, as well as by Jesus Christ and his apostles. The mercy of God is eminently displayed in every property of the gospel, which is a message of "good tidings and great joy unto all people." Its invitations and promises are general in their nature, affectionate in their address, and certain in their accomplishment, Matt. xi. 28; Acts xiii. 38, 39. Having therefore such encouragement to seek divine mercy, and assurances of his saving benefits, it is certainly both just and scriptural to exercise implicit confidence in his goodness, and joyfully anticipate all his promised blessings.

We may infer from this subject,

1. The necessity of repentance and faith.
2. The possibility of pardon and holiness. And
3. The felicity and duty of the saints.

XXI. JESUS CHRIST PREPARING TO PURGE HIS CHURCH.

MATT. iii. 12.

“ Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

THE slightest reflection on the character of the divine Being as the Governor of the world, must convince us of the justness of Abraham's observation, when he said, “ Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” And yet how much is our confidence in the impartiality of his administration staggered in looking at the state of things in the church and in the world! In the world we see duplicity triumphing over simplicity, falsehood over truth, idleness and prodigality over care and industry, and impiety over the fear of God. In the church we find God's word misinterpreted, heresies broached, and enthusiasm enthroned; while important truth, invaluable instruction, and genuine piety are neglected. Who would think that such a state of things was under a perfectly righteous government? Yet let not the wicked vaunt, nor the righteous be depressed, for the period is fast approaching when all the *apparent* irregularities shall be corrected; the purgation of the church is decreed, and the time for effecting it is at hand. “ Whose fan is in his hand,” &c. In these words we have,

I. THE SUBJECT OF PURGATION;—“ His floor.”

II. THE AGENT BY WHOM, AND THE INSTRUMENT BY WHICH THIS IS TO BE EFFECTED;—“ Whose fan,” &c.

III. THE RESULT OF THIS PURGATION;—“ He will gather his wheat into the garner,” &c.

I. We have in these words THE SUBJECT OF PURGATION;—“ His floor.” Here the visible church is presented to us under

the figure of a Jewish threshing-floor, containing wheat, straw, and chaff, lying in one confused heap. Such a threshing-floor was commonly a large level spot in the open field, covered at the top with a sort of awning, and open at the sides in the day time, for the circulation of the wind, and inclosed at night by doors, or otherwise, for the safety of the grain, and for the comfort of those who sometimes lodged in it. Their mode of threshing was sometimes by drawing a loaded cart over the corn, which was laid in rows of sheaves. Sometimes they used a flail or staff; at other times a pair of iron wheels, with sharp teeth, something like a saw, fastened together by an axle-tree. In some instances they used planks joined together and filled with sharp stones on the under side; but their most usual way of threshing appears to have been by oxen and horses, whose hoofs were shod for the purpose. To most of these methods of threshing reference is made in the following Scriptures; Isaiah xxviii. 27, 28, and xli. 15; and Micah iv. 12, 13. By such methods the straw was much cut and bruised, and the chaff much fretted; so that the contents of a Jewish threshing-floor very aptly represented the visible church, where are found hypocrites, formalists, half-reformed, and lukewarm characters, mingled with pious, zealous, rational, and accomplished Christians in one common mass. The nutritious grain is not more prized by the husbandman than are the latter characters by the Lord; while he regards the former as mere refuse, only fit for the burning, as the Jewish farmer consumed his chaff with fire. In a state of trial we naturally look for this mixed state of things in the church, and for occasional purgations as the prevalence of the refuse may require; but when a probational state shall cease, then shall there be a final and perfect purification of the church. Unto some one of the seasons of purgation the text evidently refers; which leads us to notice,

II. THE AGENT BY WHOM, AND THE INSTRUMENT BY WHICH, THIS PURGATION IS TO BE EFFECTED;—"Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor." In the fourth verse, we learn that Jesus Christ is the agent who shall purge the church. The church is styled his floor, he having purchased it with his own blood, Acts xx. 28. It is his floor, as the sowing of the grain, the reaping of it, the cleans-

ing and the securing of it, is all committed to his management, Matt. xiii. 27—43. We have said, that in a state of trial, the prevalence of the refuse in the church may require occasional purgation, as the admission of members into that church is committed unto fallible men. This was particularly the case when the church embraced the whole Jewish nation; hence the many sifting times which were permitted to that people. The cleansing of the church may not always require the destruction, but only the separation of the chaff from the wheat. Yet oftentimes it has been attended by its destruction; as in the case of the golden calf, Exod. xxxii. 27, 28, 35; in the matter of Korah, Num. xvi. 23—35; in the Babylonish captivity, Jer. xxxix. 6—9; and at the destruction of the Jewish polity. And it is evident from the text, that the purgation here referred to will be attended with the destruction of the chaff: for “he will thoroughly purge his floor.” With this intention, he has taken into his hand the instrument of purgation; “His fan is in his hand.” When the Jews had a sufficiency of wind in their threshing-floors, they appear to have winnowed their wheat by throwing it up with a shovel against the wind. But when they wanted wind, they used an instrument with sails, by which a wind was produced, and the wheat, chaff, &c. were gently poured down from a sieve, that they might be separated by the current thus created. By a figure, that winnowing instrument, in husbandry called the fan, is here transferred to spiritual things, and is used for those means whereby Jesus Christ purifies his church, which is his floor. Some, by the fan in this place, understand the Roman power to be intended, as by their means God separated the chaff, the unbelieving Jews, whom he slew with the sword, from the wheat, the pious Jews, whom he put into his garner, by sending them to Pella, where they were secure. But by the fan we rather understand the gospel to be intended, as it most effectually separates the chaff from the wheat, first, by the love to Jesus which it excites; secondly, by the sacrifices which it demands; and, lastly, by declaring, as the law by which all men shall be judged, who are, and who are not fit to enter into life eternal.

1. *We say that the gospel of Jesus Christ is calculated to separate the good from the evil by the love to Christ which it excites.* For in this sense it served as a fan at our Lord's en-

trance into the world. At that period all men were in expectation of the appearing of some extraordinary personage; when therefore the gospel proclaimed him as come, and gave the world an account of his doctrines, offices, and kingdom, it drew all the humble, teachable, and well disposed unto him; while the unbelieving and disobedient were scandalized, fell on this stone of stumbling, and so were broken to pieces.

2. *The gospel separates the chaff from the wheat, by the sacrifices which it demands.* This it does in a time of persecution: for when this arises, especially when it proceeds so far as to threaten the persons, connections, and property of Christ's disciples, if they persist in the confession of his faith, and in the observance of his precepts; then, as the gospel will admit of no neutrality, no temporizing, nor yet of cowardice, (see Matt. x. 33, and Luke xiv. 25—27.) Those who have insinuated themselves into the church, from improper motives, withdraw themselves, being unable to endure the searching heat of this fire. But, on the other hand, all who have entered the church on our Lord's own principles, (see Luke xiv. 28—33,) having counted the cost of his service, and joined themselves unto him under a resolution of cleaving to him at all hazards; all such will continue with him in his temptation, and even die with him if called to it. But,

3, *It will separate the chaff from the wheat in the day of judgment*, it being the law by which all shall be judged and declared worthy or unworthy of admission into life eternal; see John xii. 48, compared with 2 Thess. i. 8—10. When the Judge of all shall have brought this gospel to bear on the most secret things of men in the great day, (see Rom. ii. 16,) and shall have either shown them to be the heirs of his promises, or proper objects of his indignation and wrath, then shall he separate and deal with them accordingly, Matt. xxv. 31—46. But this leads us to,

III. **THE RESULT OF THIS PURGATION.** "He will gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Wheat being the most nutritious kind of grain we know, is ever accounted the stay of human life, and on that ground considered by the husbandman as forming a most important part of his treasure. Hence his care to lodge it in his garner, where it will neither spoil nor be a prey. By this

image, the Most High would teach us how highly he esteems the saints, who are more dear to him than such a treasure is to any husbandman. Hence He will gather them into what is here emphatically called the garner, as no other, compared with it, deserves that name, it being inaccessible to thieves and the destroyer, Matt. vi. 19, 20. On the contrary, as the chaff is good for little or nothing, especially the chaff of a Jewish threshing floor; nay, as on the day of winnowing, the Jewish farmer would have lost his labour in cleansing his floor, had the wind changed, and so blown back the chaff among the wheat again; hence it was his custom, to set fire to the chaff on the wind side, that so the fire might be fanned and fed, until all the refuse was consumed: on which account it was called the unquenchable fire, as it never went out until its work was done. This total consumption of the chaff by fire, furnishes the liveliest image that this world can afford, of that never ending destruction, into which the wicked will be cast in the day of judgment, Mark ix. 43—48.

To conclude :

1. Let not the wicked triumph on account of that apparent impunity which they now enjoy in their sinful courses; as we are here admonished that a sifting time will come.

2. Let not the saints be staggered or dejected at that mixed state of things which is permitted for the present in the church; seeing Christ is preparing to cleanse his floor, and secure his wheat.

3. For this time of winnowing let us all prepare, by a careful examination and reformation of our state; and by an immediate application to the blood of sprinkling, and to God for the purifying influence of his Holy Spirit.

IOTA.

XXII. CONFESSING CHRIST BEFORE MEN.

MATT. X. 32.

“ Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also, before my Father which is in heaven.”

“ ALL, that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.” This apostolic maxim has been illustrated and established by the records of the Christian history in all ages. “ The carnal mind, being enmity against God,” is decidedly hostile to the holy constitution and renovating designs of the gospel. Hence the annals of the church have been stained with the blood of martyrs, who with pious magnanimity have chosen immolation on the altar of bigotry, rather than violate the sacred rights of conscience. Of this course of suffering and death, Jesus Christ most fully apprized his followers, when he planted Christianity in the earth, Matt. x. 16—22. At the same time furnishing them with the most ample encouragement, steadily to persevere in the path of duty which lay before them, by referring to his own reproach and suffering, ver. 24, 25 ; to the circumscribed extent of their enemies’ malevolent influence, ver. 28 ; to the minute care of divine providence, ver. 29—31 ; to the awful consequence of timidity and cowardice, ver. 33, 39 ; and to the honourable and highly advantageous result of Christian magnanimity. The last description of encouragement is contained in the passage before us, in discussing which we shall have to consider,

I. THE NATURE OF THAT CONFESSION WHICH CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES,

II. THE HONOURABLE DISTINCTION WITH WHICH A STEADY COURSE OF CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE WILL BE CROWNED.

I. THE NATURE OF THAT CONFESSION WHICH CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES. This interesting confession includes various considerations, viz.

1. *An open avowal of the person and messiahship of Christ.* The sacred Scriptures represent Jesus Christ as that “ Word”

which "was in the beginning with God," and which "was God;" the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last:" and yet was "made flesh," and dwelt amongst the inhabitants of the earth for the purpose of human redemption. Therefore those who scripturally "confess Christ before men," unequivocally acknowledge his "eternal power and Godhead," and yet gratefully consider the mysterious union of the divine nature with the human as a luminous display of the love of God to fallen man, and as the divinely appointed means of rescuing him from everlasting perdition. And this they are not ashamed publicly to avow and support, in opposition to the presuming pride of human reason, which absurdly affects to reject and deny that which it cannot comprehend, John i. 1—3, 13, x. 30, xiv, 11; Col. i. 16, 17; John iii. 16; Phillip. ii. 5—8. But as devils have thus confessed Christ, saying, "We know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God," it is necessary to proceed further, and notice,

2. *A conscientious adherence to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.* In every theory which the human mind is capable of embracing, there are certain grand principles which are individually essential to the existence and consistency of the whole. So the Christian character, while it has for its ground work a conscientious avowal of the person and messiahship of Christ, includes in its superstructure a sincere confession of the deep rooted depravity of the human heart, and its consequent moral incapacity, Gen. iii. 8—19; Jer. xvii. 9; xiii. 23; 2 Cor. iii. 5; of the atonement and mediation of Christ, as the only legitimate medium of access to God, Isa. liii. 4, 5; 1 Pet. ii. 24; Rom. v. 11; Heb. vii. 24, 25; Rom. v. 1, 2;—of the reality of the Holy Spirit's influence, as a principle of spiritual light, renovation, life, and holiness, Eph. i. 17, 18, ii 1; Rom. xv. 13; Ezek. xxxvi. 25;—of the justification of the penitent sinner through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, John iii. 16—18; Rom. iii. 24—27, iv. 2—8; Gal. ii. 16, iii. 6—12;—and of holiness of heart and life, as the evidence of faith and of meetness for the felicities of the heavenly world, 1 Cor. vi. 11; 1 Pet. i. 13—16; 1 Thess. iii. 13; Heb. xii. 10, 14; Col. i. 12.

3. *A declaration of the benefits received.* The true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, having been made the partaker of in-

numerable blessings at the hands of his Divine Master, gratefully acknowledges his obligations, and with pious solicitude inquires, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?" And he evinces his gratitude to God by aspirations of praise;—by carefully guarding the good which he has received;—by emulating more exalted enjoyments;—and by publishing, for the good of others, what God has done for him, Ps. xxxiv. 1, 2; 1 Cor. xv. 57; Phil. iii. 8—16; Ps. lxvi. 16; Rom. x. 10; Acts xxiv. 26.

4. *Zealously promoting the cause of Christian truth.* No man can properly "confess Christ before men," without feeling a lively concern for the extension of the gospel in the earth. This pious zeal manifests itself by owning, adhering to, and kindly aiding the followers of Christ, John xiii. 35; by administering affectionate reproof to the ungodly, Lev. xix. 17; Eph. v. 11; by exhibiting an example of Christian excellence to the world, Matt. v. 13, 16; by contributing pecuniary support, Prov. iii. 9; Luke viii. 13; and by submitting to reproach and suffering when circumstances require it, Acts vii. 54—60; xx. 24. xxi. 13; 2 Cor. xi. 23—33.

II. THE HONOURABLE DISTINCTION WITH WHICH A STEADY COURSE OF CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE WILL BE CROWNED. "Him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Although man is by nature a rebel against the Majesty of heaven; yet the subject of vital godliness is owned, and highly distinguished by his God, even whilst journeying down the vale of life, by the ample supplies furnished to him, the invulnerable defence with which he is favoured, the divine enjoyments of which he is the partaker, and the animating hope with which he is inspired. But the blessed Redeemer doubtless refers to that solemn period when,

‘ The Judge, descending, thunders from afar,
And all mankind are summon’d to his bar;’

to that tremendous "day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ," "who will render unto every man according to his deeds." At that awful period of final decision, the Redeemer "will confess his followers before assembled worlds, by,

1. *An act of separation.* In the present condition of man,

the Christian has to maintain a frequent intercourse with that class of his fellow creatures, who are under the influence of sinful habits and immoral dispositions; and this necessary intermixture is sometimes productive of painful sensations and moral danger. Even in the silent grave the dust of the righteous and the wicked, in an intermixed state, rests till the morning of the general judgment, "when the dead shall be raised," and an eternal separation take place between "those who serve God, and those who serve him not," Matt. xxv. 31—33; Luke xvi. 26.

2. *By an approving plaudit.* The Lord Jesus Christ, in the character of Judge, will publicly *own the persons* and *approve the conduct* of those who have boldly asserted his right, and suffered in his cause. Before angels, devils, and men, he will bear testimony to their faithfulness, and introduce them to those regions of unalloyed delight where the "wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest," Matt. xxv. 23, 34—40.

3. *By making them the partakers of his glory.* Such is the amazing condescension of the "Captain of our salvation," that although it is through strength divine that the Christian overcomes his enemies, perseveres in the path of righteousness, and achieves a final conquest, yet he addresses him, and acts towards him, as though the whole were effected solely by unaided human energy. He does not remind him of his dependence and his obligations, but makes him the partaker of his honours, his throne, and his felicity. And this glory is *inviolable, eternal,* and yet *progressive*, John xiv. 1—3; Matt. xxv. 46; Rev. iii. 5, 21, v. 10.

From this subject we learn,

1. That the human heart is, by nature, decidedly hostile to the spirit of the gospel.

2. That an entire change is essential to a scriptural confession of Christ.

3. That the Christian cannot ultimately be a loser by suffering for righteousness' sake.

OMICRON.

XXIII. THE TRANSCENDENT GREATNESS OF JESUS CHRIST, THE MEASURE OF MAN'S GUILT IN REJECTING HIM.

MATT. xii. 41, 42.

“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

“It is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God;” therefore let him that readeth understand, and be upon his guard. For whether we reflect on the provocation which men give unto the Lord by tempting him, or the mischief they bring upon themselves, we cannot but consider it a most dreadful sin. And in nothing can we tempt him more, than by captiously calling in question the authority with which his Son, as his most illustrious messenger, was clothed, or by daringly trampling under foot his most important message. Hence that caution, “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh,” &c. Heb. xii. 25. Moses was but an inferior messenger, and yet the captious manner in which Korah and his companions called his authority in question, and the daring manner in which they insulted him, as the messenger of God, cost them their lives, Num. xvi. 28—35. But how much more criminal will all those be considered, who either call in question or despise the mission of Jesus Christ! On this very account the Jews in our Lord’s time were accounted *evil and adulterous*, see Matt. xii. 39. And hence it is that they were menaced with peculiar shame and guilt in the day of judgment, see the text. And should we fall into their sin, we shall fall into condemnation worse than theirs. But that we may fully see the danger of not receiving Christ as the messenger of the most high God, or of not receiving his message: let us,

I. CONSIDER THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST TO
JONAS AND SOLOMON ASSERTED IN THE TEXT.

II. THE REPRESENTATION WHICH IT MAKES OF THEIR GUILT AND DANGER WHO EITHER REJECT THE SANCTION GIVEN TO HIS MISSION, OR MAKE LIGHT OF THE MESSAGE BROUGHT BY HIM.

I. CONSIDER THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST TO JONAS AND SOLOMON.

1. *He was greater than Jonas.* And who was Jonas? We answer, an eminent prophet of God, born at Gath Hepher, in the tribe of Zebulun, 2 Kings xiv. 25. He is generally allowed to have been the first of those prophets, whose writings are contained in the Old Testament, and is supposed to have sustained the prophetic office for considerably more than forty years. During the reign of Jeroboam, as some suppose, or that of Menahaim, as is supposed by others, he received commandment from the MOST HIGH, to go and preach against Nineveh, the metropolis of the Assyrian empire, on account of its great and detestable wickedness, Jon. i. 2. The timid prophet, fearing the consequences resulting to himself from the delivery of such a message, fled from the presence of the Lord, instead of going on his errand, Jonah i. 3. But the Lord prevented his flight, and punished his disobedience, Jonah i. 4—17. Out of the whale's belly, Jonah cried unto the Lord and was delivered, Jonah ii. 1—10. Having delivered him from his perilous situation, God renewed his commission to Nineveh, which he fulfilled with complete success, Jonah iii. 1—9. Being sent to such a city, with such a message, shews Jonah to have been a man of note. And who can doubt the importance of the message, seeing its object was to save the population of the largest city then existing in the world from impending ruin. But how insignificant was this messenger and his message, when compared to Jesus Christ! The former a sinful mortal; the latter the *immaculate* and *immortal* Immanuel. The former sent to save from six to seven hundred thousand persons from temporal destruction; the latter, a whole world from eternal death. The former, accredited as an inferior messenger of God; the latter, clothed with all the authority requisite to procure the reverence of all for his person and work. But,

2. *He was greater than Solomon.* And who was Solomon? We answer, King David's son and successor in the throne of Israel, and a very remarkable prince, from the very commence-

ment of his reign. His father was the most renowned monarch of his day, for piety, military prowess, and prosperity. The beginning of Solomon's reign promised greatly to surpass his father's in renown; for as soon as he was settled in the throne, God appeared to him in a dream; and said, "What shall I give thee?" Had many young men been placed in his circumstances, they would have been perfectly intoxicated with pride and ambition, in being lifted to the throne of such a kingdom. Others in his circumstances, not satisfied with all that such a state afforded for the gratification of pride and ambition, would have asked long life, riches, and conquests. Solomon asked *wisdom*, that he might fill the throne with safety to himself, with satisfaction and advantage to his subjects, and with credit to religion. And so pleasing was his request to God, that he gave him all he desired, and more, 1 Kings iii. 5—13, compared with 1 Kings x. 14—23. In consequence of this grant, the former part of his reign was uncommonly judicious and prosperous, and his fame spread rapidly and widely, reaching as far as Sheba. But report, which in almost every other instance *far exceeds* the truth, in this fell *much short* of it, 1 Kings x. 1—7. He became a great philosopher, being a great naturalist, 1 Kings iv. 33; a great moralist and poet, 1 Kings iv. 32. He was the most renowned of sovereigns, 1 Kings x. 23—27. But what were all his treasure and glory placed by the side of Christ's? Whence had he all for which he was renowned but from Jesus Christ? Jonas and Solomon were but imperfect types of Christ, had need of his constant help, and will for ever cast their glories at his feet. Jonas and Solomon, where are they? The place which knew them once, knows them no more. But as for Jesus Christ, though he was dead, he is alive again, and has the keys of hell and of death. He is at this moment appearing in all his mediatorial splendours before the wondering eyes of Jonas and Solomon in glory, and receiving their most animated ascriptions of praise. And he is in this assembly, observing the thoughts, desires, wants, and dangers of every person present. A greater than either Jonas or Solomon is here, to save and aid all whose eyes are directed to him for help. Such being the greatness and goodness of Jesus Christ, we have,

II, TO SHEW THE AGGRAVATED GUILT AND PERIL OF THOSE WHO EITHER REJECT THE SANCTION GIVEN TO HIS MISSION OR

MAKE LIGHT OF THE MESSAGE BROUGHT BY HIM. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it," &c. By which is meant, that the *considerate, penitent, and wise* behaviour of the Ninevites, and the desire of knowledge manifested by Sheba's queen, her efforts to gain it, and her candour in acknowledging and admiring the transcendent talents of Israel's king, will be a swift witness against the *inconsideration, impenitence, folly, ignorance, prejudice, and obstinacy* of the Jews, who made light of Jesus Christ. And well might the Saviour speak thus : for,

1. The Ninevites, notwithstanding their ignorance, levity, idolatry, and wickedness, give ear to Jonah's preaching. And what had Jonah to command attention ? A man of *plain appearance, a total stranger*, without any *miraculous sanction*, and having an *ungrateful message* : and yet they listened to him, believed and received his message, stood in awe of Jehovah's judgments, proclaimed a fast, broke off their iniquities, and instantly and universally set themselves to seek the Lord. Whereas Jesus Christ, God's most distinguished messenger, came to his own people, (who were professedly waiting for him,) sanctioned by the highest measure of miraculous power, bearing the most delightful message, and remained with them for three successive years, and yet continued comparatively alone ; was disowned, rejected as an impostor, and at length crucified, as one who by their law ought not to live, John i. 11, and xix. 7. But,

2. Our Lord might well say, that the conduct of Sheba's queen would be a swift witness against the Jews, and all of their spirit, in the day of judgment. For report having carried the fame of Solomon on its wing as far as Sheba, greatly distant from Judea, the queen of that country, hearing of Solomon's uncommon talents, the wisdom of his proceedings, the splendour of his court, the felicity of his people, &c. ; was desirous to see this extraordinary man, to participate his wisdom, to improve the means of her own and her people's felicity, and possibly to form an alliance with him. Be this as it may, she came all the way from Sheba to Jerusalem to obtain her object, enduring all the inconveniences of the journey, and risking the possibility of disappointment. Finding the report to be exceeded by facts, she candidly acknowledges her conviction, and ingenuously and

warmly admires this prodigy of wisdom, &c. But with respect to the Jews, and many others of the same stamp, though they profess themselves to be lovers of wisdom and what is good, and to be in quest of these; yet do they turn away from Jésus Christ, whose fame rests not on *report* but *fact*—who has been sent by God the Father, as one *eminently qualified* and *authorized* to confer these benefits on mankind—who is easy of access to all—and who has come to our *very door* to bestow this good upon us. And let it be remembered,

3. That there will be no need of any to witness against us in the day of judgment, as we shall then (if found in disobedience, impenitence, and unbelief) be speechless, being unable to plead the want of a sufficient sanction to the Saviour's mission to produce conviction, or of encouragement to allure us to obedience, or of power to carry our purposes into execution; for the same evidence, encouragement, and power, which leave us short of salvation will have been found sufficient to have conducted countless myriads of others, to glory and honour, to immortality and eternal life.

To conclude,

1. Let not any say, that Christianity is unsupported by any proper sanction or authority; let such candidly attend to the surpassing excellence of its great Founder.

2. How *great* is the guilt, and how *dreadful* will be the punishment of those, who reject this glorious messenger of God.

3. What has been our conduct towards him? If hitherto we have either *wholly* or *partially* rejected him, let us fall at his feet, and humbly confess our sin. Let not his greatness discourage us, as a mind less noble would never receive us, and a person less able could not help us.

4. So long as our Lord and Saviour shall retain this transcendent excellence, or so long as he shall remain “the same yesterday, to day, and for ever,” let us consider it our indispensable duty to glory in and adhere to him, and our most delightful employment to honour him with all our confidence.

IOTA.

XXIV. THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

MATT. XV. 25.

"Lord, help me."

WHEN Jesus came down from heaven to save a perishing world, his merciful regards extended both to Jews and Gentiles; but his ministry and miracles were, generally, confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Here, however, we have an exception. A poor woman of Canaan came unto him on behalf of her daughter, and after a painful trial of her faith, he mercifully granted unto her the blessing which she desired. The whole account is highly interesting, and will furnish us with many important and useful observations.

I. THE PERSON WHO APPLIED TO JESUS, WAS A "WOMAN OF CANAAN."

1. *Her ancestors were a wicked race*, Lev. xviii. 24, 25, who were driven out of their native country, as a just punishment of their enormous crimes, Deut. iv. 38. The Israelites, under the command of Joshua, took possession of their land; and, by divine appointment, it became their inheritance, Josh. xiv. 1, 2.

2. But the character and conduct of this woman, is a standing proof, that *the descendants of wicked nations may be reformed and saved*. This was the case with the Corinthians, of whom the apostle Paul said, alluding to the abominable wickedness of the heathen world, "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified," 1 Cor. vi. 11.

3. *Her faith in the Son of God put the Jewish people to shame*. They despised and hated him; but she honoured and adored him; and there are persons in the heathen world in the present day, whose general conduct puts to shame the merely nominal Christians of our highly favoured land.

II. SHE APPLIED TO OUR LORD FOR HER DAUGHTER, WHO WAS "GRIEVOUSLY VEXED WITH A DEVIL."

1. In many instances *devils have had power over the bodies of men and women*; and that power has been exercised in tor-

menting those who have been under their influence. But we never read of these apostate spirits doing any good, or attempting to make any person happy. They are wicked and mischievous, and it will be dreadful to be delivered into their hands, Matt. xviii. 34, 35.

2. *But Jesus had power to cast out devils*, and to deliver men from their hellish rage and malice, A word of his terrified those foul spirits, and put whole legions of them to flight. Mark v. 9—13. This poor woman had heard the fame of Jesus, Matt. iv. 24; and sought his help with humble confidence.

3. *And has he not power over devils now?* Do they not tremble at the sound of his precious name? He ‘holds the powers of hell in chains;’ he destroys their influence in our hearts, Eph. ii. 1—4; and he bruises Satan under our feet, Rom. xvi. 20.

III. THE WOMAN USED MEANS WHICH WERE PROPER, AND WHICH WELL BECAME HER SITUATION.

1. She addressed Jesus as the *son of David*, and thereby acknowledged that he was the Christ which should come into the world; for the Jews called their Messiah the son of David, because he was to descend from him, and to sit upon his throne, Isaiah ix. 7.

2. *And she cried for mercy*; the case of her daughter required the interposition of mercy. It was wise in her to go to Jesus, for he was full of grace, John i. 14; and it will be wise in us to go to him for a complete deliverance from the power and tyranny of our adversary the devil, who, “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour,” 1 Peter v. 8. She was not ashamed of earnest prayer, but cried aloud: let us also cry aloud, like David, out of the depths of penitential sorrow, Psalm cxxx. 1, 2.

IV. JESUS, AS IF HE DID NOT HEAR HER CRY, REMAINED SILENT, AND “ANSWERED HER NOT A WORD.”

1. He seemed to treat her with *contempt*; but was trying and proving her faith. How often does he proceed on a similar plan, in his dealings with humble penitents, so that they are ready to ask, “Is his mercy clean gone for ever?” Psalm lxxvii. 8.

I. But let them *patiently wait* for his salvation, Psalm xl. 1. He may be silent for a time; but mercy is in his heart. Only remain at the throne of grace, and continue to cry for mercy, and he will give an answer of peace, Gen. xli. 16.

V. HIS DISCIPLES, WEARY OF HER NOISY CRY, BESOUGHT HIM TO SEND HER AWAY.

1. It is highly probable, from the answer of Jesus, that they wished him to grant her request; for, otherwise, there would be no point in his saying, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But allowing this, there is no proof that they pitied her case, as they only wanted to get rid of her, on account of the multitude of people brought about them by her loud cries.

2. *But the ministers of Jesus should pity all who are in trouble; kindly bear with the little improprieties of behaviour which they may fall into, in such circumstances; treat them with the utmost tenderness, weeping with them that weep, Rom. xii. 15; and, especially intercede for them with their heavenly Lord and Master. A feeling heart is a fine trait in a Christian minister! Rom. ix. 1—3.*

VI. IN REPLY TO HIS DISCIPLES, JESUS STATED HIS MISSION TO THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL.

1. He calls them *lost sheep*, because they had gone astray, and were exposed to imminent perils. No animal in the world is more exposed to danger than a wandering sheep; and when the foolish conduct of men is set forth by this figure in the Holy Scriptures, their danger is forcibly pointed out; and were not the Jews exposed in their wanderings, to error, sin, and punishment?

2. Jesus was sent, as a holy prophet, to seek the wandering sheep of the house of Israel; to bring them back to the fold of God; and to place them in safe and happy circumstances. To this he alludes in another figure, where he says, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Matt. xxiii. 37.

3. *But he was not sent as a Prophet to the Gentiles, nor did he send his disciples to them in the days of his flesh, Matt. x. 5, 6; but after his resurrection he commissioned them to go "into all the world," and to "preach the gospel to every creature," Mark xvi. 15. Thus we have known the joyful sound, and we may walk in the light of the Lord's countenance, Ps. lxxxix, 15.*

VII. NOW THE WOMAN DREW NEAR AND WORSHIPPED JESUS, SAYING, "LORD HELP ME."

1. *She paid him honour as the Son of David: but we dare*

not affirm that she worshipped him as God; because we are not quite sure that she was acquainted with his divinity. Kings were worshipped with civil respect. Thus the congregation of Israel "bowed down their heads and worshipped the Lord and the king," 1 Chron. xxix. 20. But we who know the Saviour, as God over all, are bound to worship him with divine honours, Rev. v. 13.

3. The cry of the woman was, *Lord help me*: she knew he could help her, because he had helped others in similar circumstances; and she hoped he would help her, because she had heard of his wonderful compassion. With this conviction, let us approach his mercy seat, resting assured that he is both able and willing to help us, in our lowest and most abject state.

3. Many persons would have been *offended* at the silence of Jesus; but this poor woman, being strong in faith, took no offence. It ill becomes a suppliant to murmur and complain, especially one who applies for blessings on the ground of mercy; and what other grounds have we? We are sinners, and there is no salvation for us but by grace, Eph. ii. 8.

VIII. BUT WHEN THIS WOMAN PAID HONOUR TO OUR LORD, AND ASKED HIS GRACIOUS HELP, HE SPAKE TO HER WITH APPARENT UNKINDNESS.

1. He called the house of Israel *children*; but they were rebellious children, Isaiah i. 2. They treated him cruelly; but he expressed tender love to them. That love continued, when their malice had brought him to the cross. There he said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," Luke xxiii. 34. He was not willing, after all, to give them up to wrath and justice, Hosea xi. 8.

2. The blessings which he was bestowing on those rebellious children, he called bread. By that bread he meant his wise instructions, his healing power, and his nourishing influences. He was the bread of life, and if his own nation had received him as the true Messiah, he would have fed them with the bread of life, as he had fed their fathers by manna in the wilderness, John vi. 31—35.

3. Though his own nation despised that bread, yet he said to this Canaanite, it is not meet to take it from them, and to cast it to the dogs. He did not call her countrymen dogs; but reminded her that they were viewed with contempt, on account

of their impurities and abominations. This was not said with a view to reproach any class of men ; but to prove her faith.

IX. THE WOMAN, CONSCIOUS OF HER VILENESS, ACKNOWLEDGED THE TRUTH OF HIS OBSERVATION ; BUT HUMBLY CRAVED THE CRUMBS WHICH MIGHT FALL FROM HIS TABLE.

1. Here we see a remarkable instance of *genuine humility* : the poor Canaanite did not say a word about the degrading title, but only, "*Truth, Lord.*" It was as much as if she had said, 'let us be called dogs, let us be treated as dogs ; we deserve such treatment, and I will not attempt to prove that we have any just claims to thy benevolence.'

2. But her remarks were *ingenious and inimitably beautiful* : and the reason assigned, why it was not meet to give her the children's bread, was made the ground of her pleading. 'The Canaanites, who deserve to be called dogs, ought not to expect the bread of children ; but remember, Lord, that dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table : and I only ask thee for the crumbs which are given to those animals.'

3. How strong was her faith ; how persevering her application ; how earnest her desire to obtain the blessing ! A humbled spirit is willing to be accounted vile. Let us carefully study, and humbly own, our vileness ; and while we humble ourselves before the Lord, and deem the smallest favour an undeserved boon, his mighty hand will lift us up, James iv. 10 ; 1 Peter v. 6.

X. WHEN HER FAITH WAS PROVED, JESUS SAID, "BE IT UNTO THEE EVEN AS THOU WILT."

1. Her faith in the power and merciful kindness of Christ was great. When he was silent she was not discouraged, but waited for an answer ; and when he hinted at her unworthiness to receive the children's bread, she said, "*Truth, Lord.*" Hence we learn, that a steady and strong faith in our adorable Saviour produces persevering prayer ; and the humble penitent says, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," Gen. xxxii. 26.

2. The poor woman was blessed ; her faith and prayer were successful ; and her daughter was made whole from that very hour. And we may boldly affirm, that all our lawful petitions, offered up in the name of Jesus, will be heard and answered ; for he has said, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you," Luke xi. 9.

INFERENCES.

1. The usurped dominion of the devil, and the miseries of his deluded children, demand particular attention. Let us study his devices, 2 Cor. xi. 14; and resist him that he may flee from us, James iv. 7.

2. It is a pleasing reflection, that the head of this old serpent has been bruised, agreeably to the first promise, Gen. iii. 15; and that the seed of the woman has power to bind him in chains, Rev. xx. 1—3.

3. We should go to Jesus in all our troubles; exercise ourselves in a devotional faith; expect deliverance from him alone; and when delivered, give him the glory which is due to his holy name.

4. Our griefs and sorrows will soon come to an end; we shall be removed far from our enemy, the devil; and spend a blessed eternity with God our Saviour. He is now touched with the feeling of our infirmities; he has a loving heart and a strong hand; and is mighty to save his chosen people, Isaiah lxiii. 1.

SIGMA.

XXV. THE LOVE OF THE SAINTS DESTROYED,
BY THE ABOUNDING OF INIQUITY.

MATT. xxiv. 12.

“ And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

THESE words contain a prediction of two events, of all others the most unlikely ever to occur; the abounding of sin, and the failure of the Christian's love. 1. What likelihood was there of the abounding of iniquity among the Jews, as the intolerable yoke of ceremonies was broken off their necks, and a simple rational worship substituted in its place? And besides, were they not honoured with the first offers of the gospel, and with the most signal expressions of the divine favour? 2. What

probability was there of sin abounding among the Gentiles? After having been long despised by God's covenant people, and left to grope after present and future good in the dark, they now were honoured with marks of divine favour, and in common with the Jews, were called to the enjoyment of gospel blessings, and to hope of life and immortality; and could they readily sin against such mercies? Nay, 3. What probability was there of sins abounding any where, and among any people? God had now caused the Sun of Righteousness to arise on this benighted world. He had now sent his *best* and most *honourable* Messenger into it. He had now peremptorily commanded "*all men* every where to repent." He had now announced that the unfruitful would no longer be endured. Was there any likelihood that, under these circumstances, men would dare to sin? And yet the Saviour's predictions were most awfully verified, as the testimony of Josephus fully shews, Book V. Jewish Wars, chap. xiii. sec. 6. It was not peculiar to that day, that the abounding of sin should cool the Christian's love; and hence the scripture should put us on our guard. And that it may do so, we will,

I. SHEW YOU WHEN INIQUITY MAY BE SAID TO ABOUND.

II. HOW ITS ABOUNDING OPERATES TO COOL THE LOVE OF CHRISTIANS.

1. *Shew you when iniquity may be said to abound.* In general, we may say, that iniquity abounds in any place, when it is committed by a greater number of persons, more generally by each of them, and under circumstances of increasing aggravation. Thus, for instance, in Sodom, the number of transgressors nearly equalled the population. And there is reason to fear that iniquity abounds in the same sense this day, in some places, as much as it did in Sodom. But it shall be our endeavour to furnish some of the most obvious and striking marks of the abounding of iniquity, that you may be fully on your guard. And,

1. When those who are set for the defence of the doctrines and mysteries of the gospel, can see these assaulted, corrupted, and trampled under foot without emotion. Assaulted by self-sufficient and unhumiliated reason that dares to *doubt* what she cannot *scan*. Assaulted by infidelity, whose round assertions, vulgar witticisms, superficial and sophistical arguments are

levelled at their evidence and sublimity. Corrupted by the ignorance, weakness, and the horrors of superstition. Trampled on by all lovers of iniquity, of every age, nation, and condition.

2. Iniquity abounds, when the number of those increase, who live in the total and habitual disregard of experimental and practical religion. What can be more necessary to the honour and happiness of man than these? And what can be more essential to his everlasting welfare? Or what can be more conducive to the peace and well-being of society? And what can more effectually secure to us the divine blessing, than the possession; or more expose us to the divine indignation than the want of these? When, therefore, men can live in an habitual disregard of them, do they not shew themselves to be the subjects either of a criminal ignorance, or of a total want of moral sensibility? And, consequently, when men of this description increase in number, iniquity abounds.

3. Iniquity may be said to abound, when *perfection in piety* is made a butt at which the ungodly level the darts of ridicule, calumny, and bitterness. Religion is so venerable in her mien, so amiable in her manners, and sheds so many blessings on the spot where she resides, that one would think it a thing impossible for any to persecute her. When then a cordial reception of religion, a firm adherence to it, a great advancement in, and a zealous propagation of it, are considered as forming a sufficient reason for casting out a person's name as evil, for undermining his reputation, injuring his person and connections, plundering his property; nay, when the wisdom of the wisest, the innocence of the most innocent, the most extensive benevolence, the most unvarying fidelity, the most intimate acquaintance, and the nearest affinity of blood, cannot shield a man from insults and injuries, from the most barbarous and brutal usage of his fellow-creatures; iniquity may be said to have reached a pitch of influence extremely fatal.

4. Then may iniquity be said to abound, when (in case it is pointedly and determinedly opposed by the ministers and servants of God) it can, by an appeal to the affections and passions of the multitude, command the succours of men of all ages, ranks, professions, and conditions. When children and parents, old and young, magistrates and citizens, princes and

subjects, priests and people, masters and servants, rich and poor, give each other countenance in crime, and provoke each other to it by example, by solicitation, and by menaces. Such a state of things may well remind us of the world before the flood, see Gen. vi. 5—7; or of that before the destruction of Sodom, Gen. xix. 12, 13; and also put us on our guard, as we have,

II. TO SHEW THAT ITS ABOUNDING OPERATES TO COOL THE LOVE OF CHRISTIANS. But before we do this, let us notice what is implied in the text; as,

First, That there is no religion where there is not love, 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3; 1 Tim. i. 5. Consequently, the Christian name without love, is empty and unprofitable.

Secondly, The text implies, that unless our love be fervent, it will do but little for us. Without this, it will not lead to holy singularity, activity, enterprize. Our text, however, does not so much direct our attention to our danger of falling short of love, as from it. Some are indeed of opinion, that he who has once really possessed love, can never lose it. To these we may concede, without compromising any truth of revelation, that the more perfect any man is made in love, the less liable is he to fall from it. We may also grant to them that a considerable portion of those who apostatize from the Christian profession, are such as never had any root in themselves. But we think that the text plainly points to the possibility of falling from the *real* possession of love, and shews how this defection is brought about. As,

1. By the abounding of iniquity, evil examples, counsels and efforts to turn us away from God are multiplied. These, by arresting our attention, interest and contaminate our affections. As evil affections increase, we have less time and inclination for devotional exercises. This being the case, our intercourse with God, his people, and the spiritual world, decreases. Nay, it cannot long subsist in such a state.

2. When the abounding of iniquity is accompanied by an opposition to pre-eminent piety, and the persecution of it, it diminishes the ardour of divine love, by increasing the fear of man; see Mark iv. 17. Such things, by making good men suspicious and shy of each other, deprive them of the counsel, sympathy, exhortations, and helps, which are necessary to fan the flames of love. Hence they are peculiarly calculated to

wear out the saints of the Most High. Therefore it is, that during their continuance, love is dethroned in those in whom it was not made perfect, and dominion is given to that fear of hardship, suffering, and death, which betrays its subjects into cowardice and apostacy.

3. When religion is persecuted with much violence and cruelty, it so outrages the rights of conscience, and so infringes on the divine prerogative, as to endanger the loss of our love in the spirit of vengeance. What have we not felt, when simply reading of such cruelties? What would our feelings be, were we called to be spectators of them? And what should we be, were such violence offered to ourselves? I fear that it is no uncommon case for persons in such circumstances to encourage an indignation which blindly fastens on the offender instead of the offence, and leaves not the least degree of pity in the breast for the misguided. Such feelings will lead to bitter language, infuriated zeal, and the most ungovernable passions and proceedings. In short, such a spirit, like an overwhelming flood, will hurry us on from crime to crime, until it heave us into the ocean of endless perdition. Thus see Peter first drawing his sword, then cursing and swearing, and then denying his Master.

To conclude :—

1. In what does your religion consist? Is it love? Genuine religion cannot exist without this.

2. That you may sustain no harm by the abounding of iniquity, often be searching into the progress of vice and virtue. Unless by this spirit of observation you perceive when iniquity overflows its banks, you will be in danger of being carried away by the flood.

3. It will be necessary for you to find out, not only *when*, but in *what way* iniquity abounds, as the nature of your danger must determine the nature of your defence. If evil examples, &c., multiply, guard your attention, affections, &c. If infidelity abound, beware of the pride of reason and the impatience of restraint. If superstition abound, guard against credulous conceits and will worship. If persecution prevail, guard against the fear of man and a spirit of violence.

4. By advancing to perfection, let us elevate ourselves above

the flight of these infernal showers of arrows which endanger us, or place ourselves beyond the reach of the desolating flood.

IOTA.

XXVI. THE MIRACLES OF THE LOAVES CONSIDERED AND APPLIED.

MARK vi. 52.

“For they considered not the miracle of the loaves.”

OUR text plainly intimates that the miracle of the loaves, when properly improved, is favourable to the interests of piety—that the followers of Christ are required to consider this miracle—and that those who neglect to consider it, thereby displease God, and injure themselves. Let us therefore endeavour to avoid the censures merited by negligence, and to secure the benefit graciously designed for us, by considering and applying the miracle as our duty and interest require. Let us,

1. CONSIDER THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES. In doing this, observe,

1. *The singular repetition of this miracle.*—It is recorded by *all* the four Evangelists; by Matthew, in his 14th chapter; by Mark in this; by Luke in his ninth chapter; and by John, in his sixth. And it is the only miracle of our Lord that is thus recorded by *all* the Evangelists. Hence it appears that this miracle is considered by the Holy Ghost of peculiar importance, as particularly calculated to promote the honour of Christ, and the benefit of mankind. And being thus distinguished by God himself, it should be attended to by us with the utmost seriousness. Observe,

2. *The persons for whose relief it was wrought.*—These were the attentive followers of Christ: who came to learn of him, who made his spiritual favours the object of their supreme pursuit.—The followers of Christ when in need of necessary food. The miracle was not wrought ostentatiously, for the purpose of exciting astonishment, or extorting applause; it was not designed to foster vanity, to gratify curiosity, nor to countenance intemperance; but to furnish plain supplies, which were rendered necessary by the exemplary performance of pious duty. These persons were—The followers of Christ, when incapable of obtaining necessary supplies by merely human means. God never works miracles, but when his gracious purposes cannot be effected in the usual course of his providence. While the Israelites remained in a barren wilderness, they were fed with bread from heaven; but when they entered into a land of plenty, the manna ceased. It is only when human means cannot be employed, or fail of success, that we have authority to expect supernatural relief.

3. *Observe the manner in which this miracle was wrought,* with respect both to the order and nature of it.—As to the order of it. The provisions appear to have been brought to Christ in their natural unaltered state. The companies into which the multitude was divided, most probably consisted of two fifties, or one hundred men each, who are supposed to have been seated with their faces towards each other, as at an entertainment: hence they are said to “sit down in ranks by hundreds and by fifties.” Of these companies there were about fifty; and thus the men were known to be about five thousand, besides women and children, who were most probably seated by themselves apart. When the multitude was thus arranged, the provisions were blessed by our Lord, and then they were distributed by the hands of the disciples.—As to the nature of this miracle; whether it was effected by means of a creation, or of multiplication, has been disputed in the schools with more strife of words than either of wisdom or profit. It is certain, at least, that the loaves and fishes increased as our Lord divided them: and the miracle must therefore imply the augmentation of what already existed, by a creation of what had not existed before;—it was both a multiplication and a creation.

4. *Observe the incontestible evidence of the miracle.* This

arises—From the *number* of its witnesses; considerably above five thousand.—From the *time* when it was wrought: in the open day, when there could be no imposition practised, with the possibility of success.—From the diversity of the multitude, some of whom followed Christ sincerely, and some did not, there could be no collusion.—And from the convincing attestation of all their senses. They all *saw, ate, and were filled*; they could not be deceived. That we also may enjoy the benefit of this miracle, let us,

II. APPLY IT. In doing this, observe the miracle before us conveys instruction, and administers reproof.

First, *It conveys instruction.* Among other things it teaches us,

1. *What should be the object of our first and principal care.* Like this multitude, you should come to Christ that you may be taught and blessed by him. To this he invites you, Matt. xi. 28—30.—Like this multitude, to follow Christ should be your first care. Seek him first in life, Eccl. xii. 1; Prov. viii. 17; and first in every day, Ps. v. 3; Prov. xxiii. 17.—Like this multitude, to follow Christ should be your principal care. This is the principal thing, Prov. iv. 7; and the one thing needful, Luke x. 42. This miracle teaches us,

2. *The extensive advantage of piety.* It is crowned with the compassion of Christ, and with the blessings of providence.—It is crowned with the compassion of Christ. Only follow him as he requires; then he will heal you, as he did this multitude, see Matt. xiv. 14; Isa. liii. 5; and he will also teach you many things, Mark vi. 34; Luke i. 78, 79.—It is crowned with the blessings of providence. These are promised, Matt. vi. 33; and have ever been enjoyed by the faithful, Ps. cxi. 5. This miracle teaches us,

3. *The propriety of contentment with the plain necessities of life.*—Such were chosen by Christ, both when he entertained the multitude here, and the disciples after his resurrection, John xxi. 13.—And with these Christ's followers may and should be satisfied, 1 Tim. vi. 6—8. This miracle teaches us,

4. *The Christian's obligations to engage in labours of benevolence.*—With respect to the extent of our charity, our Lord's example instructs us to relieve both the temporal and spiritual

wants of those around us, James v. 19, 20 ; Matt. xxv. 34—40. With respect to the measure of charity, this must be according to what we have. "Give ye them to eat," ver. 37. We must employ what we have for the benefit of mankind, and the honour of our Master.—With respect to the reward of charity, this we learn from what the disciples here experienced. The more they gave, the more they had. To give is our truest interest, Luke viii. 18, and vi. 38. Prov. xi. 24. This miracle teaches us,

5. *The importance of God's blessing on our enjoyments and labours.* It was Christ's blessing on those provisions that rendered them so beneficial.—So it is God's blessing on our food that renders it nutritious, Matt iv. 4.—It is God's blessing on our labours that renders them successful, 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. Hence, all our enjoyments and labours should be brought to Christ, with prayer, that he may bless them, Deut. xxxiii. 11; and with thanksgiving for his blessing, Ps. lxvi. 20. As this miracle conveys instruction, so,

Secondly, *It administers reproof.* It reproves,

1. *Those who prefer worldly objects to the salvation of their souls*—either by seeking worldly objects exclusively, Phil. iii. 18, 19; Ps. x. 4; or by seeking worldly objects supremely, hereby neglecting their souls to gain the world, Matt. 16, 26. Such consider not the miracle of the loaves.

2. *It reproves those who are discontented with the allotments of Providence.* The discontented manifest—great pride; as if their actions were meritorious, and God was their debtor—great impiety; by impiously arraigning God's providence as if it were deficient in justice, goodness, wisdom, or prayer—great folly; in desiring what would prove destructive to them, Ps. cvi. 15.—And great forgetfulness of Christ's example: who was thankful for plain necessities. They consider not the miracle of the loaves.

3. *It reproves those who omit the performance of present duties, through incapacity to perform higher ones.* Some think what they would do, if they were rich, or had popular talents, or had much leisure time, like others around them; but while thus amusing themselves with vain fancies, they do not give or improve what they now have, as the disciples did. They do not consider the miracle of the loaves.

4. *It reproveth those who neglect to acknowledge God in the provision he makes for them.* God as certainly provides for us now, as he would have done if we had been sustained by miracle. His power and goodness are as conspicuous in multiplying *corn*, as they could have been in multiplying *bread*. Those therefore who omit to acknowledge God's hand in the provision he makes for them, are more stupid than brutes, Isa. i. 3. "The ox," &c. They consider not the miracle of the loaves.

5. *It reproveth those who frustrate the design of God's bounty by careless wastefulness:* for here the fragments were required to be gathered up, that nothing might be lost, or wasted.—*Time*,—favourable *opportunities* for getting and doing good,—and worldly *property*, are all God's blessings, and should be improved: but those who destroy time, by *vice* and *trifling*, who lose opportunities by *neglect*, and who waste property by *extravagance*, forget Christ's command: they consider not the miracle of the loaves.

6. *It reproveth those who in the path of duty distrust God.* The disciples here were in the path of duty; furnished for all their exercises,—provided for amidst them,—and rewarded after them, with much more than they dispensed. Therefore, while doing God's work, do not distrust him. Consider the miracle of the loaves, and confidently expect *capacity* for duty,—*provision* in it,—and *reward* after it, Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 12.

ALPHA.

XXVII. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

LUKE viii. 18.

"Take heed therefore how ye hear."

IN the former part of this chapter, St. Luke records an interesting parable, which our Lord addressed to an immense multitude of people, and afterwards explained to the disciples, at their request. We find the parable itself in the fourth and four

succeeding verses; the explanation follows, from the ninth verse to the fifteenth. Of this parable, our text is the application; in the improvement of which we are naturally led to make some observations on the parable, and to deduce some inferences from it. Let us consider,

I. THE OBSERVATIONS TO BE MADE ON THIS PARABLE. These may relate—to its claims on the attention of mankind—to the seed—the sower—and the soil, or the various kinds of ground here specified.

1. *Observe the claims of this parable on the attention of mankind.* These arise—From its various and generally interesting contents. Some parts of God's words are applicable only to one description of characters, and some perhaps only to another, but this parable is applicable to all. It instructs the ignorant, it alarms the careless, it warns formal and unfaithful professors, while, at the same time, it encourages those who both know and do the will of God. Its claims on our attention further arise—from our Lord's solemn commands respecting it:—to hear the parable and attend to it. "Behold a sower went forth to sow." By his injunction we are required to consider the parable as of peculiar importance. He also commands us—To understand the parable; for he introduces his explanation of it, by saying, "Hear the parable of the sower," Matt. xiii. 18. Thus he requires us to become acquainted with the meaning of the parable, and to retain it for practical purposes. It should also be recollected that these commands are laid upon all without exception. All who have immortal souls to be saved, should have ears to hear the gospel of our salvation. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," ver. 8.

2. *Observe the seed which the sower went forth to sow.* This is the word of God, and may be considered, both as the gift of heaven, and as a principle of fruitfulness. Consider it—As the gift of heaven, or the effect of heavenly influence. Thus it is represented by God himself, Isa. lv. 10, 11. From its fulness, its sublimity, its purity, and its efficacy, we evidently perceive that God is its author; and from its holy and beneficial tendency we know that the salvation of mankind is the great end for which it is given, 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. This leads us to consider it also—As a principle or cause of fruitfulness. It produces fruit of various kinds. For instance, It produces the fruit of *saving*

knowledge, Ps. cxix. 130.—It produces the fruit of *reformation from sin*, Ps. cxix. 9, 128.—It produces the fruit of *conversion to God*, or dedication to his service, Ps. cxix. 7; Acts xxvi. 18; John xvii. 17.—It produces the fruit of *edification in holiness*, Acts xx. 32; Jude 20, 21.—And it produces the fruit of *divine consolation*, Ps. xciv. 19, and cxix. 111.

3. *Observe the sower.* This is the minister of God's word. Now a good minister, like a good sower, must be—*A discriminating person*; one who is able to discern between the tares and the wheat, the grain and the chaff, the principal wheat and the refuse, 2 Tim. ii. 2; Titus ii. 1—*A diligent person.* He must be diligent in *preparing for his work*; by selecting, laying up, and keeping in readiness the most important truths. The spiritual parent must lay up for his children, 2 Cor. xii. 14; Mal. iii. 7. He must be diligent *in his work*. He must not remain indolent on his bed; nor inactive in his house; nor always, even in his granary; he must go forth to sow his seed. He must go forth in a course of public teaching, pastoral visits, and unwearied endeavours to seek and to save lost souls, Rom. i. 14; 2 Tim. iv. 2; Dan. xii. 4. The spiritual sower goeth forth, not to be silent, not to lay waste God's husbandry, nor to purvey for himself; he seeks not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved, 1 Cor. x. 33. *A resolute person.*—A good sower is not deterred from his work by wintry cold, Prov xx. 4; nor by threatening storms, Eccl. xi. 4; nor by tedious delay, James v. 7; so good ministers must not be deterred from their work, by the wintry cold of *ingratitude*. In some cases they will perhaps find, with the apostle, that the more abundantly they love the people, the less they are beloved by them; but still they should, like him, gladly spend and seek to be spent for their benefit, 2 Cor. xii. 15. They must not be deterred by storms of *persecution* and *temptation*, Acts xx. 24. They must not be deterred by the *delay*,[†] either of *visible fruit*, or the *remunerating harvest*, for the persevering sower cannot labour in vain, Eccl. xi. 6; Gal. vi. 9; 1 Pet. v. 4.

4. *Observe the soil, or the various kinds of ground here specified.* These represent mankind to whom the word of God is sent; who, being various in their dispositions are differently affected by it.—*By some God's word is never received*: not into their understandings, for they never attend to it; nor into

their memories, for they cannot recollect what they do not understand; nor into their affections, for they despise the word, Ps. cvii. 11; Prov xiii. 13. Such characters are represented by the "way side;" they receive not the word, because it is taken away by the wicked one. "Then cometh," &c. ver. 12. He taketh it away, by suggesting evil and unseasonable thoughts to their minds, or by leading their attention to some distracting objects. *In some it withers away for want of root:* these are represented by the rocky ground. Such persons receive the word into their understandings, memories, and affections; for when they hear the word, they receive it with joy: they rejoice to hear the doctrines of the gospel, and to hear them ably taught, ver. 13. But it soon *withers*; for in seasons of temptation they yield, and fall into known sin; and in seasons of persecution they renounce their religious profession, to avoid suffering. It withers *through want of root*. Perhaps it wants root, because their hearts were not prepared for receiving it, by a deep conviction of their fallen state by nature: or perhaps by their resting short of an assured interest in Christ, by pardon and adoption: for it is this assurance only that can enable us to endure suffering for the sake of Christ and his gospel, Heb. x. 34.—*In some, it appears promising for a season, and yet it fails of bringing forth fruit to perfection.* These are represented by the thorny ground. In such characters, the seed evidently took root, else it could not be choked: but it brought no fruit to perfection; not the ripe fruit of persevering holiness; that fruit to which alone the promise of eternal life belongs, Rom. ii. 7. It becomes unprofitable by means of choking thorns. These thorns are the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and evil desires, Mark iv. 19. These, when not watched against, destroy what is good in us, and, like thorns, grievously torment us, 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10; Jer. ii. 19.—*In some it brings forth fruit to perfection.* These are represented by the good ground. All such characters receive the word; they entertain it, and do not despise it like the way-side hearers, Ps. cxix. 11. They keep it in honest and good hearts, and do not lose it like the rocky and thorny ground hearers. They bring forth fruit; the fruit of holiness, Rom. vi 22; fruit of every requisite kind, Tit. ii. 12. They bring forth fruit *with patience*; fruit that never fails, Ps. i. 1—3; James i. 25. That we may do the same, let us consider,

II. SOME INFERENCES DEDUCED FROM THIS PARABLE.

As our text requires us to take heed how we hear, so the parable teaches us how this care to hear aright should be manifested by us.

1. *We should take heed, and be careful to hear cautiously.*—Because it is God's word only that can promote our salvation, James i. 21. We are in danger of being *deceived* by false teachers, 1 John iv. 1. Hence, we should take heed *what* we hear, Mark iv. 24; Acts xvii. 11; 1 Thess. v. 21.

2. *We should take heed and be careful to hear seriously.*—Because our profiting by God's word greatly depends on the manner in which we receive it. The same seed, scattered by the same sower, has different effects, as it is differently received.—Hear therefore with serious *preparation*, 1 Peter ii. 1, 2; James i. 21.—And hear with serious *prayer*. Before hearing, pray for divine illumination, Ps. cxix. 18 and 73; while hearing, pray for your teachers, yourselves, and fellow-worshippers; after hearing, pray for God's preserving grace, Ps. cxix. 80.

3. *We should take heed and be careful to hear fruitfully.*—Because God's word is designed to govern all our deportment, James ii. 12.—Aim therefore at *fruit* in all your hearing:—fruit of every *possible kind*; of knowledge, holiness, and comfort; fruit in the *highest degree*, even a hundred fold: and fruit that still *increases*, by addition and growth, 2 Peter i. 5—10, and iii. 18.

4. *We should take heed and be careful to hear with self-examination.*—Because God's word is generally misimproved. This the parable intimates, and this is too evident from notorious facts, Matt. vii. 14.—Hence, modestly *suspect* yourselves, lest you prove unfruitful, Matt. xxvi. 22.—And faithfully *examine* yourselves: do you bring forth requisite fruit? Gal. vi. 4.

5. *We should take heed and be careful to hear with incessant circumspection.*—Because God's word in us is always liable to fatal injuries. Are you mere *way-side* hearers?—ignorant, unconverted, without the comforts of piety? Then consider what the devil intends by taking away the word from you, even to prevent your salvation, ver. 12. Do not therefore concur with him, Eph. iv. 27; but renounce, and resist him, Matt. xxvi. 41, and seeking gospel salvation by evangelical repentance, Acts iii. 19. Are you only *rocky ground* hearers? Remember the

form of godliness is not sufficient, Gal. vi. 15. Implore established piety, Ps. xc. 14, 16, 17. Are you *fruitful* hearers? Then still beware of choking thorns, Luke xxi. 34, 36; of consuming sloth, Prov. xviii. 9; and of blighting pride, Prov. xxix. 23.

ALPHA.

XXVIII. THE INADEQUACY OF WORLDLY GOOD TO SATISFY THE SOUL.

LUKE xii. 15.

“Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth.”

QUARRELS and animosities sometimes take place in families, occasioned by preferred claims to property. In the context, we perceive some uneasiness existing between two brothers about their paternal inheritance; for one of these applied to our Saviour, requesting him to prevail with his brother to give him his share. But our Saviour, never interfering in civil matters, refused to meddle in their quarrel. At the same time their disposition affording him a fair opportunity of giving advice on the subject of covetousness, he shews that neither the length, nor the happiness of a man’s life depends on the largeness or extent of his possessions. In the text we have—a *crime*—a *caution*—a *reason* assigned.

A CRIME;—*covetousness*, or inordinate desire, Πλεονεξίας from πλέον *more*, and ἔχειν *to have*, the desire to have *more* and *more*, let a person possess whatever he may. The word signifies an insatiable desire of the things of this world. Dr. A. Clarke in *loc.* This renders a man,

1. *Dissatisfied with what he has*, whether little or much. His desires being larger than his possessions, he does not enjoy

what he has. His circle is too circumscribed, the ground is too narrow for his range of operation ; therefore he is restless and uneasy.

2. *Eager and rapacious in attempting to enlarge his possessions.* Wealth occupies his whole thoughts, is the sole object of his ambition, excites him to bold enterprize, and persevering assiduity. This mark is constantly in his eye, and he is on the alert to seize any opportunity likely to gratify his wishes.

3. *Disposed to pursue unlawful means, by which he may increase his worldly store.* The worst species of covetousness in the pursuit of its purpose, as Dr. Macknight observes, does not scruple at fraud, falsehood, oppression, and is commonly accompanied with want of kindness and charity. This opens a door to wrongs, litigation, and distress. Such a man will lessen another man's possessions to increase his own.

4. *Tenacious in keeping what he has obtained.* He has no heart to use what he possesses ; no disposition to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. The widow's forlorn condition, or the orphan's cry, has no oratory by which to touch the springs of humanity, or soften his soul into feelings of tenderness and compassion. His wealth is his idol to which he devotes his time and his energies.

5. *There is a covetousness, which consists of an high esteem of riches as the chief good,* because they procure certain enjoyments, which are substituted in the place of divine providence and saving grace, and is compatible with a regard to decency of character, and the operations of justice. Though this, as it affects society, is much preferable to the daring aggressions of the other, yet in the sight of God, who sees the heart, it is highly criminal.

II. A CAUTION ;—" *Take heed and beware of covetousness.*"

1. Some old versions add *πάσης all*, and read *from all covetousness*, in which extent, doubtless, says Dr. Doddridge, our Lord intended his caution to be understood, whether he did or did not so particularly express it. Ὁρᾶτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε—*see to it, be on your guard.*

2. The caution is doubled, to shew the great need and importance of it, and to intimate that covetousness, in some form or other, in a greater or less degree, is very apt to prevail on persons, without a peculiar and more than common watchful-

ness; and that, when it has infected a person, it is very difficult to remove it.

3. Take heed and beware of it. Observe yourselves with a jealous eye. Keep yourselves, as prisoners are kept by sentinels, with great vigilance. So the original words, here translated, *take heed* and *beware*, signify. Be on your guard, in the possession of property, in the management of business, in household expenditure.

III. A REASON ASSIGNED;—"For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

1. *A man's life; that is the length and happiness of his life.* Though some property is requisite to sustain life, yet no man is able to prolong his life, or to render it more happy by a superfluity of wealth. The power of life and death is with God; and it is his blessing that makes any providential gifts useful to the occupier.

2. *Abundance of worldly things is attended with numerous temptations, and exposes a man to many sins.*—Pride, luxury, and other vices, are the means of personal wretchedness, instead of ministering to a man's comfort.

3. *It cannot remove those things that chiefly render a man miserable,*—such as guilt and pollution: nay, not even bodily distempers of any description, or prevent the approach of death.

4. *The insatiable desire of more still remains,* however much a man may accumulate, and that prevents him enjoying satisfaction in what he possesses. "He that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increase." Eccles. v. 10.

5. *And the greatest happiness of which this life is capable, may be, has been, and is enjoyed, without abundance of riches.* Our Saviour says, "The poor have the gospel preached to them," Matt. xi. v. And St. James asks, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" James ii. 5. The "riches of Christ," are said to be "unsearchable," Eph. iii. 8. Now, by parity of reason, if worldly-minded men expect to be happy in the possession of earthly treasures, how great then must be the happiness of those Christian believers, who, enjoying the favour and love of God, are heirs of

God, and joint-heirs with Christ ! Their happiness is spiritual, divine, everlasting.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Learn the importance of those words of Christ.—“ What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ? ” Matt. xvi. 26. When the rich man, having in his estimation realized a competency of worldly goods, said to himself, “ Soul, take thine ease ! eat, drink, and be merry,” wishing only a sensual happiness ; “ God said to him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ? ” Luke xii. 19, 20.

2. Let it be our wisdom to secure the true riches, the peace and the love of God, at all events, knowing that this will be a portion and felicity suited to the nature, powers, and duration of the human soul.

THETA.

XXIX. A SKETCH FOR GOOD FRIDAY.

JOHN i. 29.

“ Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

THE death of our Lord Jesus Christ, considered as the only saving remedy for a perishing world, demands our serious attention every day in the year ; but on that particular day which is set apart by the Christian church for the commemoration of his last sufferings, we should examine the subject with deep seriousness and awful reverence. The results of our examinations will amply repay our careful and diligent inquiries ; for thereby we shall gain clear views of a subject, which of all others, is the most important to man ; we shall feel ourselves

deeply humbled before God, under a sense of those sins which nailed our Saviour to the tree; and our drooping spirits will be revived and cheered with a hope of salvation, by him who suffered on the cross. Our text points out Christ as the Lamb of God; affirms that he taketh away the sins of the world; and exhorts sinful men to behold him.

I. JESUS CHRIST IS THE LAMB OF GOD.

1. *The paschal lamb was a type of Christ.* A parallel might be drawn in many important particulars, but we shall only mention one; by the death of that lamb, and the sprinkling of its blood upon the door-posts, all the first-born of Israel were saved from death, Exod. xii. 6, 7; and we are assured by an inspired writer, that "even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," 1 Cor. v. 7; and by his death, and the sprinkling of his blood, we are saved from wrath, Rom. v. 9.

2. *But Jesus is called the Lamb of God, especially in reference to the daily sacrifice,* which was offered up every morning and evening continually, and was a standing type of him, Exod. xxix. 38, 39. The lambs which were offered in the daily sacrifice were to be without blemish, and our Saviour was without sin, 1 Pet. i. 19; they made a *typical* atonement, but he made a *real* atonement, 1 John ii. 2; they were offered frequently, being imperfect; but our Lord was but once offered, being an *all-perfect* offering and sacrifice, Heb. ix. 25, 26.

3. *The prophet Isaiah foretold to the Jewish nation, that the Messiah would be brought as a lamb to the slaughter,* and that "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he would not open his mouth," chap. liii. 7. In this prediction, two things are clearly stated, first, the death of Jesus as a slaughtered lamb; and secondly, his patience in that awful scene. He was manifested in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil, 1 John iii. 8, and to accomplish that great object, "it behoved him to suffer, and to rise from the dead," Luke xxiv. 46.

4. *Jesus now appears as a lamb slain, in the heavenly world,* Rev. v. 6. That appearance, in all probability, is intended to remind glorified human spirits of their salvation by his atonement; and hence while this great truth is denied by some on earth, it is celebrated with songs of praise, by the redeemed of the Lord, ver. 9: and they ascribe to the Lamb

who redeemed them, power and riches, strength and honour, and glory and blessing, ver. 12.

5. *Other things are affirmed of Jesus, as an atoning Lamb, which prove the propriety of this appellation.* The sanctification of the saints in heaven, is ascribed to his blood, where it is said "they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," Rev. vii. 14; they overcame the accuser of the brethren, by the blood of the Lamb, chap. xii. 11; and they are made kings and priests unto God, by his blood, chap. i. 6.

II. HE TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.

1. *The sin of Adam in the garden of Eden, affected the whole world of mankind,* Rom. v. 17—21; 1 Cor. xv. 21; but it is so far taken away by the Lamb of God, that all men will rise from the dead, and no man will suffer in the eternal world for what he did, 1 Cor. xv. 22; Ezek. xviii. 20.

2. *But by the sin of the world is meant, all the sins of men, whether Jews or Gentiles;* including every kind of sin, unless we may except that against the Holy Ghost, Matt. xii. 32: and every degree of sin: so that a remedy is provided for all who go astray, Isaiah liii. 6.

3. *Jesus taketh away sin, by the sacrifice of himself, once offered,* Heb. x. 12; 1 Pet. iii. 18; and all the sin which is taken away, is through his precious blood, Heb. ix. 22; for no man can remove his own sin from his conscience, nor can any man take away the sin of his brother, or give a ransom for him, Ps. xlix. 7; neither is there salvation in any other name than that of Jesus, Acts iv. 12.

4. *When men repent and believe the gospel, the guilt of their sin is taken away, by the Lamb of God;* and they are justified, accepted, and adopted into the family of God, Mark i. 15; Rom. v. 1; Eph. i. 6; Rom. viii. 16.

5. *By faith the pollution of sin is taken away.* It is expressly affirmed, that we are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus, Acts xxvi. 18; that our hearts are purified by faith, Acts xv. 9; and that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin", 1 John i. 7.

6. *Through Jesus the Lamb of God, the practice of sin is taken away:* hence his followers excel in all holy conversation, and godliness, 2 Pet. iii. 11; for he saves them from their sins,

Matt. i. 21. Being saved by grace, they deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts," and "live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world," Titus ii. 12.

7. *The tormenting fears which accompany sin, are taken away by the Lamb of God, from all who are perfected in love,* 1 John iv. 18; so that they are no longer tormented, like other men, with frightful fears of death and hell, but rejoice in hope of the glory of God, Rom. v. 2.

8. *The sad effects of sin in a future state, will be taken away by the Lamb of God, from all who die in the Lord,* Rev. xiv. 13. They will have a blessed and glorious resurrection, 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52; they will appear with boldness in the day of judgment, 1 John iv. 17; and they will "be for ever with the Lord," 1 Thess. iv. 17.

9. *All the sin which was taken away before Christ suffered for men, was taken away by him.* He was to be the Saviour, and when the first promise was made, the gospel day began to dawn, Gen. iii. 15. From that day to this, men have been placed in his hands, as the only Mediator; and through his gracious undertakings, the channels of mercy were opened immediately after the fall of our first parents.

10. *And if sin be taken away in the heathen world, it is by the Lamb of God;* for, through his blood, they may come "from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God," Luke xiii. 29. Thus, "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted," through him who died for all, Acts x. 35.

III. SINFUL MEN ARE EXHORTED TO BEHOLD HIM.

1. *The persons to whom these words were addressed by John the Baptist, beheld the Saviour with eyes of flesh;* for he was present among them in his human body. In this sense we cannot see him, because he has left our world, and is gone to the Father, John xvi. 28.

2. *But we behold him by the eye of faith,* which enables us to look at things which are not seen by the eye of the body, 2 Cor. iv. 18; but all the internal views of the mind must be directed by that which is revealed in the written word, or we shall fall into foolish imaginations, 2 Cor. x. 5.

3. *To behold him as a religious duty, is to believe in him, and to trust in him for salvation,* Isa. xlv. 22; and this is not

merely one act of the mind, at some certain period of our lives, but a continued act, expressed by *looking* to Jesus, Heb. xi. 2.

4. Behold him in his *birth* at Bethlehem, in his *holy life* among the wicked Jews, in his *death* on Mount Calvary, in his *resurrection* from the dead, and in his *ascension* to heaven, where "he ever liveth to make intercession," Heb. vii. 25. Place these wonderful events as they are recorded in the *Book*, before the eye of contemplation.

5. *Carefully behold him in his sacred offices.*—He was a Prophet to guide us into all truth, Acts iii. 22, 23; a Priest to atone and intercede, Heb. iv. 14; and a King to govern and protect us, Rev. xvii. 14; xix. 16. Proper views of these offices will cheer your hearts, strengthen your hands, and inspire you with a blessed hope.

6. *As Christian believers, behold him in his person.* He "is over all, God blessed for ever," Rom. ix. 5; he is man, in the proper sense of the word, having a reasonable soul, and a body which died and rose again, Luke ii. 52; and he is God-man, and mediator between God and men, 1 Tim. ii. 5.

7. *It becomes us to behold him with profound humility.*—He had no sin of his own, either original or actual, Heb. vii. 26; but he suffered for our sins, and was "wounded for our transgressions," Isa. liii. 5; a thought which should lay us in the dust, and keep us there all the days of our lives.

8. *But behold him with grateful feelings.* We love him because he is lovely; but especially, because he first loved us, 1 John iv. 19. Had he not undertaken our cause, we should have been lost, and what but love could have moved him to die for us? Rom. v. 8.

9. *Hence we may behold him with entire confidence.* His love is a proof that he is willing to save us; and we know "he is able to save to the uttermost," Heb. vii. 25; he offers salvation, Acts xiii. 26; he invites us to go to him, Matt. xi. 28; and he knocks at the door of our hearts, Rev. iii. 20.

10. *While we view him as our Saviour, let us also behold him as our exemplar.*—There are good examples among men, but they are all imperfect; the example of Jesus should be placed before our eyes in all states and circumstances of life; and we should endeavour to imitate him, as far as may be proper, in all our works, and in all our ways. To attempt an imitation

of him in all things would be rash presumption ; but while we follow his hospitality, meekness, patience, zeal, love, and obedience, we shall be both safe and happy, 1 Peter ii. 21.

We conclude by observing that all who thus behold the Lamb of God, shall see him at the end of the world with great joy ; that they shall meet him in the air, and that they shall remain with him as their bridegroom, in a blessed and glorious state of immortality, Rev. xxi. 2—9. Amen.

SIGMA.

XXX. AN IMPORTANT QUESTION.

JOHN v. 6.

“Wilt thou be made whole?”

IN the context we are informed, that at Jerusalem, there was in the sheep-market a pool, called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, the house of mercy. This house had five porches, built, probably, for the more convenient reception of the poor and distressed, who came thither to be healed. The waters of this pool possessed a peculiar property, (verse 4.) and numbers who were diseased, resorted there to obtain relief. In one of these porticos, there was a certain man, (verse 5.) whom Jesus addressed in the language of our text, and on whom he performed a cure : see the context. In improving this subject we may observe,

I. THAT MAN IS AFFLICTED WITH A SPIRITUAL DISEASE.

II. FOR THIS DISEASE A REMEDY IS PROVIDED.

III. TO PROMOTE A CURE, AN IMPORTANT QUESTION IS ASKED:

I. MAN IS AFFLICTED WITH A SPIRITUAL DISEASE.

1. *Its seat is the heart*, Jer. xvii. 9 ; whence proceedeth evil thoughts, &c., Matt. xv. 18—20. By it all the powers of the soul are affected, Gen. vi. 5, 11, 12 ; and what the prophet said of the Jewish nation, will apply to the human family, Isaiah i. 5, 6.

2. *It is hereditary.* We are "conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity," Psalm li. 5. We are very far gone from original righteousness, and by "nature are children of wrath," Eph. ii. 3; "in whom dwelleth no good thing." Such is the corruption and fault of our nature, that, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," John iii. 3.

3. *Infectious.* So that those who have escaped the pollution that is in the world through lust, need the admonitory language of Jude, 21—23. Though sin be the disease of our nature, the extent and malignity of crime is often the result of bad example, 1 Cor. xv. 33. See the awful effects of vice, where there is not the counteracting influence of the gospel. Look at families, villages, towns, cities, and nations. How has this disease spread its pestilential influence!

4. *Dangerous.* "The wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," Ezek. xviii. 4; yet what numbers take the opiates of carnal pleasure to heal a disordered mind, or join in frantic mirth to allay the pangs of conscience! but still destruction and misery are in their ways, Rom. iii. 16; 1 Thess. v. 3.

The SYMPTOMS of this disease, are in some, 1. *Unaccountable insensibility.* They receive the gifts of God, and are ungrateful. They see his judgments, but instead of saying, "The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble," Psalm xcix.; they swell the murmur of discontent. Sin dwelleth in them, and they acknowledge it not, it is ruining them and they perceive it not. 2. *In others, universal inactivity.* Though they may in some degree see their state, yet there are no fixed purposes, no ardent desires after God, no devout inquiries after salvation, no fervent appeals to Christ for mercy. They are busy about the world, but altogether careless about the soul. 3. *In a third, painful apprehensions.* The mind is partially enlightened, but they have not resolution enough to forsake sin. They are in bondage to fear, sometimes alarmed at their own shadow. 4. *In a fourth there is continual restlessness.* They seek happiness where it is not to be found, they go from one place of amusement to another scene of vanity; but wearied in their pursuits, disappointed in their researches, they seek rest and cannot find it: let us therefore consider,

II. THAT FOR THIS DISEASE A REMEDY IS PROVIDED.

This remedy is, *the blood of Christ*, which is the meritorious cause of every thing connected with our salvation. Hence we are said to have peace through the blood of the cross, Col. i. 20. Redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, 1 Peter i. 18, 19. Justified through his blood, Rom. iii. 24, 25. Cleansed by his blood, 1 John i. 7. Washed in his blood, Rev. i. 5. We may therefore observe, it is,

1. *A suitable remedy.* Is man diseased in every part? Is there an awful destitution of every thing good? Is he lying helpless in the house of mercy? The blood of Christ can restore him, and though poor and impotent he may have this remedy without money and without price, Mark xvi. 16; Isaiah lv. 1.

2. *An incomparable remedy.* In how many instances, when the mind has felt the disease of sin and dreaded its consequences, human physicians have recommended mirth, gaiety, dissipation, company, pleasure, cards, balls, theatres, &c. These have been stated as infinitely superior to religion; but in what instance have they healed the mind, and fortified the soul against the fears of death? Alas! their only tendency is to give the sting of death a sharper point, and arm with tenfold terror the messenger most dreaded. Whereas the soul healed by the blood of Christ, can say, "O death where is thy sting?" 1 Cor. xv. 55.

3. *An infallible remedy.* Never was there one acquainted with the plague of the heart, who rejected all other proposed remedies, but obtained a cure through the blood of Christ; this is,

‘ A sovereign balm for every wound;
All, all I want is there.’

4. *It is a remedy of inestimable worth.* Not only inasmuch as it heals the most inveterate disease, but also when we consider its intrinsic value. Compared with this, silver and gold are as nothing, 1 Peter i. 18, 19. In computing its worth, arithmetic must fail;

‘ Its value vast, ungraspt by minds create.’

Such being man's disease, and such the remedy provided, we may observe,

III. THAT TO PROMOTE A CURE, AN IMPORTANT QUESTION IS ASKED. "Wilt thou be made whole?"

1. *Art thou acquainted with thy danger?* "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick," Matt. ix. 12. A knowledge of our sickness is of the utmost importance. Art thou acquainted with its nature, its source, its symptoms, and the awful consequences of not being healed?

2. *Art thou willing that Christ should heal thee?* Is there an entire renunciation of every thing incompatible with the gospel, the concurrence of the will and the desires to be saved by Christ?

3. *Art thou willing to be healed on his terms, without any stipulation of thine own.* Canst thou forsake all for Christ, (Matt. x. 37.) forego thine own ease, pleasure, and honour? Canst thou surrender to him body and spirit, without any reservation? Prov. xxiii. 26.

4. *Wilt thou abide by his prescriptions?* Renouncing "the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh," Titus ii. 11, 12; Luke xiv. 26, 27.

5. *Wilt thou now be made whole?* "Behold, now is the accepted time," 2 Cor. vi. 2. The blood is shed, the Saviour invites, the Spirit strives; art thou *now* willing, entirely willing? art thou ceasing to depend on man or means? Then,

6. *Canst thou believe?* Rom. iv. 5. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts xvi. 31; venture with him. 'He is able, he is willing; doubt no more.'

APPLICATION.

1. *To you who suppose that you need not the healing balm.* Your state is dangerous, the opiates of sin are producing a deadly stupor. Death! death! eternal death is near! awake! arise! and call upon the Lord!

2. *To those whose souls are healed.* To promote health, live in the Spirit. "Watch and pray," Mark xiii. 33. Cleave to Jesus, Acts xi. 23. "And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." 2 Thess. iii. 18.

KAPPA.

XXXI. THOSE WHO LOVE CHRIST, MUST KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

JOHN xiv. 15.

“ If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

THE Lord Jesus was now about to leave his disciples; he had in the preceding chapter, given them intimations of it. They desired to go with him; the thought of being separated from so wise a teacher, and so kind a friend, was a source of inexpressible grief to them. Christ tells them, that they could not follow him now; but he seeks to soothe their sorrows, and chase the gloomy sadness that weighed down their spirits. He informs them that his departure would be for their advantage, and preparatory to their eternal reunion and residence in his Father's house, ver. 2, 3. He further comforts them, by intimations of their being invested with miraculous powers for the discharge of their high commission, ver. 12. He also assures them of having their prayers answered, ver. 13, 14. And in the text directs them to evince their love to him, not by grieving at his departure, but by keeping his commandments. We attempt to illustrate this passage by stating,

I. THE SUPPOSITION. “ If ye love me.”

II. THE INJUNCTION. “ Keep my commandments.”

I. THE SUPPOSITION implies, that the love of Christ, is,

1. *A legitimate principle*: that it is right to love Christ.

Nothing can possess a more commanding evidence in a believer's mind than this. Is it not right to love a Being who possesses in himself all possible perfections? Can love allure us? His love passeth knowledge. Can wisdom charm us? He is the only wise God. Can beauty attract us? Oh how great is his beauty! Can justice awe us? He has all judgment committed to him. Is it not right to love a Being to whom we are indebted for that very principle which renders us capable of exercising acts of love? Christ made us capable of loving objects; and

should not our love return to its source, and centre in its origin? Does not every thing in nature gravitate towards its centre? 'Rivers to the ocean run,' &c. Is it not right to love a Being whose love to us baffles all calculation? Christ loved us when we were most unworthy and most sinful. His sacrifices were the sacrifices of love; his agonies were the agonies of love; and his death was the crowning act of love. Is it not right to love a Being whose approbation will secure to us all that is desirable in time and in eternity? See ver. 21, 23; Rom. viii. 28.

2. *A principle in partial operation.* Christ would not have said, "If ye love me," if all men were in possession of his love. Revelation confirms us in the fact, that when Christ was upon earth many hated him; said he had a devil, and was mad; and were restless till they had put him to death. And is the love of Christ more universal now than it was then? Are there now no proud persecuting rulers? No haughty overbearing priests? No hypocritical blind Pharisees? No lawless rabble, who would say, had they an opportunity, "away with such a fellow from the earth?" Oh what a melancholy picture does the world still present to the eye of a christian!

3. *A voluntary principle.* "If ye love me." Remember it must be your own act. No man is obliged by an over-ruling power to love Christ. They who love him, love him willingly; and love him because they are pleased to do it. Nothing is more free than love; we sometimes talk of the chains of love, and fetters of love; but they are willing chains and voluntary fetters.

4. *And an existent principle.* Where does it exist? To say that holy angels, and glorified saints love Christ, would be to utter a truth of which none presume to doubt: but the love of Christ also exists in the hearts of all Christians. They love Christ sincerely, not in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth. Their love is not the hypocritical profession, nor the ostentatious parade, that courts the applause of men? but the homage of a sincere, honest heart, breathing out its desires after Christ, and wishing to be "little and unknown, prized, and loved by Christ alone." They love Christ consciously. It is not a matter of doubt or uncertainty, but a point on which they have intuitive and indubitable evidence. They know that they

love Christ, for his love is shed abroad in their hearts, &c. They love Christ progressively. They increase in the knowledge of Christ, and their love abounds with their knowledge. They get more enlarged discoveries of the love of Christ to them, and their desires after Christ grow stronger and stronger. They love Christ satisfactorily. They rest in his love, and their souls are satisfied in his favour. Carnal love is often restless and uneasy; the fear of deprivation often haunts us, or the apprehension of being supplanted in the affections of the object by some worthier person than ourselves, is a source of constant torment to us. But in Christian souls such a principle has no existence. They love Christ, and have no fear of being deserted by him. They love Christ preeminently. He is their chief object. His name is in their estimation above every name, and he is their all in all.

II. THE INJUNCTION. "Keep my commandments." We cannot enumerate all the commandments of Christ, but we will endeavour to classify a few of them, in the following order :

1. *The commandments of Christ enjoin the exercise of faith in himself*, John xiv. 1—11.

2. *The commandments of Christ inculcate the practice of religious duties*. Prayer, Matt. vii. 7. Watchfulness, Luke xxi. 36. Self-denial, Mark viii. 34. Searching the Scriptures, John v. 39, &c.

3. *The commandments of Christ exhibit the necessity of Christian diligence*, Luke xiii. 24; John vi. 27; Matt. vi. 33.

4. *The commandments of Christ describe the importance of practical piety*, Matt. v. 16, vii. 12; John xiii. 17.

5. *The commandments of Christ enjoin the virtues of brotherly love, mutual forbearance, and genuine humility*, John xiii. 34, xv. 17; Matt. v. 44, 45; John xiii. 14.

These commandments should be kept.—Kept in our memories. We should retain them and store them up as a precious deposit. "Thy word have I hid in my heart."—In our understandings. Many remember them who are ignorant of their meaning; "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts."—In our affections. We should love them,

rejoice in them, and meditate on them.—Chiefly, we should keep them in our lives. Exemplify them in our conduct, and be in temper, in disposition, and in practice, all that Christ recommends.

Those who love Christ are obligated to keep his commandments. First, From the authority of Christ. He is the supreme and eternal legislator. He who has a right to make laws for another, has a right to insist on the observance of those laws; if we admit that Christ has authority to command, we are obliged to admit that we are bound to obey. Secondly, From the nature of the principle. To love and to obey, if not strictly synonymous, are yet absolutely inseparable. Hence Christ said, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me," ver. 21. Thirdly, From the character of their Christian profession. Do they not profess to love Christ? Are they not baptized into his name? Do they not frequent his ordinances, and profess his religion? And should not this induce them to keep his commandments? Ought there not to be a consistency between a man's profession, and his conduct? Is it right for a man to speak one thing with his lips and another by his life? Fourthly, From the relation in which you stand to society. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This love obliges us to consult our neighbour's interest, and do the things which will promote his happiness. "Good works are profitable unto men," Tit. iii. 8. Others will be excited to glorify God by them, Matt. v. 16. Fifthly, From the influence of self-love. Every man is supposed to love himself; this is an assumed principle: nothing promotes our personal welfare so effectually as the keeping of Christ's commandments, Isa. xlvi. 18; Ps. xix. 11; John xiii. 17. This secures a victory over our foes, Ps. lxxxi. 13, 14. This leads to heaven, Matt. vii. 21; Rev. xxii. 14.

We conclude with the following observations.

Since we have the strongest evidence from Scripture and experience for believing that all do not love Christ, how important is the inquiry, Do we love him? If we do not, how ungrateful is our conduct! and how perilous our condition! 1 Cor. xvi. 22. We must estimate our love to Christ, not so much by what we feel, as by what we do; it is a happy thing to have

rapturous feelings, but happier to have holy lives. May we all love Christ, and keep his commandments! Amen.

BETA.

*Christ's commands did not prevent the
of the U.S. but only removed them from the*

XXXII. A SKETCH ON THE ASCENSION.

ACTS. i. 9—11.

“ And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight,” &c.

THE ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is a well attested fact. His disciples, whose veracity has been established by their disinterested conduct, saw him ascend: and unitedly bore witness to all the important circumstances which accompanied that extraordinary event. He had been conversing with them on things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and when he had spoken those things which were necessary to guide their future proceedings, “ while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.” Let us consider this remarkable account of our Lord’s ascension; the ends for which he ascended; and the inferences which may be fairly drawn from the whole.

I. CONSIDER THIS REMARKABLE ACCOUNT OF OUR LORD’S ASCENSION.

1. When Jesus ascended, *he had just finished an important discourse to his disciples*; hence we may rationally infer, that they knew who he was, and were fully assured of the identity of their master, whose ascension they witnessed. This is important, and might be one reason why his shining attendants said, “ This *same* Jesus,” who has been with you so long, with whom you were so intimately acquainted, and who died and rose again.

2. Having blessed his disciples, who had to remain a little longer in the world, (Luke xxiv. 51.) *he was taken up* from the earth by an invisible but almighty power. When his work was finished, it was proper for him to return to his Father, from whom he came, when he took upon him our nature, John xvi. 28. Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, 2 Kings ii. 11; but Jesus went up calmly and majestically in a bright cloud.

3. The disciples *beheld* our Lord as he went up. They were not guided by the report of others at a distance; they were not asleep and dreaming; but they were awake, and saw him ascend. On this ground they could confidently affirm, "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, declare we unto you," 1 John i. 1—3. A good proof that they were not deceived, and a proof which will fully satisfy every reasonable inquirer after truth.

4. It is stated, "*that a cloud received him out of their sight.*" A host of holy angels waited, like a triumphant chariot, to receive the Lord of glory. To this the Psalmist alludes, where he says, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels," Ps. lxxviii. 17. But how grand was the sight of that cloud which received the King of heaven, returning from his conquests, and leading captivity captive! Ps. lxxviii. 18. Surely it might then be said as on another occasion, "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet," Ps. xlvii. 5.

5. As Jesus ascended, the disciples *looked steadfastly* towards heaven, and stood gazing up into that holy place. What their feelings were on that memorable occasion we know not; it is probable they felt wonder and astonishment, an uncommon share of prying curiosity, deep distress for the loss of their Master, and an ardent desire to accompany him to glory. Thus strange events produce wonder; the appearance of immortal spirits excites curiosity; the loss of a friend is painful; and heaven is peculiarly desirable when its glories appear in view.

6. While they stood gazing two men appeared in white apparel. Those were heavenly messengers, sent down to communicate important information on the second coming of Jesus; and the apparel in which they appeared, was an emblem of their purity, and the purity of that world from whence they came.

Heaven is a holy place, all its inhabitants are holy, and nothing that is unclean can enter its sacred gates, Rev. xxi. 27.

7. Those two men put this question to the disciples, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" Have you not heard before, that Jesus would ascend unto his Father and your Father, and to his God and your God? John xx. 17. Or do you expect his immediate return to this lower world? The question carries an air of reproof; but how sweet and gentle are the reproofs of angels! Harsh severity is more frequent among erring mortals than celestial spirits.

8. They state distinctly, that Jesus *shall* so come in like *manner* as the disciples had seen him go into heaven. This statement implies two things: first, the *certainty* of his coming; and secondly, the *manner* of his coming. You have seen him ascend to heaven, and you shall see him descend from heaven, 1 Thess. iv. 16; and you have seen a cloud of angels receive him, and you shall see him come again with clouds of angels, Matt. xxv. 31; Rev. i. 7.

II. THE ENDS FOR WHICH OUR SAVIOUR ASCENDED TO HEAVEN.

1. Jesus ascended into the heavenly world, to receive the reward of his great and gracious undertakings; for then God highly exalted him in his human nature, and gave him a name which is above every name, Phil. ii. 9; and then he entered into "the joy which was set before him," as a man and mediator, when he endured the cross, and despised the shame of an ignominious death, Heb. xii. 2.

2. Another end of his ascension was, that he might be invested with absolute power and dominion, *and* that he might fully exercise his regal authority. Then these words were accomplished, "I will set my king upon my holy hill of Zion," Ps. ii. 6; for he sitteth at the right hand of power, Matt. xxvi. 64; in that exalted state he must reign till all enemies are put under his feet, 1 Cor. xv. 25: and he is now expecting that all his enemies shall be made his footstool, Heb. x. 13.

3. He ascended, that he might send the Holy Spirit, in all his miraculous influences, to qualify his apostles for the great work of preaching the gospel to all nations. This he had promised in the days of his flesh, John vii. 39, xvi. 7; and his promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 1—12. Those

gifts were continued as long as they were necessary; and should they ever be necessary again, they will be given; because the Spirit abides with Christian ministers, to aid and assist them as circumstances may require, John xiv. 16.

4. Our Lord went up into heaven, to prepare a place for his followers, John xiv. 1—3; and in this respect he is our *fore-runner*, Hebrew vi. 20. He is gone before, to do service for us who are to follow, and is there preparing mansions for our reception. The Jews had no access to the holy place, and therefore the high priests were not forerunners for them; but Jesus has entered into "heaven itself," in our nature, and will receive us to himself, that we may dwell with him for ever.

5. The blessed Jesus ascended into heaven *to intercede for men* whom he had redeemed by his blood, when he suffered on the cross. He maketh "intercession for transgressors," Isa. liii. 12; he is our "Advocate with the Father," 1 John ii. 1; and he "ever liveth to make intercession," Heb. vii. 25. We are not informed how he intercedes, nor is it necessary to know; it is certain he appears "in the presence God for us," Heb. ix. 24; and that he appears as "a Lamb slain," Rev. v. 6; and this should satisfy our minds.

6. Lastly, he ascended on high, "to receive gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also," Ps. lxxviii. 18; Eph. iv. 8; and "he is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins," Acts v. 31. He gives men space to repent, Rev. ii. 21; when they believe in him, he gives them remission of sins, Acts x. 43; and he gives a gospel ministry to guide and comfort his church, 1 Cor. xii. 28. In short, all the blessings of providence and grace are the gifts of his munificent hands.

III. THE INFERENCES WHICH MAY BE FAIRLY DRAWN FROM THIS SUBJECT.

1. The ascension of Jesus is *an indubitable proof of an eternal state*, Rev. i. 18. Those who admit this fact, cannot doubt either the resurrection of the body, or the immortality of the soul. Here then the anchor of our hope is fixed; "because I live, ye shall live also," John xiv. 19.

2. *Our nature*, which he assumed, *is highly honoured* in his ascension. In that nature he sitteth at the right hand of God, Heb. viii. 1. This is more than can be said of angels: they

stand about the throne ; but to which of them " said he at any time, Sit on my right hand," Heb. i. 13.

3. *We have a faithful friend in heaven.* When men are exalted on earth, they frequently forget their former friends, as the chief butler forgot Joseph, Gen. xl. 23 ; but Jesus remembers us ; we are graven on the palms of his hands, Is. xlix. 16 ; and he is " touched with the feeling of our infirmities," Heb. iv. 15.

4. Having such an High Priest in heaven, we may go boldly to the throne of grace, confidently expecting " mercy, and grace to help in the time of need," Heb. iv. 16 ; for such is the influence of our Saviour in the heavenly courts, that whatsoever we ask in his name will be given to us, John xv. 16.

5. *Our hearts should be with the Lord,* while we sojourn here below ; and, like the apostle Paul, we should long, with pious resignation, to be with him in glory. This would be better than any station in the church militant, Phil. i. 21, 23.

6. But as long as we live on earth, we should honour our Saviour before men ; by maintaining and propagating his truth, by steady obedience to his laws, and by an open avowal of him as our only Lord and Master, Matt. x. 32.

7. The ascension of Jesus should reconcile us to death and the grave. Who would not willingly die, if called to it, to go to the Lord ? But there is the gloomy grave ! But has it not been opened ? and will it not be opened again ? 1 Cor. xv. 52.

8. We see how vain it is for sinners to oppose the Saviour. They are weak, but he is strong. He is " long suffering, and not willing that any should perish," 2 Peter iii. 9 ; but ere long he will come in glory to take " vengeance on them that obey not the gospel," 2 Thess. i. 8.

9. We may rest assured, that he will finally subdue all his foes ; and every knee shall bow to him, either voluntarily or by constraint, to the glory of God the Father, Phil. ii. 10, 11. May we be subdued by grace, and not by wrath ! Rev. vi. 17.

10. To conclude, we should expect and long for the second coming of Christ, to put an end to all our sufferings, and to receive us into glory. The exact time of his coming is not revealed ; but remember he has said, " Surely I come quickly," Rev. xxii. 20. " Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus !"

XXXIII. THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.

ACTS viii. 39.

“And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the Eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

SACRED history is peculiarly interesting in its nature, and instructive in its details. It faithfully preserves the righteous in everlasting remembrance, and stamps their distinguished characters with immortal renown. It eminently displays the operations and triumphs of divine grace; and the glorious achievements of the gospel of Christ in the salvation of sinners. And there is no portion of the inspired volume, which affords more important instruction on the nature and efficacy of Christianity, than this most excellent book. It is very appropriately called “Acts of the Apostles,” and contains a succinct account of the rise and progress of the Christian church, under the indefatigable and successful ministrations of the holy apostles. Its narrations are inimitably simple and impressive, and well calculated to instruct and encourage the followers and ambassadors of Christ. The sacred historian frequently enters into the most minute particulars, in reference both to churches and individuals, so far as their history is connected with the edification and profit of succeeding generations. In the chapter before us he circumstantially details the conversion of an eminent Ethiopian eunuch to the obedience of the gospel. Concerning whom we may learn from this inspired narrative—the character he bore—the change he experienced—and the happiness he obtained.

I. THE CHARACTER HE BORE. It appears that he was a person of considerable eminence in Ethiopia, and occupied an important and honourable post under Queen Candace. But waiving all observations on his worldly greatness and general history, we shall confine our attention to the interesting description of his moral character in the text and context; from which it is evident,

1. *He was a professor of true religion.* He was no scoffing atheist or infidel, nor yet an idolatrous heathen, like the generality of his countrymen. He had renounced paganism, and embraced the Jewish faith, and was a professed worshipper of the God of Israel. Some think that Judaism was introduced into Ethiopia, by the Queen of Sheba, after her visit to Solomon, 1 Kings x. 1, &c. Whether this be a fact or not is very uncertain; and it is most probable that this eunuch was thoroughly proselyted to the Jewish religion. Nor was he either afraid or ashamed publicly to profess what he believed to be the truth, but openly avowed his change of principles and was practically consistent in performing the duties of his new profession.

2. *He was a man of sincere devotion.* And hence he had lately come to worship at Jerusalem, at one of the great feasts, according to the custom of the Jews. Though he was a person of great dignity and influence as a courtier, and held a situation of vast political authority and importance, as the chief statesman of his country, yet he did not like too many, both rich and poor, neglect the appointed ordinances of religion. In conformity to the law of Moses, though at a considerable distance, he cheerfully journeyed to Mount Zion, whither the tribes went up to worship the God of their fathers. He not only sincerely attended to the private duties of his sacred profession, but he also gladly embraced the public privileges of the Mosaic dispensation. His conduct eminently proved that he "loved the habitation of the Lord's house, the place where His honour dwelleth."

3. *He was a devout lover of the Scriptures.* He happily possessed the writings of Moses and the prophets and highly esteemed them as an inestimable treasure. With these he had cultivated an intimate acquaintance, and greatly delighted in their perusal, as the oracles of God. He did not, like many professing Christians, neglect to "search the holy Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation." They were the subject of his meditation, and the companion of his travels. Philip therefore found him "sitting in his chariot, reading Esaias the prophet." And he was not a careless and commonplace reader, for he was deeply interested in what he read, and anxiously desired to comprehend the nature and import of

divine truth, ver. 31 and 34. But with all his moral excellencies, he was a total stranger to Jesus Christ, till Philip was sent to teach him the gospel way of salvation, and his faithful ministry, by the demonstration of the Spirit, instrumentally produced,

II. THE CHANGE HE EXPERIENCED.—This is very minutely described by the inspired evangelist in all its interesting process.

1. *It was ministerial in its agent.* The person employed in this glorious work was Philip the deacon, who was “full of faith and the Holy Ghost,” Acts vi. 5.—Having preached the gospel with great success in Samaria, “an angel of the Lord spake unto him, saying, Arise and go toward the South, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose, and went; and behold a man of Ethiopia,” as he was travelling in his chariot, was reading in the prophet Isaiah, of the sufferings and patience of the promised Messiah, ver 32, 33,—“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself unto this chariot.” And Philip immediately obeyed the Divine commission, and from the impressive passage in which the eunuch had been reading, “he preached unto him Jesus;” and he gladly “received the word, in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

2. *It was personal in its principle.* Though the preaching of the gospel was the instrumental cause of this gracious change, yet faith in Christ, was the actual medium by which it was experimentally realized. Philip faithfully preached unto him the good tidings of salvation, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The eunuch attentively heard and cordially embraced the Divine message, and joyfully exclaimed, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” ver 37.—This noble confession of faith, was accompanied by the most gracious results. He received the remission of his sins, and was made a partaker of the divine nature, 2 Cor. v. 17, 18. And thus being “turned from darkness to light” he personally proved that “the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.”

3. *It was practical in its influence.* The immediate effects are distinctly recorded as they appeared in the conduct of the believing eunuch, and externally demonstrate the genuineness of his conversion. He anxiously desired to submit to the

gospel ordinance of baptism, and thus publicly evinced his renunciation of Judaism, and reception of Christianity. He said "See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest." And having "believed with the heart unto righteousness, he made confession unto salvation," and was solemnly baptized with water, and with the Holy Ghost, ver. 36—39. "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more;" but as a subject of faith, he brought forth fruit to the glory of God, and greatly exulted in,

III. THE HAPPINESS HE OBTAINED; for "he went on his way rejoicing." He now pursued his journey with sacred delight "in the God of all grace." His joy was spiritual in its nature, and arose from a consciousness of the Divine goodness, and a glorious prospect of "immortality and eternal life."

1. *It was a joy of heartfelt gratitude.* He had obtained mercy of the Lord, and was actually delivered from guilt and condemnation, Rom. viii. 1.—Being reconciled to God and adopted into his family, he greatly rejoiced in the riches of his grace, and the privileges of his children.—A lively sense of the evils and miseries from which he had just been rescued, and the blessings and honour to which he was exalted, inspired his newly emancipated soul with holy wonder, love, and praise, Isa. xii. 1.—Divine grace always produces a grateful recollection of redeeming love, and pardoning mercy: and enables its happy subjects "to rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation," Psalm ciii, 1—4.

2. *It was a joy of gracious experience.* The eyes of his understanding being enlightened, he had peace with God, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The spirit of bondage was succeeded by the Spirit of adoption, and he was divinely renewed in righteousness and true holiness, Rom. viii. 14—16. He had passed from a spiritual death in sin, to an immortal life of grace, and "went on his way rejoicing," in sacred fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. The various principles, privileges, and duties of Christianity, afford the most solid and permanent joy and peace through believing, Prov. iii. 17; Phil. iv. 4.—The saints are therefore exhorted to "rejoice ever-

more : pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them."

3. *It was a joy of glorious anticipation.*—He not only rejoiced in what God had done for himself, but also in the pleasing prospect he had of being useful to his countrymen, in carrying them the joyful intelligence of salvation, through believing in the Son of God. He was now taught to live by faith, and rejoice in hope of the glory of the Lord. His confidence was strong, and his consolations were neither few nor small. Jesus was precious to his soul ; and a blissful anticipation of dwelling with him in his kingdom for ever, produced unspeakable delight, "while he went on his way rejoicing," 1 Pet. i. 8, 9 ; 1 John iii. 2. Religion invariably teaches its possessors "to look beyond this vale of tears," and joyfully anticipate and pursue the glorious "crown of righteousness which the Lord will give unto all them that love his appearing."

From the instructive case of this eunuch, we may infer,

1. Religion is not confined to any distinct class of mankind, or circumstance of life.

2. The insufficiency of a form of godliness without its power. And,

3. The gracious influence of piety on its personal subjects.

ETA.

XXXIV. REMISSION OF SINS SCRIPTURALLY STATED.

ACTS x. 43.

"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

WHEN we consider ourselves as subjects of moral government, and examine the requirements of the moral law, we at once

perceive that we have sinned against God, and are guilty in his sight; and when we attend to the brevity of human life, the uncertainty of death, and the nearness and awfulness of eternity, we cannot but be solicitous to obtain the forgiveness of all our sins, and a sense of the favour of God. In these painful circumstances, the gospel affords us suitable, present, and effectual relief, as stated in our text. Here we have,

I. A VALUABLE GOSPEL BLESSING; "remission of sins."

1. The *moral law* knows nothing of mercy and pardon for transgressors. It can command and enforce the whole extent of our duty to God; and its injunctions are in exact harmony with the divine perfections of holiness, justice, truth, and goodness; but in case of disobedience, can show no compassion to sinners.

2. The *light of reason*, unassisted by the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures, cannot discover the true doctrine of remission of sins. Whether God will forgive sins—what sins he will forgive—how many he will forgive—when he will forgive them—are matters vastly beyond the keenest glance, and largest stretch of mere reason.

3. We are under *high obligations* to God for *revealing* the doctrine of remission of sins, contained in the sacred volume. He has proclaimed his name, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin," Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; 2 Chron. xxx. 9; Psalm ciii. 8; cxvi. 5; cxlv. 8; Joel ii. 13. He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should return from his ways and live, Ezek. xviii. 23.

II. THIS DISTINGUISHED BLESSING IS COMMUNICATED THROUGH CHRIST;—"through His name."

1. We are indebted to *divine revelation* for this knowledge, which is of very high importance.

2. What could mere *reason* do here? We might exercise conjecture, but could not arrive at any certainty. For instance, we might inquire, will God of his own clemency blot out their sins? Can he do so? or is there any perfection of his nature that would interfere with such a free and unqualified display of mercy? Does he require that we should do something by way of duty or suffering, so as to deserve his compassion? Can we, in the exercise of penitence and performance of prayer, merit

his favour? Or, is it requisite that a being of superior order should interfere in our behalf, and advocate our cause, that, through his benevolence and intercession, we may gain access to the Divine Majesty, and live before him? All these queries amount to what is only conjectural uncertainty, and cannot afford any satisfactory mode of relief.

3. But the Scriptures direct us to the Son of God in the character of a Redeemer and Saviour, who has espoused our cause, assumed our nature, obeyed the law, suffered for our sins, is interceding for us at the right hand of God, and in whom the Father is always well pleased, Matt. iii. 17. He shed his blood for mankind for "the remission of sins," Matt. xxvi. 28. And "without shedding of blood there is no remission," Heb. ix. 22. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins," Acts v. 31. So that whatsoever we ask the Father in his name, he will grant it to us. Oh how invaluable is the gospel of our salvation!

III. REMISSION OF SINS IS RECEIVED BY FAITH.

1. For the knowledge of this *duty* we are also under obligation to God. Without the light of revelation to conduct us, what could our best reason do?

2. Supposing we had heard of the love of God manifested in the gift of his eternal Son, and of the sufferings he had endured in our nature for us; but were left in the dark concerning the mode of application for obtaining the benefits resulting from his mediation, what better should we be? We might conclude, that as our sins had been punished in our surety and substitute, they were pardoned. But this would be a conclusion without warrant, or inward evidence to attest it, and consequently, would leave us without peace and comfort, and evidently in our sins. Now he that believes has the witness in himself, 1 John v. 10.

3. With regard to *believing* in Christ, it is a complex act, employing both the *understanding* and the will of man; the assent of the understanding to the gospel record concerning Christ, and the consent of the will to the gospel proposal or offer of Christ. The former is the result of an acquaintance with the Scriptures, their internal and external evidence, particularly the meditorial character and work of Christ: the latter is effected by a divine power exerted on the will; for without

the aid of the Holy Spirit, we cannot submit to the conditions on which salvation is offered, or receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and enjoy his benefits.

IV. THIS BLESSING OF REMISSION OF SINS, IS FREE FOR ALL WHO, BEING PENITENT, WILL APPLY FOR IT IN THE WAY THE SCRIPTURES POINT OUT; —“ Whosoever.”

1. This expression supposes that all men *need* this blessing. It is indefinite, and concerns all mankind. All have sinned, not only are fallen as connected with Adam, but have personally sinned; that is, all persons grown up to maturity.

2. This term indicates, that remission of sins may be obtained by every one who will apply for it, without any respect of persons.

3. This word also suggests, that those who *believe* shall be saved, and that without faith no man can be saved. Christ is “the Saviour of all men, but especially of those that *believe*,” 1 Tim. iv. 10. “He that believeth not shall be damned,” Mark xvi. 16.

V. THE EXTENT OF THE DECLARATION OF THIS BENEFIT; —“ To him give all the prophets witness.”

1. This doctrine of remission of sins, through Jesus Christ, was testified by all the ancient prophets; and in the New Testament is uniformly asserted by all the holy apostles. And since the days of the apostles, it has been preached by all evangelical ministers.

2. Thus the world, in all ages, having been favoured with the gospel, men have had the means of salvation, and they who have refused to embrace them are left without excuse.

3. On this ground believers are graciously saved, and unbelievers are justly damned. Hence God can proceed on the most equitable principles in judging the whole family of man.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. We are highly favoured in having the holy Scriptures, which testify of Christ, and are the means of faith in him.

2. We should bring the ministry we attend to the law and to the testimony, that we may know if it accord with the written word.

3. Great will be our condemnation, if we do not repent of our sins, and believe in Christ for pardon; but if by faith we avail ourselves of his atoning sacrifice, we shall receive and enjoy remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion.

THETA.

XXXV. CHRISTIAN HOPE.

ROMANS V. 5.

“ And hope maketh not ashamed ; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

THE uniformity of Christian experience, and its harmony with the sacred Scriptures, furnish the most powerful arguments in opposition to the subtle sophisms of infidelity. Though the conditions of men widely differ ; yet all those who are under the influence of that “ faith which worketh by love,” bear the same divine “ image and superscription ;” and though the several denominations of Christians cannot harmonize on some minor points of doctrine, modes of worship, and forms of church government ; yet they all find a central point at which they can meet, in the union of that Christian experience described by the apostle in the verses preceding the text. In the passage before us, and its interesting context, the true believer recognizes the foundation of his experience, in the atonement and resurrection of Christ, chap. iv. 25 ; the means of its existence and progress in that faith which is “ of the operation of God,” chap. v. 1, 2 ; its interesting gradation, verse 3, 4 ; and its pleasing influence. Let us proceed to consider,

I. THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN HOPE.

II. THE EFFECT WHICH IT PRODUCES.

III. THE REASON WHICH IT ASSIGNS.

I. In giving a general idea of hope, we may consider it as implying the approbation of its object ; either on account of its real or imaginary excellence ; the possibility of possessing that object ; the desire of attainment ; and a pleasurable sensation of mind, commensurate with our estimate of the object, and our prospect of possessing it. In confining our attention to Christian hope, it will be necessary to consider,

1. *The magnificence of its object.* The hope of the Christian is an object infinitely superior to every thing of an earthly kind ; it quits terrestrial scenes ; it mounts on high ; approaches

the throne of the Eternal; and fixes on the "glory of God" as its object. The term "glory" is sometimes associated with conquest, and in this sense it is the distinguished object of the believer's hope. That adorable Being whose perfections he emulates is the universal conqueror; and through him the Christian hopes to overcome all opposition, triumph over every enemy, and seize the victor's palm in the regions of immortality, Rom. viii. 37; 1 Cor. xv. 57. "Glory is sometimes descriptive of *grandeur*, and such are the exalted expectations of the Christian, that he hopes to participate in the grandeur of his triumphant Redeemer, and vie with the sun when beaming forth in all his noontide refulgence, Dan. xii. 2, 3; Matt. xiii. 43; Rev. iii. 21. But by "the glory of God," the believer more generally understands the participation of *celestial felicity*; the eternal enjoyment of the unveiled glories of the Deity; comprehending the entire exclusion of every species of evil, the perfections of society, and the consummation of happiness, Matt. xxv. 34, 46; 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. But as ungodly men sometimes profess to have hopes of heaven, it is of considerable importance that we attend to,

2. *The purity of its motive.* The hope of the righteous is influenced by a motive widely different from, and superior to, that which excites the feeble and groundless expectation of the sinner. Whilst the wicked hope to go to heaven, merely that they may escape that punishment which is the just reward of their rebellious conduct; the righteous have the same object in view, and hope to obtain it from principles of *love to God, attachment to his people*, delight in holiness, and an ardent desire to enjoy the presence of Jehovah, 2 Cor. v. 1—4; Phil. i. 23.

3. *The solidity of its basis.* The hope of the Christian is not founded on a supposed goodness of heart, nor on a comparative superiority of character, nor yet on the mercy of God simply considered; for he remembers the righteous claims of divine justice, and therefore the basis of his hope is, the atonement of Christ, and a lively interest in, and union with, the "true vine," John xv. 4, 5; Rom. v. 1, 2; viii. 1—9; Gal ii. 20.

II. THE EFFECT WHICH IT PRODUCES;—"maketh not ashamed." Although every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is ashamed of his former sinful practices, of his late ungodly

associates, and of every thing inconsistent with the holy constitution of the gospel; yet he is “not ashamed,”

1. *Of Jesus Christ and his truth.* He humbly acknowledges his need of him as an all-sufficient and a present Saviour; with holy gratitude and pious exultation he confesses his interest in, his dependence upon, and his obligation unto him. He is zealous for the extension of Christian truth in the earth, and in various ways labours to advance his Master’s interests among men, Matt. x. 32; Rom. i. 16; Gal. vi. 14; 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

2. *Of the reproach which is connected with Christianity.* Suffering and reproach have been connected with the progress of Christian truth in all ages, and the records of the Christian church have been stained with the tears and blood of the magnanimous soldiers of the cross, who, fearless of all consequences, have steadily avowed their attachment to the divine Master. Yea, they have rejoiced in having been permitted to participate in the suffering of their Lord, Acts vii. 54—60; xx. 24; xxi. 13; Heb. xi. 35—40.

3. *Of his Christian brethren.* The genuine follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, considers all who bear the image of his Master, however poor and afflicted they may be, as members of his heavenly Father’s family, fellow-heirs of the same eternal inheritance, and partakers of like precious faith with himself. He acknowledges them by acts of social intercourse, by participating in their sorrows, and by administering to their necessities, John xiii. 34, 35; Rom. xv. 1, 2; 1 John iv. 11, 12, 20, 21.

4. *Of pious exertion in the cause of God.* This the Christian considers to be a duty incumbent upon him, and for the purpose of aiding this cause, he prudently declares what God has done for him; administers affectionate admonition and reproof to his fellow creatures; and engages in the regular ordinances of Christianity according to his ability; crowning the whole with incessant prayer to God for the prosperity of Zion, Ps. lxvi. 16; cxxii. 6; 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

III. THE REASON WHICH IT ASSIGNS;—“Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts,” &c. The religion of the gospel is a reasonable thing, and all its effects are strictly consistent with that divine source from which they proceed, and its

highly honoured subjects are “able to give a reason of the hope that is in them.”

1. *The strength of its evidence.* The residence of the Holy Spirit in the breast of the Christian, furnishes him with an indubitable evidence of the heavenly origin and divine reality of his religion. The sceptic may cavil, and the sneering infidel may object, but the

‘Christian dwells, like Uriel in the sun;
Meridian evidence puts doubts to flight,
And ardent hope anticipates the skies.’

The Spirit of love dwelling in his heart, bears ample testimony to his presence there, Rom. viii. 14—17; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Gal. iv. 6. And this internal conviction is accompanied by external operations of a corresponding character, as spirituality of temper and disposition; obedience to the divine commandments; resignation to the divine will; and zeal for the divine glory, Gal. v. 22—24; 1 John iv. 13—21.

2. *The fulness of that enjoyment with which it is connected.* “The love of God” is pleasingly adapted to the intense cravings of an immortal spirit; and when this love is “shed abroad in the heart,” it produces happiness the most pure, the most satisfactory, and the most permanent. The burden of native guilt is removed, peace is experienced, joy fills the heart, and the expanding soul has large anticipations of celestial felicity, “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God,” Rom. v. 11; xiv. 17; 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

This subject tends,

1. To promote inquiry respecting our interest in this hope.
2. To elicit sentiments of gratitude from those who possess it.
3. To stimulate to diligence those who are “without hope.”

OMICRON.

XXXVI. CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY.

GAL. vi. 2.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens; and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

“THE heart is deceitful above all things,” as well as “desperately wicked,” and is therefore to be watched over with the most scrupulous jealousy; otherwise there is danger lest, under the semblance of piety and religious zeal, we should be led to indulge rancorous and unholy passions. Thus the apostle seems to have thought, or rather to have felt: whence the *caution*, chap. v. 13—16: whence also the *exposure* of the fruits both of the flesh and the Spirit, ver 19—23; and the *exhortation*, from chap. v. 25, to the text; in which we have an important duty enforced by a powerful motive.

I. THE DUTY ENJOINED;—“Bear ye one another’s burdens.” The word “burden” denotes something which, by uneasy pressure, exhausts the strength and spirits of the person who is oppressed by it; and it may apply,

1. *To a weight of labour or bodily toil.* This is the effect of the original transgression, Gen, iii. 19. Thus were the Israelites *burdened*, Exod. i. 11. The pressure of this kind of burden we may bear for “one another” by manual assistance, which even the poorest may give, by procuring the requisite help, or by pecuniary aid, which would render the *excess* of labour unnecessary.

1. *To a weight of personal affliction;* in which “the corruptible body presseth down the soul,” and, as in Job’s case, the patient is a burden to himself, Job vii, 20. The pressure of this may be relieved by medical aid, (which a little experience and attention would enable many, who have not been bred to the profession, to afford,) by kind attendance,—the soothing, sympathizing language of friendship,—or the considerations which religion affords, Heb. xiii. 2; James i. 27.

3. *To a weight of domestic afflictions or cares.* This was a part of Job’s overwhelming case, chap. i. 13—19. Here our

text particularly applies to members of families, who should "bear one another's burdens," by manifesting a fellow-feeling, in promptly and cheerfully lending a helping hand to lighten the common load of pain and trouble; and in suggesting those encouragements which affection, reason, or religion may furnish. Not so Job's wife, who, by endeavouring to deprive him of his only remaining support, contributed to make his "stroke heavier than his groaning," chap. ii. 9, and xxiii. 2.

4. *To a weight of providential losses, poverty, embarrassment, oppression, &c.* In reference to this, the Lord directs, Isa. lviii. 6, to "undo the heavy burdens," &c. This may be effected by public subscription, Acts xxiv. 17; 1 Cor. xvi. 1—3; by private contributions, James ii. 15, 16; by furnishing materials for industry to work upon; by judicious advice, suitable encouragement, remonstrance with oppressors, &c. Isaiah lviii. 6, 7; Job xxix. 11—13; 1 John iii. 16, 17.

5. *To a weight of guilt and corruption.* So the Psalmist, Ps. xxxviii. 4. "For mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too strong for me." In this case Christian sympathy is particularly demanded. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" 'Tis true every convinced sinner must bear this load for himself; yet it is often in the power of others materially to assist such. You find one of this character on the brink of despair; long has he been thus; and he fears he shall never obtain mercy;—a relation of your own past experience may serve to show him that his case is not desperate. Another may be pained because his distress has not been more distressing, and is therefore afraid that his repentance is not genuine. Here the experience of such as have had their hearts gently "opened" may be of vast benefit, Acts xvi. 14, 29—34. In every such case, we should point to "the Lamb of God," John i. 29; 1 John ii. 2; and bear their burdens in prayer *for* and *with* the humble penitents; and "expound unto them the way of God more perfectly," Acts xviii. 26; shewing, at once, the tenderness of the Saviour, Isa. xlii. 3, and the freeness and suitableness of his salvation, Isaiah liii. 4—6; Rom. iv. 6.

6. *To a weight of temptation.* This may come *immediately* from Satan, Matt. iv. 1; or, *mediately*, from persecuting men, from the world generally, from family connections, from the church, Matt. x. 36; Phil. iii. 18. In this case also, when

the soul is "in heaviness through manifold temptations," the exercise of Christian prudence and sympathy are requisite and beneficial. A friend, formed for adversity, may detect and expose the devices of Satan; may direct in affairs of difficulty; and by advice and exhortation, support the soul of him that is ready to faint, and thus prove that "two are better than one," Eccl. iv. 9; Rom. xv. 1; 1 Thess. v. 14.

7. *To a weight of infirmities*: which is thought to be the apostle's more particular meaning in this place. These may belong to the *body* worn down by labour, want, disease, or age, Eccl. xii. 3—5; or to the *mind* wanting a clear and quick apprehension, retentive memory, steady resolution, &c. By one or other of these infirmities your weak brother is burdened; therefore you should pity rather than upbraid him; and, as making his burden your own, help his infirmities, rather than punish them as crimes. If, in addition to this, we conceal the infirmities of others, when, in consequence of such concealment, we expose ourselves to the blame which would otherwise fall on them, and thus take the inconvenience on ourselves, we then emphatically "bear one another's burdens," 2 Cor. xi. 29. In general we should have respect to circumstances, and administer our relief in the most proper mode, measure, time.

Propriety recommends this duty; we are children of the same family, members of the same body, &c. Personal advantage recommends it; it improves the best and happiest feelings of the heart. Christianity recommends it; "so fulfil the law of Christ." Thus we are brought to consider,

II. THE ENFORCING MOTIVE. It is usual, as well as proper, in the apostles, to enforce their advice and injunctions by a reference to the precepts and practice of Christ. Instance in liberality, 2 Cor. viii. 9; humility, Phil. ii. 7, 8; generous sympathy, and mutual support; thus our text, "Bear," &c. "and so fulfil the law of Christ." We do not know of any law of Christ enjoining this duty in precisely these words, yet there is much in the teaching of the Redeemer to enforce both the principle and the practice. Hence we observe that the apostle's requirement is,

1. *Worthy of the character of Christ*, inasmuch as it is a law of equity. We, who have so many burdens, of which a part must be borne by others, and of which we wish them to bear

a part, ought to bear in return, Matt. vii. 12. A law of benevolence. "Let every man seek another's wealth," Luke x. 37; 1 Cor. x. 24. A law of general utility, by which society is benefited, the sum of evil being lessened, and that of happiness increased.

2. *It is congenial with the spirit of Christ.* "Let this mind be in you," &c. Phil. ii. 5. "He hath loved us." "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind," &c. Col. iii. 12, 13.

3. *It is agreeable to the example of Christ.* Mark the sacrifices he made for the welfare, the salvation, of the poor and the unworthy, condescending to become man, to labour, to suffer, and to die, John xiii. 13—15; Phil. ii. 6—8; Heb. ii. 14—16.

4. *It is deducible from the precepts of Christ.* "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you," &c. John xiii. 34, 35. Perhaps this is the very "law" to which the apostle refers. And Jesus call it "MY commandment," John xv. 12, 17. It comprehends and is the substance of every other, Gal. v. 14. Hence "love is the fulfilling of the law," Rom. xiii. 10, and "the end of the commandment," 1 Tim. i. 5.

5. *It has, and shall have, the approbation of Christ.* As King and Lawgiver he has said, and in the day of judgment will say, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," Matt. v. 7, and xxv. 34—46.

INFER, 1. Seeing that our text expresses the peculiar genius of the religion by which we hope for salvation, the subject should awaken inquiry, 1 John iv. 19—21.

2. If examination should happen to lead us to humiliating views of past short-comings, &c. it should also lead to unreserved and constant obedience; which may be supported by a consideration of what we owe to ourselves, our brethren, Heb. xiii. 1, 2, our Saviour, who regards what is done to his followers as done unto himself, Matt. xxv. 40; and to our God, who expects such return for his love, 1 John iv. 2—11.

XXXVII. SALVATION BY GRACE.

EPHES. ii. 8.

“By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

WHAT is truth? When it refers to religious truth, it is a question of great importance; and when proposed, not to satisfy a vain and idle curiosity, but for spiritual improvement, it is one which stands entitled to most serious consideration. Every revealed truth is important. To deny this would be an impeachment of divine wisdom. Every revealed truth *may* be known. To suppose otherwise, would be to suppose a revelation and no revelation at the same time, which is a direct contradiction, and therefore impossible. It *may*, not *must* be known. The means of knowledge are within our reach. But though all revealed truths may be known, and are important, they are not equally important. Some only respect a particular people, or age, or particular circumstances; whilst others respect all people, in every age, and in all possible circumstances. Some relate to positive, others to moral duties; some respect a part, the others a whole of religion. Our text is of the latter class; it is an epitome or abstract of God's method of saving sinners.

Salvation—salvation by grace—salvation by grace through faith—and salvation through faith as a divine gift, are the topics which, in the discussion of this text, demand attention.

I. SALVATION. This is infinitely comprehensive: it relates both to body and soul; it has its commencement in this life, and its consummation in the life to come. In this, amongst other things, are included,

1. *A change of the relations in which we stood to God.* Formerly rebels, now loyal subjects; formerly convicted criminals, now pardoned; formerly strangers or foreigners, now God's household.

2. *A change of heart.* The heart is naturally desperately

wicked; it is radically bad, and contains no good thing; hence every thought and imagination is evil; hence it loves, delights in, and is habitually under the power of sin; but salvation includes a new heart, which loves, rejoices in, and obeys the Lord.

3. *A change of prospects.* The prospects of the majority are limited by the boundaries of this life; beyond it they seldom extend a single thought, desire, or hope. The prospects of others, who sometimes think of a future state, are gloomy and wretched; immortality, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment, are to them objects of terror. Salvation is at once a deliverance from inattention to the future, and from every terrific and painful anticipation. It turns aside the veil, and reveals to its subjects all the endless glories of the heavenly state, as their future inheritance.

II. SALVATION BY GRACE,—by mere favour. To this it is uniformly ascribed.

1. *It is impossible to trace it to any other source.* It could not originate in any divine obligation to save man. Man having sinned, God was under no obligation to save him. As before man's creation God was free to create or not to create, so after his transgression he was free to redeem or not to redeem. And as, on supposition that God had not created man, no charge could have been brought against him on that ground, so, on supposition that he had not redeemed him, no charge could have been exhibited against him on that account: for if he gave him a perfect law, to which he required perfect obedience, he also gave him a perfect nature, fully competent to that obedience. His disobedience therefore being voluntary and unecessitated, God was under no obligation to rescue him from the effects of such disobedience.

2. *Nor in any formerly meritorious services which he had performed.*

3. *Nor in present worthiness or importunity.*

4. *Nor in prospect of future remuneration.*—No, it originated in love, John iii. 16. This originated the plan, and set in motion the mighty apparatus of our redemption. Though salvation originates in the divine favour, and is a free gift, absolutely free, yet it only flows through a Mediator, who by his death has redeemed us from the curse of the law, by his word

has revealed the path of life, and by his influence gives power to enter upon and persevere in that path to the end.

III. SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH. Not by the works of the law either moral or ceremonial:—not by the former, because we have broken it; nor by the latter, for it could never give life; but by faith. No, the mere assent of the understanding to any part, or to the whole of divine truth, without the heart ever being affected; but that faith which,

1. *Cordially receives all that God reveals.* It approaches the Bible not as a dictator to tell it what to teach, but as a learner to inquire what it teaches. Neither does it act the part of a caviller, when it discovers any thing contrary to its previous judgment, but at once yields to the discovery, and rejects its former views. Having evidence that God speaks, it implicitly credits all he says, being absolutely certain that his truth renders it impossible that he should lie; his wisdom impossible that he should mistake; and his goodness impossible that he should deceive. Hence whatever difficulties there may be in the Mosaic account of the creation and the fall; in the divinity or atonement of Christ; in satanic or divine influence; or in the resurrection of the dead; these difficulties have no weight with faith, for God hath spoken.

2. *Promptly obeys all which God commands.* Not merely where obedience is easy or agreeable; nor where the reasons for the precept are obvious; nor where the advantages are easy to be comprehended; but where the reasons are hidden, and where obedience cannot be performed but at the expence of the most painful sacrifice. Look at the obedience of Abraham's faith, when commanded to leave Haran, Gen. xii. 1.

1. "It conferred not with flesh and blood:" it instantly relinquished and triumphed over the love of country and friends, and though not knowing his ultimate destination, in obedience to the divine command, it prompted him at once to become a sojourner in a strange land. Look at its operation in the intended sacrifice of Isaac, Gen. xxii. 1—13. The command was opposed to every feeling of human nature; especially to parental feeling; more especially to the feelings of the father of an only son. It was also apparently at variance with the divine promise of Isaac's having a numerous progeny. But Abraham

knew the voice of God, and was obedient. Such is the faith through which we are saved; it hears the voice of God and obeys it.

3. *Claims all which God promises.* Obedience to the divine commands, will invariably lead to the fulfilment of the divine promises. "If any man do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." And he that doeth the will of God shall inherit the promises. The Bible is full of promises, and faith claims them as its own. It promises pardon to the penitent sinner, and faith in the penitent boldly claims the promise; strength to the weak, and faith claims and receives it: a new and a clean heart, and great as is the promise, faith presents the *cheque*, and it is at once accepted. Faith as a hand receives all that is necessary to the conversion,—sanctification,—and eternal salvation of the soul.

IV. SALVATION THROUGH FAITH AS A DIVINE GIFT. Every thing in the economy of redemption tends to humble proud man. God not only freely provides salvation, but also gratuitously bestows all that is necessary to our receiving it. Faith is the appointed condition of our salvation; but in order to faith, four things are necessary:—

1. *That the things to be believed should be made known.*
2. *That we should have a capacity to understand them.*
3. *That we should have an inclination to embrace them.*
4. *That we should have power to do so.*

But whence this revelation, this capacity, this inclination, this power? Do they come from beneath? Are they natural to man? Are they acquired by education? No, they are the gift of God.

From hence we learn,

1. That if salvation be by grace through faith in Christ, whosoever rejects Christ must perish. "He that believeth not shall be damned."

2. That he who expects to be saved on the ground of his innocency, or good works, or repentance, builds upon a wrong foundation.

3. That the faith through which we are saved, does not supersede personal holiness, but lies at its foundation. It is a living principle, which is holy in all its operations.

XXXVIII. CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S LIFE, AND DEATH THE BELIEVER'S GAIN.

PHIL. i. 21.

“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

WHEN St. Paul uttered this sentiment, he was a prisoner for Jesus Christ, deprived of his liberty, and under the control of his persecuting foes; but his soul was not bound: the Phillipians were inexpressibly dear to him; he had them in his heart; they were his joy and his crown; and he longed after them all in the bowels of Jesus Christ: and their love to him, if less ardent, was not less sincere. Hearing of his deprivations, they voluntarily raised a contribution among themselves, and sent it to him by the hand of Epaphroditus their minister; in return, St. Paul sent them this admirable epistle. In the verses preceding the text, he assures them that the things which had happened to him, were so far from impeding the progress of truth, that they had “fallen out,” &c. ver 12; and that his fellow helpers in the ministry were more confident by his bonds, ver. 14. He then, after expressing his confidence that all his sufferings would have a favourable issue, ver. 19, 20, utters the devout and elevated sentiment in the text, “For me to live,” &c. We have here two things:—

I. CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S LIFE.

II. DEATH THE BELIEVER'S GAIN.

I. CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S LIFE. “For me to live is Christ.” This is in effect, saying,

1. *Christ is the author of my life.* ‘Two kinds of life has double-natured man.’ We all live as animal and rational beings, and have capacities for the performance of animal and rational actions. But believers live in a more exalted sense, and possess a higher life, a life of which Jesus Christ is the immediate author. Once they were devoid of this, and even dead while they lived; they saw objects, heard sounds, tasted food, performed

actions, and did all that was necessary as members of civil society, and citizens of the world; but they had no spiritual senses, they saw not God, they heard not his voice, they tasted not his love, and they had no feeling of the powers of the world to come. But when they were dead in sin, Christ quickened them. "The hour is coming," &c., John v. 25. "I am the resurrection and the life," &c., xi. 25.

2. *Christ is the principle of my life.* Every kind of life, whether vegetable, animal, or spiritual, depends upon some principle from which it springs; for life is but the effect of some latent and operative cause. Christ not only lights up the lamp of spiritual life, but he feeds the flame, and supplies the oil by which it burns. Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, becomes the principle of our life. "I am the living bread," &c., John vi. 51. "Except ye eat the flesh," &c., ver. 53. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," Gal. ii. 20. "When Christ, who is our life," &c., Col. iii. 4. "He that hath the Son," &c., 1 John v. 12. We are as much dependent on Christ for spiritual life, as plants are dependent on the earth for vegetable life, or the body is dependent on the soul for animal life.

3. *Christ is the model of my life.* Christians are not lawless beings who walk at random, or live according to the course of the world. No, they regard Christ as their pattern, and they study to be like him. They do this, because they know that the life of Christ was the most dignified and glorious life that was ever led upon earth, and that there is every thing great and good in the imitation of so illustrious a character.—Because the Spirit of Christ within them excites them to follow the example of Christ without.—Because they love Christ, and love leads them to imitate the beloved object,—and they know that the profession of Christianity lays them under strong obligations to follow the Lord Jesus. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also," &c. 1 John ii. 6.

4. *Christ is the end of my life.* Carnal men are most commonly selfish men; they seek their own, and not another's wealth; their own ease, or their own glory, or their own pleasure, engages all their attention, and occupies all their time; and they live as fully to themselves, as if they were the authors of their own being, or the arbiters of their own fate. But believers consider Christ as the end of their life; from a con-

sciousness that they owe their being to Christ, and that he formed them for his glory, and redeemed them by his blood: they surrender themselves to his service; whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, the glory of Christ is their great object: they renounce their own ease to sustain the cross of Christ: they sacrifice their own reputation for the reproach of Christ: and count not their lives dear unto themselves, so that they may advance the honour of Christ: with the apostle they can say, "None of us liveth unto himself," &c. Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

II. DEATH IS THE BELIEVER'S GAIN. "To die is gain." We must distinguish here, between the act of dying and the consequences of death. There is every thing in death, considered in itself, that is appalling and dreadful. Look at death in its deprivations. Here the tenderest bonds of affection are dissolved; the most endearing relations ended; and the deepest pangs of parting endured. Death in its agonies. How inadequate is human language to describe the pains of the dying; what deep waters go over them! how hard the struggle they endure! Death in its degradations. What can be more exquisitely beautiful than a human body adorned with youth, flushed with health, and fired with vigour, the eyes sparkling with joy, the heart dancing with gladness, the pulse beating high with expectation, and the cheeks glowing lovelier than the virgin rose! But in death all is changed! all degraded! a putrid mass of inanimate matter is all that is left; a receptacle for worms, a prey for corruption, a heap of dust! So that if there was nothing beyond death, it would be no gain to die; for death in itself is a sore evil, and a most terrible curse inflicted upon mankind. But as it is gain to die, pronounced so by an inspired apostle, we must infer that there is another state of being to which death introduces us. In illustrating this subject, we consider the evils from which we are delivered, and the blessings with which we shall be crowned.

First, The evils from which we are delivered.

1. *Death delivers us from the pains and miseries of the present life.* Man is born to trouble, and suffering is his lot upon earth. He suffers in his body; what numerous ills life is heir to! He suffers in his mind; how many things wound his spirit and put him to grief! He suffers by commiseration; his friends and fellow creatures suffer, and he weeps with those that

weep. What a suffering man was St. Paul! Hear his tale of woe: "Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes, save one," &c. 2 Cor. xi. 24. Nor was this all, he was a man of feeling; "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" "What mean ye, to weep and break my heart?" Acts xxi. 13. But in heaven there is no pain; "sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes."

2. *Death frees us from all the imperfections of our mortal state.* Our knowledge here is very imperfect and defective; we know but in part; the little knowledge of which we are possessed, is frequently obtained by hard study and intense thought; and this defective knowledge renders us liable to mistake, to entertain wrong opinions of men and things; and a mistake in judgment frequently induces errors in practice. Paul withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed. But to die is gain. "In heaven we shall know even also as we are known." "There knowledge grows without decay." That is the region of perfection, and there error can find no entrance.

3. *Death terminates the conflicts of our Christian warfare.* Believers are now engaged in a most perilous contest. Their enemies are principalities and powers, &c. Eph. vi. 12. The issue of this conflict sometimes appears doubtful; "without are fightings, and within are fears:" but when death comes, the fight is finished, the victory won, and the believer goes to his vast reward that awaits him in the skies.

Secondly, The gain to which the text refers, comprehends the acquisition of all possible good.

1. *It will be universal.* In the situation; we exchange houses of clay for everlasting habitations. *The society;* we leave behind our weeping companions, to greet the blood-besprinkled bands on the eternal shore. *The enjoyments;* here the purest pleasures are often interrupted, and may be finally forfeited. There our enjoyments will flow on like a river, pure as the source from whence they spring. *In our capacities;* here we have blessings, but sometimes cannot enjoy them; there the body will be immortal, and the soul capacitated for enjoyments the most elevated and enlarged. *In employments;* the occupations of this world are sordid and laborious; there we shall sing the

praises of God, contemplate the mysteries of his nature, the variety of his works, and the glory of his government.

2. *It will be incalculable.* There is no gain upon earth that may not be estimated. We have figures and numbers, and arithmeticians who can form estimates and make calculations to any amount. But who can calculate the value of heavenly joys! the worth of immortal pleasures!

3. *It will be eternal.* It is not the gain of a moment, or even an age, but the gain of eternity, and of all eternity can give. Gain that can never be forfeited, nor diminished in value. Earthly goods cease to give their possessors pleasure, in proportion to the duration of the period they possess them. Worldly joys cloy the appetite, and pleasures cease to please; but the happiness of heaven will increase in value to eternity.

In conclusion we observe,

First, *If Christ is the believer's life, how happy and desirable is his state!* 'What hath the world to equal this?' What life is so honourable, so profitable, and so glorious? How strange it is that we have so few candidates for such a life! Is this your life? Why should not the apostle's experience be yours? There is no state of Christianity that belonged exclusively to any order of men. You may be as holy as apostles. If Christ be not your life, you are not Christians; you may have been baptized into the Christian name, and accustomed to attend Christian ordinances; but in the benefits of Christianity you have no share, and to the rewards of Christianity you have no title. O what a miserable, worldly, sensual life is yours!

Secondly, *If death is the believer's gain, should not this more than reconcile us to the thoughts of dying?* Many look at death in the pains and agonies it inflicts, and tremble with fearful apprehensions. These we may never realize; many die as tranquilly as they sink into the arms of sleep: but should death be even as dreadful as we anticipate, 'tis useless 'to die a thousand deaths in fearing one.' Let us look at the promises of God, read the experience of dying saints, and especially "endure as seeing him who is invisible."

Thirdly, *If to die is gain, how selfish to indulge inconsolable grief for our departed friends, who have passed into the skies.*

‘ O the pain, the bliss of dying ! ’ the bitterness of death is with them for ever passed, and the bliss of dying is now their unalienable portion.

BETA.

XXXIX. THE EXCELLENCE AND VALUE OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

PHIL. iii. 8.

“ Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

THE Jews who lived in the days of our Lord and of his apostles, prided themselves much on their relation to Abraham ; their outward conformity to the law of Moses ; their zeal for the religion of their forefathers, &c. Some of them who, while they professed the Christian faith, still retained their high opinion of circumcision and the law, went from Jerusalem among the Gentile converts to Christianity, who were in danger of having their faith perverted by those Judaizing teachers, Acts xv. In the chapter before us, the apostle, after having cautioned the church at Philippi against such persons, and their false confidence, ver. 1—3, proceeded to shew, that if confidence in the flesh were justifiable, he had more ground for it than any other man, ver. 4—6 ; but that he disclaimed all dependence on such things, as being of no value, &c. ver. 7. And in the text he declared that he counted not only the things which he had before mentioned, but *all things* but loss for the “ excellency of the knowledge of Christ.” We may here consider—the knowledge of Christ—its excellence—and comparative value.

1. THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST. By this we understand that clear perception of, and undoubted acquaintance with Christ as their Saviour, with which believers in him are blessed, see ver. 10 ; and in which they are exhorted to grow, 2 Peter iii. 18.

This acquaintance with Christ may be distinguished into historical, speculative, and experimental.

1. An *historical* knowledge of Christ is that which relates to the incidents, circumstances, occurrences, and transactions of his life, &c.; the principal of which were recorded by faithful men, who were eye-witnesses of the whole, and whose records have been handed down to us, that we might be as fully assured of the facts related, as if they had passed before our own eyes. Even this knowledge is both interesting and useful, inasmuch as it refers to the most extraordinary personage in the universe, and may lead to the happiest results, see John xx. 30, 31.

2. A *speculative* knowledge of Christ is that which results from the understanding exercising itself about the person whose history is before us, and forming an opinion of his character, doctrines, &c. Our apostle calls this a "knowledge in the mysteries of Christ," which persons may acquire, by reading what is written about that mystery in the sacred oracles, and by hearing those oracles explained in a gospel ministry, Eph. iii. 4—9. In reference to their opinion of him, Christ questioned the Pharisees, Matt. xxii. 42; and also his own disciples, Matt. xvi. 15. The opinion of the latter was approved as correct; and we also may, from the evidence which is before us in the book of God, conclude, with all the certainty which demonstration can bestow, that he is "the Christ, the son of God;" and that he "came into the world to save sinners," 1 Tim. i. 15.

3. An *experimental* knowledge of Christ is that which has its foundation in experience: it is the result of theory applied and acted upon. As for instance, the woman spoken of in the gospel, who had been diseased twelve years, said within herself, "If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be whole," Matt. ix. 21: this was her opinion. She came and touched his garment, and felt in her body that she was healed, Mark v, 27, 29: this was her experience. Just so the sinner perishing in his sins, hears of Christ, and from what he hears, forms an opinion of him, as being both able and willing to save him from his sins. He flies for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before him, Heb. vi. 18; and obtains a knowledge of salvation by the remission of his sins, Luke i. 77. It is the experimental knowledge of Christ, as having "loved me," and given "himself for me," which is so highly excellent and valuable in itself, and

without which all other knowledge of him will leave us in comparative "darkness and the shadow of death."

II. THE EXCELLENCE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. Excellence signifies dignity, high rank, the state of excelling in any thing. It is formed by an assemblage of great and good qualities. The "knowledge of Christ Jesus" our Lord, is excellent on account of,

1. *Its sublimity.* It is not confined to men and things on earth,—does not dwell on merely human discoveries,—it is not detained among the planets to measure their distances, ascertain their solid contents, and observe their revolutions. It rises higher, and on its strong eagle pinion, soars to contemplate the great "mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh," &c. 1 Tim. iii. 16; and is familiar with those "deep things of God," into which "angels desire to look," 1 Pet. i. 12.

2. *Its glorious source.* A knowledge of other things;—of the useful or the fine arts, the sciences, the living or the dead languages, may be acquired by observation and study, or by instructions received from men and books. But "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor. xii. 3. "The natural man receiveth not the things of God; for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, (however learned he may be,) because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Cor. ii. 14. Hence these things are often hid from the "wise and prudent," and revealed unto "babes," Matt. xi. 25.

3. *Its peaceful influence.* Other knowledge "puffeth up," and where pride is, there is generally "envying and strife," and where these are there is "confusion and every evil work." "But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable," &c.; causing the storms of human passions to subside, James iii. 17. It also dispels our guilty fears, by discovering that "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," Rom. v. 1.

4. *Its exalting effect.* Man, without the knowledge of his God and Saviour, is a poor degraded being, sunk lower than the stupid brute, Isa. i. 3. His wisdom is "earthly, sensual, and devilish," James iii. 15. And himself is a child of wrath, Eph. ii. 3. But when we "turn to the Lord," the veil of igno-

rance is taken away, and we "with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image," 2 Cor. iii. 16—18; are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Col. i. 13; made kings and priests unto God, Rev. v. 10; and raised up to sit in heavenly places in Christ, Eph. ii. 6.

5. *Its distinguished end.* "This is life eternal," &c. John xvii. 3. Life eternal, in the presence of God, where there is "fulness of joy," and at his right hand, where are "pleasures for evermore," Ps. xvi. 11.

III. THE COMPARATIVE VALUE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. This the apostle estimates, as being,

1. *More valuable than all things.* The honours and advantages of birth and rank;—fame as being a scholar or a hero;—riches either hereditary or acquired;—the pleasures of sense and imagination; or whatever constitutes "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life," and even life itself, was less valued by him, than this "pearl of great price," Acts xx. 24.

2. *So highly valuable, that all other things are contemptible compared with it.* The apostle valued the conveniences of life, and was thankful for them, Phil. iv. 10, 18. He esteemed learning as an auxiliary to religion, and recommended it, 1 Tim. iv. 13. He regarded his liberty as a subject, and asserted it in opposition to lawless violence, Acts xvi. 37; xxv. 10, 11. His life was dear to him, and he used the means of preserving it, Acts ix. 25. But valuable as these things are in themselves, he counted them "but dung," that he might "win Christ;" see the context.

APPLICATION.

Dost thou approve the apostle's choice, and applaud his conduct? "Go thou and do likewise." Take heed that thou art not condemned out of thy own mouth. "With all thy getting get understanding;" and choose rather to suffer "the loss of all things," than to lose Christ and thy own soul.

KAPPA.

XL. A SKETCH FOR EASTER SUNDAY.

COL. iii. 1.

“ If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.”

THE festival of our Lord's resurrection is called Easter, from the goddess *Eoster*, whose festival was held by her idolatrous worshippers, in the month of April. The Greeks call it *τάσχα* and the Latins *pascha*, from a Hebrew word which is applied to the Jewish passover. The Asiatic churches kept this festival on the very day that the Jews observed their passover; others the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox: and this, after a sharp controversy, which cost many lives, was settled by the Council of Nice. But though the Christian churches differed about the *time* of keeping this festival, yet they all agreed in shewing particular respect and honour to the *feast*; and surely it is a day of joy and gladness, of holy triumph and of blessed hope. Our Lord is risen from the dead: and those who are risen with him, should seek those things which are above.

I. OUR LORD IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

1. The *death* of Jesus is affirmed by all the Evangelists. This is important; for if he did not really die, it would be trifling to argue on his resurrection. *Matthew* informs us that “ he cried with a loud voice and yielded up the ghost,” chap. xxvii. 50; *Mark* says, “ Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost,” chap. xv. 37; *Luke* states, that, “ when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father into thy hands I commend my spirit. And having said thus he gave up the ghost,” chap. xxiii. 46; and *John* affirms, that he “ bowed the head, and gave up the ghost,” chap. xix. 30. And as a proof of his death, it is observed, that “ one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water,” John xix. 34.

2. The body of Jesus was *laid in a sepulchre, and means were used by its enemies, to keep it there*. The Jews recollected “ that he said, while he was yet alive, After three days I

will rise again," Matt. xxvii. 63; therefore they requested a *watch* to guard the body lest it should be stolen away, ver. 64; and Pilate gave orders to make it as sure as they could, ver. 65; "so they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch," ver. 66.

3. Every attempt of his enemies, *to prevent his resurrection, was baffled and confounded.* There was a great earthquake, Matt. xxviii. 2; "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it; his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men," ver. 4.

4. After his passion, he shewed himself alive by many *infallible proofs.* He was seen of his disciples forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, Acts i. 3. He shewed himself to Mary, Mark xvi. 9; to other women, Matt. xxviii. 9; to two disciples going to Emmaus, Mark xvi. 12; to Peter, Luke xxiv. 34; to all the disciples, John xx. 19; to them again, chap. xx. 26; to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, chap. xxi. 1; to the disciples in Galilee, Matt. xxviii. 16, 17; to James, 1 Cor. xv. 7; to the eleven, Mark xvi. 14; and to above five hundred brethren at once, 1 Cor. xv. 6.

5. The disciples *could not be deceived in those appearances.* They knew his person, his voice, and his usual manner of address. They were not credulous; hence they rejected the story of the women concerning his being risen, Luke xxiv. 11; and one of them would not believe without the most substantial proofs of his resurrection, John xx. 25. They saw him *often*; they heard him *speak*; they handled his body, ver. 27; they ate and drank with him; and they saw him ascend to heaven, Acts i. 9—11.

6. In relating the resurrection of Jesus, *the disciples had no design to deceive others.* They were plain honest men; they told a plain and unvarnished tale; they were all of one mind; by their testimony of Jesus, they exposed themselves to dangers, toils, and death; the whole world, whether Jews, or Gentiles, were opposed to them; of themselves they were weak and feeble, and yet they never deviated from the truth, but many of them sealed it with their blood. Thus the resurrection of our Lord,

on which the whole of Christianity stands, is supported by such proofs, that the man who denies it must be pronounced either insane or abominably wicked.

7. In the resurrection of Jesus, *prophecies were fulfilled*. It was foretold that he should not see corruption, Psalm xvi. 10; and our Lord himself, who was a true prophet, predicted his resurrection on the third day, Matt. xii. 40; John ii. 19. Had he risen sooner, his death might have been doubted by some; and had he remained longer in the grave, he would have seen corruption. It is true he was not three whole days and nights in the sepulchre, but he rose on the third day, for having been buried on Friday, he rose on the Sunday, or the first day of the week.

8. The resurrection of our Saviour is ascribed to the FATHER, Acts ii. 32; and to HIMSELF, John x. 18; a proof that he and the Father are ONE, in a higher sense than some professing Christians are willing to allow, John x. 30.

9. *He rose on the first day of the week*: hence that has been called the Lord's day, Rev. i. 10; has been observed as the Christian sabbath, Acts xx. 7; and this is highly proper, because his resurrection was the commencement of the new creation, Col. i. 18.

10. His resurrection proves, beyond a doubt, that *all his undertakings for man were accepted*. Had he been what the Jews called him, a *deceiver*, he would never have risen from the dead. Omnipotent power could not have been exerted to restore the life of an impostor, after it had been justly taken away. In that case, his disciples would have been finally scattered, and Christianity would have been unknown; but the seal of divine approbation was put upon him when he rose again, so that all he had said was confirmed, and all he had done was approved.

11. Death was *conquered* by his resurrection. There had been instances before of persons rising from the dead; but they only rose to a state of mortality. Jesus was the first who rose from the dead to die no more; and is on that account, "the first fruits of them that slept," 1 Cor. xv. 20. Death, the last enemy, has been forced to deliver up his prey; the grave, his prison house, has been thrown open; and this foe has yielded to the mighty conqueror.

12. Finally, *The resurrection of our Lord is a proof that we shall rise from the dead*; “but every man in his own order; Christ the first fruits; afterwards they that are Christ’s at his coming,” 1 Cor. xv. 23. The resurrection will be general, “for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,” verse 22. Had not our Lord risen from the dead, we might have thought that event *incredible*; but fact has put this subject out of doubt, Acts xxvi. 8.

II. THOSE WHO ARE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SHOULD SEEK THE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE.

1. While we remain in a state of nature, *we are spiritually dead*. We have no union with God, Eph. ii. 12; we have no relish for divine things, Rom. viii. 5; we are at enmity against God, verse 7; and of course, we are dead in trespasses and sins, Eph. ii. 1.

2. When we hear the voice of the Son of God, and obey it, *we are brought into spiritual life*, John v. 25. We are called to repent and believe the gospel, Mark i. 15; and when we do so, by that power which accompanies the call, we rise into life, John iii. 36; 1 John v. 12.

3. This blessed change implies a quickening, Col. iii. 10; a new birth, John iii. 3; a new creation, 2 Cor. v. 17; and, in our text, a resurrection with Christ: and it is as much the work of God, though in concurrence with the will of man, as the creation of the world, or the resurrection of the dead.

4. When we feel this saving change, “we are begotten again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” 1 Peter i. 3; and this blessed hope has for its object a glorious immortality, and “an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away,” verse 4.

5. We cannot be at a loss to know what is meant by the things which are above; because they are said to be in that world where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Those things include all the light, all the glory, and all the felicity of the heavenly state. There we shall be completely happy; our companions will be saints and angels: our employment will be praise; and we shall have “fulness of joy,” and “pleasures for evermore,” Psalm xvi. 11.

6. Much is implied in seeking those things: particularly a knowledge of them; a love for them; and an ardent desire to

be put in the possession of those ineffable glories. With these dispositions, we should use all the appointed means; for those things must be sought with diligence, in the way of Christian duty.

7. But let us seek it in a right way; first, in the name of Jesus, John xiv. 6; secondly, by faith in him, Rom. ix. 32; thirdly, with earnestness or holy strivings, Luke xiii. 24; and lastly, with steady perseverance to the end, 1 Cor. xv, 58.

8. On this plan, we shall soon find a better world, and be for ever with the Lord, 1 Thess. iv. 17. The crown will be given to us, Rev. ii. 10. White raiment will be put upon us, Rev. vii. 13. Palms of victory will be put into our hands, verse 9; and "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes," verse 17.

INFERENCES.

1. The resurrection of Jesus is a subject of *vast importance* to us and to all mankind. If true, Christianity stands on a rock which cannot be shaken, and all the hopes of Christians will be realized; but "if Christ be not risen," preaching is vain, and the faith of Christians is also vain, 1 Cor. xv. 14.

2. But *of his resurrection there can be no doubt*, in the mind of any one who examines the subject with candour. To such an one, the proofs are *irresistible* and certain; unless we could admit that the apostles were ignorant of what they knew; that they told lies for the sake of reproach and suffering; and that they united to maintain, and died to confirm a most shameful falsehood. Surely it requires more faith to be an infidel than a Christian.

3. Those who believe in his resurrection and session at the right hand of God, should rise above the world; keep heaven in their view; and urge their way forward to the celestial city. There they will overtake the Saviour; behold him in his glory; and enjoy him for ever and ever. Amen.

SIGMA.

XLI. CHRIST IS ALL, AND IN ALL.

COL. iii. 11.

"Christ is all, and in all."

IT is painful to observe the powerful tendency which external habits, distinctions, and circumstances possess, to alienate the affections of mankind from each other. In former ages the very mention of a *Jew*, was sufficient to excite feelings of contempt in the bosom of a *Greek*: while on the other hand the sight of a *Greek*, never failed to produce a similar sensation in the heart of a *Jew*. Prejudices of a like kind prevail in the present day, in consequence of different names, opinions, and customs. A man born in another country, is often regarded as if he were a being of another species. Different sentiments on religious or political subjects, or dissimilar modes of worship, effectually divide the inhabitants of the same kingdom, the citizens of the same city, and often the members of the same family. There is, however, one grand uniting state, where all distinctions are dropped, all contentions are laid aside, where persons of all countries, persuasions, peculiarities, and conditions, are seen to harmonize. That state is regeneration, or as the apostle expresses it in the verse preceding the text, "the putting on of the new man," &c. "where there is neither Greek nor Jew," &c. "but Christ is all and in all." This comprehensive expression ascribes the whole glory of man's salvation to Christ; and clearly exhibits the relation in which he stands to his church. We shall further illustrate the passage by observing,

I. THAT CHRIST IS THE CHRISTIAN'S ALL.

II. THAT CHRIST IS IN ALL THINGS RELATING TO HIS CHURCH.

I. THAT CHRIST IS THE CHRISTIAN'S ALL.

1. *He is their all of dependence*,—the sole foundation of their hopes, their entire stay and support. "Christ is made unto them, wisdom, righteousness, &c. 1 Cor. i. 30. They do

not lean to their understanding, for Christ is made unto them wisdom; and he by his word and Spirit teaches them to profit. They do not depend on their own righteousness, for Christ is made unto them righteousness: the merits of the Saviour, appropriated by faith, become their own in all their beneficial effects, and through his atoning blood, their unfeigned faith serves them instead of a perfect legal righteousness, Jer. xxiii. 6; Rom. iv. 25. They do not depend on their efforts to cleanse their hearts from sin, for He "is made unto them sanctification." He is the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness; his precious blood, applied by the agency of the Spirit to their hearts, cleanseth them from all sin, 1 John i. 7; Rev. i. 5, 6. And he is their all of dependence; as they look to him for a complete and final deliverance from all the dangers of life; in all the agonies of death; and from all the consequences of sin in the eternal world.

2. *He is their all of desire*, the one great object of their affections; and they wish to indulge no desire, but in subordination to him, and in subserviency to their communion and fellowship with him. Neither riches, nor honours, nor friends, nor earthly delights attract their minds when separated from him. To know Christ, and the power of his resurrection; to be conformed to his image, and enjoy more intimate communion with him, excite the most ardent wishes of their souls; and so precious is he in their esteem, that they "count all things but loss" &c. Philip. iii. 8.

3. *He is their all of delight*. He is the sole object in whom they delight; all other comforts are but auxiliaries and adjuncts, they can do without them; but without Christ they can do nothing. Let them possess a sense of his favour, they will be happy under the greatest accumulation of earthly ills; a solitary wilderness with Jesus would be more desirable than paradise without him:

" His name yields the richest perfume,
And sweeter than music his voice, &c."

II. THAT CHRIST IS IN ALL THINGS RELATING TO HIS CHURCH. By the church is not meant any particular sect or party of Christians, whether of a national establishment, or of a dissenting persuasion, much less a building employed for religious worship; but by the church we mean the great body of

believers of every persuasion, who individually feel Christ to be their all.

1. *Christ is in all the members of his church, by his Holy Spirit and nature.* He is the head, and he communicates life to every member of the body; "If any man have not the spirit of Christ," &c. Where the spirit of Christ is, there his nature is communicated; hence all the members of the church are actuated by one common principle, and live with a view to one common end.

2. *In the formation of the church, Christ is its founder.* The church is the purchase of his blood, Acts xx. 28. It is by him that sinners are brought into the way of salvation, and made members of the church; and Christ is the foundation upon which the church stands, Zech. vi. 12, 13; Isaiah xxviii. 16; Eph. ii. 20—22.

3. *In the institutions of the church, Christ is their author, and the grand object to which they all refer.* The various types, shadows, and sacrifices, under the Jewish dispensation, were ordained by him; and all had their accomplishment in him; more especially the ordinances of the Christian church; such as the sacraments, prayers, praises, preaching, &c., all have his sanction; and he is in them all to bless every sincere worshipper.

4. *In the perpetuity of the church, Christ is its preserver.* The members of the church upon earth are subject to death; Christ provides a succession of living witnesses. They are always in want; Christ supplies them with all they require; he is "the fulness of him who filleth all in all." The church is attacked by numerous adversaries, by Satan, the world, persecutions in various forms, false doctrines, heresies, and schisms. Christ defends the liberties and persons of his people.

5. *In the government of the church, Christ is its sovereign.* He is the king of saints; he is the head over all things to his church; and as the head directs the body, so Christ directs his church; he only has authority to dispense laws, appoint officers, and execute judgment, Eph. i. 22; iv. 15, 16; Col. i. 18.

6. *In the completion of the church, Christ is the glory.* When the whole mystery of God shall be finished, and the saints shall be glorified in body and soul; then Jesus shall be their only theme and glory. As the sun is the glory of the material world, so Christ shall be of the world of happy spirits.

INFERENCES.

1. How great must be the dignity of him who sustains this character! Never can the scriptural account of Christ be reconciled to the notion of his being a mere man. What a deplorable state are those in, who seek to rob *him* of his divinity, and *his* people of their only rational and scriptural confidence.

2. How great is the happiness of those who have him for their portion; to whom he is "all, and in all." To such we may say, "all things are yours, whether Paul," &c.

3. How uniform and constant should Christians be in their attachment to him, to whom they owe their all. Let them say, "Unto him that loved us," &c. Rev. i. 5.

DELTA.

 XLII. CONTINUANCE IN PRAYER RECOMMENDED.

COL. iv. 2.

"Continue in prayer."

IN the natural world, things which are the most valuable, and the most essential to the existence of man, are scattered by an ever-bounteous Providence with a most liberal hand. Water, which is the most useful of all liquids, is the most abundant; iron, which will answer a thousand purposes to which no other metal can be successfully applied, is the most common; and bread, which is the most nutritive of all viands, is most easily obtained. These remarks will not inaptly apply to the subjects of revelation. The Bible contains a glorious variety of indisputable truths: some of these truths, it must be allowed, are hard to be understood, and like many objects in nature, their beauties can only be discovered by a diligent and laborious in-

vestigation ; but the most useful truths are the most abundant, and the most easily understood. Here we have “line upon line, precept upon precept ; and here the vision is made plain, so that he that runneth may read. The text especially is of this description ; and we deduce from it the following remarks :—

I. THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE BEGUN TO PRAY. This is assumed in the text, as they can never continue in a practice which they have never begun.

1. *Is prayer the language of distress ?*—With this language Christians have been familiar. They were once in a state of guilt and condemnation, when the waves and billows went over them ; when they reflected on the past with regret, and anticipated the future with trembling ; when they looked “on him whom they had pierced, and mourned,” &c.

2. *Is prayer the expression of need ?*—None feel their need more than Christians, and a consciousness of want urges them to pray. They feel a sense of their many imperfections, and they sue for mercy ; they feel their ignorance, and they pray for wisdom ; they feel their weakness, and they cry to God for strength ; they feel their danger, and they pray for salvation ; and knowing that without God they can do nothing, they labour to live always under the influence of a praying spirit, and with hearts turned to God, as the source of all their happiness.

3. *Is prayer the effusion of love ?*—Christians love God, because he first loved them ; and they delight to express their love by pouring out their hearts before him ; and the love they have to God leads them to love one another, for he that loveth God, will love his brother also ; hence Christians pray for their families, for the church, and for the world.

II. THAT THERE IS A DANGER LEST THEY SHOULD DISCONTINUE THIS PRACTICE. The text is sufficiently indicative of this ; but if other proofs were necessary, we might refer you to many living witnesses, who once loved prayer, and lived in the daily practice of it, but who now restrain prayer before God. Should you ask, Whence originates this danger ?

1. *In the natural dislike men have to prayer.* No carnal man loves prayer ; men dislike prayer, because they dislike God. They may indeed, for form’s sake, bend their knees to God ; but seasons for prayer will hang heavy upon their hands. In the heart of a Christian this dislike is partly conquered ;

and in a complete Christian wholly conquered. He loves God with all his heart, and loves prayer in proportion as he loves God ; but, alas ! how rarely do we meet with persons who have gained such pre-eminence in Christianity ! In how many of us are there roots of bitterness, that spring up and trouble us ; plants that are not of our heavenly Father's planting ; wrong tempers unsubdued, unholy propensities not eradicated ! and in proportion as these prevail, prayer will be disliked and neglected. And is there no danger lest the carnal principle should again predominate ? Lest the dislike which we once had to prayer should again return ? Have none of you lived to exemplify the truth of these remarks ?

2. *In the occupations and cares of the world.* Most Christians have something to do with the world ; their hands are occupied in its concerns, they labour for the bread that perisheth ; and such is the nature of their business, that it must frequently engross much of their thoughts and time ; and there is danger lest their affections should be entangled with the world ; that is, lest they should love the world, so as not to have the love of the Father in them. How many suffer their worldly occupations to swallow up all their time, and their worldly cares to engross all their thoughts. Hence prayer discontinued, for the love of prayer is totally incompatible with the love of the world.

3. *In the temptations of the devil.* The devil is our constant, implacable, and malicious adversary : he is always meditating our ruin. In order to effect this, he has two kinds of temptations. The first are those by which he seeks to entice us to positive acts of sin ; the sin of our nature, or habit, or education ; and the second, by which he labours to put us out of love with our duties ; especially that of prayer. He well knows the efficacy of prayer, and its powerful influence he cannot withstand ;

“ For Satan trembles when he sees,
The weakest saint upon his knees.”

He tempts us that our prayers are unnecessary. That God does not hear us—that we get no good by our prayers—and thus we are in danger of discontinuing the practice of prayer through the power of temptation.

III THAT MEANS SHOULD BE USED IN ORDER TO PERPETUATE THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER.

1. *We should acquaint ourselves with our moral character.* Reflect on our weakness, sinfulness, and indigence. A man who forms a high opinion of himself, will have little relish for prayer; he who is wise in his own eyes will never apply to God for wisdom. A knowledge of our state will prove one of the most powerful inducements to prayer.

2. *We should study the character of God.* Meditate much on his mercy, his wisdom, and his power. Reflect on what he has done in behalf of his people; consider the immutability of his nature, and the truth of his promises; remember the word he has given us, and upon which he has caused us to hope.

3. *Frequent the means of grace.* Duties have a reciprocal influence upon each other: if you neglect one, that will lead to the neglect of others: therefore the apostle adds, "Watch in the same with thanksgiving." He who would continue in prayer, should continue to watch, to read the Scriptures, and to practise every public and private duty.

4. *Expect the blessing of God in your prayers.* Prayer is designed to be the means of our advancement in every virtuous disposition, and in every holy temper. If you get good by your prayers, you will not easily be prevailed upon to abandon them.

IV. THAT THERE ARE THE MOST POWERFUL MOTIVES TO INDUCE A CONTINUANCE IN PRAYER.

1. *By continuing in prayer, you will continue to please God.* His will is that you should live in the practice of prayer. We know this from his precepts, Luke xviii. 1; xxi. 36; 1 Tim. ii. 8. No man can please God who does not obey him.

2. *By continuing in prayer, you will continue to be Christians.* There is no Christianity where there is no prayer. A Christian is an imitator of Christ. Christ spent whole nights on the cold ground in prayer to his heavenly Father. All Christians are devoted to prayer.

3. *By continuing in prayer, you will continue to be safe.* We live in a perilous world. Dangers threaten us on every side. Devils tempt us. Sinners entice us. Our hearts are prone to evil. Life is uncertain. Death is near. Prayer is our only asylum. "When I cry unto thee, then shall my enemies turn back."

4. *By continuing in prayer, you will continue to be happy.*

Happiness is universally coveted;—‘All like the purchase, few the price will pay.’ Praying people are the happiest people under the sun. They secure the divine favour, they enjoy the divine image, they anticipate the divine glory.

5. *By continuing in prayer, you will continue to advance towards heaven.* With you, ‘heaven already is begun—everlasting life is won;’ for “this is life eternal,” &c. John xvii. 3. You have the earnest of it in your hearts, and ere long you will have its full enjoyment. But many never pray; some pray only in times of danger; the prayers of others are blasphemies and imprecations. With such we expostulate; and, in Christ’s stead, beseech to begin to pray. To those who have neglected to continue in prayer, we address the words of our Redeemer, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen,” &c. Rev. ii. 5.

BETA.

XLIII. A SKETCH FOR WHIT-SUNDAY.

1 THESS. V. 19.

“Quench not the Spirit.”

WHIT-SUNDAY is a solemn festival of the Christian church observed on the *fiftieth day* after Easter, in memory of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. It is called *Whit-Sunday*, or *White Sunday*, because, being one of the stated times for baptism in the primitive church, those who were baptized put on white garments in token of their engagement to live a *pure* and *innocent* life. As it is observed to commemorate the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of our Lord, suitable discourses on his influences and operations are peculiarly appropriate in all our religious assemblies. Our text will lead us to useful and highly interesting thoughts on the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, which are compared to fire, and

which we are warned not to quench, lest we be left in a state of darkness and moral defilement.

I. THE OPERATIONS OF THE SPIRIT ARE COMPARED TO FIRE.

1. This figure is applied to the Spirit in the *Old Testament*. There he is called a "Spirit of burning," in reference to his sanctifying influences, Isa. iv. 4; and it is highly probable that the Spirit of Jesus is meant, where it is said, "He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap," Mal. iii. 2.

2. In the *New Testament* his baptism is expressly called a baptism of fire, Mat. iii. 11; and when he came down from heaven, on the day of Pentecost, it was in the form of "cloven tongues like as of fire," Acts ii. 3.

3. There may be an allusion in these passages to his *miraculous* operations; and tongues of fire may signify the burning zeal with which the apostles were to speak for God: but there is also a farther reference to his ordinary and general influences in the hearts of men, particularly in our text.

4. To illustrate this, we may observe, that fire *enlightens the eye*, and the Holy Spirit *enlightens the understanding*; 1 John ii. 20. He is the Author of that spiritual light which we receive from the Scriptures, for "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," 2 Peter i. 21.

5. It is well known also that the body of man is *warmed* and *cheered* by fire; and his soul is warmed and cheered by the influences of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of that man, who does not feel these influences, is like nature in the depth of winter, cold and waste, barren and unfruitful; but he who lives and walks under these influences, resembles nature in the glory of summer, warm and beautiful, rich and abundantly fruitful, Gal. v. 22, 23.

6. But the principal point of comparison refers to the *purifying influences* of fire. That element purges material bodies from their dross, and the Holy Spirit *purges* and purifies the spirits of men from the dross of sin. This is done gradually and in perfect harmony with the freedom of man as a moral agent. Thus the warnings of this Spirit produce a fear and dread of sin; his sweet and alluring drawings produce a love of holiness; and his active operations, which are better felt than can be expressed, transform the soul into the image of God, Eph. iv. 24; Col. iii. 10.

He plants all the Christian graces in the heart of a believer, nourishes and cherishes them by his vital influences, and in this way they produce all "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God," Phil. i. 11.

II. WE ARE WARNED NOT TO QUENCH THE SPIRIT.

1. To quench, is to extinguish fire; and as the Spirit is compared to fire, every thing which counteracts his influences quenches his operations. The whole is comprised in two things: first, sins of omission; and secondly, sins of commission. The first is the neglect of some known duty, and the second is some wilful and direct violation of the divine law.

2. The spirit may be quenched by a *neglect of prayer*. Prayer is a duty of high importance, and a duty which cannot be performed acceptably without the Holy Ghost. Hence it is said, "he helpeth our infirmities. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," Rom. viii. 26. And we are expressly required to pray in the Holy Ghost, Jude 20. But when we either neglect this duty, or engage in it with mere formality, we quench the Spirit, by counteracting the devotional feelings which he works in our hearts.

3. We may quench the Holy Spirit by a *neglect of the written word*. Our Lord commanded the Jews to "search the Scriptures," John v. 39; and we, like the noble Bereans, should "search the Scriptures daily," Acts xvii. 11. The sacred writings were inspired by the Holy Ghost; and when we neglect them, we either despise or disregard his divine teachings; and this must have a direct tendency to extinguish the sacred fire in our hearts, as it is a high affront and insult offered to the Spirit of God.

4. He may be quenched, in his influences, by a *neglect of the means of grace*. Under this head we include meetings for prayer, the preaching of the word, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In all these means, when piously attended, there is a special influence of the Holy Spirit; and he who stays at home, under a pretence that he can employ his time as well in private reading and prayer, pours contempt on that divine influence which is felt by spiritual worshippers in public religious assemblies; and this thoughtless conduct must damp the sacred fire in his own heart, Isa. xl. 31; Mal. iii. 7.

5. Many quench the Spirit by *vain* and *impure thoughts*. These should be hated and abhorred, because they are in direct opposition to that spiritual influence which is intended to purify our hearts, Psalm cxix. 113; Jer. iv. 14; and while they are indulged, we wander far from God and goodness, and run into all the vices and follies of sin and iniquity. In this awful state we are unmindful of the Rock that begat us, and forget the God that formed us, Deut. xxxii. 18. It was said, in the days of Noah, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man;" and the reason assigned is, "that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," Gen. vi. 3, 5.

6. Unholy *tempers* quench the Spirit of God. Among these we may notice *pride*, which, as Butterworth observes in his Concordance, 'is the master sin, and first-born of the devil,' Gen. iii. 5; *covetousness*, or an inordinate love of wealth, Isaiah lvii. 17; violent and sinful *anger*, Gen. xlix. 7; *envy*, or that uneasiness which we indulge when we observe the prosperity and happiness of others, Acts vii. 9; *hatred* of God and good men, which is one of the works of the flesh, and directly opposed to the Spirit, Gal. v. 20; *malice*, a foul and diabolical spirit, in which men live before their conversion, Titus iii. 3; and *revenge*, or returning evil for evil, which is expressly forbidden by the Holy Spirit, 1 Thess. v. 15.

7. *Vain conversation* quenches the Spirit's influences. This sort of conversation, too common among some professors, includes "foolish talking and jesting," Eph. v. 4; taking the name of God in vain, by using it on common occasions, Deut. v. 11; uttering lies and slanders of absent persons, who have no opportunity of self-defence, and which is only done by fools, Prov. x. 18; deceitful and mischievous conversation, which is like the poison of asps, Rom. iii. 13, 14; and there is no doubt but that the Spirit is often quenched by idle and trifling conversation, like that of the Athenians, who "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing," Acts xvii. 21.

8. And the Spirit is quenched effectually and entirely by *wicked works*. For instance, by acts of injustice, Eccl. v. 8; Isaiah lix. 4; by cruelty and oppression, Mal. iii. 5; James ii. 6; by gluttony and drunkenness, 1 Cor. xi. 21; by fornication and all uncleanness, Eph. iv. 19; by turning from the living

God to dumb idols, against which the beloved John carefully warned his little children, 1 John v. 21; and by a bad example and a spirit of lukewarmness in the cause of Christ, 1 Cor. viii. 11—13; Rev. ii. 14; iii. 16.

III. IF WE QUENCH THE SPIRIT, SAD EFFECTS WILL FOLLOW US, BOTH HERE AND HEREAFTER.

1. When the Holy Spirit is quenched, the soul is left in a state of *darkness* and spiritual blindness, so that we forget that we were once purged from our old sins, 2 Pet. i. 9; and by way of judicial punishment, God may send a strong delusion, that we may believe a lie, and be damned, 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

2. Then *sin gains complete ascendancy*; we are under the full influence of the flesh and the devil; corrupt nature and diabolical influences predominate; and our evil passions and lusts prevail:—for there is no good principle left, when the sacred fire goes out, to counteract these abominable evils, Rom. i. 24.

3. Those who quench the Spirit, lose all the *comforts of religion*. He is called the Comforter, and without him there is no real comfort, John xvi. 7; Rom. xiv. 17; no peace in the mind, Isaiah lvii. 21; and nothing to cheer us in our afflictions: for we may say to men who pretend to comfort us, “Miserable comforters are ye all,” Job. xvi. 2.

4. By quenching the Spirit *we lose spiritual gifts*. “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal,” 1 Cor. xii. 7; but when that manifestation is neglected and abused, it is taken away. This evil was deprecated by David, when he said, “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me,” Psalm li. 11.

5. Another sad effect of quenching the Spirit, is *spiritual death*. Jesus once quickened us by his divine Spirit, and we were then alive to God, Eph. ii. 1; Gal. v. 25: but what is our present state? are we not “twice dead, plucked up by the roots?” Jude 12.

6. But the worst of all is when the Spirit is finally quenched, we are fit for no place but hell, and must be banished into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. We say finally, because the Spirit often returns after he has been quenched, and graciously renews his work: but when he departs,

to return no more, our case is hopeless, and our ruin inevitable, Matt. xxv. 41.

These thoughts should induce us, through life, to nourish and cherish the heavenly influences of the sacred Spirit. To quench him, in his purifying operations, should ever be considered as one of the greatest evils that can befall us; and to follow him so as to become sons of God, should be considered as our highest glory and felicity.

SIGMA.

XLIV. THE BEST EXERCISE.

1 TIM. iv. 7.

“Exercise thyself *rather* unto godliness.”

WHATSOEVER things were written aforetime, were written for our learning. The text therefore, though primarily addressed by St. Paul to Timothy, may be beneficial to us. There are exercises which belong exclusively to the ministerial character, but as godliness is designed to be a general blessing, and is the same in every clime, and through every age, the exercise recommended in the text is binding on us all. We will therefore notice,

I. THE OBJECT OF THE TEXT;—“godliness.”

II. THE ATTENTION IT CLAIMS;—Exercise thyself, &c.”

III. THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD EXCITE US TO A COMPLIANCE WITH THIS ADVICE.

I. THE OBJECT OF THE TEXT IS “GODLINESS.” This is sometimes understood in a restricted sense, as having reference to one part of our duty only; hence it is mentioned in connection with other things: “Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith,” &c. “Add to your faith virtue.” &c., “and to patience godliness,” &c., 1 Tim. vi. 11; 2 Peter i. 6; “Godliness, in its true etymological sense, signifies *right worship*;—worship

right in its object. Some worship the work of their hands—others “the host of heaven,”—some worship they know not what,—others worship devils. “But thou shalt worship the Lord thy God.” “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” *Right in its subject.*—Forms of worship are necessary: Moses bowed his head and worshiped; Joshua fell on his face and worshipped; but “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.” The homage of the heart is the only acceptable worship to God. *Right in its rule.*—Every thing relative to divine worship, must be regulated by the divine precepts: the institutions of Christ, and not the inventions of men, must be the rules of our worship. The bowing to a crucifix, crossing with holy water, repeating Ave Marias, and all that ridiculous mummery peculiar to popery, is not right worship, because it has no sanction from the Bible. But *godliness* has been generally defined as being conformity to God; moral likeness to our Maker. Absolute resemblance to God is impossible; God is an infinite Being; and eternity, immensity, and infinity, are incommunicable attributes. Likeness to God may be considered in having the understanding illuminated with his light, the heart renovated by his Spirit, and the life regulated by his word.

II. THE ATTENTION IT CLAIMS;—“Exercise thyself,” &c. We should exercise ourselves to *gain, retain, and recommend* godliness.

1. *Exercise thyself to gain godliness.* No man is naturally possessed of godliness; we are totally unlike God. Godliness is not to be gained by a few cold wishes, or languid desires. “*Exercise thyself;*” this is a word of great importance, it is borrowed from the practice of those who contended for the Olympic garland; who cast away every impediment, and strained every nerve to win the prize. There is much in godliness that demands the exercise of the human understanding, for “great is the mystery of godliness.” Exercise yourselves to know all you can of godliness; its doctrines, its principles, and its practices. In order to this, give attention to reading, to hearing, to meditation, to prayer. Not only to gain the knowledge, but the enjoyment of godliness. It is a blessing to have a right judgment in all things, but knowledge of itself

will not do ; we must enjoy God, and dwell in God, and have God dwelling in us.

2. *Exercise thyself to retain godliness.* Some, after having sought it with many tears and much earnestness, seem unconcerned about retaining it. To hold it fast, set a high value upon it. To prize it too highly is impossible ; there is no overrating it. Seek for an increase of it. The most advanced Christian may yet advance ; godliness possesses infinite attractions, and prospects interminable ; and he who is not advancing, is declining. Stand aloof from the society of those who would rob you of your treasure. If you possessed a large sum of money, or a rich collection of gems, pearls, and diamonds, you would not like to travel a road infested with robbers ; and if you were obliged, you would take heed to secure a guard, and get yourself well armed. Apply this to our subject, and exercise yourself unto godliness, to keep it in possession.

3. *Exercise thyself to recommend godliness.* Many are totally destitute of this invaluable treasure. They are ignorant of its vast advantages ; and they are in extreme danger without it. Remember it is an important part of godliness, to love your neighbour as yourselves ; and as you have been prompted under the influence of self-love to seek this godliness for your own benefit, you are bound to recommend it to others. Do it by your conversation. Talk of it to your children, to your families, and to your neighbours. Do it by your holy lives. Exemplify in your conduct the purity of its principles. Let others see your good works, &c. This exercise should be *spiritual* ; all the powers of the immortal spirit should be engaged in it.—*Pre-eminent* ; it should be our first and most important business.—*Habitual* ; we should be always at it.—And, *persevering* ; we must be “ faithful unto death.”

III. THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD EXCITE US TO A COMPLIANCE WITH THIS ADVICE.

1. *Because this is the best exercise.* God is the best Being ; the participation of godliness makes us resemble God ; and every other exercise of which man is capable, is frivolous when held in competition with this. It is the best exercise ; as it engages the best powers of man, and these powers are directed to the noblest object.

2. *It is the most honourable exercise.* Some think the exercise of godliness mean, and despicable; but who are they that draw this conclusion? Are they persons who have studied its character? No, they are men who hate godliness, because godliness condemns them. Is there no honour in treading in the footsteps of the most illustrious characters who have ever lived—patriarchs, prophets, evangelists, apostles, and martyrs, “of whom the world was not worthy?” Is there no honour in that exercise which will most effectually secure to us the possession of the divine nature? which will “make us kings and priests unto God; sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty?”

3. *It is the most satisfactory exercise.* Bodily exercise is often irksome and laborious; and produces a weariness of the flesh; but the work of righteousness is peace, and the exercise of godliness yields secret satisfaction. What a comfort to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man! to know that we are working out our salvation! that we are walking in the narrow way that leadeth unto life, and returning to Zion with singing, and everlasting joy upon our heads!

4. *It is the most rational exercise.* There are many irrational exercises in the world, exercises that injure the constitution, ruin the health, and destroy the soul; but as godliness is profitable unto all things, that exercise must be most rational, which tends to secure this invaluable treasure.

5. *It is the most successful exercise.* How often are our exercises in this world unsuccessful; our labours frustrated, and our expectations blasted; but the exercise used in reference to godliness *will* be successful. They that ask shall receive, and they that seek shall find. We have the promises of an immutable Being to ensure success.

In conclusion, we observe, there are in our congregations,

1. Some who have never begun the exercise recommended in the text. To such, we say, You are capable, under the influence of divine grace, of exercising yourselves unto godliness; you have means afforded you: you are very guilty in neglecting your salvation so long; if you procrastinate much more, your ruin will be inevitable; the longer you delay, the more difficult will the work be, and the less time you will have

to accomplish it. Oh seize the present moment, and now begin this long neglected, but deeply important exercise!

2. Some who have begun, have relaxed in the exercise; have put their hand to the plough, but have looked back. Oh stir up the gift of God that is within you! Pray for the quickening influences of the Holy Ghost; and "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure."

3. Some who have begun, and continued to exercise themselves unto godliness. "Hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not."

BETA.

XLV. THE FIGHT OF FAITH.

1 TIM. vi. 12.

"Fight the good fight of Faith."

THE apostle, in the chapter before us, after enjoining certain duties, and giving a caution against antichristian teachers, proceeds to show the value of godliness with contentment; and he does this by contrasting it with the love of money, which is the root of all evil: "which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith," ver. 8, 9, 10. Covetousness being criminal and disgraceful in all, but especially in the ministers of religion, the apostle advised Timothy, as a man of God, to flee from it, and from all the vices which it occasions; and to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness, ver. 11. He then adds, "Fight the good fight of faith," or, as some read it, 'agonize the good agony;'—'Combat the good combat of faith;' which terms are quite agonistical, and refer to the eagerness with which those who entered in the Grecian games, struggled for, and laid hold on the prize. In impressing this subject, we may notice,

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE.

II. ITS PECULIAR CHARACTER.

1. THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE. It is *defensive* and *offensive*.

1. *Defensive*. He has to contend with, 1. *A depraved nature*. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," Rom. viii. 7. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit," Gal. v. 17. Pride, anger, envy, jealousy, hatred, malice, revenge, and all other dispositions contrary to the mind of Christ, must be opposed and overcome, Rom. xii. 21; Rev. iii. 12; xxi. 7. 2. *The temptations of Satan*. These are various; hence he is styled "the accuser of the brethren," Rev. xii. 10; a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," 1 Pet. v. 8; the "prince," and "the god of this world," "the prince of the power of the air," &c. John xii. 31; 2 Cor. iv. 4; Eph. ii. 2. These armies he commands, and varies his mode of operation according to circumstances; hence he presented a Babylonish garment, &c. to Achan, Jas. vii. 21; Bath-sheba to David, 2 Sam. ix. 2—4; and thirty pieces of silver to Judas, Matt. xxvi. 15. But whatever are his temptations, we are commanded to resist, steadfast in the faith, 1 Pet. v. 9; James iv. 7.

3. *The allurements of the world*. Its spirit, maxims, and fashion, Rom. xii. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3. This warfare is also,

2. *Offensive*. Hence the Christian has to attack Satan's strong holds, 2 Cor. x. iv. These are, 1. *Ignorance*. Numbers are so deluded as to imagine that ignorance will excuse them for neglecting religion; but this is their condemnation, they are ignorant, not of necessity, but choice, John iii. 19. Others say, 'Ignorance is the mother of devotion;' and use their utmost efforts to prevent the human family from being benefited by that book which was designed to be "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path," Ps. cxix. 105. The duty of Christians is, to combine their efforts to remove or prevent this evil. The means are, the circulation of the sacred Scriptures, a living ministry, the instruction of youth, the distribution of religious tracts, &c. 2. *Prejudice*. Nothing more effectually fortifies the mind against truth than this; and to overcome it, you must exercise prudence, meekness, patience, and love. With these graces, connect scriptural and sound argumentation, associated with correctness of principle and conduct. 3. *Pride*. To

some religion is degrading, it will stain their honour, rob them of their reputation; and thus Christ is to some a stumbling block, and to others foolishness, 1 Cor. i. 23; the pride of human reason will not suffer them to receive the doctrine of the cross. These you must combat with the hallowed weapons of truth, which will admit of no system of religion but that which God has revealed, 1 Cor. iii. 11. *Love of the world:* ver. 17. To overcome this, you must show the importance of spiritual things compared with temporal things, &c. Take care, however, to connect with your utmost exertions, unceasing and ardent prayer to God, for the convincing influence of the Holy Ghost, without whose aid nothing is wise, or strong, or good. Let us therefore notice,

II. ITS PECULIAR CHARACTER. It is designated,

First, "*A fight of faith.*" It is a fight of faith as opposed, 1. *To physical exertion.* You are not to rally your forces and combine your energies, to oppose an earthly power, or destroy the bodies of the children of men; but rather to promote your own salvation, and that of others. It imports a mind determinately opposed to sin and Satan, pursuing holiness and heaven, Eph. vi. 13.

2. *Mental speculation.* It is possible for a man to be well acquainted with the theory of Christianity, to be a giant in literature, an able abettor of the truth, a wise disputant on theological subjects, a successful antagonist in the controversial field, and, after all, a stranger to inward religion. This was not the case with our apostle; he was not a mere theorist, 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27; Phil. iii. 14. This fight of faith imports a mind reconciled to God, Col. i. 21, 22; an union with Christ by faith, Gal. ii. 20; and the exercise of every grace, Eph. vi. 13—18.

3. *Doubtful uncertainty.* In an earthly campaign, a successful issue is uncertain. Troops may be well disciplined, under a judicious commander, and every thing ominous of success; but circumstances over which neither the commander nor his troops have any control, may determine the conflict, and place the expectant in the hands of his enemies. But in this fight, nothing can endanger those who are immutably faithful; "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved," Matt. xxiv. 13; Rev. ii. 10.

Secondly, "*A good fight of faith.*" This will appear when we consider,

1. *The authority by which it is sanctioned.*—"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," 2 Tim. iii. 16. This text therefore, considered in connection with other texts of equal import, proves that it is sanctioned by the highest authority, 1 Tim. i. 18, 19; Rev. iii. 11, 12, ii. 7.

2. *The aid afforded during the period of exercise.* In military operations, a sanguinary engagement protracted in its duration, induces debility and exhaustion, and will not admit of those supplies necessary for recruiting the strength and invigorating the spirits; but in this warfare the supplies are seasonable, suitable, and sufficient, Prov. iii. 6; Isa. xli. 10; 2 Cor. xi. 9.

3. *The security given.* In prosecuting this warfare, according to the rules laid down in the holy Scriptures, you may say with an apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" &c. Rom. viii. 35—39. "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper," Isa. liv. 17. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him," Isa. lix. 19.

4. *The final triumph.* Instance the case of the apostle, "I have fought a good fight," &c. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. "Death shall be swallowed up in victory," 1 Cor. xv. 54—57. The conqueror shall be enthroned, Rev. iii. 21.

INFERENCES.

1. *This warfare will neither admit of substitution nor cessation of arms.* The command is personal in its application and perpetual in its obligation.

2. *This is the greatest encouragement.* Christ is your commander—the Holy Spirit your helper—the Scriptures your directory—angels your guardians—saints your companions—and heaven the inheritance reserved for you, 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

3. *A refusal to fight is open rebellion against God.* Consider this, ye sinners, and while the treaty of reconciliation is open, (2 Cor. v. 20.) humble yourselves before God, and implore mercy.

XLVI. YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE TAUGHT THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

2 TIM. iii. 15.

“From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Jesus Christ.”

THE Bible has by some been represented to be a book so profoundly obscure and mysterious, that none except persons of extraordinary learning and talents can understand it. But such a representation is a libel upon the wisdom of its author, and is equal to saying that he has given a revelation in which, to the great mass of mankind, nothing is revealed. That the Bible contains mysteries we admit—mysteries of godliness, which angels desire to look into, but which they cannot explain; profound depths, which have not yet been fathomed by any created intellect. But this is not its general character. It contains much that is easy to be understood. As in a great river which has its deep places in which the elephant might swim, and its shallow ones in which the lamb might wade, so in the Bible, whilst there is much to employ intellects of the highest order, so also is there much on a level with minds of ordinary size, and which even a way-faring man, though a fool, may understand. The apostle, who was perfectly acquainted with the character of divine revelation, was of this judgment. Instead of telling the common people that they could not understand the Scriptures, he informs them that they may even understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ, Eph. iii. 4. And in the text he teaches that even children may know the Scriptures. I am going to show,

I. THAT THE SCRIPTURES ARE HOLY. The Scriptures include all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. To the former of these our Lord refers, John v. 39. And to these our apostle also refers in the text, and verse following. Other books have been added to these, but they are apocryphal, and though some of them contain some important historical in-

formation, and a richness of moral sentiment, yet they are so mixed with puerilities and absurdities, as to demonstrate their origin not to have been divine. That the Scriptures are holy appears,

1. *From the character of their writers.* These were not wicked men, for such God never employs to declare his statutes, Ps. l. 16. To suppose otherwise, would be as absurd as to suppose that he would appoint a pure stream of water to flow through a pipe polluted with the most offensive filth. God never employs the wicked in honourable work—but as pioneers to drain bogs—to build bridges—to remove obstructions—to inflict judgments upon the beast and the false prophet—and to be the executioners in his moral government. To the honourable parts of his work, he appoints only his own faithful servants. And for this *most* honourable, of being the medium of communication from God to man, he chose holy men.

2. *From their origin.* The books of Scripture are not strictly speaking, the production of the persons whose names they bear. They are not the fruit of their learning, or genius, or talents. They were the mere amanuenses of Jehovah; for “all Scripture is given by inspiration,” 2 Tim. iii. 16. Hence they contain truth without mixture of error.

3. *From their nature and tendency.* Many bad books have been written; books awfully demoralizing; intended and eminently calculated to destroy every pious, and moral, and virtuously social principle, and to introduce speculative and practical atheism, comprehending every species of profligacy and licentiousness. But the Scriptures are perfectly opposite to all this. He whom they reveal as the grand object is holy, Isa. vi. 3. His precepts are holy, Ps. xix. 7, 8. The sanctions by which they are enforced, whether rewards or punishments, are all promotive of holiness. His people are holy—separated from common or sinful purposes, and set apart for God, 1 Pet. ii. 9. And the heaven which they reveal, and to which the faithful shall at last be received, is a holy place.

II. THAT THE HOLY SCRIPTURES MAY BE KNOWN BY YOUNG PEOPLE. Timothy had known them from a child; but as there does not appear to have been any thing in the intellectual character of Timothy, which distinguished him from others, it is

fair to conclude that what he knew may be known by persons now of the same age. But to know them we must,

1. *Be able to read them.* I do not mean able to read them in the original, for though such ability has its advantages, they are not so great as some would be-linguists pretend. Linguists who are modest, will not say, that 'they can furnish a better translation than we already possess.' Unless we can read our own language, even this Bible thus translated will be a sealed book. [There have been times when the art of reading was the privilege only of a few. Now all may acquire it, both rich and poor. The latter, if they cannot acquire it any where else, may acquire it in a Sunday school.] We must,

2. *Read them in order, with deep attention and prayer.* It has been said, that 'few books are more read than the Bible, and few, if any, are so little understood.' It is a melancholy fact, that many who read the Scriptures, are scandalously ignorant of their sacred import. This arises partly from the absurd and irregular manner in which they search them. Instead of reading any sacred book consecutively, as they would a human composition, they read a chapter here, and a chapter or part of a chapter there, without any kind of reference either to the preceding, or intermediate, or subsequent parts. To understand them, they must be read in regular order. They must be read with deep attention—The several parts must be compared—the law with the gospel—types with their antitypes—predictions with their fulfilment. We must avail ourselves of such helps as are within our reach—such as ministers—well informed Christians—and the works of pious and learned commentators. Above all, we must read in the spirit of prayer for divine illumination—a sound judgment—a teachable spirit—a tenacious memory—sanctified affections—and an obedient will. To expect to become profitably acquainted with the Scriptures in any other way is enthusiasm. We proceed to show,

III. THAT THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES IS INFINITELY IMPORTANT. Knowledge in some cases is hurtful—in others useless—or beneficial only in particular circumstances—or its benefits are only temporary. But this is saving—embraces all circumstances, and extends its benefits through the whole of our existence. The Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

1. *They reveal our want of salvation.* Man sinned, Gen. iii. Through sin he forfeited the divine favour, and lost the moral image of his Creator. The forfeiture extended to all his posterity.—Hence all are born in sin, Ps. li. 5. All are prone to sin, Gen. viii. 21; Ps. xiv. 1. And hence also the seeds of mortality are sown in all, which in due time ripen into death.

2. *They reveal a Saviour.* The descriptions which they give of this Saviour, shew that in him are united the divine and human natures. Of him are sometimes predicated things which can belong alone to the divinity, John i. 1, 3; Rom. ix. 5; Col. ii. 9; Rev. i. 8. At other times those which belong only to the humanity. Such are all these texts which relate to his birth—progress in knowledge—sufferings—death, &c.—admit the twofold nature, and these are easily harmonized; reject it, and to harmonize them will be for ever impossible. Such a Saviour, being infinite in wisdom, power, and goodness, must be all-sufficient.

3. *They reveal the method of salvation.* 1. *Through the death of Christ*—Intimated in Gen. iii. 15.—Typified in the offering up of Isaac, Gen. xxii.—By the various sacrifices under the law, Heb. x.—Clearly predicted Ps. xl. 6—8, compared with Heb. x. 5—10; Isa. liii; Dan. ix. 26, 27. The original law required death in case of transgression.—Christ, in dying, complied with that requisition;—declared the righteousness of God;—and obtained the remission of sins, for all who have faith in his blood, Rom. iii. 25. 2. *Through faith in Christ.* The passage just quoted clearly teaches this.—Faith is the grand condition of the gospel, Mark xvi. 16; Acts xiii. 39; xvi. 31; Rom. v. 1. Without reference to Christ, and faith in him, the Old Testament Scriptures, to which our text refers, not only cannot make us wise to salvation, but the typical, ceremonial, and prophetic parts cannot be understood.—Without Christ these are destitute of meaning;—with him they furnish saving instruction.

4. *They reveal the extent of salvation.* To all people, Gen. xxii. 18; Luke ii. 10.—To all cases, Isa. i. 18.—The complete salvation of the soul from sin—its guilt, love, power, pollution;—and of the body from the grave, and the eternal glorification of both.

From hence we learn,

1. The importance of a personal acquaintance with the Scriptures.
2. The duty of parents in reference to their children.
3. The great utility of Sunday Schools.

OMEGA.

XLVII. SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY PROHIBITED.

1 JOHN V. 21.

“ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

THERE were three purposes which the apostles of our God and Saviour meant to accomplish by the admirable epistles which they wrote to the primitive churches. To instruct them in the great doctrines, duties, and privileges of Christianity; to comfort them under the sufferings and privations to which they were constantly exposed; and to guard them against those pernicious errors, both in principle and practice, which were then so common in the world. St John, from whose interesting epistle we have selected the text, appears to have particularly directed his attention to the last of these subjects. In his day, false teachers and deceitful workers were numerous; and errors and heresies were alarmingly prevalent: such as the denial of the essential deity of Jesus Christ, the efficacy of his atonement, and the necessity of a practical observance of the commandments of God. Against these errors and seductions, the apostle exhorts the believers to be guarded. “ Beloved, believe not every spirit,” &c. chap. iv. 1. And as mental errors were as much to be deprecated as practical ones; and those of the heart, as studiously to be avoided as those of the judgment; the apostle closes his epistle with the important caution in the text, “ Little children,” &c. Let us notice,

I. THE INDIVIDUALS ADDRESSED;—“ Little children.”

II. THE OBJECTS TO BE GUARDED AGAINST ;—“ Idols.”

III. THE DIRECTION GIVEN CONCERNING THEM ;—“ Keep yourselves,” &c.

I. THE INDIVIDUALS ADDRESSED ;—“ Little children.” In the second chapter of this epistle, St. John classifies Christians according to the period of time they had embraced Christianity, or the progress they had made in it. He calls them little children, young men, and fathers ; but the term in the text is designed to embrace all Christians. It is a term expressive,

1. *Of the filial relation in which they stood to God.* They were children, not enemies, strangers, or aliens. There is a sense in which all are the children of one common parent, God is the father of spirits, as well as the former of bodies ; but had St. John been addressing men promiscuously, he would not have used this language, or designated them by this epithet. All Christians are God’s children ; they were once enemies to God, but his Spirit convinced them of sin : revealed to them the way of salvation ; directed them to Christ, and thus enabled them to become the children of God, by faith, Gal, iii. 26. Hence they received Christ in their hearts, John i. 12 ; and the spirit of adoption, Rom. viii. 15.

2. *Of the childlike simplicity they possessed.* What inimitable sweetness and simplicity we often see in “ little children !” How winning and attractive are their infantile ways ! How often do they delight us with their innocent prattle ! How devoid are they of trick, or artifice, or sinister design ! Is not this one characteristic mark of real Christians ? How forcibly did our Saviour inculcate this lesson of Christian simplicity and lowliness upon the minds of his primitive disciples, when he took a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, “ Except ye be converted,” &c. Matt. xviii. 3 ; Ps. cxxxi. 1, 2.

3. *Of the genuine affection which St John felt for them.* His religion was a religion of love ; and he possessed the love of God, not in a scanty or a superficial degree but he had it perfected in him ; and as he who loveth God will love his brother also, he felt the most ardent and unfeigned attachment to the Christians for whose use he designed this epistle. Hence he addresses them, “ Little children,” or as it may be more literally rendered, “ Beloved children ;” some of them were most pro-

bably the seals of his apostleship, and the fruits of his ministry, and he had begotten them by the gospel: he calls them beloved children, ch. iv. 1: and he insists upon it that they should love one another, so far as to be ready, if necessary, to lay down their lives for the brethren, chap. iii. 16.

II. THE OBJECTS TO BE GUARDED AGAINST;—"Idols." The term idol, signifies a figure or representation. God is an invisible Being; and because men cannot see him who is the object of their worship, they have substituted visible things as representations of God. The idols referred to in the text, were not such as the heathens worshipped; for though the Jews in the early period of their history, were awfully prone to idolatry, yet after the Babylonish captivity we have no evidence that they ever fell into this crime. Nor were the Christians to whom St. John wrote, in danger from that kind of idolatry which is now so common among the Roman Catholics, who worship the Virgin Mary, angels, departed saints, crosses, holy water, relics, &c. These were unknown as idols at that time. But the idols to which St. John referred here, were things substituted in the place of God, worldly things, on which the affections might be set, and to which the heart might be fondly wedded. God is the supreme being; he has an unrivalled claim to the homage of our hearts; but if we suffer our minds to wander from God, and attach themselves to worldly things, they become our idol. We may make an idol,

1. *Of our business.* Every man ought to do something. An idle man is a nuisance to society; a man who has a business, ought to be diligent in prosecuting that business; but he is equally bound, by the precepts of the Bible, to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;" but if a man be so taken up with the concerns of his farm or merchandize, as to leave no time for the duties of his religion, for private prayer, for reading the Scriptures, or for public ordinances; then his business becomes his idol and his sin.

2. *Of our property.* Our gold or silver, goods or chattels. Christians, you will say, perhaps are generally poor, and have little of worldly wealth to idolize; but it is not in the largeness of a man's property that the danger lies, but in the disposition of his mind, that loves the world: and this often exists, where the means for gratifying it are very scanty, and limited. The

young man in the gospel, whom Jesus looked upon and loved, made an idol of his property, Mark x. 21, 22. See also Luke xii. 16—21. And under this head, undue attachment to the creature may properly be ranked. A man may idolize his wife, or a woman her husband, or a parent a child, or a lover the darling object of his choice ;

‘ The fondness of our creature love,
How strong it strikes the sense.’ &c.

3. *Of our habitations.* To have convenient and comfortable houses to inhabit, are blessings for which we ought to be grateful to Him who fixes the bounds of our habitations : and to have every thing about us clean and orderly is rather a virtue than a crime. But we may go beyond this, and be ambitious to have elegant houses, and costly furniture ; and to have these things, not for convenience, but for show ; not for the sake of benefiting ourselves, but exciting admiration in others ; and we may set our affections upon these things, and pride ourselves upon them : see Dan. iv. 30.

4. *Of our dress.* The rage for costly and gaudy apparel never prevailed more in the world than at present. Formerly, people in high life were accustomed to dress according to their rank in society ; but now the lower orders so completely ape their superiors, that it is impossible to discriminate between the rich and the poor. Our clothes should be regarded as conveniences, and not as ornaments ; the badges of our shame, rather than the instruments of our pride. We may make an idol of our dress, and think more about decorating the body than adorning the soul, &c.

5. *Of our endowments.* We may have brilliancy of imagination, vigour of understanding, and strength of mind ; we may excel in painting, music, learning, and general science ; we may be great linguists, mathematicians, and proficient in universal knowledge :—or we may have spiritual gifts : a talent for preaching, a knowledge of the Scriptures, a good voice, and impressive manner, and much success ; but instead of giving God the glory, we may arrogate to ourselves the praise of these endowments, and idolize the gifts rather than praise the Giver.

6. *Of our persons.* We may admire our fine shape, elegant figure, or handsome features, and attach a degree of consequence to ourselves, as if we had contributed to the formation of these

things; or we may pamper the body, fare sumptuously every day, make our belly our god, and live as completely to ourselves as if sense and sin were the only objects of our being.

III. THE DIRECTION GIVEN;—"Keep yourselves," &c. Two things we must notice here; the manner how this direction must be carried into effect, and the reasons on which it is founded. In order to keep yourselves from idols,

1. *Get your minds fully renewed by the Holy Ghost.* Idolatry is natural to fallen man. He will put something in the place of God. Carnal objects must predominate in the carnal mind. Even where the mind has undergone some change, there is still a tendency to cleave to the dust, to love the creature, and idolize self; but when the soul is fully regenerated, then old things pass away, and all things become new.

2. *Be deeply impressed with the conviction that God alone can make you happy.* You may have splendid talents, and estimable qualities; you may have wealth, and wit, and knowledge; but without God you will be wretched. God made you for himself, and your souls can rest only in him.

3. *Keep yourselves in the love of God.* Give him your hearts; let him be your 'theme, your inspiration, and your joy:' follow him fully. The mind of man must have some centre and dwelling place. To keep yourselves from idols, keep God in your hearts, and heaven in view.

Among the reasons on which the requisition of the text is founded, we may notice,

1. *How abominable idolatry is in the sight of God.* It is a practical violation of the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." It is robbing God of his most indisputable property. You may not have idols of gold and silver, but if you set up idols in your hearts, you are not a whit more innocent in the sight of God, than if you were to go into a wood, cut down a tree, carve it into an image, fall down before it, and say 'Deliver me, for thou art my God.' See how the wrath of God waxed hot against the Israelites for this sin, Exodus xxxii. 10.

2. *How debasing to yourselves.* God made you, that you might know, love, adore, and enjoy him; and the enjoyment of God is the highest enjoyment of which you are capable; either in time or in eternity, but idolatry sinks human nature into the

deepest state of degradation. Look into the heathen world, and see the debasement into which idolatry has sunk its wretched votaries.

3. *How ruinous to your souls.* Among the characters who shall not enter into the kingdom of God, the apostle distinctly enumerates idolaters, 1 Cor. vi. 9. And St. John mentions that "idolaters shall have their part in the lake of fire," Rev. xxi. 8. With such Scriptures in our view, we shall never be at a loss for arguments to enforce the text, "Little children keep yourselves from idols.

BETA.

XLVIII. THE ORIGINAL STATE OF MAN.

GEN. i. 26.

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

As man could not give existence to himself, he must have derived it from a superior Being, possessing powers equal to such a work. The Sacred Writings give a true and rational account of the origin of the human race, leading us to the only living and true God, as the Creator of all things, visible and invisible; who is underived in his existence, uncontrollable in his power, unlimited in his presence, and everlasting in his duration. Possessed of every natural and moral perfection, He, in the beginning of time, displayed the infinite excellencies of his nature, in creating the world, especially man, who is the most interesting of all terrestrial objects. Being a rational creature, it is a very proper and necessary inquiry, What was the primitive state of man? For solution of this question, we must not turn our attention to the most celebrated heathen philosophers, poets, or historians: but to Moses, who was divinely inspired to give to mankind a written account of the first state of things. From him we learn that "God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him."

I. GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS NATURAL IMAGE. God being infinitely removed from matter, consequently can have no shape or form, he has no corporeal image; but being a Spirit, the image after which he created man, must of course be spiritual. Hence, though he has a body, it is his intellectual nature that gives him dignity, and is the basis of his vast capacity for taking in the knowledge of things both in the natural and moral world. The human spirit, or soul, is not capable of solidity, figure, or extension, and other properties of matter; but is a simple uncompounded substance, possessing various and distinct powers. It has received from God a principle of motion, or self-determination, by which it controls the appetites, senses, and members of the body, and directs all its voluntary motions; and, generally speaking, extends to the words of our mouth, and the actions of our life, with but few exceptions. It is *immortal*, not subject to any principle of decay or extinction, but will survive the death of the body, and live and act independent of it in a future state.

‘ Thrones fall, and dynasties are changed ;
 Empires decay and sink
 Beneath their own unwieldy weight :
 Dominion passeth like a cloud away.
 The imperishable *mind*
 Survives all meaner things.’

The endless duration of the soul stamps amazing importance on the character of man.

II. IN HIS MORAL IMAGE. God is infinitely holy, just, good, and true; and in a *likeness* to these moral perfections he created man. As these perfections render him a proper object of religious worship, so a conformity to them qualified man for presenting to Him acceptable worship. Man was perfect in the constitution of his nature. “ God made man upright,” (Eccles. vii. 29) in his own image, who is “ good and upright,” Ps. xxv. 8. He made him a rational creature, a moral agent, capable of responsibility, and adorned with a beautiful perfection of rectitude. His conceptions of God were correct, and his contemplations of his attributes and works clear and pleasing. All his inclinations, appetites, and desires, were regular and consonant to the will of his Creator. There was no darkness in his understanding, no evil bias in his will and affections, to lead him into the way of transgression. Inwardly he was quiet and calm, he

had no uneasy reflections, no rebukes of conscience, while he continued innocent. He had constant communion with God, whose favour and fellowship were a spring of holy joy and un-mixed felicity. He walked in the light of God's countenance, and tasted the unutterable delights of his gracious presence. All the duties and services he had to perform, were exactly congenial to his views and dispositions.

III. IN THE IMAGE OF HIS GREATNESS AND SOVEREIGNTY. God created him high and honourable, he was the chief of the works in this world, and appointed the lord over the creatures. In rank he was but a little lower than the angels, he was crowned with glory and honour, and had extensive dominion given him, having all things put under his feet, Ps. viii. 5, 6. A paradise was his palace, and all the creatures were under his government. All external objects being beautiful and pleasing, were adapted to contribute to his pleasure. The amazing magnificence of the creation, the heavens bespangled with numberless brilliant stars, the earth dappled with vegetables of various hues, adorned with flowers diffusing odoriferous sweets, furnished his mind with interesting subjects for delightful meditation. The excellent Matthew Henry says, 'The heaven was the roof of Adam's house, and never was any roof so curiously ceiled and painted; the earth was his floor, and never was any floor so richly inlaid; the shadow of the trees was his retirement, and never were any rooms so finely hung.' And he was surrounded with a numerous train of attendants for his state and service. Thus there was no creature like him in all the earth, nor to be compared with him for honour and dignity.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We see hence, that man is a noble and excellent creature, of a very honourable rank of beings; the master-piece of all the works of God, the angels only excepted. The Psalmist says, God made him but a "little lower than the angels," Ps. viii. 5. One man is of more worth than all the other inferior creatures.

2. We ought with most grateful hearts to acknowledge to the adorable Creator what he has made us, and praise him for the excellent nature he has given us. He might have classed us among the lower creatures, might have made us mere substances, as the stones, or mere animals as walk the forest, or range in the desert, and denied us those excellent intellectual and moral

powers, by which we are capable of knowing the Divine Author of our existence, and enjoying him for ever. Let us then say with the Psalmist, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made," Ps. cxxxix. 14. Let us give him the glory of his wisdom, power, and especially his goodness, which all shine so illustriously in our creation.

3. We learn hence, that God has an undoubted claim to us on this ground. He who has made us is our rightful owner and sovereign Lord. His right to us is founded in nature, and is antecedent to any act performed by us; we are the creatures of his power, who rose up into being at his command; on this ground we are his, and not our own. Let us recognise this title to us, and practically yield to his just claim, in devoting all our powers and energies to his service, and employing them for his glory, Rom. vi. 13, 19.

4. As God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, formed our bodies of the dust;—then the remembrance of this should prevent us from being proud of their beauty, strength, and other excellencies. Though the human body is admirable in its frame and constitution, which magnifies the wisdom of the Almighty and good Creator; yet it is mean and vile in its origin, and will be so in its dissolution, Gen. iii. 19; Eccles. xii. 7. St. Paul calls it a "vile body." It will soon assume a ghastly aspect, and be turned to putrefaction: this consideration should tend to keep us humble, especially when we reflect that death is the wages of sin, Rom. vi. 23.

5. Since our souls are of a higher origin, of a more excellent nature, and designed for eternity, especially considering their lapsed state, let us be careful and diligent to secure their welfare. Let our solicitude bear a right proportion to the dignity of their nature, the extent of their powers, and the length of their duration. We should, as the apostle exhorts, "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. ii. 12. By securing the future happiness of our souls, by repenting of our sins, and believing in Christ, under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit, we provide also for the everlasting glory and felicity of our bodies in the morning of the resurrection.

XLIX. THE FIRST PROMISE.

GEN. iii. 15.

“ And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed : it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

THE former part of this chapter is truly awful ! It contains a melancholy account of the introduction of evil into our world, and of man's apostacy from the Lord his God ; but here we find the first promise : and when that was made, the Gospel day began to dawn. From that time to the present, all men have been placed in the hands of a Mediator ; for Jesus was then appointed to redeem man, to avenge his wrongs, and to save him from the sad effects of sin. Our first parents understood this promise in *part*, but we understand it *fully*. They knew that a deliverer would come to bruise the head of their envious and malicious foe ; but we know, by subsequent events, the character of this deliverer, and the means which he used to accomplish his plans of grace and mercy. The words of our text may be divided into two parts :—first, the Lord put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between his seed and her seed ;—and, secondly, the seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head, and the serpent was to bruise his heel.

I. THE LORD PUT ENMITY BETWEEN THE SERPENT AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN HIS SEED AND HER SEED.

1. *The serpent is addressed, but the devil is intended.* He is called “ the dragon, that old serpent, the devil,” Rev. xx.

2. Three reasons may be assigned why he is called a serpent :—first, he assumed that form when he tempted “ the mother of all living,” ver 1.—Secondly, he is crafty, subtle, and cunning, 2 Cor. xi. 3.—And, thirdly, his influence on man resembles the deadly bite of a serpent, Gen. xlix. 17.

2. *The woman is named.* She was made “ a help meet for man,” chap. ii. 18 ; but she yielded to temptation, and drew her husband into sin. “ Adam was not deceived, but the

woman being deceived, was in the transgression." This is a *humbling* reflection to the female sex; but let it be remembered to their *honour*, that the Saviour is the seed of the woman.

3. *Wicked men are the seed of the serpent.* The devil is their father, and they are his children by wicked works. This may be proved by what our Lord said to the Jews: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do," John viii. 44. The old serpent is an enemy of God, and this may be affirmed of all his children, without exception, Rom. viii. 7.

4. *The seed of the woman is Christ Jesus our Lord.* He was born of a pure virgin, without the concurrence of man. Matt. i. 23; and was made of a woman; for "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law," Gal. iv. 4. But he who was made of a woman, was "IMMANUEL, which being interpreted, is, God with us," Matt. i. 23; and when the devil contended with him, he contended with God incarnate, 1 Tim. iii. 16.

5. *God put enmity between these parties: and they can never be reconciled.* This will not be doubted when we consider their opposite characters:—the devil is *polluted* and *defiled*, but Christ is *pure* and *holy*; the devil a *destroyer*, Christ is a *SAVIOUR*;—the devil is a *merciless tyrant*, but Christ is a *mild pacific Prince*. A war was about to commence between them, in which the one was to conquer, and the other to be destroyed, Heb. ii. 14. For,

II. THE SEED OF THE WOMAN WAS TO BRUISE THE SERPENT'S HEAD, AND THE SERPENT WAS TO BRUISE HIS HEEL.

1. *By the head of the serpent, we are to understand the mischievous power of the devil*; and the figure is very appropriate, because the life and power of the serpent lie in his head. His bite leaves a poisonous liquor in the wound, which quickly mixes with the blood, and produces speedy death.

2. *To bruise his head is to crush his power.* All his power has been employed in doing mischief; and among his other works we may reckon error, unbelief, sin, misery, and death; and therefore we rejoice in the hope of that day, when his power shall be wholly destroyed, and when his deadly influence shall cease, Rev. xx. 10.

3. *Jesus came into the world to bruise his head.* The first

conflict between these parties, of which we have any account, was in the wilderness of Judea; and there our Lord was more than conqueror, Matt. iv. 1—11: afterward the almighty power of Jesus appeared, on many occasions, in casting devils out of the bodies of men; so that they trembled before him, and asked if he were come to torment them before their time, Matt. viii. 29.

4. *The head of the serpent was bruised by the death and resurrection of Jesus.* Under the influence of the devil, his impure seed, the wicked Jews, “killed the Prince of Life,” Acts iii. 15; but in death, he made atonement for sin, redeemed man, and gave a death-blow to the serpent: and in his resurrection, he conquered death and the grave, and “became the first fruits of them that slept,” 1 Cor. xv. 20.

5. *And he is now bruising the serpent’s head, in the exercise of his grace and mercy.* After his resurrection he appointed a Gospel ministry, Mark xvi. 15; ascended into heaven, till his enemies should be wholly subdued, Heb. x. 12, 13; sent down his Holy Spirit, Acts ii. 1—4; and by the ministry of his word, and the agency of his Spirit, he bruises the head of the serpent in the hearts of all true believers.

6. That the serpent still exercises considerable power, is a fact which we cannot deny; but we may safely affirm, that he has received incurable wounds, and that his destruction is certain. Our glorious Redeemer reigns, and “must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet,” 1 Cor. xv. 25; and then glorious times will follow to his church, and to the world, Isa. xi. 5—9.

7. *But the heel of Jesus was bruised by the serpent.* He suffered greatly, in his human nature, while he tabernacled on earth, and his holy seed have suffered much from their adversary the devil; but it has only been a bruising of the heel, which is not a vital part. When Satan obtained leave to attack Job, the Lord said unto him, “Behold he is in thine hand, but save his life,” Job ii. 6; and it is a pleasing thought, that this wicked and malignant spirit could never touch the life of our great Deliverer. It is true his body died, but that was only the heel or inferior part of his nature.

INFERENCES.

1. The influence of this serpent has been vast and extensive; the mischief which he has done is incalculably great; and, even now, "he worketh in the hearts of the children of disobedience," Eph. ii. 2.

2. But it is matter of rejoicing, that we have a Saviour, and a GREAT ONE, who is both able and willing to deliver all who put their trust in him; and if we commit ourselves to his care, he will keep us safely against that day, when the serpent and all his seed shall be cast into hell, 2 Tim. i. 12.

3. That we may be safe and happy, we should 'renounce the devil and all his works:' embrace the offers of the gospel; and place ourselves under the government and protection of the *woman's conquering seed*.

4. Placed under the banner of our Redeemer, let us not fear the wicked one, but constantly and courageously resist him, under an assurance that he will flee from us, James iv. 7. Soon we shall be out of his reach, and all the sad effects of his malice will be done away for ever. Amen.

SIGMA.

L. THE ADVENT AND AUTHORITY OF SHILOH.

GEN. xlix. 10.

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

IN this verse, there are some terms which require explanation. —By "*Judah*," is undoubtedly meant the tribe of Judah, or his lineal descendants, and their domestic connexions; this is con-

firmed by that phrase, "From between his feet." The word "*Sceptre*," signifies an ensign or badge of honour, by which kings and ancient heads of tribes were distinguished; hence, the sceptre indicated the exercise of civil authority. The word rendered "*lawgiver*," means one that expounds the law, as well as one that enacts it; this therefore indicates the exercise of spiritual or ecclesiastical authority. The word "*Shiloh*" has various meanings, and among others, it signifies one that is sent; a safe-maker, or Saviour, the peaceable and prosperous one; or one whose coming shall be attended with salvation, peace, and prosperity. The "*gathering* of the people unto him," intimates the subjection of multitudes to his authority. From these elucidations, we may collect the purport of this prophecy; namely "that Judah shall remain a distinct tribe, invested with both civil and sacred authority, until one shall be sent among them, whose coming shall be attended with salvation, peace, and prosperity, and to whose authority many will become subject.

By the most respectable ancient writers both Jewish and Christian, this has ever been considered a most remarkable prediction of the Messiah; and our present concern shall be to notice its full and exact accomplishment in our Lord Jesus Christ. This will appear by considering his coming,—and his subsequent authority.

1. THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. That we may distinctly ascertain the fulfilment of this prediction, let us observe,

1. *The advent of our Lord itself; or the act of his coming.* Shiloh was to come, that he might accomplish his kind designs; so Christ came by his incarnation for the most benevolent purposes. We may regard his coming, as the fulfilment of general prophecy. From the question proposed to our Lord, by the disciples of John the Baptist, it appears that the pious Jews usually considered and spoke of the Messiah, as "He that should come." Hence they addressed our Lord in their accustomed language when they said "Art thou he that should come?" This language they were taught to use, not only by our text, but also by the predictions of Isaiah, ch. xxxv. 3—6; Haggai ii. 7; Zech. ix. 9; and Mal. iii. 1. In our Lord's incarnation, in his miracles, in his going to Jerusalem, and in his visits to the temple, we behold all these predictions most exactly accom-

plished. We may also regard his coming as a benign expedient, adapted to the exigencies of mankind. We needed divine instruction; but like the ancient Israelites, we also required a human teacher to communicate it; we needed an acceptable Mediator, by whom we might approach to God; we needed a High Priest, in whom we might safely confide; and a perfect example in our own nature. In our incarnate Redeemer we find all that our exigencies require:—He is the prophet like unto Moses, Acts iii. 22, 23; a suitable Mediator, 1 Tim. ii. 5; an accomplished High Priest, Heb. ii. 17, 18; and a perfect example, Phil. ii. 5; 1 John ii. 6. Having noticed the coming of Christ, let us observe,

2. *The circumstances connected with his coming.* From these it appears that our Lord came, *where*, and *when*, and *how* Shiloh was to come—He came *where* Shiloh was to come. Was Shiloh to come from among the tribe of Judah? Here our Lord actually came; from this tribe he descended, Heb. vii. 14; and among this tribe he was born. Compare Mic. v. 2 with Matt. ii. 5, 6.—He came *when* Shiloh was to come. Was Shiloh to come before the civil and sacred authority departed from the tribe of Judah? Our Lord came precisely at this time; when indeed the sceptre was departing from Judah; for Judæa was now become a Roman province, Luke ii. 1, 4, 5; but before the authority of Judah was entirely departed, for some judicial authority still remained in this tribe till after our Lord's death, John xviii. 31—He came also *as* Shiloh was to come. Was Shiloh to be sent? Our Lord was sent by his heavenly Father. This he repeatedly asserts, John iii. 17 and vii. 29; and this he proved by his miracles, John v. 36. Observe also,

3. *The effects which result from his coming.* Was Shiloh's coming to be attended with salvation, peace, and prosperity? Such also were the attendants on Christ's coming. This was predicted by the prophets, Ps. lxxii. 6, 7; Isa. ix. 6, 7; announced by the angels, Luke ii. 10—12, 14; and is experienced by all our Lord's faithful subjects, Heb. v. 9; Rom. xiv. 17, 18. This leads us to consider,

II. HIS SUBSEQUENT AUTHORITY, OR THE EVENT WHICH IS PREDICTED SHOULD SUCCEED HIS COMING; "Unto him shall

the gathering of the people be." This was to succeed Shiloh's coming; and this is, and will be, remarkably fulfilled in our Lord. Here we may observe,

1. *The people who are gathered to Christ.* These are,—People of every descent, both Jews and Gentiles, Isa. xlix. 6; Luke ii. 10, 32.—People of all nations and languages. These are promised to him, Ps. ii. 8; called by him, Isa. xlv. 22; and are found among his redeemed, Rev. vii. 9, 10. Having noticed the people who are gathered to Christ, let us observe,

2. *In what respects they are, and shall be gathered.* From his words we learn,—That they are gathered to him in this present life. They are gathered,—as his subjects who learn of him, serve him, and trust in him, Matt. xi. 28—30; as his sheep, whom he receives, restores, and preserves, Isaiah xl. 11; Ps. xxiii. 1—4; as his united family, among whom he resides, John xi. 51, 52, and xiv. 23. Concerning the people thus gathered to Christ now, we also learn,—That they will be gathered to him in a future state. At death they will be gathered into paradise with Christ, Luke xxxiii. 43. There they will enjoy glorious rest, (Rev. xiv. 13) felicity, (Ps. xvi. 11) and security, Rev. iii. 12. At the general judgment, they will be gathered to partake of a glorious resurrection, (Matt. xxiv. 31; Phil. iii. 21) and to be honoured with the manifested approbation of their Judge, Matt. xxv. 34. They will also be gathered through a blissful eternity, as the reward of his mediatorial sufferings, (Isaiah liii. 11, 12) when he will collect, arrange, and prize them as his jewels or special treasure, Mal. iii. 17, 18.

APPLICATION.

1. From this prophecy it appears, that our Lord Jesus Christ is certainly he that should come, and therefore we should not look for another. We should not look for another, because we need not; for he is both a suitable Redeemer, (1 Cor. i. 30) and an *all-sufficient* one, Heb. vii. 25. We should not look for another, because we ought not. To look for another must be *rebellious*, implying opposition to the authority of Christ, Luke xix. 27; it must be *ungrateful*, implying a base return for the greatest kindness, Heb. x. 29; and it must be *vain*, for none but Christ can save us, Acts iv. 12; Heb. x. 26, 27.

2. *As Christ came to bless us with salvation, peace, and spiritual prosperity, these blessings should be earnestly sought by us.* Seek them as your chief good, Ps. iv. 6; Prov. iv. 7. Seek them as the text suggests; by gathering yourselves to Christ. Come, and cry to him like sinking confident Peter, Matt. xiv. 30. Seek him as the Gospel requires; now, without delay, Luke xiv. 17: *fervently*, with all your hearts, Jer. xxix. 13; *importunately*, with incessant application, Luke xviii. 1; and *believingly*, with confident expectation, Heb. iv. 16; Ps. cxviii. 25.

3. *Our Lord's authority should engage us to demean ourselves as faithful subjects.* By *steadfast adherence* to him, Acts ix. 22; by *zealous efforts*, to promote the interests of his kingdom, Phil. i. 27; Gal. iv. 18; and by *hoping* for its universal extension, Luke xi. 2; Ps. lxxii. 17—19.

ALPHA

LJ. RELIGIOUS STABILITY ENFORCED.

JOSHUA xxiii. 8.

“ But cleave unto the Lord your God, as ye have done unto this day.”

THE dying testimonies of aged saints are peculiarly interesting and impressive. This is more particularly the case with those who have long occupied important stations in the church; and have been eminently useful in their day and generation. Such were precisely the circumstances of Joshua, the captain of the Lord's host. He was the illustrious leader of the children of Israel into the land of Canaan, and from his youth he faithfully served the God of his fathers. And now, when the day of his life was far spent, and the time of his departure drew near, he solemnly took leave of his brethren, in the most faithful and affectionate manner. Being deeply concerned for their future welfare, he assembled the congregation and elders of Is-

rael, that he might give them his dying charge, and kindly instruct, admonish, and encourage them to be steadfast and courageous in the service of God. He reminds them of the great things which the Lord had done for them, and urges them to love, obey, and cleave unto him continually, as the only hope and Saviour of them that trust in him. But the text is an appropriate exhortation to the people of God in every age, in which we may notice, the duty it recommends; the importance it involves; and the motives it suggests.

I. THE DUTY THE TEXT RECOMMENDS;—“*Cleave* unto the Lord.” The term *cleave* is commonly used in two distinct and opposite senses. It sometimes signifies to disunite and divide asunder, Job xvi. 13; Ps. lxxviii. 15. But it generally means to persevere in a particular course, or to adhere to some specific object, Deut. xi. 13; Rom. xii. 9. In this sense it is used in the text. Cleaving unto the Lord evidently implies,

1. *Previous union with him.* We cannot cleave unto him while we are unacquainted with him, and at a distance from him. Though many of the Israelites were wicked and rebellious, yet as “a chosen generation” they were a people near to the Lord, by covenant and profession, Ps. cxlviii. 14. And no doubt there were many pious characters among them, and hence it was with much propriety that Joshua urged them to cleave unto the Lord their God. And every true minister of Christ will feel it his duty to go and do likewise; and will joyfully imitate the example of Barnabas, who, when he came to Antioch, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that “with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”

2. *Faithful adherence to him.* Our religion must be uniform and constant; we must not only come to the Lord as humble penitents, but also adhere to him as his indefatigable servants. *We should cleave to his name*; as the fountain of all goodness, from whom we receive every blessing; and therefore should continue to love, obey, hope, and trust in him, as the God of our salvation, Isa. xii. 2; Hab. iii. 18. *We should cleave to his word*; by faithfully reading its contents, imbibing its doctrines, obeying its precepts, and by making it the perpetual subject of our meditation and prayers, and the infallible rule of our faith and conduct, Psal. cxix. 18, 148; John v. 39; 2 Tim.

iii. 16, 17. *We should cleave to his ways*; by diligently discharging all personal and relative duties, constantly attending all the means of grace, working out our salvation with fear and trembling, and by "walking in all the commandments and ordinances blameless." *We should cleave to him at all times*; in prosperity and adversity, in tribulation and distress, in health and affliction, in life and death; implicitly "trusting in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." As closely connected with this conduct, we may proceed to consider,

II. THE IMPORTANCE THE TEXT INVOLVES. This evidently appears, both from the solemnity of the occasion on which it was delivered, and the fervency of the manner in which it was urged on the tribes of Israel. It is also equally important to all Christians, to cleave unto the Lord who is their "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

1. *This duty is reasonable.* All the Divine commands are founded in eternal reason, justice and truth. God requires nothing but what is essentially connected with our present and everlasting happiness. As we are invariably dependent on him for every blessing, it is meet and right that we should cleave unto him through every period of our existence, 2 Cor. iii. 5. Constant adherence to "the God of all grace," is unquestionably the bounden duty, and most reasonable service of mankind, John vi. 67—69; Rom. xii. 1, 2.

2. *This duty is honourable.* Instability in religion is peculiarly disgraceful, 2 Pet. ii. 20—22. It is extremely weak and childish, and should be carefully avoided as displeasing to God, and dishonourable to our holy profession, Eph. iv. 14. But uniform stability of character reflects honour on the saints, and glory to Divine grace, by which they are kept "steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord," Heb. xiii. 9.

3. *This duty is profitable.* Though it cannot be meritorious, it is always accompanied with peculiar advantage. The fickle, and unstable, never excel either in knowledge or virtue, James i. 6—8. It is only by cleaving unto the Lord that we can maintain personal piety, overcome our enemies, encounter difficulties, rejoice evermore, triumph over death, and "lay hold on eternal life," Deut. iv. 3, 4; Psal. lvii. 7; 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

4. *This duty is indispensable.* Having obtained mercy, we should “cast not away our confidence, which hath great recompence of reward,” If we draw back, God will have no pleasure in us. Final perseverance is necessary to final salvation. He only that “endures to the end shall be saved.” “If we forsake God, he will forsake us;” but by closely adhering to him, and being “faithful unto death,” we shall receive “the crown of life,” 1 Cor. xv. 2; Rom. ii. 7; 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. To enforce this important duty, let us observe,

III. THE MOTIVES THE TEXT SUGGESTS. Joshua endeavoured to urge this exhortation by the most suitable and impressive considerations. We may discover in the text and context,

1. *A motive of sacred obligation*:—“Cleave unto *the Lord your God.*” The vows of the Lord were often upon them, and he justly claimed their faithful adherence. He was the covenant God of their fathers, and chose them and their seed, to be his peculiar people, Deut. vii. 6. The Lord is also the God of all his people, and this endearing relation involves the most solemn obligations of fidelity and constancy in his service, Gen. xvii. 1; Deut. xxiv. 18.

2. *A motive of former obedience*;—“Cleave unto the Lord *as ye have done unto this day* ;” or since ye came into Canaan. Though they had frequently sinned in the wilderness, on their entering into the promised land, they became more obedient and steadfast, chap. xxiv. 24, 25. And hence their venerable leader affectionately commended their past conduct, as an argument to encourage their future stability and faithfulness.

3. *A motive of sincere gratitude.* In the context, Joshua distinctly specifies the goodness of God in bringing them into the goodly land; and thus fulfilling the promises which he had made to them and their fathers, ver. 14, 15. Divine goodness is practical in its tendency, and should always lead us to obey and cleave unto the God of our mercies, Rom. ii. 4.

4. *A motive of solemn warning.* Their departing captain, like a faithful prophet, assures them that if they “went back” from the Lord, they would quickly perish in his anger, ver. 13, 16. He therefore entreats them to cleave unto him as the only way to escape utter destruction, and secure eternal rest, Psal. ii. 12; 1 Cor. x. 12. “Remember Lot’s wife.”

From what has been advanced we may infer,

1. The necessity of Christian stedfastness, Gal. v. 1.
 2. The duty of watchfulness and prayer, Matt. xxvi. 41.
- And,
3. The felicity of those who stand fast in the Lord.

ETA.

LII. CEASING TO PRAY FOR OTHERS IS A SIN AGAINST THE LORD.

1 SAMUEL xii. 23.

“God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.”

THE text stands connected with a singular event in the history of the Jews. They had lived under a theocracy; God was their king; their whole nation was a church; the five books of Moses, which contained their civil code of laws, contained also their religious institutions; the execution of the laws was committed to judges, chosen by the people; and cases of peculiar difficulty were determined by God himself. But the people grew dissatisfied with this divine form of government; they would have a king; Samuel reasoned with them, and predicted what their king would do, ch. viii. 11—13. A gloomy prophecy, but not more so than its accomplishment. All would not do, they persisted in their purpose. Samuel, in obedience to their voice, anointed a king over them; but gave them to understand how grievous their conduct was to God, and, to convince them of it, he said, “Now therefore stand,” &c., xii. 16. The sentiments of the text are, that prayer for others is a duty, and the neglect of it is a sin. We will therefore inquire,

I. WHO ARE THE INDIVIDUALS FOR WHOM WE SHOULD PRAY ?

1. *For our families.* We have most of us relatives; wives or husbands, parents or children. Individuals who are especially dear to us, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." Some of these are, most probably, unregenerated and unsaved. Let us pray for their salvation.

2. *For the Church of God.* God has a church upon earth, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. The members of this church are distinguished by different names; but they all need our prayers. Let us pray that they may be united in affection—that they may increase in piety—that the Lord may add to their number such as shall be saved.

3. *For our country.* God has not dealt so with any nation. We are highly privileged, but we are deeply guilty. Let us pray for our country; for our king, that he may reign in righteousness; for our magistrates, that they may be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to those who do well. For the preachers of God's holy word among us, and for the afflicted, and the poor in the land.

4. *For the world.* What an awful state is the world in, notwithstanding all the attempts which are made to mend it! We anticipate the period when it will be brought under the influence of Christianity. Let us pray for the world, for Turks, Jews, heathens, and infidels of all descriptions.

II. STATE THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE ADOPTION OF SUCH A PRACTICE.

1. *We are related to each other, and therefore we should pray for one another.* Where can we find a human being to whom we are not related? "Have we not all one father? Mal. ii. 10. God "hath made of one blood," &c. Acts xvii. 26. "The rich and the poor," &c., Prov. xxii. 2.

2. *We are dependent on each other's exertions for a subsistence.* Some talk of being independent, but this is absurd. "The king himself is served by the field," Eccl. v. 9. Some procure for us bread by the cultivation of land.—Some form our houses—others build our vessels—others make our clothes.—Some labour for us abroad, and waft the treasures of distant countries to our shores; and others toil for us at home: and our mutual dependence upon each other, should excite us to mutual prayer.

3. *The practice of praying for others will serve to keep alive in our hearts the most benevolent feelings toward them.* There are many bad feelings in the human mind, and many slanderous and malicious aspersions are propagated in the world. These are contrary to the letter and spirit of Christianity; pray for others, and you will get to love them, and desire to do them good.

4. *This practice may promote their salvation.* God hears the prayers of some persons in behalf of others. God threatened Israel with total extirpation; Moses pleaded for them, and God said, "I have pardoned according to thy word," James v. 16, 17. But,

III. WE MAY OMIT TO PRAY FOR OTHERS. The text is sufficiently indicative of this.

1. *We may omit to pray for others through unconcern about our own salvation.* Many think nothing about their salvation; they in effect say, "What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit is it unto us if we pray unto him? They never pray for themselves, and, of course, neglect to pray for others.

2. *We may do it through unbelief, in reference to the efficacy of prayer.* Many think it is of no use to pray; others pray from a sense of duty, but without expecting that God will hear their prayers. While unbelief prevails, we shall pray to little effect.

3. *We may do it through prejudice.* We think that others have injured us, and we resent their conduct towards us: and instead of praying for them, we slander them. Look at Samuel; the people of Israel had treated him very unkindly, but said he, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord," &c.

IV. THAT OUR CEASING TO PRAY FOR OTHERS IS A SIN AGAINST THE LORD.

1. *It is a sin against the precepts of the Lord.* See 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. Nothing can be more plainly enjoined than the duty of praying for others.

2. *Against the Spirit of the Lord.* The Holy Ghost dictated the Scriptures to holy men. The Holy Ghost works in our hearts feelings of benevolence and love, which give birth to prayer.

3. *Against the example of the Lord.* The Lord Jesus set us an example in praying for his murderers; "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Let us imitate him in praying for our enemies. Learn,

1. What straits people are brought into by their sinful conduct.

2. None can help us in our distress but God.

3. People in affliction are glad to have the prayers of those whom they have treated with insult before.

4. Good men pray for those who have despitely used them.

BETA.

LIII. THE GOOD AND THE RIGHT WAY.

1 SAMUEL xii. 23, 24.

"But I will teach you the good and the right way; only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart, for consider how great things he hath done for you."

IN this chapter we find the Israelites reprov'd, humbled, comforted and instructed.

1. *They are reprov'd*, for desiring a king, v. 16, 17.—Because in asking an earthly king, they rebelled against God, by rejecting him as their king, ch. viii. 7. Hereby they tacitly reflected on God's government; intimating that it was defective either in goodness, or wisdom, or power.—And in thus asking a king, they proved ungrateful to Samuel, by rejecting him as their judge.

2. *They are humbled* and alarmed, under a sense of their guilt, ver. 18, 19.

3. *They are comforted and instructed* as sincere penitents. By the prospects of God's returning favour, ver. 20—22. And

by the assurance of Samuel's continued kindness, ver. 23, 24. "Moreover, as for me, God forbid," &c. In improving our text, let us observe the course of duty which is here recommended, and the arguments by which it is urged. Observe,

I. THE COURSE OF DUTY WHICH IS HERE RECOMMENDED.— "Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart."

1. "*Fear the Lord.*"—That fear of God which he requires in his word, implies either the whole of religion, both internal and external; or only the pious dispositions of the heart, as distinguished from, and productive of, outward piety of conduct.— Sometimes it signifies the whole of religion, Psalm xxxiv. 11. — Sometimes it signifies that piety of heart from which rectitude of conduct always proceeds, Deut. v. 29; Eccl. xii. 13.— In this latter sense it is urged in our text. Fear God, by cherishing suitable and requisite dispositions of heart towards him; as contrition on account of past sins, Psalm xxxviii. 18; and li. 17; earnest desire of his manifested favour, Psalm iv. 6; and xc. 14; hopeful affiance in his mercy, Psalm xxxiii. 22; and grateful recollection of his manifold benefits, Psalm xlviii. 9; and ciii. 1, 2.

2. "*Serve him,*" by conforming to his revealed will in your lives. Come to him as he requires, John xiv. 6; 1 Tim. ii. 5; and obey him as he requires, Micah vi. 8; Titus ii. 12. Serve the Lord—by consecrating your persons to him, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; by consecrating your influence to him, in your families, Josh. xxiv. 15; Gen. xviii. 19; and among all your connexions, Psalm xxxiv. 4, 8; and by consecrating all your talents to him, 1 Peter iv. 10. In doing this, seek to promote the interests of Christ's kingdom, Psalm cxxii. 6; and cheerfully serve mankind for God's sake, Acts xiii. 36; Gal. vi. 2.

3. "*Serve him in truth with all your heart.*" "In truth," with a pure intention to please him, Matt. vi. 22;—"With all your heart;" exclusively, serve God only, Matt. iv. 10;—universally, respect all his commandments, Psalm cxix. 6;—and perseveringly, never forsake his service, Psalm cvi. iii; Num. xiv. 24. That you may adopt the course here recommended, observe,

II. THE ARGUMENTS BY WHICH IT IS URGED. These arise from the consideration of God's favours, and from the special qualities of the course prescribed.

1. *From the consideration of God's past favours.* Consider how great things he hath done for you. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; therefore we should consider this exhortation addressed to us, as certainly as it was addressed to the ancient Israelites. In so doing, consider what great things God hath done for you.—*In your natural capacity, as human beings.* As such, God has endued you with immortal natures, capable of enjoying eternal blessedness; what was formerly wished in compliment to kings, will be realized in you all; you will live for ever. God designs your eternal happiness as his servants, Deut. v. 29; Psalm xxxv. 27. And he requires you to choose eternal happiness, Deut. xxx. 19, 20. Consider how great things God has done for you—*In your civil capacity as British subjects.* As such, he has singularly protected us from the menaced ravages of foreign enemies; our Israel alone has dwelt in safety, Psalm cxxiv. 1, &c. He has kindly preserved us from the calamities of civil discord. This many have wickedly endeavoured to foment; and this others have certainly promoted, perhaps without design; but the influence both of the deceiver and the deceived, has been graciously counteracted by an ever-watchful Providence, Psalm lxxv. 7. He has mercifully continued us in the full enjoyment of all our rights, both those of social life and of conscience, Micah iv. 4. Consider also how great things God has done for you—*In your religious capacities, as professing Christians.* As such, he blesses you with the revelation of his will: the full revelation of it; the pure revelation of it; the plain revelation of it, in your own language; and the general revelation of it, in every church, and every house. He affords you all the most advantageous means of piety; as religious ordinances, public, domestic, and secret; many bright examples of exalted piety; and the enjoyment of Christian sabbaths. He crowns the faithful among you with his richest blessings, Psalm lxxxiv. 11, and xxxi. 19. These favours justly entitle him to your services, Rom. xii. 1. But recollect, another argument by which this service is urged, still remains to be considered; this arises,

2. *From the special qualities of the course here prescribed.* It is the good and the right way. It is the way; the course that leads to eternal rest, Jer. vi. 16. The good way, the way of manifest equity, Rom. vi. 13; of solid comfort, Isaiah xxxii.

17; and of extensive profit, 1 Tim. iv. 3.—The right way; conformable to the best rule, God's word, Psalm cxix. 128; and leading to the best end, the advancement of God's glory, 1 Peter iv. 11. It is the good and the right way of acknowledging God's past favours: let gratitude induce you to walk in it, Psalm cxvi. 8, 9, 12. It is the good and the right way of promoting national prosperity: for it averts national evils, 2 Chron. vii. 14, and it increases national glory, Prov. xiv. 34. Love to your country should induce you to walk in this way. It is the good and the right way of working out your own salvation, 2 Peter i. 10, 11. Rational self-interest should also induce you to walk in it. "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself," Prov. ix. 12. "By humility, and the fear of the Lord, are riches, and honour, and life," Prov. xxii. 4.

ALPHA.

LIV. THE FINAL DESTINIES OF MANKIND.

PSALM i. 5, 6.

"Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

THE immortality of the soul, and the consequent responsibility of mankind as moral agents, are subjects distinctly revealed in the Scriptures, and perfectly consonant to sound reason. But they are evidently positions highly important in their general bearings, and are replete with the most awful or interesting results to the human race. As immortal beings, this is not the only state of our existence; and our future happiness or misery is essentially connected with our present characters and pursuits. This is manifestly the doctrine of the text and context, in which the Psalmist represents the different states and conduct of the righteous and the wicked; and their respective portions, when God shall come to judge the world in righteousness and truth: "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand," &c. These words

explicitly describe the solemn event of the future judgment;—the different characters which it regards—and the final destinies of saints and sinners.

I. THE SOLEMN EVENT OF THE FUTURE JUDGMENT. This is a subject to which the Scriptures frequently refer, and that unquestionably involves the eternal interests of every human being. It is therefore highly necessary to consider, the certainty of the great day of God, and the important transactions which will then take place. We should duly remember,

1. *The future judgment is a certain event.* Though infidels scoff, and profanely say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" and practically disregard all the threatenings of his wrath; yet the dread "day of the Lord will" certainly "come as a thief in the night," 2 Peter iii. 9, 10. This is a truth which is clearly established by every possible and satisfactory evidence. That God will hereafter judge "the quick and the dead," and render unto all men according to their works, is evident from the impartial administration of divine justice—the dictates of reason and conscience, Acts xxiv. 25—the character of human life as a state of probation—the general expectation of it in all nations—and the positive declarations of Scripture, which fully reveal the certainty of its approach—the equity of its process—and the solemnity of its issue, Eccl. ix. 11, xii. 14; Dan. vii. 9, 10; Acts xvii. 31; Jude 14, 15; Rev. i. 7.

2. *The future judgment is an important event.* It is called by way of eminence, *the Judgment*, "the coming of the Lord, the great day of his wrath, the revelation of Jesus Christ from heaven in flaming fire," &c. *This event is important to all men.* It deeply concerns every responsible being in every period of time—in every nation on earth—in every station of life—and of every diversity of character. "The great and the small" shall stand before God; yea "all nations shall be gathered before him, and every eye shall see him," Matt. xxv. 31, 32. *This event is important in its results.* How glorious the Judge! How grand his appearing! How momentous his work! The trump of God shall sound! The dead shall be raised! The elements shall be dissolved and the earth burnt up! Time shall be no more! All worlds shall come to judgment, and the final destinies of mankind shall be unalterably fixed in eternal misery or immortal bliss! Behold

the Judge is at the door! Watch and tremble, and “prepare to meet your God!” 2 Thess. i. 7—10; 2 Peter iii. 14; Rev. xx. 11—15. Such is the judgment to come. Let us then consider,

II. THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS WHICH IT REGARDS;—“Ungodly sinners and the congregation of the righteous.” This description of character includes the whole human race. All men are either godly or ungodly—either wicked or righteous, and, as accountable beings, must “all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,” 2 Cor. v. 10. According to the text,

1. *All the ungodly will be brought to judgment.* Now they impiously refuse to come to the Saviour, that they might have life; but then they will be irresistibly compelled to appear before him, to receive the sentence of eternal death, Matt. xxii. 13. How awful is their character, and how dreadful their portion! They are *ungodly sinners!* They are morally unlike God, and practically opposed to his will: being “alienated, and enemies in their minds, by wicked works.” All atheists, infidels, sabbath-breakers, drunkards, adulterers, the covetous, the impenitent, the self-righteous, and all hypocritical professors of religion must undeniably be classed with *ungodly sinners*, who shall not inherit the kingdom of God, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.—They cannot possibly escape detection and punishment, when God shall judge the secrets of all hearts; for, “every one shall receive according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” “Ye have sinned, and be sure your sin will find you out.”

2. *All the righteous will be brought to judgment.* “The congregation of *the righteous*” may include, all “the holy angels, the spirits of just men made perfect,” and all the saints “which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord,” 1 Thess. iv. 13—17. All the people of God are called *righteous*, and are the hallowed subjects of his saving grace. Their righteousness is not natural or legal, but imputed through faith in Christ, Rom. iv. 23, 24.—*implanted* by the Holy Spirit, Tit. iii. 5;—and *displayed* in holiness of life, Tit. ii. 12—They are freely “washed, and justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God.” They are the approved objects of the divine pleasure, whom he now delights to honour, and will not fail to bring with him “when he shall come

to be glorified, and admired in all them that believe." The text also announces,

III. THE FINAL DESTINY OF SAINTS AND SINNERS.—

"For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."—Such will be the respective allotments of mankind, according to their several states and characters, when God shall summon all men to his impartial tribunal.

1. *The doom of the ungodly will be inconceivably dreadful.* They "shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous." Now they frequently mingle with them in the house of God; but when he shall call them to his bar, they shall not stand approved with the saints at his right hand, but sink condemned with the wicked on his left, Matt. xxv. 33—41. Their ungodly excuses, characters, and ways, will not stand the test of justice; when "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing," Dan. v. 27; Rev. vi. 17. And hence the "way of the ungodly," which is the way of misery and ruin, shall certainly perish; for it is "the broad way, that leadeth to destruction." Their hopes, their enjoyments, their bodies, and their souls, shall utterly perish; not by extinction of existence, but by the conscious endurance of eternal perdition, Matt. xxv. 46; Rev. xiv. 11.

2. *The portion of the righteous will be ineffably glorious.* They shall stand accepted in the Beloved, without spot and blameless; yea, all the righteous congregation of saints and angels, shall stand justified and applauded by "God the judge of all," who shall say unto them, "Well done good and faithful servants" enter ye into the joy of your Lord," Matt. xxv. 21. Then will it appear to assembled worlds, that "the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous," and will gloriously reward them "with a crown of righteousness," 2 Tim. iv. 8. He now perfectly knows their persons and characters, and highly approves of their piety and faithfulness; and kindly declares for their encouragement, "They shall be mine saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels," Mal. iii. 16—18.

This subject should deeply impress our minds with,

1. The value of divine revelation.
2. The necessity of self-examination. And
3. The blessedness of being "faithful unto death."

LV. A PRAYER FOR THE WICKEDNESS OF THE
WICKED TO COME TO AN END.

PSALM vii. 9.

“Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end.”

FEW men have ever risen to eminence in the world, or in the church, without encountering the most formidable opposition from a host of assailants. Censure is a tax invariably laid upon the candidate for fame; and persecution is a brand as uniformly fixed upon the pious. David's experience exemplified the truth of these remarks. His almost sudden elevation in the world roused the jealousy of Saul; and his devotedness to religion exposed him to the hatred of unreasonable and wicked men. When he wrote this Psalm, he was suffering under the imputations of slander. Thus circumstanced, he made his appeal and his prayer to God, ver. 1, 2. He then shows his willingness to suffer the severest doom, if iniquity was found in his hands, ver. 3—5. And, knowing that all his persecutions originated in the wickedness of men, he uttered this passionate exclamation,—“O let the wickedness,” &c. In explaining the text, we will,

I. MAKE A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE WICKEDNESS OF THE WICKED. By the wicked we understand all unregenerate persons. They may be as moral as the wicked pharisees, against whom Jesus Christ denounced the heaviest judgments, Matt. xxiii. They may be as prosperous as the rich man, whose grounds brought forth plentifully, Luke xii. 16. They may be as popular as Herod, who made an oration, and the people gave a shout, and said, “It is the voice of a god,” &c. Acts xii. 22. Or they may hold as distinguished offices in society as Haman or Pharaoh, Esther vii. 6; Exod. ix. 27.

1. *The wickedness of the wicked is the genuine fruit of a depraved nature.* God made man in his own image, but the devil sowed the seeds of wickedness in his mind. Adam fell—all men are now totally depraved—and wickedness is the genuine result of innate depravity. Hence wickedness proceedeth from

the wicked, just as streams proceed from a fountain, or as fruit is produced by a tree, Gen. vi. 5; 1 Sam. xxiv. 13; Ps. v. 9.

2. *The wickedness of the wicked displays itself in various forms.* It is seen in the horrid rites and abominable superstitions of heathenism; in the dreadful trade of war, where men hurry each other to hell with awful precipitation; in the cruel persecutions inflicted on the righteous; in that lust of power, insatiate avarice, and hardened infidelity, so prevalent among the higher classes of society; in the scenes of riot, intoxication, and intemperance, and oaths, and blasphemies, that prevail among the poor.

3. *The wickedness of the wicked presses into its service the whole man:* the soul, with all its powers, and the body with all its members.

4. *The wickedness of the wicked has abounded in all ages of the world.* It has prevailed in all periods of time, pervaded all climes, and formed a principal ingredient in the histories of all ages. Whether we look at the old world—at Sodom and Gomorrah—the various nations of the earth, who were not blessed with the light of revelation—or even at God's peculiar people—we shall see how the wickedness of the wicked has abounded. Inquire,

II. WHEN MAY IT BE SAID THAT THIS WICKEDNESS COMES TO AN END? The end of a thing is its termination, or the extinction of its existence.

1. *The wickedness of the wicked comes to an end, partially, in the individual conversion of sinners to God.* "When the wicked man turns away from the wickedness that he hath committed," he ceases to do evil, and learns to do well; and God regenerates his nature, so that old things pass away, and all things become new.

2. *It will come to an end generally by the conversion of the world to God.* Wars will end, Isa. ii. 2—4. Private piques and animosities will end, Isa. xi. 13. Idolatry will end, Zeph. iii. 9; Isa. ii. 18; lx. 12. The dominion of the devil will end, Rev. xx 2. Ignorance of God will end, Isa. xi. 9. Jewish blindness and prejudice will end, Rom. xi. 25, 26. Prove,

III. THAT THIS IS A MOST DESIRABLE OBJECT.

1. *It is desirable on God's account.* How is the name of God blasphemed by the wickedness of the wicked! His goodness insulted—his laws violated—his people lampooned! Wickedness is hateful in his sight; it is contrary to his nature, to his prohibitions, to his grace, and to his Spirit.

2. *It is desirable on our own account.* Good men have always been grieved at the wickedness of the wicked. Lot was vexed by their filthy conversation, 2 Peter ii. 7. The spirit of Moses was so provoked by the wickedness of Israel as to speak unadvisedly, &c. Ps. cvi. 33. David beheld the transgressors and was grieved, Ps. cxix. 158. Jeremiah exclaimed, "O that my head were waters," &c. ix. 1. And Paul said, "Many walk of whom I have told you," &c. Phil. iii. 18. Nor does the wickedness of the wicked wound our feelings only; it endangers our souls. People of the soundest constitutions may be infected by disease, when obliged to live among disordered persons; and Christians may fall from their own steadfastness by the fascinations of wickedness.

3. *It is desirable on account of those who are the immediate subjects of this wickedness.* Their state is deeply to be deplored. Miserable they must be; for wickedness is as ruinous to a man's peace, as poison is to his health. Even in this world, wickedness and wretchedness are inseparably twined together; and in eternity, perdition must be the inevitable lot of the wicked, Ps. ix. 17; xi. 6, 7. Ask,

IV. WHAT MEANS CAN BE ADOPTED TO PUT AN END TO THE WICKEDNESS OF THE WICKED? God alone possesses the power of eradicating the principles of wickedness from the human heart, but he often uses men as his instruments in effecting this desirable work. As Christians, we should therefore,

1. *Give no countenance to wickedness.* We should set our faces as a flint against every kind of wickedness. There is such a thing as the being partakers of other men's sins. Saul did not stone Stephen, but he held the clothes of the men who did it, and was a pleased spectator of the infernal sport.

2. *Warn the wicked of their danger.* They are in danger, many of them know it not; they are going blindly on to perdition. Labour to show them their danger; tear the scales from their eyes. You may say it is useless,—they will only

mock you. You must leave that with God; the duty is yours—the event is his.

3. *Pray that their wickedness may come to an end.* Wrestle with God in their behalf; say with David, “O let the wickedness of the wicked,” &c. Who can fully unfold the prevalence of prayer?

INFER.

1. What a dreadful state the world is in! How awful must it appear in the sight of God and good angels! We see but little of the wickedness of the world, but it is all naked and open to the view of God.

2. Have we turned away from our wickedness? Let us thank God for his converting grace.

3. In return, let us do what we can to pluck others as brands from the burning.

BETA.

LVI. HEAVENLY FELICITY.

PSALM xvi. 11.

“In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

OUR text refers to the heavenly state: a state about which our best observations are very imperfect; for what can children of the dust say about immortal glory, and immortal life? And yet, as God hath, through his infinite goodness and mercy in Christ Jesus, rendered this glory and this life attainable by such as we are, and hath, in his word, frequently spoken of the world of spirits, and of blessedness, it cannot be improper for us to expatiate on those passages in which he thus speaks. The prophets and the apostles dwell sublimely and delightfully on heaven; but our blessed Saviour speaks of it most familiarly

and easily; and it should not be overlooked, that our text, though found in the book of Psalms, is, according to St. Peter, Acts ii. 25, really the language of the Lord from heaven. The *nature*, the *plenitude*, and the *duration* of heavenly felicity are here asserted.

I. THE NATURE OF HEAVENLY FELICITY.

It is living in the presence of God. The presence of God sometimes means the local manifestation of the divine glory, Gen. iii. 8; iv. 16; 1 Chron. xvi. 27; Jude 24; Heb. ix. 24. When it expresses a *state*, it signifies the *favour* and the *friendship* of God, Ps. cxl. 13; Exod. xxxiii. 14; 2 Kings xiii. 23; xxiv. 20. Hence, to live in the presence of God, is to live where God particularly displays his glorious attributes; and to live in such a state of intimate friendship and favour with God, as to amount to familiar converse and communion.

It is living at the right hand of God: that is, in a state of *exaltation*, *dignity*, and *glory*; see Ps. xlv. 9; cx. 1; Matt. xxv. 33; xxvi. 64; Col. iii. 1; Heb. i. 3. In the present life, the saints of God are frequently found in situations which are the very reverse of dignified, exalted, and glorious. Lazarus the beggar, the fishermen of Galilee, and thousands of others, are so many proofs of this. But the Redeemer of men, who suffered more degradation than all his followers, said, "where I am, there shall also my servants be;" and having purged our sins, he "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

It is a state of joy. "In thy presence there is joy." The pleasing sensation termed joy, however gratifying, is but indifferently suited to the present state of man, and is experienced by him in but a very imperfect manner. *Man is born to sorrow*, and his days are said to be "full of sorrow." God does indeed, at times, kindly administer to his children joy, as a cordial to revive them amidst the depressions of life; but even then they "rejoice with trembling." Heaven is, in these cases, almost the very reverse of earth; for, in that state, *man is born to joy*.

It is a state of pleasures. "At thy right hand there are pleasures." *Here*, our pleasures, such as they are, are enjoyed through the medium of senses equally susceptible of, and subservient to, the operations of pain. We see, we hear, we taste, we feel, what sometimes, it is true, pleases: but how

much more frequently, what causes no small degree of inconvenience! *There*, it will be all enjoyment; our senses, whatever they may be, will admit pleasure only; they will be pure and perfect in their kind; and all the objects in that state will be suited to the pleasurable exercises of those senses. We derive pleasure here—from intellectual acquirements, from converse of friends, from Christian company, and from divine worship. And, among other things, we prize most highly the pleasures derived from an ineffable union with the Saviour, “whom having not seen, we love.” *There* the acquirements will be of the highest order, the conversation of the best sort, the company will be most select and excellent, the worship will be entirely spiritual, and we shall see our glorious Redeemer as he is. But this is almost encroaching on another part of our subject.

II. THE PLENITUDE OF HEAVENLY FELICITY. This is expressed by the word *fulness*. Here our enjoyments, even our *religious* enjoyments, are accompanied by fear, mixed with sorrow, frequently interrupted, at best but partial, and at most but small.

There will be a fulness;—what is pure, without any alloy—perpetual, without any interruption—what is general, without deficiency—and what is enough, without any satiety. Even *here* the divine glories

‘Blaze all nature round,
And strike the wondering sight,
Through skies, and seas, and solid ground.’

But there the universe will probably be the range of vision, and all the works of God the subjects of contemplation; the expanded powers of the glorified saint will reach far and wide, and be ever exploring what is new, and gratified with what is explored: for,

III. THE DURATION OF HEAVENLY FELICITY WILL BE FOR EVERMORE. For evermore is one of the scriptural expressions denoting interminable duration. In the present state, duration is measured; and the revolutions of the heavenly orbs, among other grand purposes, serve for seasons, and for days, and years; but, in the other world, the sun no more goes down, nor the moon withdraws her shining. There is no night there! It is everlasting day! Time is no longer! All is eternity! In the

holy Scriptures, to whatever heaven or the heavenly state is compared, everlasting duration is associated with it. As a place, it is a house eternal in the heavens, 2 Cor. v. 1. As a residence, it is dwelling in the house of the Lord for ever, Ps. xxxiii. 6. It is life—eternal, everlasting, Matt. xxv. 46; Rom. vi. 22; 1 John ii, 25. A crown of life, of glory, that fadeth not, 1 Cor. ix. 25; 1 Pet. v. 4. It is eternal glory, 1 Pet. v. 10. Everlasting joy, Isa. xxxv. 10. There are pleasures for evermore. It is true, that those who think themselves at liberty to amalgamate the holy doctrines of the Bible with their crude metaphysics, have said, that as moral freedom is essential to enjoyment, and as the saints in heaven must, for that reason, be free, so it may be possible for them to abuse their liberty, and thus cease to be happy. If such were sure that they understood all that is possibly connected with the manner in which glorified saints can morally enjoy happiness, this reasoning might have some show of propriety. But it is enough to add, that the holy Scriptures declare the state of the saints in heaven to be perfectly secure. See, in addition to the above, Rev. xxi. 1—5; Luke xvi. 26.

Saints of God! Think on, contemplate, your heavenly, your everlasting home!

Sinners! The reverse of all this bliss awaits the impenitent.

GAMMA.

LVII. A SUNDAY SCHOOL SERMON.

PSALM xxxiv. 11.

“Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”

THE present day may with propriety be specially designated ‘A day of religious institutions;’ of institutions combining in their members, the good and the wise of all ranks, and having for their objects every needy and miserable child of man.

Among these we should naturally expect to find some that had immediately in view the welfare of the rising generation. There are many of this kind; and not the least distinguished or useful is that which embraces Sunday Schools. If this institution might be allowed a voice descriptive of its own peculiar province, what language could be more appropriate than that of our text—"Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord?" Waiving, however, all personifications and figures, I will endeavour from these words to point out the duty of those who teach in Sunday Schools, and the duty of those who would learn.

I. THE DUTY OF THE TEACHER.

1. *He should invite.* Children need invitation. It should not be presumed that they really know the importance or the value of instruction, so as to seek it; for "foolishness is bound in the heart of a child." Every thing about a teacher should be inviting; his appearance, his looks, his manner, his temper, his language, should in effect say, "Come, ye children." Besides, as the teaching is gratuitous, there should be the strongest intimations that it is perfectly free, and that the children are very welcome.

2. *He should teach.*—*Teaching* is communicating information, and supposes in the teacher, a knowledge of what he would teach; and an ability to communicate that knowledge. The teaching should be adapted to the age, the genius, and the capacity of the child. "I will teach you" is expressive of willingness and readiness, in the teacher.—Important qualities.

3. *The ultimate subject of his teaching should be "the fear of the Lord."* "The fear of the Lord" means religion, Prov. xv. 33, and xix. 23. But children should be taught literally to fear the Lord; for many of them can be restrained only by fear. Teaching to read is not enough; if we stop here, we shall in many instances, only teach them to do wickedness with greater effect. Witness many of the learned of all ages and nations, of all ranks and professions, not excepting priests, either pagan or popish. Learning of every species and degree, capable of being hallowed by religion, and consecrated to the service of God, is excellent. But when any thing is suffered to take the precedence of "the fear of God:" when the aim is rather to accom-

plish than to make good, to communicate useful (so called) rather than religious information; there is reason to fear that the teacher, at least in a Sunday School, has missed his way. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

4. *Teachers!* mark the verses following the text; here moral is blended with doctrinal instruction. Here you have the creature's duty; God's promise; the rewards of the righteous; the punishment of the wicked, present and eternal. Thus instruct children to "remember their Creator in the days of their youth." And never forget to say to them, in the wholesome language found in the church catechism, or in language to that effect, 'My good children, know that you are not able to do these things of yourselves,' &c. &c. I will now endeavour to describe.

II. THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO WISH TO LEARN.

1. *They must come.* Children should be invited; but when invited, they should at least come. Parents should take care to send them; and facilitate their going. And when sent, they should come willingly, regularly, and in time. They should be sent, and should come where they may "learn the fear of the Lord." And they should understand that there is nothing which they can be taught so important as this.

2. *They must hearken.* This expression often occurs in the Scriptures, and means attention—understanding—application—practice, Exod. vi. 30; Jer. xxvi. 3; Isa. lv. 2; Jer. xxxv.

13. Learners should listen attentively, should endeavour to understand what they hear from their teachers—and should at home, and every where, endeavour to practise accordingly.—They should respect their teachers; their authority, their knowledge, their kindness and their piety.—And, by the way, teachers should take care to be such as the children ought to respect. It remains to,

III. ENFORCE THESE DUTIES.

1. *By the command of God.* Consult attentively the following passages, Deut. vi. 7, and xi. 19; Ps. lxxviii. 4—8; Eph. vi. 4.

2. *By the example of the Old and New Testament saints;* and of Christ, who gathered the lambs with his arm, and carried them in his bosom. See Gen. xviii. 19; Prov. *passim*.—Tim. iii. 15.

3. *By the consequence of remaining in ignorance.* See Prov. xix. 2, and x. 21; Isa. xxvii. 11; Hos. iv. 6; John xvi. 3; Rom. x. 2.

4. *By the blessings connected with sanctified religious instruction.* Out of a great number of passages illustrative of this, the following is sufficient: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it," Prov. xxii. 6.

But what can be said to children to enforce their duty? Think, children, on Joseph, whose early piety secured him from ruin; and, connected with his early culture, ultimately rendered him the wise and able governor of an important kingdom—on David, who, beginning to serve God in his youth, became inimitable as a poet and as a musician; unconquerable as a warrior; and, as a king, a man after God's own heart; and, more than all this, great as a prophet and as a man of God. Think on Obadiah, who, serving God from his youth, remained uncontaminated even in the court of Ahab. Above all, think on and obey that divine command, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," &c., and rightly estimate that gracious promise, "They that seek me early shall find me," Prov. viii. 17.

GAMMA.

LVIII. THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION DAILY LOADETH US WITH BENEFITS.

PSALM lXviii. 19.

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation."

"O LORD how manifold are thy works!" What a diversity prevails in all the walks of nature! How multiform are the

operations of God in the church! What a variety of truths are displayed in the Bible! But were we to analyze the sacred volume, we should not find one sentiment of more frequent occurrence than that with which our text commences: "Blessed be the Lord!" How proper then for our consideration! Nothing can be more calculated to inspire us with this sentiment than the subject before us. Here we have,

I. WHAT GOD IS; He is "the God of our Salvation."

II. WHAT GOD DOES; He "daily loadeth us with benefits."

III. WHAT WE SHOULD DO IN RETURN; "Bless the Lord."

I. WHAT GOD IS; "The God of our salvation." Salvation is deliverance from danger; the term is sometimes applied to deliverance from human enemies, then we call it a temporal salvation. It is generally, however, applied to the soul. Man is a sinner, and sin exposes him to danger; for "the wages of sin is death," and "the soul that sinneth it shall die." But there is deliverance from this danger; this is attributed to God.

1. *The scheme of salvation* originated in God. When man sinned, he could not restore himself to the forfeited favour and image of God. He had no desire for salvation—he could make no atonement for his sin—he could not extricate himself from the power of his enemies. But God pitied him in all his wretchedness; and "God sent not his Son into the world," &c. John iii. 17.

2. *The means of salvation are afforded us by God.* God sends us his gospel, containing good news of salvation; his ministers to declare the way of salvation. He gives us a day of salvation. He affords us Christian Sabbaths, religious ordinances, and various means of grace; in order to promote our salvation.

3. *The work of salvation is accomplished in the human soul by God's immediate agency.* "Behold God is become my salvation!" The Holy Ghost convicts of sin, and shows us the need of salvation; witnesseth with our spirits that we are saved; sanctifies the soul, and makes it his holy habitation; and seals it unto the day of redemption.

4. *The sole glory of our final salvation will endlessly redound to God.* In heaven we shall have clearer discoveries of the greatness, extent, and freeness of our salvation; we shall see the evils from which we have been delivered, and the hell we have escaped, and we shall feel how deeply we are indebted to God for our salvation, and sing "salvation to our God," &c., Rev. vii. 10.

II. WHAT GOD DOES FOR US;—He "daily loadeth us with benefits." Three things we notice here.

1. *The nature of God's gifts;*—they are "benefits;" a benefit is a kindness, a favour conferred, an act of love. God's gifts are benefits, not deserts; were God to deal with us according to our demerit, we should be loaded with punishments rather than benefits. Even our afflictions are benefits, as they "work for us," &c. 2 Cor. iv. 17; Heb. xii. 10.

'Crosses from his sovereign hand
Are blessings in disguise.'

2. *Their number.* We are loaded with benefits. Here we may enumerate the intellectual powers we possess—the health we enjoy—the age of the world in which we live—the country we inhabit—the civil and religious advantages with which we are favoured; and especially the spiritual privileges which God has so graciously conferred upon us.

3. *The frequency of their communication.* He "daily loadeth us," &c. God's benefits come to us daily; they are new every morning, great is his faithfulness.

'Each evening shows his tender love,
Each rising morn his plenteous grace;
His waken'd wrath doth slowly move,
His willing mercy flies apace.'

And these benefits flow to us *freely*, unsolicited, unimplored, unsought. *Seasonably*, exactly as we need them. Critics state that instead of "daily loadeth us with benefits," it should be read 'who bears our burdens, or supports us, every day.' This an interesting truth! In the wilderness God bare Israel as a man doth bear his son, Deut. i. 31. Or as an eagle bears

her young on her wings, Deut. xxxii. 11. The promise is, "Even to hoary hairs will I carry you," Isa. xlvi. 4. We have our cares, and burdens, and anxieties, but God invites us to cast them upon him, Ps. lv. 22.

III. WHAT WE SHOULD DO IN RETURN.—"Blessed be the LORD." To bless signifies to extol, exalt, or speak well of a person; and to bless the Lord is to speak good of his name.

1. *We should bless the Lord sincerely.*—Hypocrisy is hateful to God. What our lips express our hearts should feel. In order to this we should meditate on God's benefits, and on our unworthiness, sinfulness, and great demerit.

2. *We should bless the Lord affectionately.*—Our gratitude should be the effusion of love. How pleasing is the exercise of praise when love tunes our hearts.

3. *We should bless the Lord constantly.*—"I will bless the Lord at all times." The benefits of God are incessantly flowing to us, and our gratitude should be as constantly returned to him.

4. *We should bless the Lord practically.*—To say, "We praise thee O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord," while we practically violate his laws, must be abominable in his sight. Let us "praise him not only with our lips but by our lives," &c.

CONCLUSION.

1. *Is the Lord the God of our salvation?*—Are we saved from sin? From the dominion of sin? From our easily besetting sin? Salvation from sin is essential to our being saved from hell. God is the Saviour, and the only Saviour. He invites us to look to him and be saved. O let us avail ourselves of his kind invitation! How desirable it is to be saved! May God be our Saviour, even the God of our salvation!

2. *Does he daily load us with his benefits?*—What a lesson for humility! What have we that we have not received? What an excitement for love to him who deals so bountifully with us! Does God bear our burdens? Let us learn to depend upon him. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved.

3. *Are we saying, "Blessed be the Lord?"*—Are his statutes our songs in the house of our pilgrimage? Let us anticipate

the period when we shall join the society of angels, and rival them in the chorus of praise.

‘Thee they sing with glory crowned,
We extol the slaughter’d Lamb ;
Lower if our voices sound,
Our subject is the same.’

BETA.

LIX. DISTRESSING BEREAVEMENTS UNDER AFFECTING CIRCUMSTANCES.

[The outline of a Sermon occasioned by the death of a pious Missionary’s excellent wife in the Island of Ceylon.]

PSALM lxxxviii. 18.

“ Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.”

LIFE a state of trial,—called to submit to the discipline of Providence, to acquire right views, principles, habits: to be prepared for a place at God’s right hand.—Life a varied scene: some called to endure much.—Pious not exempt: share in national, domestic, individual calamities.—May continue long: prayers, hopes, exertions of no avail. Psalm describes heavy affliction,—writer wise; little inferior to Solomon, 1 Chron. ii. 6.—encompassed with trouble; near the grave,—considered dead,—friends ignorant, or regardless of his calamities,—probably in prison,—heard the wind whistle through the grates.—Moreover, divine wrath upon him, and every consolation denied,—‘wearier night succeeded wearier day; and bitterer was the grief devoured alone.’—Melancholy meditation! “Lover,” &c. In our text may be noticed,

I. THE CONNEXIONS WHICH IMPART COMFORT TO LIFE. Life is not destitute of comfort,—creation, indeed, under a curse: but miseries may often be traced to individual mis-

conduct.—Godliness is profitable; and the regular, pious, and holy, are known and esteemed.

1. *Lover.* Love, a passion common to the human race, includes a desire to promote another's happiness; affection bounded by reverence; result of approbation.—Promoted and hallowed by Christian principles.

2. *Friend.* Friendship implies mutual attachment: kindness accepted, acknowledged, returned; or, mutual perception, approbation of amiable and respectable qualities.—Unreasonable expectations, fickleness, unfaithfulness, have induced some to call it a mere name; contradicted by experience and by the pages of inspiration: David and Jonathan, Paul and Timothy. The great example without a miracle, drew from the lips of malice, "Behold how he loved him!"—Christianity calls it brotherly love; 'Poor is the friendless master of a world!' Many of us feel a melancholy pleasure in tracing the varied incidents of friendship.—The spontaneous kindness of our departed sister was experienced by all denominations of missionaries; and the memorial thereof will accompany the spread of the Gospel. Free from party spirit, we closed our interviews with prayer for the whole estate of Christ's church, preceded by that beautiful hymn, 'Arise my soul and spread thy wings: thy better portion trace,' &c. Yes; 'one family, we dwell in him: one church,' &c. Christians are lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they are not divided. A third connexion is,

3. *Mine acquaintance.* Love and friendship blended, increased, established into fellowship. [Prayer-book *ver.* lovers and friends, *pl.*; acquaintance, as here, *sing.*] Authorized to believe he means his help-meet, the doubler of joy, divider of grief. The mourning widower of our departed friend may adopt the sentiment.—She had my preference; honoured me with approbation, and sacramental acts have declared our mutual resolution to participate in all—ease and pain, joy and woe. We have realized the same;—united in an enterprise the most important—crossed oceans—in 'distant, barbarous climes, rivers unknown to song, where first the sun gilds Indian mountains.' Alas! her days are past, her purposes are broken off; oh! delicious, though mournful recollection, "The coals thereof," &c. Hearers behold, admire, imitate her devotion to the blessed work. Bade adieu—

repaired to 'the farthest verge of the green earth.' Perceiving her accomplishments, and fitness for an enterprise less hazardous, a Judas may inquire, "To what purpose is this waste?" but the observing Master utters the reproof, "Trouble not the woman, she hath done a good work; it shall be told for a memorial." Our text shews us,

II. THE LOSS OF CONNEXIONS. Life essentially composed of perpetual change rather than of permanence; "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow,—all flesh is grass, and," &c. The noblest triumphs are soon over;—

'Earth's highest station ends in, "Here he lies."
And, "Dust to dust," concludes their noblest song.'

1. *The writer had lost all, and "despaired even of life."* Sick and in prison, without a visitor,—surrounded by scenes of woe,—ray of rising sun, struggling through a crevice, and darting on the gloomy wall, denoted the comfort of others, and his individual misery. No written letter, or printed gazette,—condition aggravated by suspense and uncertainty. [The *Habeas Corpus* then unknown.]

2. *Lovers and friends are lost by desertion and removal.* Excess of attachment itself promotes it:—extravagant expectations not being realized, or reciprocal, end in disappointment; if moral cure unwrought thereby, proportionate dislike; circumstances promote it,—difference of genius, followed by varied pursuits and habits of reflection.—Early connexions where? In as many directions as the mariner's compass. Often these separations are acutely painful. The disappointed lover gets sympathy. Not the passion, but the situation interests. The spectator cannot conjecture the possibly desperate consequences.

3. The *missionary*, by removal, may be said to "suffer the loss of all things." Friends and brethren—no probability of regaining any thing analagous abroad. Perhaps his hardest lesson may be to learn what St. Paul places first among his apostolic accomplishments, 1 Cor. iv. 10. "We are *fools* for Christ's sake." In becoming a missionary, he not only parts from all that is dear, but, humiliating reflection! he forfeits the reputation arising from his ministerial and literary character; in attempting to speak a foreign language, he appears a fool to all intents and purposes. The nature and difficulties of his work, and the requisite talents and tempers, are neither sufficiently understood nor duly appreciated.

4. *Bereavement.* Appointed to die—to make room for the next blooming race—to answer the ends of justice and mercy. First falsehood, “Ye shall not die.” First sentence, “Ye shall.” How impartial! “Neither doth God respect any person.” *Margin*, “knows no faces.” Usefulness, zeal for his glory, dignity, royalty, no exemption. “House appointed for all living.”

5. *Our friend has gone far from us.* Far from us at the period of her departure to eternity—from her husband—acuteness thereby heightened—final solemnity mournful in the extreme;—on an island in the midst of the rolling ocean; in a distant part of another hemisphere; she, like Doddridge and Whitefield, returned no more, or saw again her native country:—

‘By foreign hands thy dying eyes were closed,
By foreign hands thy decent limbs composed,
By foreign hands thy humble grave adorned;
By strangers honoured, and by strangers mourn’d!’

III. IN REMOVALS WE SHOULD TRACE THE AGENCY OF GOD. Immediate instrument, tyranny. Though severe, and knew God was good, the writer attributes his calamities to him: “Thou hast,” &c.

1. *God has the sovereign disposal of all.*—All nature, all classes of beings. Can justly do what we cannot do without injustice. Neither our duty nor privilege to account for, or complain. Principles of divine government we know; righteousness and judgment;—but individual acts are wrapped in clouds and darkness. Sometimes reproves kings,—“touch not mine anointed.” Other times removes pillars from the church: Baptist, Abel, &c., yet says “Friend, I do thee no wrong.”

2. *Wisdom and goodness displxyed in our sufferings.* “Too wise to err,” &c. Eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth,—revolutions, battles, kings ascending, counsels advising, yet, “not a sparrow falls,” &c. Great and small observed by him. “Ye are of more value than many sparrows,”—than many men. But when the volume of providence shall be opened, righteousness and rigour, mercy and vengeance, will be explained to an assembled universe. The faith of God’s people, that the “judge of all the earth will do right,” will be “found unto praise, and honour, and glory;”—an echo will resound through earth and heaven, “Hallelujah, salvation, and glory, and power

unto the Lord our God, for true and righteous are his judgments."

IV. OUR IMPROVEMENT IS DESIGNED IN ALL DISPENSATIONS. We may improve the present,

1. By *sympathy*. "Weep with them that weep,"—shew fellow-feeling. See the disorganized family mourning apart! A melancholy page in the mission history. Let your sympathy alleviate the grief; imitate angels, for—

' From above descending spirits move,
To wipe the falling tear from mortal eyes;
To bring to earth the nectar of the skies;
To blend with human griefs their angel sympathies.'

2. By *gratitude*. How many favours pass away unheeded! Think of the blessed portion of the righteous. Light affliction—weight of glory.

3. By *resignation*. Many evils inevitable. Heaven begun, but not completed below. Religion refines, ennobles man.—God our guide.

4. By *preparation*. Every moment hastens our end,—every funeral a sermon.—"Be ye also ready,"—live to God,—be zealous in his service,—and "living or dying, Christ is gain."

LAMBDA.

LX. VAIN THOUGHTS ARE HATEFUL.

PSALM cxix. 113.

"I hate vain thoughts."

THE outward conduct of man greatly depends on the inward thoughts of his heart. If these be good, his life will be good; but, if they be evil, his life will be evil. Therefore, "Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life," Prov. iv. 23. Many who are shocked at blasphemous, impure,

and revengeful thoughts, are not sufficiently careful to guard against vain thoughts; but, if these are not checked when they arise, our life will be vain, and our death without honour.

I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY VAIN THOUGHTS ?

1. The original word *Soophim*, according to Dr. John Taylor, is applied, figuratively, to the thoughts or sentiments of the mind, when they are *discomposed* and *distracted*; and when they are not united in truth and virtue, but *split* or *diverge*, and branch out into falsehood, folly, or vanity. In this sense all the wild roving of the mind, like those of the heathen nations, in their fanciful theology, may be denominated vain thoughts; and, whilst they are rent by violent imaginations, we wander far and wide in the field of error and of sin.

2. Our thoughts are vain, when they *wander from God, from our duties, and from our best interests*. The pious have to lament the wanderings and distractions of their thoughts in prayer, in reading, and hearing the word of God, and in every other act of religious worship; and how frequently have they been brought into heaviness, by giving way to these foolish roving of the heart! But let them awake out of these wild dreams, and say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul," Psalm cxvi. 7.

3. All *useless, trifling, impertinent, and perplexing thoughts*, which tend neither to the glory of God nor our own salvation, *are vain*. These are frequently crowding into our minds, and hurry us away from one vanity to another, without any order or connexion, till the soul is completely dissipated, and lost in wild confusion. But when the Lord arrests these thoughts, and pours into our hearts the sweet consolations of his grace, we can say, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul," Psalm xciv. 19.

4. *Our thoughts are vain when we think too highly of ourselves*. We are naturally prone to overvalue our own wisdom, power, and goodness; and when this is the case we despise instruction, imagine we can do what we please, and, being lifted up with pride, fall into the condemnation of the devil, 1 Tim. iii. 6. Will not this remark apply to a confused, distracted, raging mob; to which, in the opinion of Dr. Adam Clarke, there is a reference in our text? The apostle Paul gave the

Christians in Rome a solemn caution against these vain aspiring thoughts, Rom. xii. 3.

5. When we indulge *fanciful notions of future greatness*, which are never likely to be realized, our thoughts are *vain*. These are often indulged in youth, confirmed in manhood, and carried on to old age. We build castles in the air, and puff ourselves up with vain dreams, and lying imaginations. To these the prophet Jeremiah may allude, where he says, "How long shall these vain thoughts lodge within thee?" It is probable that the devil suggests these thoughts: it is certain that pride and covetousness feed them; and they generally end either in gloomy melancholy or in real madness.

II. WHY SHOULD WE HATE VAIN THOUGHTS ?

1. We should hate them because they are really *hateful in themselves*. They are evil and abominable; and those who love the Lord are commanded to hate evil, Ps. xcvi. 10. There are six things which the LORD hateth, and one of these is, "an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations," Prov. vi. 18.

2. Vain thoughts should be hated because *they disturb and distract the soul*; and under their influence we are "like the troubled sea which cannot rest," Isa. lvii. 20. The choicest outward blessings are lightly esteemed, when these thoughts take hold of us; and we are tormented by them in every place and circumstance, for like frightful ghosts, they follow us wherever we go.

3. They should be hated because *they are sinful* in the sight of the Lord. He sees them as they rise, marks their progress, and ever frowns upon them, Prov. xv. 26. Human laws have no control over these hidden springs of action; but God will bring them into judgment in the great day, Eccles. xii. 14.

4. The *dreadful effects* of evil thoughts should make them hateful to us. They produce error both in judgment and practice; violence in our temper and behaviour; distraction and disorder in our works. Weakness, folly, and misery attend them; and future punishment closes up the awful scene, Psalm ix. 17.

5. These thoughts should be hated because *they are a dishonour to our nature*. They sink us lower than the brutes that perish, and make us like devils, whose thoughts are always

evil. There is nothing in them of the great and noble; but every thing of the mean and contemptible. A good man is elevated by his thoughts; he rises far above the world, and is rich in heavenly wisdom; but he whose thoughts are vain, has that wisdom only which is "earthly, sensual, and devilish," James iii. 15.

III WHAT MUST BE DONE TO AVOID VAIN THOUGHTS ?

1. Let us *humbly and earnestly pray to the Lord for a clean heart and a right spirit*, Ps. li. 10. He who tries any other method of correcting his thoughts, begins at the wrong end, endeavouring to remove the effect without removing the cause; but when the tree is made good, the fruit will be good, Matt. xii. 33.

2. We should *acquire a love for the law of the Lord*. David says, in this verse, "Thy law will I love." That law, including all the inspired books, will furnish us with fine materials of thought, and direct us how to think to the best advantage; and he who makes that law his study, by day and by night, will hate vain thoughts, Ps. i. 2.

3. *Our thoughts should be carefully examined as they spring up in our hearts*; and we should resist those which are vain, on their first appearance. Bishop Beveridge says, 'I am resolved by the grace of God, to stop every thought, at its first entering into my heart, and to examine it, whence it comes, and whither it tends.' When these thoughts first appear, they are weak; but by indulgence they gather strength.

4. When a vain thought arises, instantly *pray to God for help*, to resist and overcome it. We are weak, but he is strong. Ask for his grace, with importunity, and it shall be given, Luke xi. 9. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength," Isa. xxvi. 4.

5. *Acquire the habit of close and calm thinking*. This remark should be applied to business, to learning, and to religion. The practice will produce wonderful effects; and, when this habit is strengthened by grace, we shall not be easily conquered by vain and foolish thoughts.

6. But above all, *bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,"* 2 Cor. x. 5. He is our Lord and Master, and should govern both the inward and the outward man.

While we look to him by the eye of faith, his Word and Spirit will guide us in the right way; and then our thoughts will be pleasing to ourselves, acceptable to God, and useful to men.

INFERENCES.

1. While our thoughts are wise and holy, neither wicked men nor evil spirits can do us any harm, 1 Pet. iii. 13.

2. Therefore our greatest care, in the government of our hearts and lives, should be directed to our thoughts.

3. Every attempt which we make to banish vain thoughts from our hearts, in the name and strength of the Lord, will be crowned with complete success; for while he strengthens us, we can do all things, Phil. iv. 13.

SIGMA.

LXI. THE FEAR OF THE LORD INSPIRES
THE SOUL OF MAN WITH CONFIDENCE.

PROVERBS xiv. 26.

“In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge.”

SIN makes man a coward; but righteousness inspires him with courage. As a proof of this, it is affirmed that “the wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion,” Prov. xxviii. 1. He who fears the LORD, with a filial fear, has confidence in the most imminent dangers and perils; being assured that as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever, Ps. cxxv. 2. Here are two things:—First, In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and, Secondly, His children shall have a place of refuge.

I. IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS STRONG CONFIDENCE.

1. The fear of the Lord, in this passage, includes both *inward and outward religion*; or that reverential love of JEHO-

VAH, which produces holy tempers, and a holy conduct. In other passages, where the fear of the Lord is expressed, without any reference to the keeping of commandments, the phrase implies solid piety, and sound morality. Thus when it is affirmed of Obadiah, that "he feared the Lord greatly," the meaning is, he was a pious, holy man, both in heart and life, 1 Kings, xviii. 3.

2. Genuine religion, or the fear of the Lord, *inspires the soul with confidence*. This implies a humble boldness and firmness in the hour of danger, under a persuasion that Almighty God will protect and deliver all who love and fear HIM; and it stands opposed to rashness, presumption, and imaginary security, without any reference to God and Providence. Let us consider this, as it appears in holy men, under the following circumstances:—

3. The fear of the Lord gives strong confidence in *poverty*. The pious poor use the appointed means to obtain the necessities of life; and in the use of those means they trust in the Lord for food and raiment, confidently resting on that promise, "Verily thou shalt be fed," Ps. xxxvii. 3.

4. In *sickness*, the fear of the Lord gives strong confidence and firmness of mind. In that painful season, the good man considers himself as being placed under the immediate care of the Lord; and when human help fails, the Lord strengthens him upon the bed of languishing, and makes all his bed in his sickness, Ps. xli. 3.

5. Piety inspires a man with confidence under the *persecutions* of wicked and unreasonable men. He fears the Lord, but does not fear "them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," Matt. x. 28. They persecute him for righteousness sake; but he rejoices and is exceeding glad, knowing that he has a great reward in heaven, Matt. v. 10—12.

6. Under *strong temptations* from the *wicked one*, religion gives great confidence. That evil spirit is a conquered enemy, Matt. iv. 10, 11; he is not suffered to tempt the pious more than they are able to bear; and the Lord always makes a way for them to escape, 1 Cor. x. 13. Rash confidence might lead them to abuse *the enemy*; but prudent confidence leads them to say, "The Lord rebuke thee," Jude 9.

7. When nature is convulsed by *storms and tempests*, there

is strong confidence in the fear of the Lord. Thus when David was exposed to the raging of a terrible tempest, he had strong confidence, was graciously preserved, and ascribed his safety and deliverance to the Lord. "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters," Ps. xviii. 16. And this confidence is felt by good men, when winds blow, when thunders roar, when lightnings blaze, and when earthquakes shake the ground.

8. If the Lord visit a nation with his *four sore judgments*, "the sword, the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence," there is strong confidence in his fear. In those dreadful seasons of justice and wrath, righteous men may not be able to deliver either son or daughter; but they shall "deliver their own soul by their righteousness," Ezek. xiv. 20. And they rest securely on that special promise, "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him," Isa. iii. 10.

9. In the solemn hour of death, when every thing earthly withdraws its aid, there is strong confidence in the fear of the Lord. He is present with his dying saints, Ps. xxiii. 4; they have fought the good fight, 2 Tim iv. 7; holy angels wait around them, and are ready to carry their happy spirits to the heavenly feast, Luke xvi. 22; and the Lord Jesus Christ stands ready to receive them to himself, John xiv. 1—3. Acts vii. 59.

10. The ground of this confidence, in life and death, is the merciful kindness of the LORD. He knows the state and circumstances of his people, Exod. iii. 7, he stands by them in dangers and difficulties, Isa. xliii. 2; and he delivers them, because he delighteth in them, 2 Sam. xxii. 20. They dare not confide in themselves, well knowing that without the Lord they are ignorant, weak, and helpless; but his wisdom makes them wise, his strength makes them strong, and his power makes them mighty and valiant.

II. AND HIS CHILDREN SHALL HAVE A PLACE OF REFUGE.

1. By his children we are to understand the children of the Lord. Believers are the children of God by regeneration and adoption, John i. 12; Rom. viii. 15. They partake of his nature; they love him; and they imitate him, and follow him, as

obedient children imitate and follow their earthly fathers, Eph. v. 1.

2. They have a place of refuge. The Lord is their strong hold, Nahum i. 7; he is their rock, their fortress, and their deliverer, Ps. xviii. 2; and in him they are more safe than men are in their strongly fortified cities. Christ is a refuge for guilty souls, Heb. vi. 18; and he is a covert to his people in the storm and tempest, Isa. xxxii. 2.

3. But some understand by his children, the children of God-fearing men. Bishop Patrick, one of the most judicious commentators in our language, says, 'A religious care to please the Lord in all things, gives a man the firmest resolution, and the strongest confidence of security and protection in all dangers; and his children after him may flee to God for safety, and hope to fare the better for their pious fathers' sake.'

4. These children are now placed under our care, and we are a refuge to them in danger; but soon we must leave them to an ill-natured world. Let us educate them piously, Prov. xxii. 6; set them a good example, Ps. ci. 2; pray for them, as Abraham did for Ishmael, Gen. xvii. 18; and then commit them to the care of the Lord, who will watch over them when we are in the silent grave.

5. Our last and best refuge will be found in the heavenly world. There we shall be out of the reach of danger; and there we shall enjoy rest, with God and the Lamb, for ever, Rev. vii. 16, 17. Let us, therefore, amidst all the storms of life, look up to that holy and happy place as our permanent home.

May we not rationally infer, that religion is of inestimable value, and that the enjoyment and practice of it is our highest wisdom, our greatest honour, and our best security?

SIGMA.

LXII. A CAUTION AGAINST ENVY, AND A
CALL TO PIETY.

PROV. xxiii. 17, 18.

“Let not thine heart envy sinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.

THE Proverbs of Solomon contain some of the finest maxims of morality, and the most admirable rules of holy living with which the world has ever been favoured: they exemplify a profound acquaintance with human nature, an inviolable regard to truth, and a zeal for the promotion of the best interests of mankind. The words of the text cannot be too deeply impressed upon our minds. They contain,

I. A DISSUASIVE ADVICE; “Let not thine heart,” &c.

II. AN ADMONITORY PRECEPT; “Be thou in the fear of the Lord,” &c.

III. AN ENCOURAGING ASSERTION; “For surely there is an end,” &c.

I. A DISSUASIVE ADVICE; “Let not thine heart envy,” &c. Envy is an uneasy sensation, arising from a view of the real or imaginary excellencies which others are supposed to possess, accompanied with a malignant disposition towards them. There appears to be this difference between ambition and envy; the former excites in us a desire to rise above others, but the latter leads us to wish to get others beneath us. Sinners generally are not the objects of envy. Many sinners are poor, despised, destitute, and miserable, and are more the objects of pity than envy; but some sinners are envied for the wealth of which they are possessed. They prosper in the world, their grounds bring forth plentifully, and they heap up riches and know not who shall gather them.—Others are envied for the honourable distinctions they obtain among mankind. How many are praised, extolled, and almost deified, for their scientific researches, literary knowledge, or military prowess.—Others are envied for the variety of pleasures which they have at command. Pleasures of sense

or of society. The advice in the text is, "Let not thine heart envy sinners."—This precept is practicable. There is a state of mind attainable where envy has no existence. Christians lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies; and they put on that charity which suffereth long, and is kind, which envieth nor, vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up. This precept should be obeyed,

1. *Because envy is a disposition of mind whose influence can never be justified.* When God made man, it formed no part of his character, it had no existence in his mind. It was then the sole property of the devil; this moved him to meditate the ruin of mankind: hence envy is the basest, most degrading, and most fiend-like disposition that can possibly find dominion in a human spirit; and nothing can be more mischievous. Some of the foulest crimes that have been ever perpetrated upon earth have been the offspring of envy. "The Patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt," Acts vii. 9. How cruel to sell a brother so innocent and so unoffending! What a deep and lasting affliction to an aged parent! The murder of the Prince of Life resulted from this principle; for when the Jews delivered him to Pilate, he knew that for envy they delivered him. But envy is not less injurious to ourselves than others. "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion," &c., James iii. 16. Nor is it the mind only that is disturbed by this hateful disposition, "for wrath killeth, and envy slayeth the foolish one," Job v. 2. "A sound heart is the life of the flesh, but envy the rottenness of the bones."

2. *To envy sinners is absurd.* You think they are happier than you are; what, because they have more money? But "a man's life consisteth not," &c., Luke xii. 15. Is it because they have more honour? But does happiness consist in titles, vain and transitory titles, which time destroys? Is happiness a sound, a bubble, or a mere name? Are those happier who are more frequently found in the circles of dissipation? But does happiness dwell with fox-hunters, horse-racers, card-players, gluttons, or debauchees? It is foolish to envy sinners: even now their circumstances are most pitiable. Conscience condemns them; heaven frowns upon them; hell is moved from beneath to meet them: and oh! their end will be destruction. Therefore, "fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against

the workers of iniquity," Ps. xxxvii. 1, 2. To envy sinners is unjust. Suppose God does prosper them in this world, and their grounds do bring forth plentifully? What is that to thee? "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," and he has a right to do what he will with his own. Suppose sinners do live in pleasure on the earth, and wax wanton, they are but nourishing their hearts as in the day of slaughter.—Why envy them? To envy sinners is antichristian. It is contrary to the whole spirit and design of Christianity. The New Testament teacheth us to pity sinners, to pray for their salvation, to do good to them, and perform every office of kindness towards them; but, if we envy sinners, the whole of our duties towards them will be left unfulfilled. Having considered the dissuasive advice, let us observe,

II. THE ADMONITORY PRECEPT; "Be thou in the fear of the Lord," &c. This implies,

1. *To be in possession of correct and spiritual ideas of his holy and exalted character.* How erroneous are the notions men entertain of God! Some "say in their hearts that there is no God." Some have "gods many, and lords many." Some think God is altogether such a one as themselves. But those who fear God conceive of him, "as he has revealed himself in his holy word;" as possessing such natural perfections as eternity, immensity, infinity; and such moral perfections as love, wisdom, holiness, justice, &c.

2. *To cultivate suitable dispositions of heart towards him.* Not only to think of God as he really is, but to feel towards him all those affectionate, reverential, and devout dispositions which his nature and character are calculated to inspire. Is he a God of infinite love? those who have the fear of God will love his name, his laws, his people, and "the place where his honour dwelleth." Is he inviolably just? those who fear God will tremble at the thought of offending him; and rather die than provoke the eyes of his glory, &c. "To be in the fear of the Lord all the day," it is necessary to begin every day in the fear of God. Let your voice be heard every morning, in the sacred and hallowed exercises of prayer and praise. What gratitude is due to God for the mercies of the night, to have laid down in peace, and arose in safety; what reason for prayer, that God may defend and provide for us! Never engage in any work during

the day, on which you cannot with confidence ask the blessing of God. Though God is high, yet "he hath respect unto the lowly; he giveth grace unto the humble;" he permits them to consult him on all occasions, and he promises to direct their paths. Before you engage in any enterprise, pause for a moment; and inquire, Will this be pleasing to God? Will his blessing accompany me in it? &c. In all you do, try to realize the awful presence of God. Often say to yourself, "thou God seest me," and remember, in all the labour of your hands, "that for these things God will bring you into judgment." As moral motives to induce a compliance with this precept,—consider, God is the only proper object of fear. "Sanctify the LORD God in your hearts," &c. Isa. viii. 13. "Who would not fear," &c. Jer. x. 7. Fear not them which kill the body," &c. Matt. x. 28. This principle has characterised good men in all ages. The judges chosen by Moses, were to be "able men, such as fear God," &c. Exod. xviii. 21; see also Job i. 1; Mal. iii. 16; Acts x. 2. The happy effects produced by this temper of mind, should excite us to comply with this precept. This will secure the approbation of God, Ps. cxlvii. 11; excite his compassion, Ps. ciii. 13; induce him to supply our wants, Ps. xxxiv. 9; procure for us deliverance in danger, Ps. xxxiv. 7; and make all things end well, Eccles. viii. 12.

III. AN ENCOURAGING ASSERTION:—"For surely there is an end," &c.

1. *There is an end to that prosperity with which the efforts of sinners are crowned.* Have they riches? they will either escape through their instability, or sinners will soon be constrained to leave them. Have they honours? these will soon be torn from them. Have they pleasures? these must shortly end. There is an end, this is certain, Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36. This end may come suddenly, 1 Thess. v. 3; Ps. lxxiii. 17—19. Who then can envy sinners?

2. *There is an end to the tribulations of the saints.* Their afflictions are light and momentary. From all temptations they will soon obtain an eternal deliverance. The storm of persecution will ere long blow over. Want and pain will soon end, "For they shall hunger no more," &c. Rev. vii. 16.

3. *Thine expectation shall not be cut off.* That is, the expectation of those who continue in the fear of the Lord. Seve-

ral causes conspire to cut off human expectation. The unreasonable nature of their claims. Carnal men expect too much, their expectations are raised too high. The saints expect much, but not too much; God can give more than they can expect; and God's promises exceed description. Human expectations are cut off by slothful and indolent habits. Thousands expect what they never try to realize; but saints use the means to secure the end, and hope for nothing but what they labour to gain. Human expectations are cut off by unforeseen occurrences. Insects blight the hopes of the husbandman, &c. but God watches over his saints, numbers the hairs of their heads, and suffers no weapon that is formed against them to prosper.

From the text—Sinners may learn their awful situation; they may prosper in this world, but their prosperity will soon end.

Saints may learn their duty; instead of envying sinners, they should pity them, pray for them, set them good examples, and try to save them.

And all may learn that the present state is preparatory to a fixed, final, and endless life.

BETA.

LXIII. LIVING MEN OUGHT NOT TO COMPLAIN.

LAM. iii. 39.

“Wherefore doth a living man complain?”

COMPLAINT is one of the commonest things in the world. It is heard in all circles of society, from the throne to the cottage; no age, nor sex, nor condition, is free from it. All seem to think that they have a right to complain; and all act as if they imagined it rather meritorious than censurable. But let us not think that the commonness of the thing can at all lessen its criminality. “Wherefore doth a living man complain?” In illustrating this subject, we will,

I. STATE THE MOST COMMON CAUSES OF COMPLAINT. In doing this we must make two exceptions to an almost general rule. There are two kinds of complaint which may be justly allowed to be legitimate.—*Complaints relative to ourselves.* We have all acted wrong, we have offended God, hated our neighbour, and injured ourselves; and we may be allowed to complain of our errors, and to reproach ourselves for our irregularities.—*Complaints relative to others.* There are few of us but what have suffered in our reputations, or our circumstances, from the ignorance or wickedness of others. Every man has his rights, and, as a member of civil society, his person and property deserve protection; and, when men make inroads on his rights, he may complain to the magistrate, and institute a process against them. But the complaints that are deemed reprehensible, may be reduced to the following heads.

1. *Complaints of our circumstances in the world.* Though we inhabit the same globe and are made of the same blood, yet our circumstances vary amazingly; and over these, in a thousand instances, we have no control. One man is born in England, another in Nova Zembla, another in Japan. One inhabits a frozen country, where Providence sends snow like wool, scatters hoar-frost like ashes, and makes men cry, Who can stand before the cold? Another dwells in a burning climate, beneath the rays of a vertical sun. One is born in a squalid hut of poverty; another in the mansion of splendour: but though the circumstances of men vary, yet all find something to complain of; the climate, or the weather, or their indigence, or any thing that caprice suggests.

2. *Complaints of the sufferings to which we are doomed.* Suffering is the lot of humanity; we suffer in our bodies by disease, in our minds by anxiety, in our families by domestic affliction. Some suffer grievously; have years of acute and complicated affliction. Oh, what complaints sufferings give birth to!

3. *Complaints of our condition as moral agents.* We see ourselves introduced into the world with infirm mortal bodies; bodies liable to a thousand ills, and which must soon submit to the stroke of death. We also know that our souls are exposed to dangers more to be deprecated than those which attack the body; that sin has the dominion over us; that we must shortly

stand before the bar of God ; and that if not justified in his sight, we must be punished with everlasting destruction. Hence men complain—of the weakness of human nature,—of the temptations to which they are subject,—of the shortness of time allotted them to prepare for eternity,—of the few helps they have of securing their salvation, &c.

II. SHOW THE IMPROPRIETY OF SUCH CONDUCT.

1. *For a living man to complain is unreasonable.* Unreasonable, because he is a living man ; not dead, not damned, not suffering the penalty of the law, nor the punishment of perdition. We are men, not brutes who are devoid of reason ; we are men, not angels who have never sinned, and therefore never suffered ; we are men, not devils confined in chains of darkness. But we are sinful men, and every sin that we commit deserves a proportionate punishment : and if God had dealt with us according to our sins, what tremendous punishments would have been ere now inflicted upon us ! Why then should we complain ? How unreasonable is such conduct !

2. *For a living man to complain is useless.* Why does he complain ? Will it be any advantage to him ? Will it answer any valuable end ? Will it remove any of his evils ? Will it lighten his load ? As living men, we ought to act reasonably ; and complaining is a most unreasonable, unprofitable concern. Have people, who are always disposed to complain, less to bear than those who patiently and quietly submit to the chastisements of their heavenly Father ? No ; complaints aggravate our burdens rather than lighten them.

3. *For a living man to complain is impious and profane.* The Scriptures teach us that there is a God and a Providence ; that God governs the world according to the counsel of his own will ;—that whatever happens in the world is under his direction, or is by his permission ; and this refers not merely to the pleasing, but to the painful events of life. “ Shall there be evil in the city,” &c., Amos iii. 6. “ Shall we receive good at the hand of God,” &c., Job. ii. 10. “ I make peace, and create evil,” Isaiah xlv. 7. Are we afflicted ? “ Affliction cometh not forth of the dust,” &c., Job. v. 5, 6. “ Are we in indigent circumstances ? “ The Lord maketh poor,” &c., 1 Sam. ii. 7. Hence to complain is impious and profane. Complaints are reflections on the conduct of God in the government of the

world; it is indirectly saying that, if we sat at the helm, we could manage its affairs more wisely and more equitably than God himself does.

4. *For a living man to complain endangers his immortal interests.* This disposition to complain, is a never failing proof of an unregenerated mind and an unsubmitive spirit; a spirit rising up in opposition to God. St. Jude describes the wicked of his day as "murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts," &c., ver. 16. To understand how offensive such conduct is to God, we need only turn to the xi. chap. of Numbers. For when the people of Israel complained, "it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heart it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them," &c. And is Jehovah better pleased with complainers now, than he was with Israel of old? Will not the same conduct merit the same punishment?

III. POINT OUT ITS MOST EFFECTUAL REMEDY.

1. *As an antidote to complaining, let us seek the regeneration of our natures.* "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and that enmity will excite complaints against God and his government. Carnal men think that they have a right to complain, and that they do well to be angry. But God can renew in us right spirits; spirits right towards him, submissive to his government, and patient under his dispensations.

2. *Let us frequently consider what pain and punishment we deserve.* Had we our desert, we should be in perdition. "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed." How many younger than we are, and a thousand times less guilty, have been cut down as the grass!

3. *Let us think of the sufferings of others.* Jeremiah had suffered much personal insult, had been thrown into a dungeon, &c.;—much in his prophetic character. He had seen an invading army enter Judea, destroy Jerusalem, burn the temple, carry the people captive. He had witnessed the ravages of famine, when the hands of women had sodden their own children, &c. Yet even he said, "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" Let us think of those who were stoned, sawn asunder, &c., Heb. xi. 37.

4. *Let us never forget the design of God in afflicting us.* Our afflictions are proofs of his love, and pledges of his affection. He afflicts us for our profit, and he will sanctify our sufferings to our eternal advantage.

5. *Let us pray that our strength may be according to our day.* "Our help is in the name of the Lord," and his help is always nigh. "Let us trust in the Lord for ever." Exercise faith in his promises, and anticipate the period when suffering shall be no more, and death shall be swallowed up in victory.

BETA.

LXIV. THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER.

EZEK. xxxvi. 37.

"Thus saith the Lord God: I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock."

THERE is a very striking analogy between the natural and the spiritual world; between the productions of nature, and the operations of divine grace. In the former, a variety of means are necessary for the attainment of providential mercies; and in the latter, the duties of religion are essentially connected with the enjoyment of its personal privileges. In both cases the ends are made to depend on the means, which, by virtue of the divine appointment and influence, are rendered efficient and successful. This is particularly evident in the important duty of prayer. The Lord has graciously promised innumerable blessings to mankind in his word; but in order to obtain them, we must earnestly call upon his name, with penitent and believing hearts. This chapter contains various promises, both of temporal and spiritual blessings, to the Jews, which are also generally applicable to the Gentiles; but we are assured in the text, that they can only be realized by faithful prayer;—"Thus saith the Lord God," &c. These words will lead us to consider,

I. THE BLESSINGS FOR WHICH WE SHOULD INQUIRE;—"I will yet *for this* be inquired of by the house of Israel." This language manifestly refers to the inestimable benefits pro-

mised in the preceding context. Whatever God promises we may humbly desire and pray for, both for our own salvation and the welfare of all mankind.

1. *We should pray for ourselves.* We are sinful, indigent, and dependent creatures. God only can supply our wants and satisfy our desires. To him we must come, and devoutly inquire for every blessing which our circumstances need, 2 Cor. ix. 8; Phil. iv. 19.—Such as pardoning mercy—adopting love—quickening power—sanctifying grace—the indwelling Spirit—the consolations of piety, ver. 25—27; Psalm li. 9—12;—for light in darkness—strength in weakness—succour in temptation—assistance in duty—guidance in difficulty—peace in trouble—victory over enemies—triumph in death—and a blissful immortality beyond the grave, Psalm lxxxii. 10; Phil. iv. 6; Heb. iv. 16. For these and all necessary and promised blessings, for body and soul, for time and eternity, we must incessantly seek and inquire of “the God of all grace.”

2. *We should pray for the church of God.* Good men regard all the subjects of piety as brethren, Eph. iv. 4—6. They feel interested in each others welfare, and desire the peace and prosperity of Zion, Psalm cxxii. 6—9. They pray for the extension and stability of her borders—the increase of her converts—and the unity and progression of her members, Hab. iii. 2; Eph. iii. 14—21; Phil. i. 9—11. Many such prayers have been offered by the pious, for the church of Christ in all ages, Psalm cxviii. 25; Isaiah lxii. 6, 7; Rom. xiii. 15.

3. *We should pray for the world.* We are commanded to “love our neighbours as ourselves,” and “pray for our enemies;” even for those who “despitefully use and persecute us,” Matt. v. 44. The Lord assures us, that he will “give his Son the heathen for his inheritance,” &c., and that “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge and glory of his name,” Psalm ii. 8; Isaiah xi. 9; Jer. xxxi. 34. Encouraged by such declarations, we should “pray for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority;”—for the universal dissemination of divine truth—and the glorious triumphs of the Redeemer’s kingdom, in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, Psalm xliiii. 3; Isaiah lxii. 1; Matt. vi. 10; Rev. xi. 15. If such are the blessings for which we should inquire, we may observe,

II. THE MANNER HOW WE SHOULD INQUIRE FOR THEM.

This is highly necessary, both for our instruction and encouragement. And for the proper discharge of this important duty the Scriptures furnish every needful direction, by which we are explicitly taught to inquire of the Lord.

1. *In the method which he appoints.* We cannot approach unto him acceptably, but through Jesus Christ, who is the high priest over the house of God for ever, John xiv. 6; Heb. vii. 17. He has sprinkled the mercy seat with his own precious blood, and “now appears in the presence of God for us.” Through his mediation, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, we have constant boldness of access to the throne of grace, Rom. viii. 26, 27; Eph. ii. 18. This is the new and living way, which is divinely consecrated for mankind, to the “Father of mercies,” Heb. iv. 14—16, chap. x. 19—22.

2. *With devout dispositions of mind.* The Lord looks at the heart, and when we enter into holy converse with him we should inquire for the blessings of salvation *sincerely*, without hypocrisy, Matt. xv. 8—*humbly*, with reverence and godly fear, Psalm lxxxix. 7;—*fervently*, with holy ardour, Gen. xxxii. 26;—*affectionately*, with hearts filled with love to God, and good will to all mankind, Matt. vi. 14, 15; and *believingly*, in the lively exercise of faith, Matt. xxi. 22; 1 John v. 14, 15.

3. *In every situation of human life.* Whatever stations we occupy, or however different the circumstances in which we are placed, prayer is indispensably necessary. In private retirement, Matt. vi. 6;—in our families, Joshua xxiv. 15;—in the public ordinances of the gospel, Psalm xxvii. 4;—and in our daily occupations, we should “pray always, with all prayer, and every where, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting,” Eph. vi. 18; 1 Tim. ii. 8.

4. *With diligent perseverance unto death.* We are invariably dependent on God, and continually need his special direction and blessing, as sinful and helpless creatures. Without him we can do nothing; and though he has promised every needful benefit, yet for all these things he will be inquired of to do them for us. And hence we ought to “pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks,” Rom. xii. 12. And in this sacred exercise we shall be greatly encouraged by considering,

III. THE REASONS WHY WE SHOULD INQUIRE OF THE LORD. These are various; but we select the following only:

1. *Prayer is an ordinance of divine authority.* If it should be said, why inquire of the Lord, who knows our wants, and is ever ready to do us good? the text affords an appropriate answer to all such vain objections;—" *Thus saith the Lord God,*" &c. Every duty which is distinctly revealed and divinely enjoined, is unquestionable in its authority, and imperious in its claims. Now this is certainly the case in reference to prayer. The Lord commands us to pray, Ps. iv. 4, 5; Jer. xxix. 12; Luke xviii. 1;—he promises to hear and answer prayer, Ps. xci. 15, 16; and he directs how to pray, Matt. vi. 9—13. If therefore we restrain prayer before him, we impeach his wisdom, despise his authority, and reject his ordinance, Job xxi. 14, 15.

2. *Prayer evinces the dependence of the creature on the Creator.* It powerfully reminds us of our own insufficiency, and the all-sufficiency of the Almighty, 2 Cor. iii. 5. We feel innumerable wants which we cannot supply, but are taught "to ask and receive, that our joy may be full." We thus at once discover our utter indigence and dependence as finite beings, and the absolute necessity of praying *to*, and "trusting *in* the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength."

3. *Prayer demonstrates the connexion between duty and interest.* As intellectual beings, we are capable of moral actions and spiritual enjoyments. The Lord is therefore pleased to suspend the blessings he promises, on the performance of the duties he enjoins; and it is only by complying with the latter, that we can realize the former, Ps. xxxiv. 17; Jer. xxxiii. 3. This inseparable connexion admirably displays the wisdom and goodness of God in the salvation of his people.

We may conclude by warning the prayerless of their danger,—and encouraging the devout to "continue instant in prayer."

ETA.

LXV. DANIEL'S DEVOTIONS.

DAN. vi. 10.

“ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house ; and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”

THERE are two general methods of exhibiting truth, and communicating instruction to mankind : the one by the abstract theory, the other by the living example. The inspired writers employ both these methods. In the precepts of revelation we behold the former, and in the lives of saints we survey the latter. And religion appears to most advantage, and shines with superior lustre, when displayed in living characters. We now call your attention to one of the most holy, self-denying, and courageous champions of religion that the world has ever seen : Daniel, who was honoured as a statesman, venerated as a sage, extolled as a prophet, and admired as a saint. In the text we consider,

I. DANIEL'S DEVOTIONS ;—“ He prayed, and gave thanks before his God,” &c. He prayed. The expressions used in Scripture to illustrate the nature of prayer are various. It is said to be a calling, crying, knocking, seeking, asking, making supplication, pouring out of the heart, lifting up the soul, lifting up holy hands, making intercession, &c. All these expressions serve to shew that God is the fountain of good, and that all his people apply to him for what they need. How Daniel prayed, we learn from the ninth chapter of this book.

1. *He humbled himself when he prayed.* Hear the language which he uses in his addresses to Jehovah, “ O Lord, the great and dreadful God,” &c. chap. ix. 4. How he humbled himself we learn from ver. 3. O, how much does humility become us when we pray ! The Being whom we address, the circumstances in which we stand, the punishment we deserve, all serve to inspire us with humility.

2. *He confessed his sins, and the sins of his people, when he prayed.* “ We have sinned,” &c. ver. 5. This was not pecu-

liar to Daniel. David said, "I acknowledge my sin," &c. Ps. xxxii. 5; li. 3. Jeremiah did the same. "We acknowledge, O Lord," &c. Jer. xiv. 20. See also Luke xv. 21. This is the most effectual way to obtain pardon, Prov. xxviii. 13.

3. *He deprecated punishment, and implored mercy, when he prayed*;—"O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away," &c. ver. 16. "To the Lord our God *belong* mercies," &c. ver. 9. Sin deserves punishment,—God might justly pour out his indignation upon us. We have no appeal but to his mercy, through the blood of the covenant.

4. *He pleaded with God when he prayed*;—"O Lord hear; O Lord forgive; O Lord hearken and do; defer not for thine own sake," &c. ver. 19. We may plead with God also; plead his mercy, his promises, the sacrifice of his son, and his glorious intercession in heaven: and as Daniel obtained an answer to his prayer, we likewise shall secure the blessing of God by our prayers, ver. 20, 21, 22.

Secondly, *Daniel gave thanks*. We can always find reasons and subjects for thanks to God. Daniel thanked God for what he was in himself—for what he did in the kingdom of providence—and for what he had done for him, Dan. ii. 20—23.

II. THE MANNER HOW HE PERFORMED THEM.

1. "*He went into his house and in his chamber*," &c. The Jews were accustomed to set apart rooms in their houses for *oratories*, or places of devotion. Each house had generally one of these rooms, a chamber, most removed from noise and disturbance. Christ said, "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet," &c. Matt. vi. 6. Peter went upon the house top to pray. Christ went upon a mountain, and continued all night in prayer to God. Retirement is necessary to prayer. A man may pray in a crowd when he cannot find a better situation; but opportunities should be secured for closet devotions.

2. *He prayed and gave thanks three times a day*. Hence he had stated times for private devotion. We have regular periods for feeding the body; why not be as frequent, and as prompt, in seeking food for the soul? "Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud," &c. Ps. lv. 17. How proper is the morning for devotional exercise! Protection during the night, should excite praise to him who "giveth his beloved sleep."

Ignorance of the events of the day, should induce us to commit ourselves into the hands of him who alone is able to protect us. At *noon*, how proper to recal our dissipated thoughts, and turn our hearts to God, to secure his continued favour. And at *night*, ere we lie down to rest, let us solicit pardon for the past, and protection for the future.

3. *He kneeled upon his knees and prayed.* The position of the body is not of so much importance in devotion as the disposition of the mind. The Scriptures sanction different attitudes in prayer. Abraham stood before the Lord when he pleaded for Sodom, &c. The publican stood in the temple to pray. Christ fell upon his face and prayed. But kneeling is most common, Ps. xc. 6.; Acts xx. 36; xxi. 5.

4. *He looked towards Jerusalem when he prayed.* The meaning of this will be understood by referring to the consecration of the temple, 1 Kings viii. 44—48. Hence all those who were in Jerusalem turned towards the temple when they prayed; and those who were in foreign lands opened their windows towards Jerusalem in performing their devotions. We must look towards the heavenly Jerusalem. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

5. *Daniel's prayers were regularly performed.* He "prayed, and gave thanks, as he did aforetime." Inconstancy is the fault of multitudes. There was a decision of character, and a uniformity of conduct, in Daniel, which all should be anxious to emulate.

III. THE PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH HE WAS PLACED.

1. *He was in a foreign land, far from his native country.* Daniel was one of the children of the captivity of Judah; he had been brought to Babylon at a very early period of his life. He was far from Jerusalem, where the worship of God was established, where the temple had stood, and where the tribes of the Lord went up to worship.

2. *He was surrounded by the most inveterate and designing men, who meditated his ruin.* Men who envied his popularity, sought to find occasion against him, and did their utmost to persecute him even unto death. Yet he maintained his integrity, stuck close to his devotions, and served his God with a constancy that nothing could destroy.

3. *He was in high life.* Daniel was a courtier, a prime minister, and a man surrounded by temptations to pride, infidelity, idolatry, and a whole train of evils that swarm amidst the splendours and dissipations of a court. But he was innocent from the great transgression of apostatizing from God.

4. *He was involved in most important business.* He had the affairs of a kingdom to transact. He had a hundred and twenty princes to give an account to him, that the king might have no damage; and he managed his business so creditably, and so faithfully, that no error or fault was found in him. Oh how often is the urgency and press of business made an excuse for the neglect of religion! No man had ever more business than Daniel; and few men have ever served God with greater fidelity than he did.

5. *He was prohibited from praying.* A law was enacted, that every man who should ask a petition of any God or man, within thirty days, except of the king, should be cast into a den of lions. This was a cruel, senseless, and an atheistical decree. Daniel knew that this law was enacted. He knew that it was irrevocable. He knew that his life was in danger; but nothing could shake the steadfast purpose of his soul.

IV. THE INFERENCES TO BE DRAWN FROM THE WHOLE.

1. *Whoever you are, or wherever you may live, learn (if you serve God) to prepare your heart for temptation.* Enemies you must have, temptation you must endure. No man deserved better treatment than Daniel. He was a holy man, a man greatly beloved by his Maker; a wise man, in whom was the spirit of the holy gods, who could pry into the secrets of futurity; a useful man, who could manage the affairs of a great nation; a courageous man, who shrunk from no danger; an old man, grown grey in the service of his God, and in acts of public utility; and a faultless man, who had no error or fault found in him; and yet even this man met with enemies.

2. *Whatever snares may be laid for your feet, never swerve from the line of duty.* How easily might Daniel have eluded the watchful vigilance of his enemies! He might have prayed elsewhere—shut his windows, and used a thousand arts to avoid detection. What would not worldly prudence have suggested? But oh! Daniel was above all this. That abominable system of

time serving, so common in the Christian world, was unknown to Daniel.

3. *That the way of duty is the way of safety.* Obstructions often lie in the way; stones of stumbling, and rocks of offence, are frequently thrown in our path; but if we adhere rigidly to the line of duty, it will, and must lead us to a favourable issue. Look at Daniel, and understand the truth of this sentiment.

4. *That persecutors often defeat their own object.* Daniel's enemies intended to ruin him, but their infamous projects tended to his advancement.

5. *The wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.* They who expected to see Daniel devoured by lions, had all their bones broken in pieces, or ever they came at the bottom of the den.

BETA.

LXVI. WISE AND USEFUL MEN WILL SHINE IN GLORY.

DANIEL xii. 3.

“and they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

MEN who enjoy religion themselves, and recommend it to others, are worthy of double honour; but whatever excellencies they possess, or whatever good they do, the world will not rank them among its worthies. But they shine in the eyes of the pious in the present state of things, and in a future state they will shine in glory for ever. Let us consider their present character and conduct, and their future reward.

I. THEIR PRESENT CHARACTER AND CONDUCT.

1. They are *wise*. But what is true wisdom? Carefully distinguish it from human learning, worldly prudence, and low cunning; because many who are learned, prudent, and cunning, are "without Christ and without God in the world," Eph. ii.

12. True wisdom includes knowledge, experience, and practice in the things of God; and he is wise unto salvation, who *knows* revealed truth, who *feels* its powerful influence on his heart, and who lives in constant *obedience* to the truth. The wise man hears and obeys the word of the Lord, and builds his house upon a rock, Matt vii. 24, 25; his life and conversation, like that of the wise virgins, is set forth by the beautiful emblem of a burning lamp, which is well supplied with oil, Matt. xxvi. 1—7; and under the influence of knowledge and grace, he walks circumspectly both before God and men. Eph. v. 15. His wisdom is "pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy," James iii. 17.

2. And they *turn many to righteousness*. This work is truly *great*; and all other works when compared with it, are mere trifles. When *Nehemiah* was engaged in re-building the temple, he said, "I am doing a great work;" but these persons are building the spiritual temple of the Lord, which is a greater work than that of erecting a house for his worship. The work is truly *good*, being a work of mercy to the souls of men, and resembling that of Jesus Christ, "who went about doing good," Acts x. 38. And it is a work of vast *importance*, uniting in its objects the glory of God and the salvation of souls from death, James v. 20. There are some who are shamefully employed in corrupting men, by turning them to error and vice; but this resembles the work of the devil, who, "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," 1 Pet. v. 8.

3. The *means*, which wise men use in turning many to righteousness, are calculated to promote the desired end. They do not use fire and sword, like the prophet of Mecca; nor do they use hypocritical craft and cunning, like the Jesuitical missionaries in foreign parts. The weapons of their "warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds," 2 Cor. x. 4. The first means they use is wise *instruction*; "they that understand among the people shall instruct many," chap. xi. 33. They point out the evil and

danger of sin, and the excellency and safety of holiness. Then they direct the sinner to the Lamb of God, who made atonement for transgressors, and "who taketh away the sin of the world," John i. 29. The next means they use is *earnest prayer to God*. We have a fine instance of this, chap. ix. 3—19; and the apostle Paul exhorts us to pray to God our Saviour, "who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto a knowledge of the truth," 1 Tim. ii. 1—4. And another means used to turn men unto righteousness is *a good example*, Matt. v. 16. These are powerful means, which, when prudently united, generally ensure success.

4. The *ends* accomplished by turning many to righteousness are valuable beyond description; God is honoured and glorified in their salvation; truth prevails over error; virtue triumphs over vice; and these miserable sinners are made holy and happy. They are pardoned and made righteous by faith in Christ Jesus, Rom. x. 9; and they are practically righteous, for "he that doeth righteousness is righteous," 1 John iii. 7. Their character and circumstances are completely changed; they now fear God, and enjoy him as their portion, Ps. cxix. 57; and, while they love their neighbour as themselves, they cheerfully engage in every social and civil duty.

5. But *this work is not confined to ministers*, all the wise engage in it; and every one, however humble his lot in life, who "winneth souls is wise," Prov. xi. 30. The wise are determined to go to heaven themselves, and to take as many with them as they can. It is, indeed, the peculiar work of wise and holy ministers to turn men to righteousness; but many obscure saints have been happy instruments of saving souls. They are influenced by God-like principles, and, like pious preachers of the word, use every means of doing good, leaving the event of their labours to the Lord.

II. THEIR FUTURE REWARD.

1. They shall *shine as the firmament*. The firmament, or vast expanse around us, illuminated by the sun, moon, and stars, shines with a bright lustre; which, in our way of thinking, resembles the glory of the heavenly world; and a finer emblem of future glory could not have been used by the inspired writers, 1 Cor. xv. 41.

2. But the glory of the stars is particularly noticed in this

passage. The glory of the sun resembles the glory of our Lord, who is the Sun of righteousness, Mal. iv. 2; but the glory of the moon and the stars resembles the glory of wise and useful men, especially in this particular—they will shine by reflection. Hence the church is commanded to arise and shine, because her light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon her, Isa. lx. 1.

3. The stars being of different magnitudes, “one star differeth from another star in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead,” 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42. This conveys an idea that some will shine with a brighter lustre than others in the world of glory; and this must be the case if every one be rewarded according to his works, Matt. xvi. 27.

4. The glory of heaven will endure. Holy and useful men shall shine there as the stars, for ever. “All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever,” 1 Pet. i. 24, 25. And by that word we are assured, that the glory of heaven will remain when this earth and the visible heaven have fled away, and no place is found for them, Rev. xx. 11.

5. We conclude by observing, that the obvious sense of our text is, That wise and useful persons shall be exalted to high honours in a future state. Their spirits will be glorious in holiness, and their bodies will be made glorious. When Christ who is their life shall appear, they shall appear with him in glory, Col. iii. 4. Their employment will be glorious, their companions will be glorious, and their rank and dignity will be glorious.

INFERENCES.

1. We should study wisdom; use means to attain it; and prize it more than rubies; for “all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it,” Prov. viii. 11.

2. We should study usefulness, and engage in it with all our might, recollecting that there is “no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave,” Eccles. ix. 10.

3. In this state, and in this work, we should be encouraged by the prospect of a vast reward. That reward will be of grace;

but not less welcome on that account. Glory be to God, and blessed be his holy name! Amen.

SIGMA.

LXVII. THE BENEFIT OF FOLLOWING ON TO KNOW THE LORD.

HOSEA vi. 3.

“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.”

THOSE who have experienced the renewing grace of God, and who therefore endeavour to make his law their rule of life, wish to see their relatives, friends, and neighbours walking in the way to heaven; and it is to them matter of heaviest grief that so many lie—that the world in general lieth—in wickedness, Ps. cxix. 136; Rom. ix. 1—3. As they feel, so, of consequence, they speak. But when they express their painful apprehensions, their friends, too often, instead of respecting their piety, and thanking them for their kind intentions, think them exceedingly uncharitable, and needlessly troublesome. If fidelity of reproof and warmth of expostulation were to be admitted as proofs of an uncharitable spirit, none would be deeper in the condemnation than the Sacred Writers, who are full of censure and complaint; and who try every means to save sinners; showing them their danger, and “pulling them out of the fire;” while they are ever ready to promote the first appearances of good. The former part of this prophecy contains much of warning and denunciation; see chap. i. 9, iii. 4, and v. 14. This chapter begins with an invitation on the part of Hosea, or of those whom he had been addressing; “Come,” &c., ver. 1. and such encouragement as divine mercy authorized them to take, ver. 2, 3. Here we have,

I. A COURSE OF CONDUCT PROPOSED; "If we follow on to know the Lord." Knowledge in general is an excellence, Prov. viii. 10, xix. 2, xx. 15; Eccl. ii. 13, and vii. 19. The knowledge here proposed is most excellent as to its nature and object; and most profitable to its possessor; so much is supposed in the promise, Hab. ii. 14; and expressed in our Lord's declaration, John xvii. 3. Nor need we despair of attaining it, though at present we feel ourselves to be destitute of it. For, in the case now under consideration,

1. *The proposal implies a previous state of ignorance, and estrangement.* This was manifestly the case with Israel, who "rejected knowledge," chap. iv. 6; "was joined to idols," chap. iv. 17; was openly and variously wicked, chap. iv. 1, 2, 12; and obstinate in rebellion, chap. v. 1—4. This is but too true a picture of our own times. How many, during the time of health, neglect instruction, idolatrously worship and serve the creature, &c., and who, therefore, in the day of sickness, are found ignorant of themselves, and of the nature of salvation, the method of salvation, &c.

2. *The proposal implies reformation begun.* A new course has been commenced. The obstinacy has given way, ver. 1. They are ashamed, &c., chap. iv. 19. Their wickedness is abandoned and acknowledged, chap. v. 15. They fear the Lord and his goodness, chap. iii. 5. And they seek his face "early," earnestly, chap. iii. 5, v. 15.

3. *The proposal is that of following up these good beginnings.* "If we follow on to know the Lord." Any attempt to comprehend his essence would be vain, Job xi. 7. Yet we may and should learn much concerning his attributes, in his works of creation and conservation, Rom. i. 20:—much of his gracious disposition towards us in his work of redemption, John iii. 16, i. 14:—much of his moral character and of the holiness of his nature, in his sanctifying work, Rom. viii. 13, 14; 1 John iv. 16. The inquiry should be followed up in the way he has prescribed—the way of righteousness, Isa. i. 15—18; of self-denial, Rom. xii. 1, 2; of prayer and religious obedience generally, Luke xi. 9—13; John vii. 17. We should follow on in the manner he has prescribed, sincerely, John iv. 24; humbly, Ps. xxv. 9; James iv. 6; fervently, Prov. ii. 1—5; perseveringly, Prov. viii. 34—36. And we should follow on in the company he has

prescribed. When "the saints and the excellent of the earth" are our companions, we may avail ourselves of their counsel, reproof, encouragement, &c. The blessings of grace are given in church fellowship, where the two or three are met in their Master's name; hence the advice, Gal. vi. 2; Phil. i. 27. Thus we may go on to know the Lord as our Saviour, to pardon, to heal, to invigorate us, &c., ver. 1, 2. And thus may we also realize all that is expressed in,

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT ASSUMED; "His going forth" to clear the way of his people from difficulties, prowling enemies, dangers, &c., "is prepared as the morning." Here we may observe the certainty and the progress of the blessing expected.

1. This "going forth" is a certain blessing—"is prepared as the morning." "The out-goings of the morning" are settled by a divine constitution; and since the heavenly bodies were set "for seasons," &c., these out-goings have not been prevented. Nor has God said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye me" in vain, Ps. l. 15; Rom. x. 11—13.

2. "This going forth" is a progressive blessing. The condition here suggested is that of improvement:—of going on from good to better. It is a state—of improving light. As the approach of the sun scatters the damps and darkness of night, so the beams of the Sun of Righteousness chase the gloom of unbelief, and give a clear and yet clearer view of "God in Christ, reconciled," &c., and more fully discover the greatness of the Christian privilege, both in this world and the next. Hence this is a state of—improving confidence. While darkness veils the world, the traveller, the labourer, &c., are at a loss how to proceed. The morning relieves them from their doubts, and shows them the path of duty, and enables them confidently to proceed. So the providential "path of the just is as the shining day," &c., and he is enabled to say, "I know whom I have believed," &c., 2 Tim. i. 12, iv. 7, 8, see also Ps. xlvi. 1, 2. From these and other considerations there is—improving comfort. Grateful is morn to the benumbed and exhausted watchman, the weather-beaten mariner, &c. More grateful God's appearance, in providence or in grace, to those who, in their own apprehensions, are ready to perish. 'Sweet is the breath of morn,' and reviving to the spirits of all the tenants of

earth and air. More exhilarating that “morning without clouds,” when the Sun of Righteousness warms us into vigour and happiness, 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4; Isa. lviii. 8. This is rendered still more apparent by the latter part of the verse, “He shall come unto us as the rain,” &c. This blessing, especially in the country to which the prophet’s words refer, is to be regarded—As a refreshing, and therefore highly desirable visitant, Ps. lxxii. 6; Isa. lviii. 11, so refreshing the *Lord’s* coming down to “rain down righteousness,” &c.—As a beautiful visitant. As vernal showers adorn the earth in a robe of cheerful green, and of flowers of every hue, so the LORD shall beautify the meek with salvation, Ps. cxlix 4; Isa. lxi. 3. As a fructifying visitant. “The former rain,” which fell soon after their seed time, was necessary to the vegetation of the seed; and “the latter rain,” which fell not long before their harvest, was equally necessary to fill up the ear. So necessary are showers of grace to water the seed sown, and to perfect “the fruits of righteousness,” Isa. lv. 10—13. As a seasonable and satisfying visitant. The former and the latter rains were periodical, and saturated the thirsty land. In like manner, “in due season, they that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled;” shall be satisfied when they awake with the likeness of God. How stands the case with us? The subject should teach us,

1. The importance of saving knowledge. Those who remain at a distance from God must remain in darkness, and barrenness, and misery.

2. It should encourage exertion, “Every one that seeketh findeth.”

3. It should induce *large* expectations, “Prove me,” &c., Mal. iii. 10.

4. It should confirm us in a patient continuance in well-doing, Isaiah xl. 27—31.

ZETA.

LXVIII. A MISSIONARY DISCOURSE.

MICAH iv. 1—3.

“ But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord,” &c.

A prophecy similar to this, and delivered in nearly the same words, is found in the prophet Isaiah, chap. ii. 1—3. We can scarcely perceive that these declarations could in any sense refer to the political state of the ancient Jews. The text evidently points to the days of the Gospel, and strikingly presents to our minds a very glorious and prosperous state of the Christian church; which may be considered under the following heads:—

I. THE CHURCH RENDERED CONSPICUOUS TO ALL. It is scarcely necessary to observe, that such phrases as “ the mountain of the Lord’s house,” and “ Zion,” signify, in such connexions as the present,—the church of God. The visible church has, from its beginning, always had an existence: but its boundaries have generally been very limited, and its situation has often been very obscure. The mere mention of Abel, Seth, Enoch, Abraham, and his seed;—Zion, Jerusalem, and Judea,—will illustrate the fact. Its limits were greatly extended in the days of the apostles, and during some subsequent years. But since those days, until very recently, how often has all that deserves the name of church been confined to a small space, and hidden, as in a corner! now in this land, then in that.—

But the church shall be conspicuous to all:—as on the top of the mountains. She shall be so circumstanced—so situated, that *all* may behold her.

She shall be exalted above the hills. And philosophy, idolatry, superstition, and errors, shall no longer obstruct her view, or obscure her glory. The Bible, the Saviour, and his followers shall then no more be contemned. Zion shall be generally recognized by all: her Sovereign acknowledged—her laws honoured—her goodness regarded—her greatness revered—her ordinances attended. Zion shall be a praise in all the earth!—and,

She shall be established. How has the church been tossed as by tempests, convulsed as by commotions! But, being *thus* established, no longer shall persecutions, general nor partial, oppress her; no longer shall the arm of human power disturb her; no longer shall she be driven—in her doctrines,—in her members, from one land to another, by popes, by councils, by ungodly sovereigns; or by any other hostile power: for the “Highest himself shall establish her.” And there shall be amidst these favourable circumstances,

II. A DISPOSITION IN ALL TOWARDS THE CHURCH;—“All nations shall flow unto it.” As yet, a few in a nation, in a town, or a village,—a few in a family,—or at most, a nation partially—have moved towards Zion like small and solitary streams. But now, at the fulfilment of this promise, behold *nations—all* nations, moving in such masses as may be compared to rivers wide and deep! And they all *flow*—proceed onward to Zion, as rivers to the ocean.

Their movements shall be characterised,—

By friendly co-operation;—“Many people shall go and say, Come ye and let us go.”

By a definite and sacred object;—“let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.”

By proper intentions and correct views;—“he will teach us of his ways.” They own their ignorance, and seek to be taught. They have confidence in his goodness to teach: he “*will* teach us.” What religion but Christianity,—what god but our God, *teaches?*

By right dispositions;—“we will walk in his paths,” believe his doctrines, obey his precepts, not those of men, or of corrupt nature.

By confidence in the excellency of the divine instructions;—“for out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” All nations have had their laws; all legislators have had their words. But the law—the law suited indiscriminately to all lands—to all people—and to all classes of men—is the “law out of Zion”—the gospel. This has never been found unsuitable to any people: and has ever ennobled all who have received it. It is from Zion—from Jerusalem—from the church—the Bible, that unadulterated truth proceeds. The law, the word literally went out from Jerusalem.

III. THE BLESSINGS RESULTING FROM THESE CIRCUMSTANCES ; —“ He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people,” &c. While men judged,—after the sight of their eyes, and after the hearing of their ears, nation quarrelled with nation, and man with man. But at the period here referred to, taught from above, they generally own the authority of God ; acknowledge his right to judge ; and submit to his laws. Those that do not, he will rebuke : will teach by severe methods, such as will not yield to milder means ; until all submitting to the Prince of Peace, “ they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, neither shall they learn war any more.”

The Jews too, long cast off, on account of their wickedness and obstinacy, shall no longer wander in mazes of error, and amidst darkness that may be felt ; but listening to the voice of the prophet, or to Christian teachers, or to some divine suggestion which inspires them with dispositions of obedience and of reciprocal good will, they shall acknowledge Christ as the light of the world ; and thus the house of Jacob, too, shall come and walk in the light of the Lord.

IV. THE PERIOD OF THESE GREAT EVENTS ;—“ It shall come to pass *in the last days.*” The church of God has had her days ; and these days have been somewhat commensurate with the progress of time, and with the limited or more extended population of the earth.

The day of the patriarchal church was a day of comparatively small things, when the people of God were few in number, yea very few, 1 Chron. xvi. 19 ; Psalm cv. 12. The Jewish church had her day—a day of many years, during which the boundaries of Zion were enlarged.

But patriarchs and prophets spoke of another day—of other days, which they called the last days. To these our text refers, and the New Testament makes it plain what these days are ; (see Acts ii. 17 ; Heb. i. 2 ; 1 Peter i. 20.) that they are the days of the Messiah—of his gospel, and of the Holy Spirit ; days that should be followed by no other day, and therefore called “ the last days.” Hence the Comforter is promised as one that should abide for ever, John xvi. 16.

It is sufficiently evident, then, that the prophet referred this great event to the days of the gospel. And as such a day as he

describes has not yet fully opened upon us, we can consider ourselves as only verging towards it.

Humanly speaking, God's days are long ones, even as a thousand years, 2 Peter iii. 8. Two of these have nearly elapsed since the commencement of the last days; the time spoken of may therefore be at hand, and the *signs of the times* bespeak its approach. This we know, "It shall come to pass;" for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

IMPROVEMENT.

Let this prophecy cheer all whose spirits have drooped on account of the few who have hitherto embraced real Christianity.

Let it excite us to renewed exertions, in rendering divine truth conspicuous to all. Here is a sure word of prophecy—we must succeed.

Let it call forth the gratitude of all who already participate the blessings of redemption. And soon our song shall be "Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

GAMMA.

LXIX. THE REWARD OF CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS.

MATT. xix. 27.

"Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"

WHATEVER enterprises we engage in, it is equally rational and just duly to consider the general merits of its character, and the probable results of its issue. This is more especially the case when we embark in any cause which is likely to involve the most

interesting and important consequences. Now this is unquestionably the character of religion, which is the one thing needful to every human being. In making choice therefore of this momentous subject, we should "first count the cost," and then willingly renounce every thing which is incompatible with its possession, or it is impossible to realize its personal benefits. This is evidently the doctrine that is taught in the preceding context, and which gave rise to the language of the text. The Saviour having described the snares of affluence, and asserted the impossibility of those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven (as strikingly exemplified in the case of the young ruler, with whom he had been conversing,) Peter, with his usual zeal and boldness, "answered and said, Behold, we have forsaken all," &c. These words clearly unfold the true character of Christ's disciples, and distinctly suggest the evils they renounce—the example they follow—and the reward they anticipate.

I. THE EVILS THEY RENOUNCE ;—"Behold we have forsaken all," said Peter. And though Christ does not require all his followers to forsake their secular occupations and become ministers of the gospel, as the apostles did, yet there are many things which we must renounce for his sake, or we cannot be his disciples, Matt. xvi. 24.

1. *We must forsake all our sinful practices.* As impenitent sinners we "live after the flesh, according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind," Eph. ii. 2, 3. But, as the followers of Christ, we must mortify the deeds of the body, "cease to do evil, and learn to do well." Every vicious habit must be fully abandoned, however painful to human nature, Matt. v. 29, 30. Whatever is offensive to God, and injurious to the soul, must be freely sacrificed to our best interests on the altar of conscience and truth.—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." All sin of every description must be faithfully renounced as utterly inconsistent with Christian discipleship, Titus ii. 11, 12.

2. *We must forsake all our ungodly associates.* While we are of the world we are companions of the wicked, are actuated by the same carnal principles, and governed by the same worldly maxims. But when divine grace apprehends and subdues sinners, and convinces them of the vanity and corruption of the world, they immediately "come out from among them, and are

separate, and touch not the unclean thing, 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. And though religion does not forbid every kind of intercourse with the wicked, yet it teaches its subjects the evil and danger of making them their constant associates and intimate friends, 2 Cor. vi. 14—16; James iv. 4. And hence, like David, they become companions of them that fear the Lord, and their delight is with the excellent of the earth.

3. *We must forsake all our unholy attachments.* Religion regards the heart as well as the life. We must not only be outwardly separated from sin and sinners, but also inwardly renewed in the spirit of our minds, Eph. iv. 22—24. An undue attachment to the world was evidently the ruin of the hopeful young man whose character and conduct are recorded in this chapter. He loved his possessions, and was unwilling to give up every thing for Christ, ver. 21, 22; Matt. x. 37, 38. But his faithful disciples “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts,” and gladly forsake sin in all its diversified forms and fascinating snares. The text also asserts,

II. THE EXAMPLE THEY FOLLOW;—“We have forsaken all and followed thee.” The apostles followed Christ, both literally and morally, as his personal attendants and approved disciples. They gladly received his word, acknowledged his Messiahship, and obeyed his injunctions. In these respects we also ought to be “followers of God as dear children.”

1. *We should follow Christ as our teacher, by embracing his gospel.* He is an infallible prophet, and teaches the way of God perfectly. “He spake as never man spake,” Matt. vii. 28, 29. His word is spirit and life, and able to save the soul. It must be received believingly, gratefully, experimentally, and practically, “as the power of God unto salvation,” John viii. 31, 32. As willing and obedient disciples, we must affectionately imbibe, and duly improve, all the instructions of his word and Spirit. “Hear ye him.”

2. *We should follow Christ as our sovereign, by obeying his precepts.* He is the king of Zion, and sways his sceptre in his church. As our Redeemer, Saviour, and Judge, he justly demands the obedience of mankind, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. We must obey him decidedly, cheerfully, faithfully, and constantly. In vain do we profess to be taught by him, and trust in him, if we do not obey him. Obedience is the genuine test of discipleship,

Matt. vii. 20. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

3. *We should follow Christ as our pattern, by imitating his example.* "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; for he fulfilled all righteousness." His example is perfect, extensive, intelligible, and distinctly recorded by the evangelists for our instruction and encouragement. As far as possible we should imbibe the spirit that he manifested, uniformly follow the example which he left for our imitation, John xiii. 15; 1 Peter ii. 21. We shall thus "walk as he also walked," and rejoice with all his disciples in,

III. THE REWARD THEY ANTICIPATE;—"What shall we have therefore?" Whatever motive might prompt this important inquiry, the Saviour kindly gave a full and explicit answer in the following context, by which we are taught,

1. *Following Christ will secure our personal salvation.* They "shall inherit everlasting life," ver. 29. Now it is impossible to obtain the inheritance of glory without a previous possession of saving grace, Heb. xii. 14. Those who reject Christ are condemned already; but such as embrace and follow him "are saved by grace through faith." They take his yoke upon them, and find rest unto their souls, Matt. xi. 28—30. Conformity to his image and will constitutes both the purity and felicity of his followers.

2. *Following Christ will secure our temporal interests.* He assured his disciples that whatever worldly advantages they might sacrifice for his sake, they would certainly "receive manifold more in the present life," ver. 29. Though he did not promise them riches, he engaged to supply all their necessities.—Religion always casts a friendly influence over all our temporal concerns, and makes "all things work together for our good." It ensures every blessing, both for life and godliness, for this world and the next, Ps. lxxxiv. 11; Matt. vi. 33; 1 Tim. iv. 8.

3. *Following Christ will secure our eternal happiness.* He therefore distinctly promised this to the apostles, in his answer to Peter, ver. 28. This promise is certainly glorious in its import, and infallible in its accomplishment. It is the end that crowns the work. Christians have respect to the recompense of reward, and follow Christ from earth to heaven. He is now pre-

cious to their souls, and soon they will appear with him in glory everlasting, John xiv. 2, 3; 1 John iii. 2.

Are we the followers of Christ? Do we follow him fully, or at a distance? Let his enemies repent and believe, and escape the wrath to come. But let the saints rejoice, and "follow on to know the Lord."

ETA.

LXX. GOD'S VISIT TO HIS PEOPLE.

LUKE vii. 16.

"God hath visited his people."

THE text is connected with an interesting narrative, circumstantially detailed by the evangelist in the preceding verses. The Lord Jesus "went about doing good;" in the course of his travels he came to a city called Nain. Many disciples and much people were with him: some to gratify curiosity, others perhaps to entangle him in his talk, others to imbibe instruction. Near the gate of the city they met a funeral procession, a young man cut down in the prime of life—a mother's only son, and she was a widow. A widow is a solitary character, the prop that once supported her is withdrawn; she has sometimes indeed the melancholy pleasure of beholding in her offspring the resemblance of him whose memory is ever dear to her; but, in the widow before us, this slender consolation was denied her; she was following her only son to the grave. Jesus Christ compassionated her circumstances, and he drew near and said, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise: and he that was dead sat up," &c. "And there came a fear on all, and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up amongst us, and that God hath visited his people." We will state,

I. THE NATURE OF THIS VISIT.

1. *It was not an abrupt or unexpected visit, but a visit previously and variously intimated.*—God was accustomed to visit man in his primitive innocency; and the visits of Jehovah were sources of inexpressible joy to our first parents: but, when man revolted from God, he no longer desired his presence. “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid.” God however did not abandon man, but gave him a promise, Gen. iii. 15.

2. *It was a visit long and ardently expected.*—The words of Christ sufficiently prove this; “Verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which ye see,” Matt. xiii. 17,—“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day,” &c. John viii. 56.

3. *It was a visit personally and punctually paid.*—Personally as to the manner, “For in the fulness of time God sent forth his Son made of a woman,” &c. And punctually as to the period. Daniel had referred to this, “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people.” &c. Dan. ix. 24.

4. *It was a visit generally known and widely and extensively spread.*—John the Baptist did all he could to give publicity to the character of Christ, and Christ himself “went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues,” &c. Matt. iv. 23. But,

5. *It was a visit almost generally disregarded.*—A few revered and adored the Saviour, and exclaimed, “Never man spake as this man;” but the great mass of the Jewish people rejected him. “He came unto his own, but his own received him not.” View the insults they offered unto his person, and the contempt they cast upon his doctrines and miracles.

II. THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH THIS VISIT WAS PAID.

1. *To display the divine glory.*—Every thing that God does in the kingdom of nature, providence, and grace, must in a certain sense refer to himself. “The heavens declare the glory of God,” the glory of his natural perfections; but the visit which God in the person of Christ paid to his people, was to display the glory of the moral perfections of the Deity—wisdom, love power, and mercy.

2. *To make an atonement for sin.*—God is the moral Go-

vernor of the world.—When he made man he placed him under a law, a law whose penalty was death. This law was violated—justice demanded punishment. No creature could make an expiation. God revealed himself in human nature, to make an atonement for sin. Hence “he was wounded for our transgressions,” &c. He “gave his life a ransom for many,” &c. “He was made sin for us,” &c.

3. *To reveal a comprehensive and complete system of religious truth.* Divine truth was sparingly and cautiously revealed under the Old Testament dispensation; it was here a little and there a little; and that which was revealed was corrupted by the artifice or ignorance of men. But Christ declared “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth,” &c. John xviii. 37.

4. *To exhibit a perfect model of virtue.* The Old Testament saints were patterns of piety—Joseph of chastity, Moses of meekness, Job of patience, Daniel of courage—but Christ was all perfection. See his submission to parental authority, his humility, his sympathetic feeling for the afflicted, his zeal for his Father’s glory, his love, his patience, &c.

III. THE RETURNS WE SHOULD MAKE TO GOD FOR FAVOURING US WITH SUCH A VISIT.

1. *We should admire and adore the condescension of the visitant.* Never was there such a visit paid before; so voluntary; so little was there on the part of man to invite such a visitant; the treatment he was to meet with from the parties visited: all serve to excite our astonishment, and lead us to adore the condescension of our God and Saviour.

2. *We should form our lives upon the model of his.* Let us study his character, let us imbibe his disposition, and let us copy his life, 1 John iv. 17.

3. *We should avail ourselves of all the advantages which God’s visit to our world was designed to procure.* He came to save sinners—to destroy the works of the devil—“that we might have life, and have it more abundantly.” Let us seek salvation, &c.

4. *As God has visited us, let us visit him in return.* He comes among us when we assemble in his name. Let us meet him in his house—in our closet—at his table, and let us anti-

cipate the time when we shall visit him in his kingdom ; when he will send his flaming messengers, to shout us welcome to the skies. "He is gone to prepare a place for us, and he will come again and receive us unto himself." Amen. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

BETA,

LXXI. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT OFFENDED IN CHRIST,

LUKE vii. 23.

"And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

It has been justly remarked that public characters, like the most stately buildings in a city, the goodliest trees in a forest, the highest mountains in a range of them, or the largest and most brilliant stars in the heavens, forcibly attract general attention. Thus it was said of Christ, that he went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into a house, and would have no man know it, but he could not be hid. And as such characters attract public notice, so also do they partake of praise or blame according to the knowledge or ignorance, deliberation or precipitancy, diffidence or conceit, candour or violence, of those who sit in judgment on them. No wonder therefore that it should be said of Christ, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." Or that "the stone which the builders disallowed is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence." Let it however be well observed, that none will be stumbled in Christ but those who seek occasion of stumbling in him. Hence the force of the words in the text. "And blessed is he," &c. Observe,

I. THAT WHEN THE SAVIOUR SAYS, "Blessed is he," &c. HE INTIMATES THAT THERE IS OCCASION FOR OFFENCE OR

STUMBLING IN HIM, TO THOSE WHO DISINGENUOUSLY SEEK IT AS AN EXCUSE FOR THEIR DISOBEDIENCE. The idea is taken from a traveller who meets with something in his way that causes him either to halt or fall. Any thing therefore in the person, religion, or followers of the Saviour, which either hinders men from becoming Christ's disciples, or turns them aside from being such, is called a stumbling-block. Thus when Christ said, (John vii. 53, &c.) "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man," &c. many of his disciples were offended and walked with him no more. From hence we perceive,

1. That those who are unwilling to submit their understanding to the authority of revelation, are either offended with the sanction of the Saviour's mission, because it is not overbearing; or with his doctrines, because some of them are so mysterious; or with his institutions, because they are so simple; or with his rewards, because they are so remote.

2. That those who love the praise of men more than the praise of God, and the pomp of the world so as not to relish any thing which does not savour of it, such are easily stumbled at the humble appearance and circumstances of the Saviour, supposing that he ought to have appeared otherwise; or at the caste and condition of his friends and subjects.

3. That those who are too fond of their sinful pursuits to relinquish them, too much attached to sensible good to sacrifice it for that which is spiritual and remote, and too much indisposed to the holiness of the gospel to submit to that course of self-denial which is enjoined by the Saviour; such will easily be scandalized by the singular and unsavoury precepts of Christ, by the manifold and great inconveniences which Christianity sometimes imposes on its followers, and by every thing in the religion of Christ which is opposed to the carnality and enmity of the natural man. And, indeed, weak must be that man's understanding, and exceedingly small his wit, who is not able to frame some objections to the religion of Jesus, sufficiently plausible to take with others as well as himself, if he is wishful to find an excuse for rejecting it. But observe,

. II. THAT ALTHOUGH SUCH AS SEEK OCCASION OF STUMBLING IN THE SAVIOUR MAY FIND IT, YET IS THERE NOTHING IN HIM TO STUMBLE OR OFFEND THOSE WHO ARE TEACHABLE AND WELL DISPOSED.

Such well know that reason could never have supplied the want of revelation. That, consequently, reason can never be competent to pronounce what ought to be and what ought not to be a part of revelation; but must receive on the accredited testimony of Jehovah whatever he may see it necessary to reveal.

Such will see that from the *very nature* of many subjects of revelation, many of its doctrines must necessarily be mysterious. That, as it has to annihilate the spirit of the world, and to promote a mode of worship adapted to the nature of God, and perfective of the nature of man, its institutions must be simple.

Such will also see that had the Saviour affected a greater degree of state, or had his precepts and promises been more accommodated to the taste of sensual men, or the complexion of his kingdom to the form of worldly sovereignties, then had the purpose of his incarnation, in a great degree, been frustrated, the truth of his mission been rendered justly suspicious, and unbridled, or barefaced infidelity had a solemn and perfect vindication. As it is, we see in the mission and economy of Christ, what furthers a design worthy of Jehovah's choice, and therefore what is entitled to his sanction.

But while there is not any thing in Christ that can *justly* offend the teachable and well disposed, there is much in him to attract and command their admiration and love. He is a *perfect daysman*, truly allied to God and men—able to shield us from all in God that terrifies, and to interest us in all in him that can delight us. One who can save us from all in ourselves that would subject us to damage, and can sanctify all in us that will conduce to our felicity. In short, he is a Saviour through whose humanity, the otherwise inimitable excellencies of the Divine Being are rendered inimitable by us, while our peaceable and sinking nature is raised, by an imitation of his blessed example, into a likeness of the Divine Being. Who can see any thing here to give offence? This glory can only offend the diseased eye! The man of God will go to him without the camp, bearing his reproach; he will account all things as loss for him; he will follow him through good report and evil. And observe,

III. THAT THOSE WHO SURMOUNT THE CAUSE OF STUM-

BLING WHICH THE DISINGENUOUS FIND IN CHRIST, ARE BLESSED INDEED ;—“ And blessed is he,” &c.

1. Such are blessed, in that they escape the reproach and misery consequent on being offended in him. Supposing such as are offended to be *sincere*, yet, what a reproach and injury is it then to be ignorant of a matter of such importance ! But if the offended is stumbled through his own insincerity, his reproach and danger must be great indeed. He will not only fall on this stone, and so be broken to pieces, but this stone will fall on him, and so grind him to powder.

2. Such as are not offended in Christ, are by their disposition brought near to the kingdom of God. The very circumstance of having examined the peculiarities of Christianity without offence, augurs well : for a well disposed mind cannot remain in the same state after such an examination, as it was in before it proceeded to make it ; as such an examination will either offend it, or predispose it to a better. He, therefore, who is not offended, is prepared to edify by any gracious visitation of God, while God is disposed more abundantly to favour such a state of preparation. “ To him that hath shall be given,” and he shall have more abundantly, &c.

3. Such as are not offended in Christ, will, by their disposition, be led to a correct, perfect, and saving knowledge of Christ, John viii. 12.

To conclude.

1. From this subject we infer the *truth* and *importance* of Christ's mission, for otherwise our being offended in him would subject us to no disadvantage.

2. We infer the awful condition of such as are offended, since Christ's mission is true and important, is to us and for us ; and its success, as to us, depends on our acceptance and concurrence ; we evidently have much at stake.

3. If we have been offended and now discover our error, let us bewail our situation, and instantly return.

IOTA.

LXXII. A JEWISH PROVERB ILLUSTRATED.

LUKE xvii. 37.

“Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.”

SINNERS are ever ready to offer pleas for their sins; but God will punish them with just severity. He is jealous of his glory, and he revengeth the insults which are offered to him and to his government, Nahum i. 2. He bore long with the Jews, his own peculiar people, but the hour came at length, when he overwhelmed them with his wrathful indignation. That event was foretold by our Lord Jesus Christ with great exactness, and his awful predictions were accomplished in due time. In the preceding verses he dwells on this melancholy subject, and when interrogated where these things would take place, he replied, “Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.” This was a Jewish proverb, in common use, and well understood. It implies two things.—First, Wherever the Jews are, thither the Roman armies will be gathered together to punish them for their sins.—And, secondly, as a learned writer observes, Wherever the state of things is the same, and the circumstances alike, there also will the event, in any place or at any time, be proportionably alike.

I. WHEREVER THE JEWS ARE, THITHER THE ROMAN ARMIES WILL BE GATHERED TOGETHER TO PUNISH THEM FOR THEIR SINS.

1. The religious and moral state of the Jews resembled that of a *dead carcase*, and in the parallel passage (Matt. xxiv. 28,) that word is used by our Lord. The comparison was just, for they had lost the life and power of religion; their morals were corrupt and abominable, and they were highly offensive both to God and good men.

2. By the *eagles* we may understand the Roman armies, whose ensign was the eagle, and whose cruelties, in many of their wars, resembled that of the eagle, which is a bird of prey, Job xxxix. 27—30; and on many occasions they were sent

forth as instruments of divine vengeance, to punish guilty nations.

3. When the Jews were *ripe for destruction*, the Romans invaded Judea, in great force, and with great wrath; having been provoked by repeated rebellions and horrid cruelties practised by that hardened and abandoned race of men.

4. The events which followed were *dreadful*. Judea was laid waste; a trench was cast about Jerusalem, Luke xix. 43; the daily sacrifice was taken away, Dan. xi. 31; the temple was burned, the city was trodden down, Luke xxi. 24; *eleven hundred thousand* persons perished in the siege, and *ninety thousand* were carried away captives.

5. Here, then, we see the avenging hand of God punishing a people whose wickedness was without a parallel; and our opinion is not singular, for Josephus, the Jewish historian, says, that if the Romans had delayed to come against their city, it would either have been swallowed up of the earth, or have perished by thunderbolts and lightning from heaven, and so would have suffered like Sodom.

6. To see *the justice of this visitation*, we should consider the following facts: the Jews had rejected Christ, whose holy life and mighty miracles should have endeared him to them as the true Messiah; in their rage and madness they had insisted on his crucifixion, and were his murderers; they had rejected his blessed gospel; and had persecuted his followers unto death, Acts vii. 59.

II. BUT WHEREVER THE STATE OF THINGS IS THE SAME, AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES ALIKE, THERE ALSO WILL THE EVENT IN ANY PLACE, OR AT ANY TIME, BE PROPORTIONABLY ALIKE.

I. This has happened in *former times*. The sin of our first parents was awfully punished, Gen. iii. 16—24; the old world, being exceedingly wicked, perished by the flood, Gen. vii. 21, 22; polluted Sodom suffered the vengeance of eternal fire, Jude 7; when the Canaanites had filled up the measure of their iniquity they perished by the sword of Joshua, Josh. xxiii. 9; idolatrous Egypt was visited by sore plagues, and hardened Pharaoh perished in the Red Sea, Exod. xv. 4, 5; and the fall of great cities and mighty empires, as recorded both in sacred and pro-

same history, proves, that wherever sinners are, there the judgments of a righteous God will find them out.

2. This will happen to sinful individuals, who, whatever they imagine, are not overlooked in the great mass of mankind. The eyes of the Lord are upon them continually, and their sins will find them out, Num. xxii. 23. Judgments will fall upon them in an evil hour; and, when that comes, they will meet destruction without a remedy, Prov. xxix. 1.

3. The same things will befall those wicked cities which now flourish in the earth. When God ariseth in judgment they will fall to rise no more. Their names may remain as a warning to others, but their glory will fade, and their pride will be laid in the dust; so that faithful ministers should even now sound an alarm, like the ancient prophets, "against the fenced cities, and against the high towers" of the ungodly, Zeph. i. 16.

4. Fallen and corrupt churches will share similar punishments. Mystical Babylon, or the church of Rome, shall be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all, Rev. xviii. 21. God will utterly destroy her power, and make her, like the Jews of old, an example of his vengeance. Nor let other fallen churches hope to escape; for the Lord will punish them in the day of his wrath, even as he punished heathen Rome under the opening of the sixth seal, Rev. vi. 12—17.

5. All the nations that forget God will perish like the great monarchies of old; and, what is more dreadful still, they shall be turned into hell, Ps. ix. 17. Surely we may say with an inspired apostle, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 31.

6. But through the sin of man, the world itself will perish by raging fire, 2 Pet. iii. 10. When that event takes place, the predictions of our Lord in reference to Jerusalem and the end of the world will have had their full accomplishment, Matt. xxiv. 2, 3. They were partly fulfilled when the Roman eagles destroyed Jerusalem; but will have their complete fulfilment when divine judgments are poured out upon all the wicked in the end of time.

INFERENCES.

1. God is the same in his holiness from age to age; and has the same abhorrence of sin now that he ever had. He cannot

be reconciled to evil, because it is, and ever will be, directly opposite to his pure nature, Ps. v. 4.

2. Sin is ever the same, both in its nature and in its effects. It includes all that is mean, vile, contemptible, and destructive; and all that degrades, torments, and slays the wicked, Ps. xxxiv. 21.

3. Therefore, on these principles, it is evident there can be no change in the divine conduct and administration. His obedient subjects are, and ever will be, safe and happy; but the disobedient are, and ever will be, in danger and misery. The eagles will ever find the dead carcase, wherever it be; and the wickedness of the wicked, wherever they be, will find them out in just and equitable punishment, Prov. xi. 21.

SIGMA.

LXXIII. JESUS WEeping OVER PERISHING SINNERS.

Luke xix. 41, 42.

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

1. **WHEN** we see a man weeping, of whom but little is known by us, it is natural for us to set our imagination in exercise, that we may be able to ascertain the probable cause or causes of his distress. We very readily suppose that he is a man weak in his intellects, and liable to be thus affected by every unpleasant occurrence, however trifling; or he has committed some heinous crime, and his conscience is wrung by bitter remorse; or he is now overwhelmed by the pressure of some recent affliction in his

circumstances; or some great calamity has befallen his friends, and the tears we behold are tears of sympathy.

2. Our text exhibits to our view a man in tears. But be not hasty in your conclusions; these tears are not indicative of mental imbecility, for in him dwelt all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge.—These tears are not expressive of remorse, for in him was no sin, and in all his deportment he was holy, harmless, and undefiled.—These tears are not occasioned by personal afflictions, they have no reference to himself.—They are not occasioned by the calamities of his friends, for their case, even at the worst, is very hopeful.—Why then does he weep? The reason is, he sees his enemies, his open and avowed enemies, obstinately bent on their own destruction. It is this that fills his heart with sorrow, his eyes with tears, and his mouth with this affecting language. “When he came near,” on his last visit to Jerusalem, “he beheld the city,” that city, the inhabitants of which had despised, rejected, and reviled him, and were now forming designs against his life. Well knowing the dreadful judgments by which this city would soon be laid desolate, he most compassionately lamented “and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known,” or, “Oh! that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” This lamentation, it appears, was lost on the Jews in general, but it is recorded for our instruction: and, under the divine blessing, it may prove highly beneficial to us, by teaching us,

I. THAT GOSPEL BLESSINGS ARE CONDUCIVE TO THE PEACE OF MANKIND. They are the things which belong unto our peace. Here let us more particularly observe,

1. *What those things are to which our Lord refers.* That they are those blessings which he had called “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” to enjoy, but which they had obstinately rejected, is evident from similar complaints, see Matt. xiii. 14, 15, xxiii. 37; John v. 40. They include the blessings of grace in this world: and the blessings of glory in the eternal state.—The blessings of grace in this world. Deliverance—from bondage, condemnation, and guilty fears, Ps. cxvi. 16; Isa. xii. 1; Ps. xxxiv. 4; and holiness—both of heart and life, Obadiah 17; Rom. vi. 22.—The blessings of glory in the eter-

nal state. An eternal life of rest, felicity, honour, and security, Rom. ii. 6, 7. Let us also observe,

2. *How these things are conducive to our peace.* They belong unto our peace, as they produce sweet tranquillity of mind, Eccl. ii. 26. This arises from peace with God, Rom. v. 1; peace of conscience, 2 Cor. i. 12; a peaceable disposition, James iii. 18; the joy of victory, Rom. viii. 37; 1 Cor. xv. 57; and the joy of hope, Rom. v. 2, and xiv. 17. Our text teaches us,

II. THAT THESE BLESSINGS MUST BE KNOWN TO BE ENJOYED:—"Oh that thou hadst known," &c. The knowledge thus necessary, must be,

1. *A speculative knowledge*; that is, we must have a correct view of them, as they are exhibited in God's word.—For we are naturally without them, Rom. iii. 16—18. We must seek them to obtain them, Job xxii. 21; Isa. xxvii. 5. And we must understand them, in order that we may seek them aright: we must understand the nature of them; the necessity of them; and the way to obtain them, Prov. xix. 2. The knowledge here required must also be,

2. *An experimental knowledge.* This is evident—From the testimony of inspired apostles, 2 Cor. v. 1, xiii. 5; 1 John v. 19.—And from the nature of gospel blessings; spiritual sight, liberty, and health, must be experienced to be enjoyed. Our text teaches us,

III. THAT A SEASON IS AFFORDED US FOR ACQUIRING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THESE BLESSINGS.

1. This season is here called our day, because it is the time in which we are called to labour for the blessings of peace, John vi. 27; Phil. ii. 12, 13; 2 Pet. iii. 14.

2. This season is favourable for seeking the things here recommended; for they are set before us, Deut. xxx. 19, 20; we have strength promised to seek them with, Isa. xl. 31; and we have light to seek them in, John xii. 36. Hence, we should also recollect,

3. *This season is limited*; it is only a day. It began with the exercise of our reason; it may be terminated either by death, the general judgment, the loss of our mental powers, or the departure of God's spirit, Jer. vi. 8; and while it remains,

it should be promptly improved, John xii. 35; Matt. xxiv. 44. Our text also teaches us, with respect to gospel blessings,

IV. THAT IT IS GOD'S WILL THEY SHOULD BE ENJOYED BY US. This is certain,

1. *From the wish of Christ*; "Oh that thou hadst known," &c. Such a wish we find often repeated by God in his word, and expressed in the kindest manner; see Deut. v. 29, xxxii. 29; Isa. xlvi. 18.

2. *From the tears of Christ*. These demonstrate the sincerity of his wish, Deut. xxxii. 4; the great importance of godliness, 1 Tim. iv. 8; and the dreadful doom of impenitent sinners, Rom. ii. 8, 9.

3. *And from the visitations of Christ*: see ver. 44. He visited us by his incarnation, Luke i. 78, 79; and he still visits us by the strivings of his Spirit—the gifts of his providence, Acts xiv. 17.—and the ministry of his word, 2 Cor. v. 20; Luke xix. 10. Hence we learn,

V. THAT ALL WHO SEEK THESE BLESSINGS ARIGHT, WILL OBTAIN THEM.

1. *To seek them aright, is to seek them as God requires*:—with respect to time, now, while our day of visitation lasts, Job xxii. 21:—with respect to manner—by faith in Christ, John v. 38, 39;—by receiving Christ, John i. 12;—coming to God by him, Heb. vii. 25;—and abiding in him, 1 John ii. 28.

2. *All who thus seek them will certainly obtain them*; for Christ died for the chief of sinners, Zech. xiii. 1. He calls them to seek salvation, Isaiah i. 16—18; and engages not to reject them, John vi. 37. Only those shall perish who despise him, Acts xiii. 41; and all such must perish, because they obstinately reject the only remedy, Prov. xxix. 1; John iii. 17. Hence our text finally teaches us,

VI. THAT THE REJECTION OF THESE BLESSINGS IS PUNISHED WITH DESTRUCTION.

1. *This is evident from Scripture*;—for all mankind by nature are sinners, Rom. iii. 23. As sinners they are exposed to destruction, Prov. x. 29; and by impenitence, the only means of salvation are neglected, Heb. x. 26, 27.

2. *And it is evident from facts*. These Jews, through im-

penitence, became the victims of divine vengeance; and so must all impenitent sinners, 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

APPLICATION.

1. *Examine yourselves.* Do you enjoy the things which belong unto your peace? Gal. vi. 4.

2. *If not, seek them*—on God's terms, Acts xx. 21;—with your whole heart, Jer. xxix. 13; and without delay, Job. xxxvi. 18.

3. *If thus seeking, expect salvation*—from Christ's all-sufficiency, Heb. vii. 25; and from his goodness. Recollect, he visits you—weeps over you—wishes your salvation—has bled for you—and now waits on you, Rev. iii. 20.

ALPHA.

LXXIV. THE CHRISTIAN'S PRESERVATION
DEPENDENT ON HIS PATIENCE.

LUKE xxi. 19.

“In your patience possess ye your souls.”

“IN the world” (said Jesus Christ to his disciples) “ye shall have tribulation.” This he clearly foresaw would be the case, from the spirit engendered by all false religions, and from the manner in which his own (so far as it should be plainly, faithfully, and perseveringly published and exemplified) would expose and condemn them and the practices which they countenanced. The words of the text suppose his followers to be in these very circumstances, and exposed to the greatest difficulties and perils; yet even in these they are instructed how to save themselves, and are assured that if they act agreeably to the instruction given them, they would infallibly be preserved. In your patience, or

rather by your patience and perseverance, ye shall preserve your souls. These words suppose,

I. THAT THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS ARE EXPOSED TO DISTRESSING AND PERILOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. That those of them who were more immediately addressed in these words were thus circumstanced, is evident from the context. And the case will be much the same, at this day, with those who consistently profess, and are zealously employed in propagating the religion of Jesus Christ. But if the disciples of Christ in general suffer on these accounts, there are some who suffer much more for the same things. But, in addition to these distressing circumstances, the condition of the saints is rendered more dangerous by the efforts of the evil one to sow and propagate the growth of tares with the good seed; or, in other words, to suggest to curious, proud, enthusiastic, and corrupt men, such sentiments and practices as may subvert the understanding, the faith, and the purity of God's people. But that which carries the danger of the saints to the highest point, is the effort, the unwearied effort of the enemy so to operate on the remaining corruption of their nature, or so to press on their weakest graces, as either by allurements or discouragement to turn them out of the way; or else, by lifting them up with the pride of their attainments and performances, to sink them into his own condemnation. By such means are the disciples of the Redeemer tried and endangered;—and by these very means have many in every age been destroyed;—and from this danger nothing can preserve us, as the text,

II. SUGGESTS, BUT PATIENCE;—“In your patience possess ye your souls.” We are naturally led to observe,

1. That so far as the saints are endangered by the growth and propagation of error, their preservation will depend on their growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and on their abounding in knowledge and all judgment, that they may be able to try the things which differ; or, as the apostle elsewhere expresses himself, on having their senses exercised to discern between good and evil, without which there is no security against error. But,

2. This understanding may exist in a person who is unable to stand in the evil day. Little more is wanting than the *truth of piety*, to enable a Christian to stand against the ordinary

allurements and discouragements of life, as such a one will hold on his way, and grow stronger and stronger. But when a man is beset and completely surrounded with more than ordinary distresses and hazard, especially when he is marked out as the butt for the enemies of the Redeemer to shoot at, the rock which the furious waves of tribulation are to lash, the tree of righteousness on which the storms of temptation are to expend themselves; then we may be bold to say that nothing but patience, or an ability to abide for any length of time under the greatest possible pressure, can preserve us. Or rather as the passage may, and perhaps ought to be interpreted, in your fixed determination and endeavour to withstand the evil of those times, ye shall possess your souls; it requiring something more than *merely passive virtue*, to render us constant in such circumstances. And such a resolute state of mind can only spring from a full conviction of the wisdom and goodness of God in permitting such trials; from the warmest attachment to the Lord Jesus, which will dispose us to suffer any thing and every thing rather than forsake him; and from an unvarying persuasion that the help and deliverance which he hath promised will most certainly and seasonably be afforded: where these things meet, the mind cannot but be determined; and looking to God for aid, cannot but be prepared to resist unto blood. And such a state of mind we are assured will bring us off victorious: for as the text,

III. DECLARES SUCH SHALL POSSESS THEIR SOULS; the words, "possess ye your souls," we understand to be of the same import as 'ye shall preserve your souls:' so that the sentiment of the text is, that by patience or perseverance we shall preserve our souls. And to see the truth of the text, we have only to attend to historical facts. And,

1. Those Christians who were living in Jerusalem when it was encompassed by the Roman armies, and who retained their faith, escaped destruction. The Romans surrounded the city in three divisions. But after that the Roman general had taken the lower part of the city, he most imprudently withdrew his army to a distance: by which circumstance, those Christians who remembered and adhered to the directions of their Lord, (Luke xxi. 21,) escaped: and all who fled to the mountains east of Jordan, that is, to the country that was under the government of Agrippa the younger, and which remained in obedience

to Rome, were safe. So fully was the proverb used in Luke xxi. 18, verified, that it has been asserted by some historians, that not one Christian perished in the siege. But,

2. We speak with greater certainty when we say, that all who, both before and since that event, have yielded up their persons unto death for Christ's sake, resisting unto blood, striving against sin; and all who have held fast their profession to the end of their probation, finishing their course in hope and purity, have preserved themselves unto life eternal, Matt. xvi. 25, xxiv. 13. And as all such infallibly preserve themselves to eternal life, so also,

3. Do they preserve to themselves, together with life itself, the *true enjoyment of it*; a sense in which some commentators understand the text: for such have the joy of a good conscience, of the divine approbation and presence, and a transporting hope; hence, so far as these either *do* or *can* contribute to this end, than which nothing can do it more, the enjoyment of life is theirs. And let it never be forgotten, that where these are wanting, nothing else can make life happy.

From hence we learn,

1. That those who follow not with Jesus, though they have nothing to suffer for Christ's sake, yet is their case far from being an enviable one.

2. That though the condition of the saints is one of trial and exercise, yet is it one that no man needs to dread, seeing it furnishes present, and leads to future enjoyment and safety. And,

3. That discipleship, to furnish this advantage, must be persevered in and improved to the very last.

IOTA.

LXXV. EVERLASTING LIFE CONNECTED WITH BELIEVING ON THE SON OF GOD.

JOHN xxiii. 8.

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.”

IN the preceding verses John the Baptist delivers to his audience a discourse concerning the dignity of Christ's person, the certainty and excellence of his doctrine, and the power and authority of his office. It is the work of faithful ministers to study, know, and preach Christ and him crucified. It is their aim and labour to win souls to Christ, by presenting him to their view in all his amiable and attractive excellencies; and by representing, on the one hand, the everlasting happiness of all such as embrace him, and on the other hand, eternal misery resulting from the rejection of him. In the text, our attention is directed to two important points. *First*, the duty of all that hear the gospel; and that is, to “believe” on the Son, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who is the Son of God with respect to his divine nature, and the Son of man, by miraculous conception, relating to his human nature; on this account he is called the Son of God, Luke i. 35. Now, believing on him is the duty of all to whom the gospel is preached, by the plain and express command of God, 1 John iii. 23. *Secondly*, The unspeakable advantage attending this duty of believing on the Son; and that is “everlasting life,” by which is meant the endless happiness of heaven. So that what is evidently our great duty, is no less our unspeakable interest; we are sure to find our highest advantage in it, the gain will certainly be our own, and nothing can so much promote our benefit as faith in the Son of God. Let us shew,

I. WHAT THIS BELIEVING ON THE SON IS. And,

II. IN WHAT RESPECT TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST MAY BE SAID TO HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

I. WHAT IS THIS BELIEVING ON THE SON?

1. This believing on the Son, as here mentioned, supposes a *distinct knowledge* of him—of his person, natures, and offices;

as that he is the Son of God and Saviour of mankind—the promised Messiah, who came into the world, was made flesh, obeyed the law, died for our sins, and rose again for our justification; that pardon of sin, adoption, sanctification, and eternal life, are to be obtained through him, and him only. Knowledge, though it does not enter into the nature of faith, yet it is so requisite to it, that there can be no believing on the Son without it. “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” Rom. x. 14. And therefore faith in Christ is sometimes expressed by the knowledge of him, and by seeing him.

2. It includes *assent* to the record that God the Father has given of him. St. John gives us the sum of it,—“This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son,” 1 John v. 11. Divine faith, strictly taken, signifies the belief of whatever God has revealed and made known to man, and has for its general object the whole system of truths contained in the Bible: and particularly it is our assent to, and belief of God’s testimony concerning his Son, and the way of salvation through him. He that believes on the Son of God, assents to the truth of all that God has revealed concerning him, saying, with the angel, “These are the true sayings of God,” Rev. xix. 9, and so “sets to his seal that God is true,” John iii. 33; and he that does not assent to the gospel testimony concerning Christ, is said to “make God a liar,” 1 John v. 10.

3. It includes, in consequence of both the knowledge of him, and assent to the testimony of God concerning him, our hearty approbation of him, as every way qualified, able, faithful, and willing, to save to the uttermost all that believe, Heb. vii. 25; Heb. ii. 17; John vi. 37. It takes in a well-pleasèdness with Christ, and the design of his coming into the world, and settled way of salvation through him, which the believer is ready to express in the words of the apostle, “This is a faithful saying,” &c. 1 Tim. i. 15.

4. Chiefly it includes a cordial acceptance of Christ, as offered in the gospel. Saving faith includes not only assent to the gospel proposition, but consent to the gospel proposal of him; the consent of the heart that Christ shall be ours on gospel terms, in all his offices, and for all the purposes of divine appointment; and that we shall be entirely and perpetually his, to be actually employed and disposed of by him, according to his sovereign

authority and righteous pleasure. This act of faith, as it respects Christ, is expressed by "receiving him," John i. 12; and, as it concerns the believer, it is called a giving himself to Christ. It is said of the Macedonian Christians, that they gave themselves to the Lord, 2 Cor. viii. 5. Now this is emphatically the faith in the Son of God that through him gives the believer a title to eternal life. I do not say that this faith is the foundation of our title to heaven, but that it is the instrument of the conveyance of it. All the former particulars are unavailable to salvation without this consent to the gospel proposal of the Son of God, without this acceptance of him, and resignation of ourselves to his government and disposal. We may have much knowledge of Christ, and never attain salvation; may assent to all that God has said concerning him, yet never obtain eternal life; may approve of him as the only all-sufficient Saviour, and as most worthy to be received, yet never embrace him. We shall now,

II. SHOW IN WHAT RESPECTS TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST MAY BE SAID TO HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

1. They have it in title and right of purchase. The Son of God, who has a natural right to it, as being heir of all things, (Heb. i. 2) purchased it for them, Heb. ix. 15. Hence heaven is called a "purchased possession," Eph. i. 14; and faith gives interest in his purchase; so that in the day a penitent believes, he has a right freely conveyed to him of everlasting life.

2. They have the blessedness of the heavenly state in the promises of it; therefore it is called "eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, has promised," Tit. i. 2. It is a promise very frequently repeated in the New Testament, that he who believes shall have everlasting life. And to these promises God has added his oath, which is the highest security possible, that by two immutable things, they who have believed on the Son might have strong consolation, Heb. vi. 18.

3. Believers have the eternal happiness of heaven in their glorified Head and Forerunner. He, as their Forerunner, is entered into heaven for them, Heb. vi. 20; has taken, as it were, possession in their name. He told his disciples, before he left them, that he went to prepare a place for them, John xiv. 2. This expression, as some conceive, is borrowed from travellers, amongst whom one, by agreement, goes before to engage lodgings for the rest of his company. And as Christ, at his ascension,

took possession of heaven in the name of believers, so also does he keep possession of it in their names, preserving still their right to it, till they shall come to be personally and actually possessed of it themselves; and therefore believers are said to "sit together with Christ in heavenly places," Eph. ii. 6.

4. They have everlasting life in the first fruits of it. They have already received some part of their future blessedness in the graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit, which are therefore called the "first fruits of the Spirit," Rom. viii. 23; and the "earnest of the heavenly inheritance," Eph. i. 14. Now as the first-fruits are always of the same kind with the whole harvest, and the earnest part of the bargain; so it is here, the graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit are the same now for kind, though different in degree, that they shall be in heaven itself. Every grace of the Spirit is a spark of future glory; and every spiritual comfort, a drop of the water of the fountain of life, with which the heavenly inhabitants are perpetually refreshed, Rev. xxi. 6. The Spirit of God in the renewed soul is called a well of water, which springs up into everlasting life, John iv. 14.

THETA.

LXXVI. CHRIST'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS SHEEP, AND HIS ASSERTION OF THEIR SECURITY.

JOHN x. 27, 28.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

The riches of the ancients consisting more in the possession of large estates, well stocked with numerous flocks and herds, than in the possession of currency, it of course became an important and even a dignified employment to take care of them. This

being the case, it was no unusual thing for the greatest personages to have charge of them. These circumstances caused the office of a shepherd to be well understood, and commonly esteemed: and hence the propriety of selecting this office as a fit emblem of Jehovah's care of his church. And the same reasons which induced the divine Being to assume the title of a shepherd, caused him to designate his people his flock, his sheep, &c. "My sheep hear my voice," &c. This Scripture sets forth,

I. THE DISTINGUISHING PROPERTIES OF CHRIST'S SHEEP;—“ My sheep hear my voice,” &c.

II. HIS PECULIAR CARE OF THEM;—“ I know them—give to them eternal life,” &c.

I. THIS SCRIPTURE SETS FORTH THE DISTINGUISHING PROPERTIES OF CHRIST'S SHEEP;—“ My sheep hear my voice, and follow me.” Some, by Christ's sheep, understand the elect, whom they suppose to be absolutely decreed to salvation. Others suppose (and we think more justly,) that by Christ's sheep are to be understood those persons who have so yielded themselves up to the influence of divine grace, as to be made humble, teachable, and obedient. Such truly hear Christ's voice; that is, they *know* or *distinguish* his voice from the voice of any other shepherd: alluding to the custom of the shepherd's going before his flock, and teaching it by certain sounds to know and follow him, see ver. 4, 5. Attention to this circumstance will serve as a key to this passage. Suppose a sheep of the Israelitish fold about to hear the true Shepherd for the first time. Suppose this Jewish sheep to have a copy of the Jewish Scriptures in his hand, and Christ to deliver himself in some such way as the following:— ‘ I am the good shepherd spoken of by your prophets and historians; the substance of your prophecies and types, which, as an index, all point to me; to their united testimony I appeal, and rest my claims to your regard entirely upon it. Examine and see whether or not my person, parentage, birth-place, time of appearance, life, doctrines, miracles, &c. do not correspond with the account given in your Scriptures of the Messiah.’ Would not this Jewish sheep go and search his Scriptures on this subject? And, coming to a full persuasion of the Redeemer's divine authority, would he not yield himself up to his teaching and government? Again, suppose Jesus Christ addressing him-

self unto the Gentiles in some such manner as this:—‘ I am sent into the world by the Maker of it, for the sole purpose of saving it. I am sent to instruct its inhabitants how they may make their peace with God; to lay down my life as an atonement for their sin; and to take on me the guidance and protection of all who are wishful to lay hold on eternal life. As a proof of the truth of what I say, I appeal to my doctrines, morals, and institutions, whether they are not worthy of God, and adapted to the great purposes of my mission. I also appeal to my works, whether they are not such as no man could perform unless the hand of God were with him. I court your scrutiny, and demand your submission, if you find my claims to be just.’ Would not every humble, teachable, and obedient soul among the Gentiles exclaim, *This is the Son of God?* The case is exactly the same at this day. Suppose a person born of irreligious parents, totally destitute of any religious light, or any relish for it, who has been carefully kept by his parents from all good, and placed in the way of all evil; who has heard no mention made of Christ, unless it has been to vilify him as an impostor; suppose this man to be powerfully visited by the strivings of God’s Spirit, and to be made desirous of coming to God; while under these feelings, suppose him, for the first time in his life, to stroll into a Christian assembly, and to hear the preacher speaking of one Jesus, who, he affirms, came into the world to save it; and to convince his hearers of the truth of what he says, he appeals to a book which he calls the Bible, and which his hearers believe to have been divinely inspired. Would not this man, before he left the assembly, inquire of some one of its members where this book was to be procured? Would he not immediately possess himself of it and search it? And finding the preacher’s allegations to be true, would he not exclaim with Philip, “ I have found the Christ?” And would not the Jewish and Gentile sheep, on finding the great and good Shepherd, instantly yield themselves up to be taught and governed by him? Would they not consider themselves bound to hearken and to obey in all things? And would not their reliance be placed on him alone for salvation? Of all such persons we may affirm, still keeping the figure of the text in sight, that they will hear the voice of this the true Shepherd, and follow him; and in doing so, the Shepherd will, as we have to shew,

II. EXTEND TO THEM HIS PECULIAR CARE, &c.; "I know them, and I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

1. *He knows his sheep.* He distinguishes between his sheep, and those who merely mingle with them, but are not of them; for he knows who they are that believe not, John vi. 64. Nay, he knows all men, John ii. 24, 25. Or, by knowing his sheep, may be meant his love for them; as in the Scriptures, to know is often meant for to love, see 1 Cor. viii. 3: and Gal. iv. 9. The very commitment of a flock to a man's charge is enough to excite in him a feeling in its favour; how much more then must his continued and peculiar association with it excite such a feeling! And shall not the good Shepherd have an infinitely greater love for his flock of immortal beings, whom he hath purchased with his own blood.

2. *He gives to his sheep eternal life.* The care and affection of a shepherd appears in his leading his flock to a pasture, to good pasture; and in doing it seasonably, constantly, &c. The Psalmist comforted himself by the consideration that God, his shepherd, would thus conduct himself, (see Ps. xxiii. 1—3.) and the Holy Ghost predicted that Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, should act the same part: see Ezek. xxxiv. 23—27. Agreeably to this prophecy Christ says, "I give unto them eternal life:" that is, I give them the means of eternal life; and in the right use of them, the promise of eternal life; and in dependence on that the foretaste of eternal life: and on the retention of that to the end, I will advance them to the perfect enjoyment of it.

3. *He will never permit his sheep to perish.* A shepherd expresses his attention for his flock by his willingness to endure any inconveniences, and to brave any dangers, for its sake. So Christ says, "his sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of his hand." There are two ways in which even an affectionate and in some respects a faithful shepherd might lose his flock: that is, either by ignorantly leading it to pasturage through a deadly path, or by timidly allowing beasts of prey, which may be driven by hunger into the pasture, to devour it; but against both these evils Christ's flock is secured. He is too wise to lead them in a dangerous path to pasturage; and his love and power are too great, ever to permit him

to abandon them, or to be mastered by any enemy, see ver. 11—15, and 29, 30. Thus is the salvation of Christ's true flock infallibly secured.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. How delightful is the prospect which is here opened to the followers of Christ! What interest have you in it? Are you of Christ's flock? What evidence have you that you belong to it? Have you heard his voice? Are you following him?

2. If you belong not to this flock, how dismal is your prospect! you belong to a shepherd who hates you, who will never suffer you to be saved if he can prevent it, and who will make every exertion to conduct you to the lowest degrees of misery. Open your eyes on your danger, and oh escape for your life! The good Shepherd will compassionate and assist you in the attempt.

IOTA.

LXXVII. JESUS CHRIST IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.

JOHN xiv. 6.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life · no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

THE prospect of our Lord's departure out of the world filled the hearts of his disciples with trouble, because they had long enjoyed his gracious presence, and had indulged a hope that he was about to "restore again the kingdom to Israel;" but he comforted them with an assurance that he "was going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them, and that he would come again and receive them to himself," ver. 1—3. When he had stated this, he added, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know,"

ver. 4. But Thomas, who was slow of apprehension and apt to doubt, saith unto him, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" ver. 5. Then Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

I. "I AM THE WAY."

1. As a way or road leads to a certain place, and as means lead to certain ends, so our Lord Jesus Christ is the way to all the blessings of grace on earth, and to all the glories of the upper and better world. Particularly,

2. He is the way to *pardon*. Through him our sins are remitted, when we believe in his name, Acts x. 43; and through him the ministers of his word preach the forgiveness of sins, Acts xiii. 38.

3. Jesus is the way to *peace*. Wicked men are at war with God; but he is the medium of reconciliation, 2 Cor. v. 19; and all true believers have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, Rom. v. 1.

4. Christ is the way to *holiness*. "His blood cleanseth from all sin," 1 John i. 7; his Spirit sanctifies the soul by an application of that blood, 2 Thess. ii. 13; and he "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," Tit. ii. 14.

5. And our blessed Lord is the way to *heaven*. His merit gives us a title to it; his grace works in us a fitness for it; his Holy Spirit leads us to that happy world, Rom. viii. 14: and by his blood we shall enter with boldness into the holiest place, Heb. x. 19.

II. "AND THE TRUTH."

1. Jesus is the *fountain* of truth. All truth is known to him, John xxi. 17: all the treasures of wisdom are hid in him, Col. ii. 3; and all the divine truth that is known in the world has flowed from him.

2. He is the *revealer* of truth: he revealed truth in former times, by his holy prophets; he revealed truth himself, in the days of his flesh, John viii. 12; and he sent his apostles to reveal the truth to a dark and erring world, Acts xxvi. 18.

3. He is the constant *patron* of truth. The friends of truth are his friends, and the enemies of truth are his enemies. His

cause is the cause of truth; he contends for it; and his truth must finally triumph: for "he shall bring forth judgment unto truth," or "victory," Isa. xlii. 3; Matt. xii. 20.

4. And he is the truth of all those promises, prophecies, and types of the Messiah which are recorded in the Old Testament; for they had their accomplishment in him, John i. 17.

III. "AND THE LIFE."

1. Our blessed Lord has life in *himself*, John i. 4; and he is the author of life to all created beings, both in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, John i. 3; Col. i. 16, 17.

2. He is the *spiritual life* of believers. They were quickened by him, Eph. ii. 1; they live by faith in him, Gal. ii. 20; and the constant supplies of their life are derived from him, as those of the branch are derived from the vine, John xv. 5.

3. Our Saviour is the life of the *body*, which "is dead because of sin," Rom. viii. 10. He will raise it from the dead at the last day; for he is "the resurrection and the life," John xi. 24, 25: his resurrection is a pledge of ours, and because he lives we shall live also, ver. 19.

4. And he may be called the life, as he gives *eternal life* to all who hear his voice and follow him, John x. 27, 28. Through him, "the gift of God is eternal life," Rom. vi. 23; and he that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life, John iii. 36: he hath an undeniable claim to it, and a sweet foretaste of it in his heart.

IV. NO MAN COMETH UNTO THE FATHER BUT BY ME."

1. Men have no intercourse with the Father in *this world*, but by Jesus Christ; but through him, both Jews and Gentiles have free access, by one Spirit, Eph. ii. 18. In his name they offer up prayer and praise, and through him the choicest blessings are sent down from the *throne of grace*, Heb. iv. 16.

2. No man, when he departs this life, can go to the Father in the *heavenly world*, but by Jesus Christ. He is gone before to prepare the place for us; he will receive us to himself: and in that world he will make us kings and priests unto God and his Father for ever, Rev. i. 6.

3. Jesus, as *our Mediator*, stands between us and the Father, 1 Tim. ii. 5. He brings the offender and the offended together; and is the instrument of restoring us to the divine favour by the death of the cross, Eph. ii. 16.

4. This proves that the mediatorial plan is the only way of salvation to a sinful world ; and no man ever was saved, and no man ever will be saved, on any other plan, 1 Cor. iii. 11. The law cannot save us, and therefore salvation must be by grace ; and if by grace, then by Jesus Christ, Eph. ii. 13.

INFERENCES.

1. We should be thankful for Christ, and gratefully bless God, for the unspeakable gift of his Son, 2 Cor. ix. 15.

2. It is our duty and our privilege to receive Christ, in all his sacred offices and characters, John i. 11.

3. Having received him we should abide in him, John xv. 4 ; and we should walk in him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life, Col. ii. 6.

4. Then we shall live with him and reign with him, when time shall be no more ; and, with all the redeemed of the Lord, sing " blessing, glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Rev. vii. 12.

SIGMA.

LXXVIII. REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION MUST PRECEDE PARDON.

ACTS iii. 19.

" Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

REPENTANCE and conversion are by many held to be very unfashionable, not to say enthusiastic and worthless doctrines, which neither any minister mindful of his reputation will care to preach, nor any person wishful to live in ease and security will be disposed to hear. Such, however, were not the views of the first ministers of the gospel, nor of the first Christians.

On the contrary, so important and essential to salvation did they consider these doctrines, as to judge it impossible to perform the lowest duties of the ministerial office, without giving them a prominent place in all their discourses. And this was their uniform practice, whether men would bear it or not. So it was with Paul, Acts xx. 21; so it was with Peter on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 38; and thus again it was under this sermon, as the text proclaims These doctrines were highly necessary to the Jews; and certainly are not less so to us. Permit us therefore to set before you,

I. THE CHANGE WHICH IS HERE PRESCRIBED AS NECESSARY TO PARDON.

II. THE ARGUMENTS HERE EMPLOYED TO INDUCE MEN TO COMPLY WITH THE ABOVE DIRECTION.

I. We have to set before you THE CHANGE WHICH IS HERE PRESCRIBED AS NECESSARY TO PARDON.

1. Repentance, from its very nature, supposeth past misconduct, for where there has been no misconduct, or where a man's conduct could not have been otherwise, there repentance is not only *unnecessary*, but clearly *impossible*. And, of course, repentance towards God, the thing which is here prescribed, necessarily supposeth misconduct towards God. And such misconduct must necessarily have arisen either from *inconsideration*, or from *daring*, or from *both*. From *invincible ignorance* it could not have arisen. The Jews were not left to infer their obligations and duties to the Divine Being, from a state of mere nature, as were all the Gentile nations. They had the best means which that day afforded for knowing these things, and yet neither lived answerably to their obligations, nor performed God's will. Nay, their ingratitude and disobedience were *notorious* and *flagrant*. And in nothing were these more apparent, than in their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah; Isa. liii. 3; John i. 11; compared with this chapter. Most necessary therefore was it, that they should be required to review their conduct towards God, to sorrow over their undutiful and impious behaviour towards him, and to amend their ways. And is such a step less necessary for us? Is it not evidently commanded to all? Acts xvii. 30. And if no such commandment were in being, might it not be fairly inferred to be our duty from our conduct to Jehovah? Have not his goodness

and benevolence brought us under great obligations? And have we always acted conformably to those obligations? And have we not been favoured with a most *explicit* and *perfect* revelation of his will? And have we always acted agreeably to its requisitions? And even while affecting to believe the gospel, and receive the Saviour, have we not, *in fact*, treated him as a deceiver, and acted the part of the Jews over again? Have we not been indignant at the base behaviour of the Jews to Christ? and have we carried ourselves to him with *real respect*?

If not, are we not also bound to repent of our misdeeds? But,—

2. We are here directed to be converted;—“Repent and be converted.” As the term ordinarily signifies to turn about, so here to turn unto the Lord. Then are we turned to him when we are led to desire his favour as our *chief good*, to *study his word*, as the only infallible directory how to obtain it, to use his ordinances with a view to obtain ability to obey its directions, and *actually* and *entirely* to separate ourselves from sinners and sin, and cleave unto his people and services. To be thus turned to the Lord is necessary to prove the sincerity of our repentance. For, to profess sorrow for sin, and return to it again, is *practically* to proclaim our hypocrisy; and to affect sorrow for sin, without *immediately* and *decidedly* turning to the Lord, although we do not openly turn to sin and folly, is either to subject the *correctness of our views*, or the *sincerity of our repentance*, to suspicion. And to be thus turned unto the Lord is indispensably necessary to pardon, as the Most High cannot *countenance sin* in pardoning it, Ps. lxxxv. 8; cxxx. 4. But were he either to pardon those who *live in sin*, or those *who do not turn to him*, he would give it countenance and support. And, if men could be pardoned without turning to the Lord, they would have a right to infer that purity is not essential to the participation of Jehovah’s favour and blessing; and so would have no inducement to seek it. For these reasons we boldly say, that no one can have pardon of the Holy One of Israel without conversion. But let a man turn to the Lord, and his pardon is sure. For, as we have to state, here are,

II. TWO ARGUMENTS EMPLOYED TO MOVE US TO COMPLY WITH THE ABOVE DIRECTIONS.

The first argument used to excite our compliance with the

direction already explained is, that if we repent and be converted, "*our sins shall be blotted out*" This may allude to the practice of ancient monarchs, who kept what they called books of remembrance. And to render these records more durable, they were sometimes cut on tables of stone, with a point of a diamond or some hard substance, Jer xvii. 1. Now, the blotting out of sin, may refer to the *effacing* of such a record in any man's favour, Isa. xlv. 22. Or these words may refer to the blotting out of the curse that was written against a Jewess (when her fidelity to her husband was suspected) by the waters of jealousy; see Num. v. 23. Now, that we may see the greatness of the benefit here tendered, let us reflect on the evils resulting from the existence of such a record with God.—1. It being a standing record of our unfitness to receive any good, and, consequently of the impropriety of bestowing any on us, it would operate as an effectual bar to it, Isa. lix. 1, 2. 2. It being a standing declaration of our desert of punishment, and of the danger there is in suffering us to live, it would ever *expose us to punishment*, by marking us out to the pure and piercing eye of the Judge of all, and crying for vengeance; Gen. iv. 10; xviii. 20, 21. Now, the blotting out of such a record is, in fact, 1. Giving a right to that life that was under a forfeiture, 2 Sam. xii. 13. 3. It gives a right to all those blessings that are necessary to sustain and crown this life with happiness and glory, Job xxii. 21. And of this we are sure, for,

The second argument used to induce us to compliance with the direction in the text is, that if we repent and be converted, times of refreshing shall come; or, as the learned may think the words should be rendered, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. Now the idea may refer to rest after great fatigue, as in 2 Sam. xvi. 14; or of consolation and quiet after much trouble and danger, as in Exod. viii. 15; or of being cooled and refreshed by the fanning of a cooling atmosphere, after being overheated; or of having the cooling stream to drink when parched and burnt up with internal heat, Ps. xlii. 1. Or, as others think, the idea conveyed is that of a breathing time after being hard driven. But whichever of these ideas we receive, it is only to be understood figuratively; as it is to the mind that all this refers, when urged onwards by impetuous passions and propensities, and then driven back on itself by disap-

pointment and guilty forebodings ; thus wearing and exhausting, harassing and tormenting itself. Now, to a mind thus circumstanced, how desirable must rest from this fruitless pursuit of happiness in the creature, this vexation and this misery resulting from the disappointment and stings of conscience experienced in such a course, and from all the peril attendant on it, be. Still more desirable must be the rest arising from an assurance of peace with God, of his favour, of intercourse and communion with him, and the hope of a blessed immortality. Such a rest can only spring from the presence of the Lord Christ. This does not refer to the return of Christ's *personal presence* at the last day, though that will be refreshing to those who are persecuted in his cause, 2 Thess. i. 7. But to his presence in and by the ministry of his word, the influences of his Spirit, and the possession of divine ordinances ; or it may refer to that gracious constitution of things under the gospel which affords but little enjoyment until after pardon, but immediately after it furnishes real, constant, and increasing refreshment to the spirit. This rest is here promised, Acts iii. 20. In this passage the apostle seems to anticipate the desponding reasonings of the Jews, who might now say, ' Though Jesus was ordained to be our Saviour, and was sent to us in the prophets and in person ; yet, as in our ignorance and wickedness we rejected and cut him off, we shall have no more opportunity of either receiving or being saved by him.' ' Yea,' says the apostle, ' but you shall ; for he shall send him (who before was preached to you) in the ministry of the gospel once more to you.' And this he did, until they judged themselves to be unworthy of everlasting life, and put the word of God far from them ; and, from that time to this, Jesus Christ has been sent unto the Gentiles. Now therefore nothing can be wanting to this blotting out of sin, and this enjoyment of times of refreshing to us, but penitence and conversion to God. " Repent therefore," &c. while Jesus Christ is with you, for if he withdraw from you, it will be impossible. And if you do, his presence will ensure absolution and remission.

IOTA.

LXXIX. PHILIP'S PREACHING AT SAMARIA.

Acrs viii. 5—8.

“ Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.”

PERSECUTION commonly defeats its own object. Persecutors have aimed at the total overthrow of Christianity, and the irreparable ruin of its advocates; but God counteracts the designs of his enemies, and makes the wrath of men and devils turn to his praise. In the verses connected with the text we have a striking illustration of the truth of these remarks. Here was a great persecution raised against the church, and the disciples were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria; but they went every where preaching the word, and “ Philip went down to the city of Samaria,” &c. We will notice,

I. PHILIP'S CONDUCT;—“ He went down,” &c.

II. THE ATTENTION WHICH THAT CONDUCT SECURED;—“ And the people with one accord,” &c.

III. THE EFFECT PRODUCED BY IT;—“ And there was great joy,” &c.

1. *Philip went down to Samaria.*—Samaria was the metropolis of the country called by that name; a name which primarily belonged to the hill on which the city was built, 1 Kings xvi. 24. Josephus declares that no city called Samaria was at that time in existence; hence some have imagined that it was Sychem to which Philip went. Christ charged his disciples, when he first sent them forth, not to go into any city of the Samaritans, Matt. x. 5. But afterwards he enlarged the sphere of their operations, and said, “ Go ye into all the world,” &c.—“ And they went forth and preached every where,”

2. *Philip preached Christ unto them.*—Though he was

driven away by the storm of persecution, yet he did not abandon his work. He was a christian minister, and he preached, proclaimed, and published Christ in the city of Samaria. How he did thus, we have no rule for judging except by analogy. We know how others preached Christ, and hence we infer how Philip did it; for their commissions and credentials were the same; the same Spirit animated them, and they ever kept the same object in view. The apostles preached Christ in his nature, in his supreme and eternal divinity;—in his humiliation, including his incarnation, sufferings, and death;—in his offices of Prophet, Priest, Saviour, and Sovereign. They preached Christ, because they loved him; and love leads us to extol the beloved object.—Because they loved mankind, and they knew that their preaching of Christ would be the salvation of the world.

3. *Philip wrought miracles in Samaria*;—“For unclean spirits,” &c. Miracles were facts of a most extraordinary character; facts totally inexplicable on natural principles. Christ wrought many miracles, and told his disciples that they should do greater works than they had seen him do. The miracles which Philip wrought were numerous—they were various in their character—unclean spirits were dispossessed, paralytic people were healed, &c.—they were public, the people saw the miracles that he did—they were benevolent, they were not done to gratify an idle curiosity, but to confer real benefits on those who were the subjects of them.—Such was Philip’s conduct. Let us observe,

II. THE ATTENTION WHICH THAT CONDUCT SECURED;—“And the people,” &c.

1. *The people of Samaria heard Philip preach*.—Wherever God sends his ministers, he designs that they should be heard, but it is lamentable to think in how many instances the ministration of the word is almost totally deserted. How few attend! Some absent themselves through ignorance—some through prejudice—some cannot find time—and some have no inclination. Philip, however, was heard, and most probably his ministry was numerously attended.

2. *The people heard Philip with one accord*.—There is an expression similar to this, Acts ii. 1. “They were all with one accord in one place;” they assembled unanimously; their minds, affections, and desires, concentrated in one object. Philip’s

hearers were excited by one common feeling and accordant sentiment. How desirable to have such congregations! How many are now drawn together by idle curiosity—by custom—to spend an hour that hangs heavy upon their hands—or to watch with eagle eye for defects in the speaker or the sermon. O let us come to worship God with one accord!

3. *The people gave heed unto those things which Philip spake.*—This implies attention; many hear inattentively; the word reaches their ears, but never penetrates their hearts; they hear, but their thoughts go after their covetousness, their farm, or their merchandize; or their pleasures steal away their hearts, and hence they hear unprofitably.

4. *The people believed the things which Philip preached.*—ver. 12. Faith is essential to profitable hearing; “The word preached did not profit,” &c. Heb. iv. 2. There are many who now hear with infidel hearts, evil hearts of unbelief; but Philip’s hearers believed what they heard, and made a public profession of their faith, by submitting to Christian baptism.

III. THE EFFECT PRODUCED BY IT;—“There was great joy,” &c. Joy is that kind of sensation which we feel from the possession or anticipation of real or imaginary good.

1. *Philip had brought the most joyful tidings to Samaria that were ever embodied in human language.*—He had put the inhabitants into the possession of all the glorious and interesting facts relative to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. His sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension were the subjects of his preaching. How joyful are tidings of a Redeemer to slaves and captives—of pardon to a race of criminals—of health to persons deeply disordered!

2. *Philip had relieved many oppressed and suffering individuals at Samaria.*—Here was another reason for great joy. What a horrible thing to be possessed of a devil! Mark ix. 17. Philip found many demoniacs at Samaria. He relieved many. These had relations, friends, and neighbours. How would the joyful tidings circulate of the miracles wrought by Philip!

3. *Philip had been instrumental in the conversion and salvation of many of the inhabitants of Samaria.*—General religion produceth joy. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. The Christian’s privilege is to rejoice evermore. “There was great joy in that city.”

In conclusion, observe,

1. How the devil was outwitted and his purposes defeated! He had raised a storm of persecution against the saints, but Philip went down to Samaria and cast out devils, &c.

2. How eminently Christ qualified his ministers for their work!

3. What different kinds of treatment the servants of Christ met with at different places!

4. What joy the gospel produces where it is received in honest and good hearts!

BETA.

LXXX. JESUS CHRIST A PERFECT MEDIUM OF JUSTIFICATION TO BELIEVERS.

Acts. xiii. 38, 39.

“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

THESE were the words of St. Paul, addressed to his countrymen the Jews in a synagogue at Antioch, in Pisidia. Hither had Paul and Barnabas come on their mission to the Gentiles. On their arrival at this place, they first repaired to the synagogue, to make an offer of salvation to their brethren; and, having liberty given them by the ruler of the synagogue to address the people, Paul proceeded to lay before them an abbreviated view of the steps taken by Jehovah to prepare the world for the manifestation of his Son as its appointed Saviour.—And, having done this, he set this Saviour before them, offering them life and peace through faith in him.—“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren,” &c.—“Be it known unto *you*, therefore.” Some of you will be ready to say, ‘Why surely, this was already

known! How could any be ignorant of it?' The fact, however, was, that though the great body of the Jews had the oracles of God in their hands, those oracles which contained so full an account of this matter, yet were they totally destitute of any correct views on this subject.—It is equally matter of fact, that the great mass of men down to the present day, and that in the most enlightened parts of the world, are without any right knowledge of this matter: and, that you may not be of this number, suffer me to call your attention to a few observations on this interesting Scripture. And observe,

I. THAT FROM THE APOSTLE'S MANNER OF EXPRESSION, HE EVIDENTLY CONSIDERED HIMSELF TO BE THE BEARER OF JOYFUL TIDINGS TO HIS COUNTRYMEN. And if we advert to the dangerous tendency of unpardoned sin, this will be found to be a fact.—That sin unpardoned tends to danger, appears,

1. *From the very terms remission and justification.* If unpardoned sin did not render a man liable to punishment, he could not be the subject of remission; and, if it did not bring him under a sentence of condemnation, he could not be the subject of justification.—And can a man be liable to endless punishment, and under a sentence to endure it, and not consider the tidings of pardon as joyful?

2. *From the existence of sacrifice for sin.* What could be Jehovah's motive for requiring sacrifice as the medium of remission? Surely it could not be that he derived any pleasure from the death of the victim, but that he might point out the evil of sin.—And wherein would he have afforded to us such a wonderful display of his goodness in providing a sacrifice for our sin, if it did not expose us to great danger? And what but a conviction of its dangerous tendency could have driven the whole world into the notion of appeasing the Most High by sacrifice?

3. *From the legal disabilities under which it brought men.* It disqualified them for public worship; it subjected them to corporeal punishment; it exposed them to certain and immediate death.

4. *From the threatenings denounced against it.* To cite them all would be to cite the Bible: a few therefore shall suffice: "And be sure your sin will find you out."—"Though hand

join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished."—" Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord; shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"—" The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. I ask, then, can any man be the subject of sin, and exposed to all this evil, and not account the offers of pardon joyful tidings? But observe,

II. THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY MEDIUM OF REMISSION OR FORGIVENESS. At least the New Testament, in which the subject is more amply and perfectly discussed than in the Old, makes mention of no other.—It is true that to a superficial and inconsiderate observer, the Old Testament apparently holds out another, viz. the sacrifice or oblation of the ceremonial law, but to a thoughtful person the very epithets applied to it proclaim its incompetency to justify us. It was but a type, a shadow, &c., the antitype and substance being in Christ. And if the epithets bestowed on the law proclaimed its incompetency to justify us, the imperfection of its sacrifices and services do it much more: see Heb. x. 1—4. And what else can the sinner regard as the medium of his forgiveness? Does any one say that his repentance may be that medium? Not to mention that this plea supposes him capable of repenting without grace, or of partaking of grace without an atonement, neither of which can be granted; yet were we to grant this, it would not follow that his repentance would declare the righteousness of God in forgiving his sins.—And what has he else to plead? Does any one say that the surrender of his life as a forfeiture to justice may be sufficient? But what value can there be in that life that is already forfeited to justice?—But if every other resource should fail us, Jesus will not; for through him a plenary remission is preached. We are justified from all things through him, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses. The law of Moses, as we have seen, had no sacrifices capable of procuring the full pardon of any sin, and for some sins it had no sacrifice at all. But by Jesus Christ justification from all things is attainable; from sins of ignorance, and sins of presumption, from sins committed against the Son of man, and from all manner of sin and blasphemy. If any one shall doubt this doctrine,

let him advert to the perfection of the victim, Heb. ix. 13, 14 ; or let him advert to the declarations of Scripture, Rom. iii. 25; 1 John i. 7. But let it be observed,

III. THAT JESUS CHRIST IS ONLY THE MEDIUM OF FORGIVENESS CONDITIONALLY ? “ And by him all that *believe* are justified from all things,” &c. To those who have been accustomed to consider the covenant of grace as having no conditions in it, it will be thought an ungracious manner of expression, to say, that Jesus Christ is only the medium of remission conditionally. And to avoid offence, we will cede the term, provided the necessity of the thing is but admitted ; and admitted we contend it must be,—for whether we account faith in Christ the cause of salvation, or the condition, or neither, still faith in Christ there must be, and faith going before justification, and in order to it, or there can be no justification, John iii. 18 ; Rom. iii. 22—26. And although in some places of Scripture, and on some occasions, other things are connected with our faith in order to salvation, yet it is always done in such a manner, as to show that faith is the first and the chief pre-requisite. Hence to it are our pardon, adoption, preservation, and salvation, expressly and repeatedly attributed in the Scriptures. And, as the apostle observes, (Rom. iv. 16) it is of faith, that it might by grace ; for on any other principle, salvation would be altogether unattainable to a sinner ; but this brings it within the reach of every sinner, it brings it to his ears and to his heart. This leads us to observe,

IV. THAT THROUGH JESUS CHRIST THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS IS IMPARTIALLY BESTOWED ON ALL WHO SUBMIT TO THE TERMS PRESCRIBED ; “ And by him all that believe are justified from all things,” &c. Ignorance and pride may affect to doubt the allegation, but they never can refute it. Nor can it ever be refuted, but by showing either that there is not a sufficiency of merit in the atonement of Christ to make it available for all believers ; or, that the Father did not intend it to avail for all of them ; or that he was engaged to do for believers, what he is unable or unwilling to perform ; and that consequently, it is possible for believers, as such, to perish. But as none of these positions can be established without turning the whole gospel into a mere tissue of folly and falsehood ; hence it follows, that pardon and salvation are sure to every believer.

Yes; forgiveness is sure to any, and to all of you who will this day accept it through faith; and remember, to day we offer it to you, nay, we press it on your acceptance.

To conclude :

1. Are none but believers in Christ justified? then see the fearful tendency of unbelief, and guard against it: diligently addict yourselves to the use of those means by which faith comes and grows.

2. Are all believers in Christ justified? Then let none despair, nor let any be discouraged; on the contrary, if you feel your need of justification, and are sincerely and greatly wishful to possess it, endeavour firmly to grasp the promise of God, and to rest on it.

3. Is this method of justification accommodating to the state of sinners? Then let us adore the grace of God for having opened it, and benevolently endeavour to make it known.

IOTA.

LXXXI. THE CERTAINTY OF OBTAINING GOD'S FAVOURS INFERRED FROM THE GIFT OF HIS SON.

ROM. viii. 32.

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.”

AMONG all those trials which were laid on the ancient saints, no one appears greater than that laid on Abraham, when God commanded him to sacrifice his son. And he said, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of,” Gen. xxii. 2. But this trial proved no less glorious in its issue, than it

appeared severe in its nature. Abraham obeyed resolutely, against the feelings and pleadings of natural affection;—he obeyed promptly, without delay;—and he obeyed fully, to the utmost extent of God's command. Thus, by his exemplary obedience, he evinced both the strength of his faith and the truth of his love. But this act of Abraham was not merely exemplary, it may also be considered typical; as exhibiting God's love towards us, while it instructs us in our duty towards him. Isaac was Abraham's best beloved son; so Christ is God's beloved Son, Matt. iii. 17. Isaac was intentionally sacrificed according to God's will, for his sake; Christ was actually sacrificed, by God's appointment, for us, 1 Cor. v. 7. Abraham's gift of Isaac manifested his piety, and proved his readiness to give God all that he demanded, Gen. xxii. 12; God's gift of Christ manifests his love to us, and proves his readiness to give us whatever we need. This conclusion our text fully justifies, and even suggests, "He that spared not," &c. In these words we find an interesting fact assumed, and an encouraging conclusion deduced from it.

I. AN INTERESTING FACT ASSUMED. That God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." Here we are taught,

1. *That Christ is the Son of God.* So he is frequently called in the Scriptures.—Because his *birth was supernatural*, Luke i. 31, 32, 35.—Because his *authority is supreme*; as Governor (Phil. ii. 9—11), and Judge, John v. 22, 23.—Because he is *the image of God's perfections*, Heb. i. 3; John i. 14.—And because he is the *object of God's peculiar complacency*, Matt. xii. 18. But though he was thus beloved by God, we are taught,

2. *That he was not spared.* He spared not his own Son. He was not spared,—For He was not withheld from us, when his mediation became seasonable, Gal. iv. 4, 5.—He was not favoured or exempted from suffering, when his sufferings became expedient, Heb. ii. 10. They were expedient in God's estimation, to render our Saviour a perfect example of piety and love, Phil. ii. 5—8; 1 John iii. 16;—to show us the nature of his kingdom, that it is not an earthly one, John xviii. 36; to constitute him a suitable high-priest, experienced and sympathizing, Heb. ii. 17, 18;—and to display his righteousness in our redemp-

tion; his holiness, justice, and truth, as well as his mercy, Rom. iii. 25, 26. Hence it follows,

3. *That he was delivered up.* To what was our Lord delivered up?—*To poverty and want*, even the want of common necessaries, Matt. viii. 20; 2 Cor. viii. 9.—*To contempt and infamy*, being rejected, (John i. 11) opposed, (Heb. xii. 3.) and defamed, (Matt. x. 25.)—*To grief and sorrow*, Isaiah liii. 3; Matt. xxvi. 38, xxvii. 46.—*To agony of death*; this it was predicted he should suffer, Isaiah liii. 10—12; and this he actually did suffer, Gal. iii. 13; 2 Cor. v. 15. Hence it is added,

4 *That he was delivered up for us all.* This implies,—*That his sufferings were endured for the benefit of mankind.* To save us from perishing, John iii. 14, 15; to bring us to God, 1 Peter iii. 18; and to make us rich, 2 Cor. viii. 9.—*That none are excluded from the benefit of Christ's sufferings, but those who exclude themselves by wilful impenitence and unbelief*, 1 John ii. 2; Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Hence unbelievers are justly condemned, John iii. 17, 18, and charged with self-destruction, 2 Peter ii. 1.—*That his sufferings actually benefit all true believers in him*, 1 Tim. 4, 10; John i. 12, iii. 16. This leads us to notice,

II. A MOST ENCOURAGING CONCLUSION DEDUCED FROM THIS FACT—That God with his Son “will freely give us all things.” Here we should consider,

1. *The characters thus encouraged*;—“us.” He will give us all things. The characters interested in this conclusion, are “*The called according to God's purpose*,” ver. 28. Such as are invited to partake of gospel blessings; the justification of their persons, conformity to Christ's image, and heavenly glory, ver. 29, 30,—and such as come for these blessings in the way which the gospel prescribes, Acts xx. 21;—and for such as thus come, and come now, all things are prepared, Luke xiv. 17. On our thus coming, as invited and commanded by God, let us consider,

2. *What we may expect from God*,—“All things.” *All things that God hath promised for the benefit of our souls*; as guidance in all difficulties, Eph. v. 14; John viii. 12; the merciful forgiveness of all our past sins, Prov. xxviii. 13; Isaiah lv. 7; all needful supplies of grace, Heb. iv. 16; protection from all our spiritual enemies, Isaiah xxvii. 3; John x. 27, 28; and

eternal glory, commencing at death, Psalm lxxiii. 26, and perfected at the resurrection of the just, Phil. iii. 21; Isaiah xxxv. 10.—*All things that are necessary for our bodies*; at least food and covering, Matt. vi. 33.—And every other indulgence that God sees will be good for us, Psalm xxxiv. 10, lxxx. iv. 11. For our farther encouragement, we are taught,

3. *That these blessings are certainly attainable by us*;—“How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” This question implies the strongest assertion that God will give us all things; an appeal to our reason, in proof of this assertion; a defiance of all objection that can be urged against it. If God should refuse those things to us with Christ, it must be through inability, because he has not power to give them;—or through disinclination, because he is not graciously disposed to give them;—or through rejection, because we are excluded from his kind regards;—or through mutability, because he does not remain now what he was when he delivered up his Son for us. But God cannot want ability to bless us, for he is possessor of all things, Gen. xiv. 22. He cannot want inclination to bless us, for he hath so loved us as to give his own Son to us, in whom is deposited every other good, Col. i. 19. He cannot want grace to bless us freely, for the gift of his Son was freely bestowed on us when we were enemies, Rom. v. 10; and when unsolicited. He therefore who so blessed us when enemies, and despised his favours, surely cannot reject us when we seek friendship with him, and implore his favours. He cannot have excluded us from his kind regards, for he has delivered up his Son for us all. He cannot be mutable, for he remains ever the same, James i. 17. These blessings, therefore, are as certain as the existence of God’s perfections.

By way of application let us finally consider our subject, as administering reproof,—affording encouragement,—and conveying instruction.

1. *It administers reproof to all careless neglectors of salvation.* It reproves them as foolish, by rejecting God’s choicest gifts, Jer. v. 21; as despisers of God’s goodness, Rom. ii. 4; and as inexcusable before God their judge, Matt. xxii. 13.

2. *It affords encouragement to all gospel penitents.* Let all such hope for a full salvation, all things being promised; for a free salvation, Christ being freely given; and a certain salvation, the earnest of it being given in him, 1 Cor. i. 30.

3. *It conveys instruction to all believers in Christ Jesus.* It teaches you to rejoice in your portion (1 Cor. iii. 21—23; Psalm xxxi. 19); and to ask God's most enlarged favours with confidence, Eph. iii. 14—21.

ALPHA.

LXXXII. CHRIST'S CLAIM TO BELIEVERS ASSERTED.

1 COR. iii. 23.

“Ye are Christ's.”

IN the context, the apostle Paul cautions the Christians of Corinth against glorying in their ministers, however distinguished by their ability, grace, reputation, or success. This he presses on their attention by the important consideration of their legitimate claim, as *believers*, to *all things*. He adds, “And ye are Christ's;” as if he should say, This is the foundation of your title and right to all things; all things are yours, because ye are Christ's, who has graciously invested you with this exalted privilege. Here we may observe that all believers are Christ's in a peculiar and special sense, *so his* as none else are. His claim to them, and the relations in which they stand to him, open for them a way to that source of strong consolation which is provided for the heirs of promise, who have fled for refuge to “lay hold on the hope set before them.” In treating this subject we shall first confirm and illustrate the text;—and, secondly, improve it in a few inferences.

I. WE SHALL CONFIRM AND ILLUSTRATE THIS TRUTH, THAT ALL TRUE BELIEVERS ARE CHRIST'S. On that ground of creation and providence all persons and things are Christ's, considered with relation to his essential divinity, for as God all things were made by him, (John i. 3.) and by him all things

consist, Col. i. 17; such is his conservative influence, that he constantly upholds them by the word of his power. All persons and things are Christ's likewise by designation and appointment, as Mediator. All power in heaven and earth is given to him, Matt. xxviii. 18. The original word *ἐξουσία*, here rendered *power*, implies *legitimate authority*, and *rightful sovereignty*: being thus invested, Christ is constituted heir of all things, Heb. i. 2. But true believers, such as have received Christ in the extent of his offices, or as he is offered in the gospel, are peculiarly his; "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name," i. 12. Here those that *believe* on his name are described by *receiving* him, and are such as rely on him for the perfect and final salvation of soul and body. St. Paul asserts, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," 2 Tim. i. 12. The summit of his ambition was "to be found in him," Phil. iii. 9. Believers are Christ's in the following special respects.

1. *By purchase.* Purchase is a sure title to inheritance; Christ has bought believers to himself. When addressing the Corinthian believers, St. Paul says, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price," 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. Another apostle, declaring what this price was, says, "Ye were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ," 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. This was the greatest price that could be given for the redemption of sinners. The blood of Christ was most valuable; we may form a just estimate of it from what St. Paul says to the Ephesian elders or presbyters: "The church which God hath purchased with his own blood," Acts xx. 28; that is, the blood of him who is God. Essential divinity is infinitely remote from the properties of matter, consequently *has* no blood; but Christ, who was God and man in one person, had blood; and there would be no sense in this passage, if he, who purchased the church with his own blood, was not God as well as man.

By conquest. All men have, by sin, sold themselves captives to Satan; on which account he exercises a power and authority over them. But when sinners become the subjects of penitential sorrow for having sinned against God, and yield themselves to the guidance of the Scriptures and the controlling influence

of the Holy Spirit; then, in the day of their regeneration, Christ, as the Captain of salvation, "goes forth conquering and to conquer, leading captivity captive," and actually delivers them from under the dominion of Satan. He binds the strong man armed, and spoils him of his goods, Matt. xii. 29; delivers believers from the power of darkness, Colos. i. 13; that is from Satan, the ruler of the darkness of this world, Eph. vi. 12. And not only so, but he also overcomes the opposition that is naturally in their hearts, and subdues them to himself, by the operations of his regenerating grace, without interfering with their moral liberty; and thus delivers them from the tyranny of sin as well as from the slavery of Satan. Previously, they were as full of enmity and resistance to the government and laws of Christ as others; their understanding was as dark, their will as perverse, their affections as carnal, as those of wicked persons. But, in the day of conversion, Christ diffuses his saving grace through the hearts of believers, and thereby changes the whole disposition, so that they become his willing subjects.

3. By *covenant dedication*. Believers having voluntarily consented to be Christ's, they wholly surrender themselves into his hands. The words recorded by the prophet are in point; "I entered into a covenant with thee," saith the Lord God, "and thou becamest mine," Ezek. xvi. 8. Their minds were enlightened, their wills renewed, their affections hallowed; being accepted of God in Christ, and their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, they became new creatures; and they now live in the spirit of devotedness to God, walking in all his ordinances and commandments, with uprightness and delight. They present themselves "living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, through Christ, as their reasonable service," Rom. xii. 1. This solemn act they frequently repeat in secret at the table of the Lord. With David, they can say, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; thou hast loosened my bonds," Ps. cxvi. 16. We shall now proceed,

II. TO IMPROVE THE SUBJECT IN A FEW INFERENCES.
Hence,

1. We may justly infer that believers, even the weakest of them, are very dear to Christ. This is demonstrable from the several endearing relations existing between Christ and believers. They are his peculiar people, 1 Pet. ii. 9; his jewels, Mal. iii.

17 ; his peculiar treasure above all people, Exod. xix. 5 ; Ps. cxxxv. 4. And being so, he will employ all his perfections for their safety while exposed to dangers in this world, and bless them with endless happiness and glory in that which is to come.

2. The lively sense of this high dignity and relation to Christ will be a source of support, encouragement, and consolation to believers under all their trials and afflictions in the house of their pilgrimage. Their character and connection, though so excellent and sublime, will not, while here, exempt them from privations, reproach, and sufferings : notwithstanding, their steady faith in Christ, and its glorious results, will strengthen and animate them in their Christian toil and conflicts, enliven their graces, and enlarge their hearts to run the way of his commandments, Ps. cxix. 32.

3. The most fervent acts of love are due to Christ from believers, for the great love wherewith he has loved them, in dying for their sins, rising again for their justification, making them his by the spirit of adoption, and renewing their moral nature, to the praise of the glory of his grace, Eph. i. 5, 6. It was not for any thing done by them or foreseen to be done by them, but from love alone, that he became their Redeemer and Saviour, 2 Tim. i. 9. It was his grace that disposed and enabled them to believe, and make surrender of themselves to him, Eph. ii. 8—10. Therefore they are under the strongest obligation to adore his grace, and abound in love to him.

4. Since all true believers are Christ's in a peculiar sense, let sinners cherish the convictions of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, renounce all iniquitous practices, humble themselves before God for their past offences, believe on Christ with all their heart, and become his by personal surrender and covenant-dedication of themselves to him ; then shall they likewise know that they are his by adoption and grace.

THETA.

LXXXIII. SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

2 Cor. iv. 17.

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

BOTH Scripture and experience teach us, that “many are the afflictions of the righteous.” They are, however, not to be regarded as tokens of the divine displeasure; but as the fatherly chastisements of his beloved children, Heb. xii. 6, 7. They are not designed to depress and injure their souls, but to promote and secure their spiritual interests. Under this animating impression, Christians “glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.” And this consolatory persuasion has ever induced the saints patiently to endure their complicated sufferings, and was a continual source of encouragement to the apostles and primitive Christians, in all their persecutions. This is evident from the general tenor of this chapter, and is fully expressed in the inimitable words selected for our present consideration; “For our light affliction,” &c. This sublime and interesting passage specifies present affliction,—describes future happiness,—and suggests useful instruction.

I. THE TEXT SPECIFIES PRESENT AFFLICTION; “For our light affliction which is but for a moment.” Affliction may here include all the difficulties and trials to which believers are subject in this vale of tears. And these are,

1. *Various.* Though the apostle speaks in the singular number, he evidently intends all the variety of afflictions mentioned in the context, ver. 8—12. It is certain, however, that all the pious are not equally afflicted and tried; yet in this world they all have tribulation, Acts xiv. 22; 2 Tim. iii. 12. They have some afflictions in common with mankind, and others peculiar to themselves. These frequently arise from the temptations of Satan,—the wickedness of the world,—the persecutions of the

ungodly,—the afflictions of their persons and families,—the perplexities of business,—the unfaithfulness of friends, &c., Job xiv. 1; Ps. l. 15; 1 Pet. i. 6.

2. *Merciful.* Hence they are called light. The Lord always corrects his people with a kind and gentle hand. He knows our frames and pities our infirmities, Ps. ciii. 13. The afflictions of the righteous are greatly diversified. Some appear almost to escape the rod, while others are “chosen in the furnace of affliction.” But though our sufferings may be various, yet they are always comparatively “light.” Light when compared with what Christ suffered,—with what some of the saints have endured, Heb. xi. 33—38; and with what we deserve to suffer, Lam. iii. 22.

3. *Transient*; “But for a moment.” Time is short, and those whose lives and sorrows are the most protracted, suffer but a “little while,” even as a moment, when viewed in the light of eternal duration, Rom viii. 18. Our present trials are also often alleviated by seasonable deliverances, and supplies of grace; and are very limited in their utmost continuance, Ps. xc. 10. ‘Our conflicts here shall soon be past.’

4. *Profitable*; “Our light afflictions work for us,” &c. They do not naturally, nor meritoriously work for our good; for all suffering is the result of transgression; and the effect cannot destroy its cause, nor can human woe atone for personal guilt, Lam. iii. 39, 40. But they instrumentally and graciously work for our spiritual and eternal welfare, as they are appointed and sanctified by God to humble our souls,—correct our follies,—restrain us from evil,—refine and try our graces,—embitter the world and sin,—endear Christ and heaven,—promote watchfulness, devotion, and diligence, and “yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness.” Thus, as afflictions tend to increase our present holiness, they will augment our final “recompence of reward.” And hence, for our encouragement,

II. THE TEXT DESCRIBES FUTURE HAPPINESS; “A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Though future glory is invisible and unfathomable, it is frequently described in the Scriptures, in the most sublime and animated language. This is evidently the case in the words before us, in which the heavenly world is represented as,

1. *A state of glory.* We can have but very imperfect views of this glory in the present life, John xiii. 7. It no doubt includes the glory of perfect knowledge, 1 Cor. xiii. 12; the glory of entire conformity to God, 1 John iii. 2; the glory of a blissful immortality, Rom. ii. 7; and the glory of an endless vision and fruition of Jehovah, Ps. xvii. 15. The bodies of the saints will be glorified with their spirits, Phil. iii. 21; they shall dwell in glorious mansions, John xiv. 2, 3; receive glorious crowns of righteousness, 2 Tim. iv. 8; associate with glorious companions, Heb. xii. 22, 23; and be glorified together with Christ, Rom. viii. 17.

2. *An exceeding glory.* The believer's present state of grace is spiritually glorious. They are "changed from glory to glory," and the Spirit of God and of glory rests upon them in all their troubles, 1 Pet. iv. 14. Grace is 'glory begun below.' But eternal glory will far exceed the highest possible attainments of grace. It is compared to the glory of the firmament,—of the planets,—of kings, &c.; but it infinitely exceeds all comparison, description, and conception, 1 Cor. ii. 9; Col. iii. 3, 4; 1 Pet. i. 8.

3. *A weight of glory.* It is called a weight in opposition to the lightness of our afflictions. It may also denote its excellence, as unspeakably superior to all the perishing vanities of the world; its plenitude, in filling every power of body and soul 'with glory and with God; and its influence, as affording perfect felicity in the "presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore."

4. *An eternity of glory.* All things temporal are transient and uncertain in duration. Our afflictions are only for a moment; but "the glory that is to be revealed" is permanent and eternal. It is without diminution and without termination, Isa. xxxv. 10, 1 John ii. 25. Nothing less than this eternity of happiness can perfectly satiate our immortal spirits. A perpetuity of bliss only, can be bliss to mankind. To apply the subject we shall observe,

III. THE TEXT SUGGESTS USEFUL INSTRUCTION. It is well calculated to edify and profit every pious sufferer. It should particularly inspire and promote,

1. *Serious reflection.* Affliction is a season of peculiar so-

lemnity, and frequently leads the most dissipated to consider their ways. "In their affliction they will seek me early," saith the Lord; and it is well when this is the case, Ps. cxix. 67. We should seriously reflect on the design of God's corrections, and faithfully "hear the rod, and Him who hath appointed it." Affliction is a school in which we may learn many important lessons, Ps. cxix. 71.

2. *Patient submission.* Surely God has a right to do what he will with his own. He never willingly afflicts the children of men, but only as it is necessary for our profit. Shall the children of God then murmur or resist the kind and salutary discipline of their heavenly Father? Heb. ii. 9, 10. Let us rather gratefully embrace the hand that corrects us, and piously exclaim with humble submission, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt," Luke xxi. 19; Heb. x. 36.

3. *Admonitory warning.* We should regard every affliction as designed to impress our minds with a deep and lasting sense of our mortality,—the vanity of the world,—the uncertainty of life,—the approach of eternity,—the necessity of salvation,—and the importance of preparing to meet the Lord. Let us then hear the warning voice of the Saviour, saying, by every afflicting stroke, "Be ye also ready,—behold I come quickly,—watch and pray."

4. *Consolatory prospects.* The Christian's momentary afflictions will soon be succeeded by an eternity of blessedness. They now look by faith beyond "those things which are seen and temporal to those which are unseen and eternal," ver. 18. And hence they faint not in the day of adversity, but rejoice in hope of the glory of God; because, for them "to live is Christ, to die is gain," 2 Cor. v. 1.

LXXXIV. THE DIFFERENT EFFECTS PRODUCED BY A GODLY SORROW AND A SORROW OF THE WORLD.

2 COR. vii. 10.

“ For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of : but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

A CHRISTIAN church had been planted at Corinth through the instrumentality of the primitive preachers of Jesus Christ; Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and others, had laboured successfully in the word and doctrine in that dissipated and populous city. But the preachers had different gifts, and the hearers divided into parties under their ministry; one said, “ I am of Paul,” &c. And, what was worse than this, some gross irregularities and shameful practices, not even named among the gentiles, had been tolerated among them; especially an incestuous marriage of a man with his father’s wife. St. Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians to reprove them for their sin, and bring them to repentance: this letter had an appearance of harshness and severity in it, and the apostle had many doubts in his mind as to its success; but, having heard from Titus that his former letter had produced the happiest results, he now writes another, in which he says ver. 8, “ For though I made you sorry,” &c. The text contains two parts, and describes the widely different effects of godly and worldly sorrow.

I. “ GODLY SORROW WORKETH REPENTANCE TO SALVATION.”

A description of sorrow is unnecessary; that to which all are doomed must be familiar to all. The different sources of sorrow, however, need some illustration.

1. *Godly sorrow harmonizes with God’s will.* All have sinned, and sin is a reproach to any people; it is a broad foul blot upon our characters; it offends God, and exposes us to punishment; and it is the will of God, that we, who have so foully offended, should be sorrowful on account of our sin, 2 Kings xx. 5; Jer. xxxi. 18—20; Matt. v. 4; James iv. 8, 9.

2. *Godly sorrow is wrought by the agency of God's Spirit.*

The love of sin is natural to a fallen creature, it is the genuine fruit of a depraved nature! sinners love sin and rejoice in iniquity, but the Spirit of God enlightens their understandings, they discover that sin is a horrible evil, and they mourn before God in deep anguish for the crimes they have committed. "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem," &c., Zech. xii. 10. The deep sorrow evinced by Peter's hearers at the feast of Pentecost, was the effect of the operation of the Holy Ghost. Christ declared, that when the Comforter came, he would reprove the world of sin, &c., John xvi. 8. And convictions for sin will produce sorrow for it.

3. *Godly sorrow is excited on God's account.* Penitent sinners, who are the only subjects of this sorrow, look at God, and consider his goodness in supplying their wants, and crowning their lives with mercies;—and they look at themselves, at their vileness and wickedness in grieving God's Spirit, breaking his laws, insulting his majesty; and they sorrow on God's account, knowing that all sin is against God,—against his nature, his government, his laws, and his designs. Hence the term, "godly sorrow," is sometimes read, "sorrow according to God," according to God's will; and referring to him as the Being against whom all sin is committed.

4. *Godly sorrow worketh repentance.* Repentance has been described variously, but here it must be considered as comprising two things:—*A hatred to sin, and a reformation from it.* He who repents of his sin will hate it; not merely because it is injurious to his reputation, or ruinous to his health, or his property; but because it is inimical to his best interests, and because God hates it, and threatens to punish it with his curse. *Repentance also implies reformation.* Where sin is practised there it is loved; the love of sin and the commission of it go together. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance." Godly sorrow is frequently considered a part of repentance; but here it is rather the cause of repentance than an ingredient in it, for it worketh repentance as the cause produceth the effect. Whatever is the cause of sorrow, must needs be the cause of aversion also; he that is sorry for sin, will hate the sin that produceth the sorrow, and will turn away from it, and not practise that in future which grieves and afflicts him in reference to the

past. It worketh repentance unto salvation. 1. *It prepares the mind for the reception of salvation.* Every thing in the natural world is carried on by a slow and regular progression. One thing prepares for another:—the winter's cold prepares the land for the reception of the vegetative grain; the moisture of spring, and the heat of summer, prepare for autumnal plenty: and godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, prepares the soul for salvation, and fits the mental soil to receive it. 2. *It leads it to seek salvation in all the appointed means.* A soul oppressed with godly sorrow will be restlessly seeking salvation in all the private and public ordinances of religion. 3. *It will always terminate in salvation.* Salvation will be its ultimate issue. There is no other way to salvation but this, and this will infallibly conduct the soul to present and eternal salvation.

II. "THE SORROW OF THE WORLD WORKETH DEATH."
Here we notice,

1. *The sorrow arising from the loss of worldly substance.* There are few persons in business who have not felt this. The husbandman loses his cattle. The merchant his goods; those who are indebted to him fail to fulfil their engagements; and, unless there be great deadness to the world, the loss of our substance will produce sorrow.

2. *The sorrow arising from the failure of our worldly schemes and projects.* Man is a most ingenious creature, he possesses powers of amazing grasp, he hath found out many inventions, but he hath failed in many more. How many devices fall to the ground! How many schemes are unsuccessful! and when money, and time, and labour are all lost in some fruitless project, what sorrow is produced as the consequence!

3. *The sorrow arising from the bereavement of our dearest friends.* In some cases I scarcely know whether this deserves the epithet of worldly sorrow. When we lose our Christian friends, the companions of our toils, with whom we took sweet counsel and went to the house of God; there is a feeling excited of too sublime and sacred a character to be denominated *worldly*. But, generally, the sorrow felt on such occasions is wholly sensual.

Worldly sorrow worketh death. 1. *There is a death of the body.* This is produced by lingering diseases, sudden accidents, or violent hands; but worldly sorrow often induces disease.

How many are brought down with sorrow to the grave ! Many in their sorrow forget to eat bread, Prov. xv. 13 ; Job xvii 7 ; 1 Kings xxi. 4. 2. *There is a death of the soul.* Not the extinction of its being, but the forfeiture of the divine favour, and the irreparable loss of that union which the holy soul holds with God, succeeded by a final banishment from his presence. To this the apostle refers, as contradistinguished from that salvation which he speaks of in the former part of the verse. The spiritual life of the soul is maintained by union with God, as the natural life of the body is by union with the soul. Worldly sorrow worketh death, as it springs from the love of the world ; and “ if any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him.” Hence there can be no union with God. Faith is an essential principle in the support of spiritual life ; “ the just live by faith ;” faith looks at invisible objects ; but worldly sorrow calls off the attention of the soul from heaven, and ties it down to earth ; and hence the subject of this sorrow becomes dead while he lives : and that spiritual death of the soul, is a sure prelude to an eternal separation from God and the glory of his power.

INFER,

1. What a blessing is godly sorrow ! How beneficial in its effects !

2. How much to be pitied are those who have never felt it ! Their sin will find them out ; and they who never mourn on account of it in this world, will have weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, in hell for ever.

3. How much we should be on our guard against the sorrow of the world which worketh death.

BETA.

LXXXV. REMEMBRANCE OF THE POOR RECOMMENDED.

GAL. ii. 10.

“ We should remember the poor.”

THE leading topics of the Christian ministry are frequently inculcated, and by judicious hearers generally understood, and distinctly remembered. The fall of man, the redemption of the world, the necessity of regeneration, and the final rewards of virtue and vice, are subjects which, in a direct or indirect manner, breathe in every sermon you hear, in every prayer you offer, and in every hymn you sing. But there are other subjects of a subordinate character, clearly stated in the sacred volume, which though they may not form articles of your faith, yet stand as rules for your practice, and are too important to be discarded from the pulpit. Among those we may notice the reciprocal duties that arise from the various relations in which we stand to society, and one of the least regarded, though not the least in importance, is the practice recommended in the text. “ We should remember the poor.” We will,

I. EXAMINE THE NATURE OF THE ASSERTION.

II. STATE THE OBLIGATIONS WE ARE UNDER TO COMPLY WITH IT.

III. ANSWER OBJECTIONS.

I. EXAMINE THE NATURE OF THE ASSERTION. We need not spend a moment in describing the poor: alas! they describe themselves. You daily witness the scantiness and poverty of their apparel, their pale and emaciated forms; and you hear their piteous plaints, and the tale of their complicated woes. But we should,

1. *Remember the work of the poor.* On these the curse entailed by sin daily rests; in the sweat of their face they eat bread, till they return unto the ground. Their work is irksome and laborious. See their hands worn hard with incessant toil; their faces bathed in profuse sweat; and their bodies bent, not

so much with the weight of years, as with the pressure of ponderous burdens. Their work is often destructive to health. Many are plunged in mines: view the confined situation in which they labour, the unnatural posture in which they pursue their work, the noxious damps that infect the air in which they breathe, and the incessant streams that distil upon their wearisome bodies. Huge masses of rocks often burst around them, and bury them alive in their subterraneous vaults; and even if they escape these awful accidents, what multitudes go prematurely to the grave! But their work is chiefly beneficial. They labour for the public benefit. Consider the labours of the mechanic, the husbandman, and the artizan.

2. *Remember the deprivations of the poor.* Here note, the means of instruction which are placed beyond their reach. The children of the poor are sent to work as soon as they can earn a scanty pittance, with little or no learning, except what they get from Sunday Schools. They read but little, partly for want of books, and partly for want of inclination. They are deprived in many instances of the common necessaries of life; view the miserable huts and hovels in which they reside; in low damp situations where the wintry winds howl through the broken casement; view their tattered vestments amid the rigours of winter, and their coarse food scantily administered, and scarcely sufficient to satisfy the demands of exhausted nature.

3. *Our remembrance of the poor should be founded on a personal acquaintance with their circumstances.* We should visit their abodes, and find out the retreat of wretchedness. It should be attended with a compassionate feeling towards them. 'Indeed Sir,' said a person of large property, 'I am a very compassionate man; but to tell you the truth, I do not know any person in want.' The fact was, he stood aloof from the poor, and kept out of their way.—And it should be accompanied by relief. Many say, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled;" but never administer the blessings which the poor need. We cannot do all we would, but let us do what we can. Cannot we retrench a little from our food? Or give them some garments? Or employ them in our farms, or at our merchandize?

II. STATE THE OBLIGATIONS WE ARE UNDER TO COMPLY WITH IT.

1. *The dictates of humanity require it.* There is a chord

in human hearts that vibrates to the touch of misery ; hence all human beings occasionally remember mercy. The sufferings even of brutes excite compassion. The Jews had a law which required them to help an ox or an ass in distress, Deut. xxii. 4. And shall we show mercy to a brute, and neglect a man ? The poor are our brethren ; one God hath created us, one Saviour hath redeemed us, one heaven will receive us, if faithful unto death.

2. *The demands of duty require it.* The laws of God have made this imperative upon us. The texts that bear upon this point are numerous, Deut xv. 7—9 ; Dan. iv. 27 ; Luke vi. 36—38 ; Matt. vii. 12 ; 1 John iii. 17. Consider the connexion of the text. The saints at Jerusalem were exceedingly oppressed by poverty. A contribution had been made for them in Macedonia, and in Achaia ; St. Paul had written to the Romans concerning them ; Peter, James, and John, wished to “remember the poor ;” “the same, (said Paul) I also was forward to do.”

3. *The rights of justice require it.* The common opinion is, that ‘the poor are solely dependent on the rich for a scanty pittance ; and that men of affluence are independent ; have independent fortunes,’ &c. But the reverse of this is the truth. Men who do nothing, are mere drones in the hive of society, who live upon the labours of others. To the poor we are most deeply indebted. Who erect our houses ? Who form our clothes ? Who procure our food ? Do not the poor ? therefore remember them. Justice requires this at your hands.

4. *The claims of interest require it.* Every man is obliged to pursue that course of conduct, which will most effectually subserve his present and final happiness. Is it not our interest to imitate God ? God remembers the poor : his Son was poor ; his disciples were poor ; to the poor the gospel was preached ; God hath chosen the poor. Angels are mindful of the poor ; they visited poor shepherds—they conducted the soul of poor Lazarus to paradise. God will bless those who remember the poor, Ps. xli. 1, 2 ; Prov. iii. 9 ; xix. 17 ; Isa. lviii. 10, 11.

III. ANSWER OBJECTIONS.

1. ‘*My circumstances are impoverished, and I have nothing to spare.*’ What, nothing ? Think of the poor widow, and her mite. Read the account of her to whom Elijah applied for a morsel of bread, 1 Kings xvii. 11, 12.

2. '*Charity must begin at home.*' But remember it should not end at home. The proper sphere of charity is abroad; the ties of relationship bind us to look at home; but benevolence looks abroad on all the suffering sons of humanity, and stretches forth her hands to relieve them.

3. '*I have a right to do what I will with my own.*' But what is your own? Are you not a steward? Is not God the universal proprietor of all things? Will not he call you to account how you have spent his goods? It is not optional with you to give or not to give; God has made it imperative upon you.

4. '*The poor do not deserve to be remembered.*' But their merit is not the ground or rule of our benevolence. We are to "be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful;" and what if God had dealt with us according to our merit? How do we know that the poor do not deserve what we give them? We do not know their value or their real characters.

Conclude with a word of advice to the poor; to excite them to economy, to submission to their superiors, and gratitude to their benefactors.—And a word of comfort to induce them to bear their lot of poverty, during the period of their mortal pilgrimage, with patience and resignation to God.

BETA.

LXXXVI. THE USE OF THE LAW UNDER THE GOSPEL.

GALATIANS iii. 19.

"Wherefore then serveth the Law."

THIS is an important question, and requireth to be carefully considered. For want of this consideration, some Christian professors have wholly set the law aside, while others have placed

themselves under it as a means of life. Indeed it is the want of this that has converted one man into a hardy son of presumption, and another into a trembling slave. And it doubtless was with a view to prevent these mistaken conceptions of the law, that St. Paul, in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, particularly the latter, has so fully shown that the law never was intended to supersede the gospel as a means of life. And that the gospel, that is, the most perfect edition of the gospel, so far from having abrogated the least tittle of the moral law, has established it. We call your attention to this sentiment of the apostle,

1. THAT THE LAW (by which he means all the moral and ceremonial precepts which were delivered to Moses,) NEVER WAS INTENDED TO SUPERSEDE THE GOSPEL AS A MEANS OF LIFE.

The apostle argues, that as Abraham, to whom the gospel covenant was given, was not present when the law was introduced, its introduction could not annul the covenant made with him, without his consent, Gal. iii. 15—18. And had he been present at the delivery of the law, and pressed to relinquish his right in the gospel in favour of the law, yet could no reason have been advanced that would have induced him to do this; for while the law affords no relief at all to guilty man, the gospel most effectually commiserates and relieves him, Gal. iii. 21. 22.

The law might righteously and wisely be given as a means of life to an innocent and perfect being, such as man was when he proceeded from the Creator's hand; for such a being would be able to observe it. It was therefore no unjustifiable requisition of the supreme Rector to demand of innocent man the observance of this law; and to threaten in case of failure, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." And having, by the most absolute and liberal communication of favours, laid man under an obligation of gratitude to obey, it might have been imagined that his duty would have been his delight; and that he never would have swerved from it.

But alas! he did swerve. And ever since, our frail and depraved nature has been totally incapable of enduring the suspension of life on the rigorous condition of observing the law

of innocence ; God has therefore mercifully taken away the first covenant, and established a new one, founded on better promises, Heb. viii. 7—13 ; x. 9.

“Ye are not under the law,” says the apostle, (Rom. vi. 14,) “but under grace ;” and well for us it is so ! For were we under it as fallen creatures, it could not benefit us, “being weak through the flesh,” (see Rom. viii. 3 ;) but it might and would irritate our evil propensities, which it cannot cure, Rom. vii. 5, 8. And it would fret us exceedingly by the extent of its demands, Ps. cxix. 96. Did it only require us to obey in less difficult cases for a constancy, or in more difficult cases but occasionally, and did it animate us at the same time by some bright and cheering examples and promises, perhaps our hope would rise. But to demand perfect obedience in every case, and that through every moment of our probation ; and for the smallest failure therein, to curse us with the utmost rigour to the endurance of eternal death, is exceedingly dispiriting. Were we therefore to be placed under it as a covenant of life, it would do more than bring us to “the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire ;” it would bring us to the judgment seat of him whose looks would confound the sinner, and whose sentence would wring his heart with anguish ; nay, it would bring us to those who agonize in fire unquenchable, being doomed to weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth for ever and ever. To be delivered from such a law, as a condition of life, oh, how great a blessing !

But some may ask, If it do not supersede the gospel as a means of life, what purpose doth it serve ? In reply, we proceed to the consideration of our second general head, which is to show,

II. THAT THE MOST PERFECT EDITION OF THE GOSPEL, SO FAR FROM HAVING ABOLISHED THE LEAST TITTLE OF THE MORAL LAW, HAS ESTABLISHED IT.

While some have inferred the intention of Jehovah to supersede the gospel given to Abraham, by the introduction of the law four hundred and thirty years afterwards ; others have inferred from Paul’s words, (Gal. iii. 19,) where he says, that the law was “added because of transgressions, till the seed should come,” that it was intended that the law should cease on the arrival of that period. But had these persons considered either

those words of our Lord, "I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil;" or those of Paul, where he says, that "God, sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit," they would not have entertained this doctrine. And, before we can reasonably suppose the moral law to cease, moral order must first cease to be the most perfect mode of action, to be essential to the happiness of rational existence, and most conducive to Jehovah's glory. Hence, we infer, that when any of the writers of Scripture speak of Christ's coming as putting an end to the law, it must necessarily be meant of the ceremonial part of it. But if any still ask, "Wherefore serveth the law?" we answer,

1. *To constitute probation.* We cannot fairly urge the existence of probation from the existence of moral law; but we may legitimately infer the necessity of moral law to constitute probation; for if by a probationary state we mean, a state in which a better or more degraded state of being is suspended on the qualities of previous conduct, then must some rule or law exist to give birth to these different qualities: for we cannot see how our conduct can partake of different qualities; that is, we cannot see how it can be either right or wrong, good, or evil, without a rule. For we have been taught to reason, "that where there is no law there can be no transgression." And as probation necessarily supposes law, so also moral law; it being most conducive to the happiness of society, the perfection of our nature, and the honour of our God. If this reasoning is just, then must moral law necessarily run through the whole of our probation, whatever changes of circumstances we may undergo.

2. *We say that the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.* By a schoolmaster, we understand one of those persons among the Greeks who had the persons and manners of the Grecian youth in charge. The conduct of these Grecian pedagogues was rigid, and therefore better calculated to shadow out the influence of the law on the sinner's conscience. But the law is, perhaps, likened to these schoolmasters, because its office is to communicate the rudiments of divine knowledge; as the knowledge of sin, Rom. iii. 20; vii. 7; of its aggravations,

Rom. v. 20; vii. 13; and of its desert of punishment; thus shutting us up as in a prison, *unto the faith*, or the method of justification by faith, revealed in the gospel. By the perfect obedience which it demands, and by thundering out its anathemas against the smallest failures, it leads us trembling and affrighted to cast about us for help, and exclaim, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" And then it is that Christ appears a refuge to be desired; and then the sinner flees to him, and submits to be taken in on any terms.

3. *The law serves to give beauty and symmetry to the hidden man of the heart.* Take away the moral law, and you deprive the world of the fairest transcript of Jehovah's excellence that ever was given to it: take this away, and you render the dispensation of the Spirit nugatory. For to what purpose are all these means of superior holiness given, if none is wanted?

4. *To vindicate the conduct of our Judge in dooming the impenitent and unbelieving to eternal death.* For seeing they had one to lead them to Christ, and they would not be led to him; and were shown what holiness was required to the attainment of eternal life, and they would not seek after it; this modulated law will curse their unbelief and consequent disobedience, as deserving of the most fearful and lasting punishment. And, seeing that grace will reign no more to suspend the execution of the curse, of course judgment will come with vengeance on the matured victim of perdition.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since the law as a covenant has been mercifully superseded by a covenant better adapted to our guilty and helpless circumstances, let us be sensible of the favour done to us, and make a proper use of the mercy.

2. Since the law remains to promote our perfection, let us acquaint ourselves perfectly with its demands, and abound in the holiness which it enjoins.

3. Let us mark those who set aside the law, and shun their company; let us abhor the sentiment, and oppose it; and let us pray that God may give repentance to those who hold it, that they may escape out of this snare of the devil.

LXXXVII. THE HINDERANCES TO RUNNING
WELL PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED.

GALATIANS V. 7.

“Ye did run well, who did hinder you?”

IT appears from this epistle that the Galatians had been converted to Christianity through the instrumentality of St. Paul, that they at first received him with great kindness, and continued for some time to adorn their Christian profession by a consistent deportment, but that they were now become alienated from our apostle in affection, unsound in their principles, and disorderly in their conduct. This degeneracy was occasioned by the evil influence of those false teachers spoken of in the Acts, (chap. xv. 1,) who came down from Judea, and taught the brethren, saying, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” In proportion as this doctrine obtained credit, it proved highly injurious to those new converts, as it at once destroyed their faith in Christ, involved them in grievous bondage, blasted their hopeful prospects, diminished their brotherly love, and paralyzed their holy exertions. To remedy these evils, our apostle sent the Galatians this epistle, written with his own hand, in which he seeks to accomplish his kind design by every method which wisdom and piety could suggest. To awaken their concern, he exclaims, “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” To excite their gratitude, he declares his tender anxiety for their welfare, by saying, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth till Christ is formed in you.” To guard their privileges, he earnestly exhorts them to “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.” To alarm their fears, he solemnly warns them, “If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” And, to expose the injuries they had sustained, he makes the inquiry in our text, “Ye did run well, who did hinder you?” These words lead us to observe, that to run well is

of the highest importance to all professing Christians, that some who did run well have been hindered, and that the hinderances to running well should be carefully detected, by the institution of serious inquiry.

I. THAT TO RUN WELL IS OF HIGH IMPORTANCE TO ALL PROFESSING CHRISTIANS. In discussing this proposition, it appears natural to observe,

1. *What is implied in running well.* The words of our text evidently allude to the well-known Grecian games, in which those ran well who contended for the prize exhibited, by the persevering exertion of all their powers in conformity to those laws by which the course was regulated; those were crowned, and those only, who ran lawfully. To run well therefore, in the sense of our text, must imply our striving to obtain the prize which Christianity exhibits in the course which it prescribes.—The Christian's prize is a crown, a crown of life, Rev. ii. 10; Rom. ii. 7; a crown of righteousness, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8; an unfading crown, 1 Cor. ix. 25; 1 Pet. v. 4. The Christian's course is persevering obedience to the truth; for these Galatians are here said not to run well, because they "obeyed not the truth." To obey the truth, is to do the will of God as it is revealed in his word, James i. 22, 25. Those therefore run well who run as God requires them; who run disencumbered, renouncing all sinful impediments, Heb. xii. 1; who run earnestly, intent on making continual progress, Phil. iii. 12, 13; who run perseveringly, till they arrive at the goal of death, Heb. xii. 1; who run evangelically, looking to Jesus, Heb. xii. 2, for guidance, strength, forgiveness, acceptance, comfort, and eternal life, Jude 20, 21. That we may be excited to adopt and pursue this course, let us observe,

2. *All Christians are called to run well.* All public characters are called to this, by St. Paul's example, Acts xx. 24; 2 Tim. iv. 7; and all private characters are called to it by his precepts, 1 Cor. ix. 27; Phil. iii. 14, 15. To run well is of high importance to us all. It is necessary to our usefulness, Heb. xii. 13—15; to our present comfort, Jer. ii. 19; Isa. xxxii. 17; and to our eternal felicity, Matt. vii. 21. Our text leads us to observe,

II. THAT SOME WHO DID RUN WELL HAVE BEEN HINDERED. By being hindered is meant the being obstructed in our course,

or turned out of it by something laid across it. Thus some in every age have been hindered. This therefore may be profitably considered,

1. *As an incontestable fact.* In proof of it, recollect the state of these Galatians now fallen from grace, compare chap. iv. 6, 7, v. 4; of the Ephesian church, which had left her first love, Rev. ii. 4; of the church at Sardis, applauded by men, but dead to God, Rev. iii. 1, 2; of the church of Laodicea, fair in externals, but lukewarm, Rev. iii. 14, 17; of Hymeneus and Alexander, who put away faith and a good conscience, 1 Tim. i. 19, 20; and of many similar characters in the present day. But this may be considered also,

2. *As an instructive fact.* It teaches us our total dependence on Christ for strength, John xv. 4; and protection, Ps. iv. 8. The necessity of constant vigilance, 1 Pet. v. 8, 9; Mark xiii. 37. To aid and engage us in this holy exercise, our text leads us to observe,

III. THAT THE HINDERANCES TO RUNNING WELL SHOULD BE CAREFULLY DETECTED BY THE INSTITUTION OF SERIOUS INQUIRIES.

1 Your first inquiry should be, 'Do we run well?' In pursuing this inquiry, faithfully and candidly ask yourselves, Did we ever run well, disencumbered, earnestly, evangelically? If we ever did, do we continue thus to run well? 2 Cor. xiii. 5; Gal. vi. 4. Let these inquiries be accompanied with prayer to God, Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

2. Your next inquiry should be, If we do not run well, what are the hinderances? Have you been hindered by persons or things? If by persons, who did hinder you? Have trifling professors, or treacherous backsliders, or forbidden connexions, or worldly companions, proved hinderances to you? If by things, what did hinder you? Did unchristian doctrines, or inordinate worldly pursuits? Luke xxi. 34. Have you been hindered by omission of known duties? James iv. 17. By neglect of ordinances? Mal. iii. vii. Or by sinful indulgencies, either open, like those of the ancient Jews, Isa. iii. 9, or secret, like that of Achan? Josh. vii. 13; Job. xv. 11.

3. Your last inquiry should be, How ought the discoveries we make to influence our conduct? If you never ran well, set out now for heaven, Jer. vi. 16; Job. xxii. 21. If now running

well, and never hindered, be thankful to God for his preserving grace, Ps. lxvi. 8, 9. If at all hindered, or fallen, apply for restoring grace, Hos. xiv. 1, 3, 8, by repentance, prayer, self-consecration, affiance, and lasting reformation. Thus apply promptly, Job xxxvi. 18; believingly, Micah vii. 18; importunately, Ps. li. 12, 13. If restored from falls, or preserved from hinderances, be concerned to promote the benefit of others, Luke xxii. 32; by cautioning them if in danger, Heb. iv. 1; reclaiming them if wandering, Gal. vi. 1; and strengthening them in trials, 1 Sam. xxiii. 16. And, however established, still diligently persevere, 2 Pet. i. 5—11. Thus you shall avoid future danger, and be crowned with distinguished glory, Jude 24, 25.

ALPHA.

LXXXVIII. THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT PROMOTED BY A PEACEABLE DEMEANOUR.

EPHES. iv. 3.

“ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

WE are directed to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, from the consideration that those shall prosper that love her. And that we should be so directed, is not at all to be wondered at, when we reflect on the direful consequences of disunity, or schism:—the distress it occasions to the pious; the mischief it does to the weak; the triumph it affords to the wicked; and, in short, the dishonour it does to God, and the ruin which it brings on mankind. Hence the care taken by Jehovah to promote it, see 1 Cor. vii. 18—25. And lest we should overlook what he has done, or be indisposed to copy his example, he has expressly exhorted us hereunto, and has employed the weightiest motives

to rouse us to compliance, "Endeavouring," &c. In discoursing on these words, we shall state,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.

II. HOW IT IS TO BE MAINTAINED. And then,

III. ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION BY URGING THE MOTIVES HERE EMPLOYED.

I. We have to state WHAT IS MEANT BY THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT. We think it means that unity among Christians which the Spirit of Christ promises. From our differences in the make of our minds, the mode of our education, thinking, &c., we cannot all be brought to think alike without a miracle. The slightest difference in sentiment, habit, motive, and circumstances, renders it impossible that we should have the same kind and degree of religious feelings, without a miracle. And hence, without a miracle it will be evident enough that all Christians cannot be brought to determine and act precisely alike. There will also be a difference among the members of the church as to health, stability, and usefulness. But because a union in every little thing cannot be effected, or even wisely attempted, does it follow that no union is to be sought? Surely not! The Holy Spirit must necessarily lead all under his guidance to what we may call an evangelical union, or a union, as far as possible, in faith, experience, and practice.

I. *We say that the Spirit leads Christians of all denominations to unity in the faith*; not by fines, confiscations, imprisonments, and tortures: such methods may do for the church of Rome, but not for the Holy Ghost. To lead to this, he has inspired a perfect system of truth, to the understanding of which he leads men by his secret influences, causing them to hold the great cardinal doctrines which constitute the glory of our common faith.

2. *He leads men to a union in experience.* Although men are awakened by the consideration of different truths, and are assured of their pardon by an application of different promises, yet the same truths and promises must needs lead to the same kind of feeling, and can only differ in degree,—while the same experience must be secured by whatever truths we are convinced, comforted, or established. Thus we are all made to feel our helplessness,—to acknowledge it,—to seek the aid of the Spirit,

—to rely on Christ, and to love him, and all that belong unto him: and until the same truths be presented to every mind at the same time, with the same force, and under the same circumstances, which is not to be expected in the present state of things, I cannot look for any greater union of feeling.

3. *He leads to unity in practice.* The same duties cannot be commanded of persons differently circumstanced, or differing in habit and relation; but the same duties may be enforced on persons of the same habits, relations, and circumstances. And however differently Christian men may seem to act, they will act alike in the following respects;—all will endeavour to please God, and to edify mankind; and to accomplish this, will consult the same Word. But we think that the union which is more especially promoted by the Spirit of God is,—*First*, A union of affection. Many considerations lead Christians to love each other;—but lest we should neglect them, God has made this essential to religion.—*Secondly*, An interchange of kind offices. The interests of Christians cannot be identically the same;—but their interests must necessarily be *mutual*, owing to their mutual love:—and mutual interests will lead to mutual efforts to promote them. “We shall look not every man on his own things,” &c., “weep with those that weep,” &c., and “love with pure hearts fervently.”—*Thirdly*, A union in Christian patriotism. As a general providence necessarily supposes a particular, so a particular love of Christians necessarily supposes a general or collective; and a collective love must lead to the cultivation of a public spirit. The Holy Ghost has commanded us to “love the brotherhood;” and to “look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.” But we proceed to state,

II. HOW THIS UNION IS TO BE MAINTAINED. And this is to be maintained by the maintenancè of *peace*; for where peace, like a belt, a knot, a cement, binds men together; or, rather, while by the promotion of peace, we avoid those angry passions which *separate* instead of *bringing* men together, we shall lay the foundation of greater unity. The peace of which we speak not only stands opposed to that hostility which avowed enemies observe towards each other, but to a quarrelsome or litigious temper, which is often found in those who disavow all hostility; it is, in short, that goodness of heart which has no private ends to serve; which will not suffer a breach of that good

understanding which ought to reign among the saints, so long as it can be maintained without any sinful compromise. And, to maintain this peace, we must,

1. *Cultivate lowliness of mind.* I do not mean that we should undervalue our talents or attainments,—but justly estimate them; in which case we shall neither be arrogant, nor yet expect too much from others; and so the peace of the church will not be broken.

2. *We must cultivate meekness.* This signifies the restraint of anger; which intimates that we may be under a temptation to anger, and even have cause for it. But we must endeavour to limit it to proper occasions and degrees. By the cherishing of this we shall often restrain that violence which endangers the body of Christ.

3. *We must cultivate long-suffering.* This means a long mind, which never allows a provoking case to find the end of our patience; which endures until every extenuating circumstance has been sought out, and we have thought maturely on the example placed before us. And should we be driven to the adoption of severities, it must be with reluctance: we must feel judgment a strange work; and go no farther than the case strictly requires for God's honour, and the offender's good. In this way we may maintain peace in a great degree, and so draw the bonds of Christian unity closer and closer. And to induce us to do so, we proceed,

III. TO ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION. And,

1. Reflect on the evil he does to himself, and to those who are influenced by his example, who does not endeavour to preserve and promote this unity. He casts himself and them out of the true church, seeing Christ has but one body; he places himself under the guidance of another spirit, seeing Christ has not two spirits, one promoting, and the other violating this unity;—relinquishes all rational hopes of happiness, seeing there is but one heaven for him and the church in which he cannot dwell;—becomes disobedient to the Christian's Lord, who has commanded us to observe this unity;—renounces the true faith, which is but one, and tends to this unity;—denies the true baptism, which is but one, and obliges us to maintain this unity;—and breaks off from the God and Father of all, of whom the whole family in

heaven and earth is named, who is above all, through all, and in all his children, see ver. 4—6.

2. He who does not endeavour to keep this unity, does what he can to defeat the end of Christ's manifestation in the flesh, which was to purchase gifts for the edification of his church; he defeats, as far as he can, the object of his ascension into heaven, which was to send them down, and to co-operate with his servants, whom he placed in the church, in promoting the unity and the perfection of his church, see ver. 7—16. Nay,

3. He who does not endeavour to promote this unity, deprives the church, to the best of his ability, of its *security* and *glory*.

To conclude,

Surely our object is not to destroy ourselves and others!—If, on the contrary, we are minded to save ourselves and others, we must get into the church, put ourselves under the guidance of one Spirit, become subject to the one Lord, embrace the one faith, &c., and to the uttermost of our power endeavour to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

IOTA.

LXXXIX. THE ENEMIES OF THE CROSS.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 18, 19.

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

FROM a consideration of the excellent nature, and benevolent tendency of the Christian religion, one would imagine that it could have no adversaries among mankind. But, alas! nothing has ever had to encounter such inveterate and persevering opposition. Nor is persecution the worst sort of opposition that it

has had to withstand. The ungodly and inconsistent lives of those who call themselves Christians, have done more injury to the interests of religion, than all the fire and faggot, the fines and confiscations, that have ever been employed against it. Even in the first ages of Christianity, there were characters who professed to know God, but by works denied him. Of such the apostle had to complain, "Many walk," &c. We will consider,

I. THE DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF THE ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST. By the cross of Christ, we understand the cause of Christ in the world; called the cross of Christ, because the doctrine of the cross in all its ramifications is its great distinguishing tenet;—or the sufferings of Christ on the cross are essentially connected with the whole scheme. The enemies of the cross are distinguished,

1. *By their sensuality*;—their "God is their belly." Alas! what numbers are there who know no greater pleasure than what arises from the gratification of their appetites! What sumptuous banquets are prepared for their entertainment! Behold the drunkard, the voluptuary, the glutton. Are not these enemies to the cross of Christ? Isaiah v. 11—22; Prov. xxiii. 30; Luke xxi. 34.

2. *By their worldly-mindedness*;—"they mind earthly things." This is a sweeping censure, that includes the far greater part of mankind. *The covetous*, who engage in such a multiplicity of concerns as to unfit them for spiritual duties; who are so anxious, so fretful, and so often in a bad humour, about worldly things; who are sensibly elated at the prospect of gaining a few pounds, &c. *The ambitious*, who love to hear their own praises sounded; who do their works to be seen of men; who cannot bear contradiction, nor hear the fame of another without envy, &c. *The dissipated and vain*, whose idols are pleasures, cards, plays, balls, and company: the sports of the field, convivial society, and the baneful joys of licentiousness; and among these, we include such as are vain of their persons, parts, and actions. How many worship themselves in their glasses; and mind earthly things so effectually, that health and life are sacrificed to their influence!

3. *By their infatuation*;—"they glory in their shame." How many applaud their abominable practices! How common

is it for drunkards and gluttons to boast of their excesses! to extol themselves, because they are men of strength to mingle strong drink. How many pique themselves on that industry, economy, and sagacity, by which they amass wealth! How often are the most nefarious actions the subject of self-gratulation! And some are so abandoned, as to triumph in the ruin and infamy which their ungoverned and licentious passions have occasioned. Observe, it is not necessary that all the above marks should be found in a person to prove him an enemy to the cross of Christ.

II. THE DOOM WHICH THEY WILL EXPERIENCE;—“whose end is destruction.” By their end, we understand their final state. Destruction cannot mean annihilation, seeing the Scriptures represent it as a severe and sensible punishment. But it does signify the irreparable ruin of man; his being lost to all happiness, and his endurance of all misery.

1. *It is complete.* The soul and body will both be destroyed. All the felicity which the soul is capable of possessing will be lost; and every painful reflection will be experienced. The body, deprived of all its pleasures, will suffer the acutest pains. The sensualist will not have a drop of water to cool his tongue. No wealth for the covetous—no honour for the ambitious—no pageantry for the vain—no amusements for the dissipated. All the fearful descriptions that are given of hell in the Bible, will be awfully realized by the enemies of the cross.

2. *It is certain.* The enemies of the Lord shall be consumed. No vigilance can elude the eye of God, no force can resist his arm, no arguments can change his purpose. It is his fixed, inflexible decree, that those who obey not his gospel, shall be punished with everlasting destruction, &c.

3. *It is eternal;*—“Their end is destruction.” Nothing is to succeed to it. There is no escaping out of it. Every part of the Bible testifies that the misery of the wicked is everlasting. To what hopeless anguish then are the enemies of the cross exposed! and it is much to be feared, that in this number are included thousands, who are distinguished by the honoured name of Christ, but who are virtually enemies to his cross.

III. THE EMOTIONS OF MIND WITH WHICH ST. PAUL BEHELD THEM;—“I have often told you, I now tell you even weeping.” He was deeply concerned for them; tears of sorrow

and holy indignation trickled down his cheeks. These emotions were probably excited by two causes :

1. *His attachment to Christ.* We ever feel interested in the cause of him whom we love ; and in proportion to our love, so will be our grief, at any injury done to his person, his character, or his property. St. Paul ardently loved Christ, and was deeply interested in the success of his gospel. But as these enemies hindered in some measure the triumphs of the cross, brought reproach on the gospel, and dishonoured Christ, he was deeply affected with sorrow on this account.

2. *His ardent love for immortal souls.* He knew that Christ estimated souls at the price of his own blood ; that they were unspeakably precious to him, and incalculably valuable in themselves ; and while the enemies of the cross of Christ exposed themselves to eternal destruction, who can wonder that St. Paul shed tears of pity on their account ? And it is highly probable that many of them once ran well, and that he had been made instrumental in their conversion, but that now they had declined from the ways of God, and were in effect the real enemies of the cross of Christ.

This subject teacheth us,

1. The true character of sinners ;—“ Their God is their belly,” &c.

2. The awful circumstances in which they are involved, and the misery to which they are exposed.

3. With what feelings of compassion and mercy we should regard them.

4. What necessity there is for zeal and fidelity in the ministers of Christ.

DELTA.

XC. ST. PAUL'S APPEAL TO THE THESSALONIANS.

1 THESS. ii. 11, 12.

“Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”

NEVER were there more disinterested men upon earth than the apostles of the Lord and Saviour. Wealth they never sought, for they worked with their hands for a coarse maintenance; and wandered about in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness. Human praise they never courted, for they were made the filth of the earth, and the offscouring of all things; a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. Personal ease they never gratified, for they stood in jeopardy every hour. Nothing can be more manly and independent than the appeal which the apostle makes to the Thessalonians in the verses preceding the text, ver. 4—10. In the passage selected for our meditation we notice the following things:

I. THE WORK OF GOD;—He “hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”

II. THE WORK OF CHRISTIANS;—To “walk worthy of God.”

III. THE WORK OF MINISTERS;—“We exhorted and comforted,” &c.

I. THE WORK OF GOD;—He “hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.” God hath called you unto his kingdom, &c. A kingdom is the dominion of a king; the place where he exercises royal acts and royal authority. In reference to God, this exists every where, for “his kingdom ruleth over all.” In a peculiar sense, God’s kingdom is established in his church. “The kingdom of God is within you:” and to this kingdom God calls men.

1. *He calls them to become the subjects of this kingdom*

Men are morally in a state of rebellion against God; they dislike God and his law, and other lords have the dominion over them; but God calls them to submit to his authority, sends them messages of mercy, and terms of reconciliation, and his ministers pray them, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled unto God.

2. *He calls them to conform to the laws of this kingdom.* Every kingdom is governed by laws; where there are no laws there is no government. God's kingdom has its laws; laws that prohibit sin, that bind us to believe in Christ, enjoin us to love God, inculcate the practice of benevolence, &c. To these laws men are called to submit, voluntarily—universally—constantly.

3. *He calls them to realize the blessings of this kingdom.* These blessings are innumerable; two of the most distinguished are *peace* and *protection*. The kingdoms of this world are often the theatres of war, but wherever grace reigns, peace will prevail; the principles of enmity and hostility against God will be slain; and heaven-born tranquillity will erect her peaceful throne in the human mind. *Protection* also will be secured in the kingdom of grace. God always protects his subjects, "the Lord is our king, he will save us."

4. *He calls them to this kingdom as preparatory to his everlasting kingdom.* All that God does in his church upon earth, is designed to prepare men for his church in heaven. The reign of grace fits them for the reign of glory. "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptation," &c. Luke xxii. 28, 29.

Secondly, God calls us to his glory: glory here is another word for heaven, Ps. lxxxiii. 24; 2 Cor. iv. 17.

1. *Glory is honour.* Military glory is honour achieved by military skill; the highest honour to which men can aspire in this world is termed glory. But what are the plaudits of mortals compared to the honours of God! Christ will say to his people, "Well done, good and faithful servants!" They will inherit his kingdom, and be introduced to the most exalted society.

3. *Glory is splendour.* "Solomon in all his glory," &c. Luke xii. 27. "There is one glory of the sun," &c. God calls us to immortal glory. What splendour and refulgence will be displayed in the New Jerusalem, where the Lord God

will be an everlasting light to the blessed inhabitants, where the saints will have glorious bodies, and the church be a glorious church!

3. *Glory is prosperity.* "Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased," Ps. xlix. 16. In heaven there will be eternal prosperity. Want will be there unknown; there will be no lack of any thing. This glory is *inexpressible*; human language fails to describe it;—Paul heard unspeakable words;—it is *inherent*, a glory that shall be revealed in us; worldly splendour is all on the surface; but this is a substantial intrinsic glory;—it is *eternal*; worldly glory fades, and will ere long pass away; this is an eternal weight of glory. To this kingdom, and to this glory, God calls us—By his word, his Spirit, his ministers, and his various dispensations. Such is the work of God.

II. THE WORK OF CHRISTIANS;—"To walk worthy of God," &c. The term *worthy* usually signifies deserving. Thus we read, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," &c. Rev. v. 12. But here the term *worthy* signifies suitable, 1 Sam. i. v. A *worthy* portion is a suitable portion. Fruits *worthy* of repentance, (Luke iii. 8.) are such as comport with the nature of repentance. To walk worthy of God is,

1. *To lead such a life as comports with the favourable circumstances in which God has placed us.* Where there is much given, there is much required. The Lord hath done great things for us. How highly are we distinguished! Privileges and obligations go hand in hand. "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done to him," 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

2. *To pursue such a course of conduct as suits our profession.* The religion we profess emanated from God, and its design is to make us like God in temper and conduct. To walk worthy of God, is to live according to the rules, and precepts, and ordinances of his religion; and what these are, his holy oracles sufficiently testify.

3. *To tread in the steps of those who have been the followers of God as dear children.* God has set before us patterns, models, and examples; in these we see our religion embodied and exemplified. The saints lived up to what they

professed; they were men of faith, of courage, of self-denial, of zeal, and active benevolence.

4. *To act in exact conformity with the expectations we have of a better country.* We hope to live in the presence of God for ever, we should therefore live as in his presence in this world. A life of sin upon earth can be no preparation for a life of holiness in heaven. We must walk worthy of God. God is a being of infinite purity, therefore we must be holy. God has an infinite abhorrence to sin, therefore we must fly from the very appearance of evil. God is inviolably true, therefore we must be men of truth. God is love, therefore we must walk in love, as he hath loved us. God is the author of peace, therefore we must live in peace, &c.

III. THE WORK OF MINISTERS;—"We exhorted," &c. Learn,

1. *The object at which the apostles aimed was to excite believers to walk worthy of God.* To instruct men in doctrines, and convey correct information on theological subjects, are objects of importance; but they are important only as they are preparatory to a life of devotedness to God. It was like death to the apostles to witness the disgraceful lives of professors. "Now we live," &c. 1 Thess. iii. 8. "Many walk," &c. Phil. iii. 18. "I have no greater joy," &c. 3 John 4.

2. *The means they used to accomplish this object.* "We exhorted," &c. There are few Christians but what have their hours of barrenness or languor, when they need the friendly exhortation of a minister to rouse their dormant powers to action, and excite their languid affections to seek the things which are above. How cheering must the exhortation of an apostle have been! We *comforted*. The primitive Christians had many painful exercises and sore troubles, arising from the temptations of the devil, the insults of men, the loss of their worldly substance, &c. The apostles comforted them by an assurance that all would ultimately turn to their advantage; that God would never leave them; that the same afflictions were common to their brethren in other parts of the world, and that their reward in eternity would be in proportion to their sufferings here. We *charged*;—a charge is an authoritative precept, delivered by a superior; we counsel a friend, but we charge a child or a servant. The apostles were men high in office; the

Christians to whom they preached were the fruits of their ministry; hence they charged them most solemnly, 2 Tim. iv. 1.

3. *The manner how these means were carried into effect*; "We exhorted," &c. as a "father doth his children." This may mean *as affectionately* as a father doth his children. How indescribable is the affection of a parent! How lovingly does he exhort, and comfort, and charge his children! *As familiarly*; how distant from every thing like ceremony is the conversation between a father and his little child whom he instructs! *As frequently*; fathers seize opportunities to teach their children;—*As faithfully*; fathers use great fidelity with their children; Or, *as impartially*; "We exhorted," &c. every one of you; this refers most probably to their pastoral visits. Here was no system of partiality pursued, or *favouritism* followed, that fawned when fortune smiled, but treated with stern neglect the poor and the destitute: the apostles taught publicly, and from house to house.

In conclusion, observe, here is a word for all.

1. Has God called you unto his kingdom and glory? Inquire, Have you obeyed the call? You may refuse, Prov. i. 24, but oh, consider the consequences!

2. Christians, do you walk *worthy* of God? worthy of the privileges with which God has invested you, and the hopes with which he has inspired you?

3. Ministers, do you exhort, and comfort, and charge every one of your people, as a father doth his children? O what glorious results would be produced, were those who profess to be the successors of the apostles, to act like them. May God endue his ministers with righteousness, and make his chosen people joyful!

BETA.

XCI. A CALL TO WATCHFULNESS AND SOBRIETY.

1 THESS. v. 6.

“Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober.”

EVERY thing in this world is liable to degenerate. The richest soil would, if neglected, be soon overrun with weeds. The most laudable institutions, if not watched over, would be desecrated from their original purpose. The firmest and the best constructed buildings are subject to decay. Metals of the finest polish are liable to be tarnished; and Christians of the most exalted piety may fall from their own steadfastness, and degenerate into lukewarmness and apostacy. On this principle, we justify all the cautions, warnings, and admonitory precepts found in the apostolic writings. In the last of these, we include the text; “Let us not sleep,” &c. We have here,

I. A STATE ADVERTED TO:—“*Sleep*, as do others.”

II. A COURSE OF CONDUCT DESCRIBED;—“Watch, and be sober.”

III. AN OBLIGATION TO PURSUE IT INTIMATED:—“Let us not sleep, but *let us watch*,” &c.

I. A STATE ADVERTED TO;—“*Sleep*.” This is the state of sinners: their moral condition is variously described as being a state of darkness, bondage, death, &c. Here, they are considered as being asleep, &c.

1. *Those who are asleep are insensible of their state, and unconscious of all the objects that surround them.* They have eyes, but they perceive no objects; ears, but they hear no sound; hearts, but they feel no sensations. How descriptive is this of the state of sinners! To their worldly concerns, they are broad awake; all eye, all ear, all attention; but, in reference to the interest of their souls, a deep sleep has fallen upon them. They are unconscious of the immediate presence of God with them, insensible of his amazing love, of their moral condition as sinners, of the duties that devolve upon

them, of the dangers that await them, and the privileges they are called to realize.

2. *Those who are asleep are motionless and inactive.* Powers the most vigorous may be in their possession; blessings the most inestimable may be within their grasp, and business the most important may devolve upon them; yet no efforts are called forth, no energies are roused; such is the state of sinners. For the accomplishment of worldly objects they are ever on the alert, but, in reference to their spiritual interests, they are motionless, and inactive; a death-like torpor rests upon them: they hear of heaven, but make no efforts to enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way that leadeth to life;—they hear of hell, but they give no diligence to escape its tremendous punishment;—they are told of their duty, but to do it they manifest no concern.

3. *Those who are asleep are often the subjects of illusion and deception.* What senseless dreams delude them! How many airy nothings swim before their eyes! How many pleasing and painful thoughts occupy their minds, as destitute of reason as they are of reality! Nothing can be more characteristic of the condition of sinners. Their whole life is a dream. Delusions deep as hell bind them fast; and all their ideas of God, of themselves, of sin, and religion, misery, and happiness, are the phantoms of error, and the creatures of imagination.

4. *Those who are asleep are frequently exposed to dangers which they have no power to escape.* Hence sleep is a defenceless state. Men may bolt their doors, yet thieves often enter and surprise them. But sinners are exposed to dangers infinitely more dreadful. They are taken already in the snare of the devil, and they are liable every moment to be arrested, and hurried down to perdition. Such is the state adverted to in the text. Let us notice,

II. THE COURSE OF CONDUCT EXPRESSED;—"Let us watch and be sober."

1. *Watchfulness is opposed to sleep, therefore let us be wakeful.* Complying with the requisitions of the apostle, "Awake thou that sleepest," &c. Rousing ourselves from that delusive slumber into which sin has thrown us. Let us awake, and keep awake.

2. *Watchfulness is opposed to thoughtlessness and stupidity,*

therefore let us be considerate and thoughtful. Our worldly business claims our thoughts ; but our souls, our God, our salvation, our duties, and privileges, possess higher claims. To these we should bend our thoughts, with deep concern and solicitude.

3. *Watchfulness is opposed to indolence and sloth, therefore we should be diligent.* “Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep.” We have much to do for our neighbours, ourselves, and our God, and we must work while it is day.

4. *Watchfulness has reference to danger, therefore we must be prepared to meet its attacks.* Our enemies are wakeful and vigilant, and always waiting to attack us to advantage. Let us always be on our guard, and watch as sentinels at the post of duty.

5. *To watchfulness we must add sobriety.* Be sober, that is temperate ; avoid gluttony and intoxication : eating and drinking are designed to nourish the body ; but we may make our table a snare, and convert our aliments into poisons. Be sober, that is, calm and dispassionate ; holding your tempers and passions in subjection, never suffering wrathful dispositions to surprise you.

III. AN OBLIGATION TO PURSUE IT INTIMATED ;—“*Let us not sleep, but let us watch,*” &c. We must regard this as an apostolic precept ; an expression of this kind, in some cases, amounts to little more than advice or counsel ; but when a superior gives it to a dependent, and especially when God, by the ministry of his servants, imparts it for our instruction, it is a law from which we dare not swerve.

1. *Our circumstances call us to comply with this requisition.* We need not sleep, but we may watch ; the power and the obligation go together ; we are not circumstanced as heathens are, nor as Jews, or Papists, or Mahometans are. Our privileges are superior, therefore we should not sleep as do others.

2. *Our profession demands obedience to it.* Hear the apostle : “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day,” &c., ver. 5. “For they that sleep, sleep in the night, &c., ver. 7. We profess the Christian religion ; this prohibits sin, therefore we should not sleep as do others ; this prescribes duties, therefore we should watch and be sober.

3. *Our personal security should bind us to observe it.* Sin-

ners are in a state of dreadful danger; their imaginary peace is no security against its attacks, ver. 3. Safety and duty are inseparable, "Watch and be sober," this will insure protection.

4. *Our eternal happiness is connected with the performance of this duty.* "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching."

Here then we discern,

1. The essential difference between the righteous and the wicked; the latter are asleep in their sins, the former are watching, &c.

2. That the Christian religion binds us to the practice of a holy singularity; we must not do as others, but do what God has enjoined.

BETA.

XCII. A CHARGE TO THE RICH.

1 TIM. vi. 17—19.

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate: laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

THE Holy Scriptures contain advices and instructions suited to every sort and condition of men. And God's ministers are charged with messages to all;—some of these messages are mild and agreeable,—and others are the reverse; so that in some cases great and excellent messengers have shrunk from their duty, see Jer. xx. 7—18; Jonah i. 3; but they dare not refuse, Ezek. ii. 5—8, iii. 17; Jer. i. 8, 17. Allow me, then, to deliver the

message contained in the text ; by attending to the *subjects*, the *nature*, and the *execution* of the charge.

I. THE SUBJECTS OF THIS CHARGE ;—"the rich." Whatever difficulty may be found in the appropriation of the term *rich* to individuals, it is sufficiently obvious that there are rich as well as poor. Riches are opposed to poverty :—and as poverty signifies scantiness, penury, want ; so riches imply abundance, a store, more than enough.

1. *There may be a thousand gradations of riches* : from the least superabundance, to the largest sum that a mortal ever possessed. But that man must be ranked among the rich, who can command the necessaries, conveniences, and comforts of life, and still have something to spare.

3. *Riches are strongly desired by mankind.* And the rich are frequently envied by their inferiors. And if man might be viewed merely as an inhabitant of this world, such conduct would hardly be censurable. But the word of God, which connects eternity with time, and man with eternity, shows that religion is a thing essential to the happiness of the present and of the future state. Speaking of riches and poverty, in a way suited to these momentous associations, it declares advantages peculiar to the poor, and dangers peculiar to the rich. Some of the latter, with the way to avoid them, form,

II. THE NATURE OF THIS CHARGE. Which comprehends,

1. *The dangers specified.*

(1.) *Highmindedness.* It is exceedingly difficult for a person to be rich, and not to think the more highly of himself on that account. Solomon asserts, that the rich man is "wise in his own conceit," Prov. xxviii. 11 ; and Ezekiel, "that the heart is lifted up because of riches," chap. xxviii. 5. The manner in which such are honoured, and the advantages which their riches give them, lead to ideas of superiority, and thus tend to generate and to nourish this ostentatious evil.

(2.) "*Trust in uncertain riches.*" Trust in riches is mentioned in the Scriptures as a very dangerous sin, see Mark x. 24 ; Prov. xi. 4, 28, xxiii. 5. And the rich are much exposed to this danger ; because riches may procure many worldly comforts ; they may banish many apparent evils. And to trust in any thing rather than in God, is the common fault of man. Let us now endeavour to understand from the apostle,

2. *The way to avoid these dangers.*

(1.) *Trust in the living God.* Hold your possessions as uncertain, but depend on God, who cannot fail. He gives even the riches: he gives all things; the enjoyment, the zest. He alone can enable us really to enjoy what we have. How few enjoy even riches! "Trust in the living God;" because if riches fail, he can, in the absence of riches, give sweet enjoyment. Trust in God! This is of more value than any quantity of riches; implicit dependence on God is greater security against want, than any extent of worldly property.

(2.) *Employ your riches in doing good.*—Liberally; "rich in good works." Be in good works what you are in worldly possessions, abounding. — Promptly: "ready to distribute." Some people who are very able, are never ready.—Extensively; "ready to *distribute*." We often hear of what we may be allowed to call, home-charity; but the apostle here enforces distributive charity. So the Psalmist, "He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor," &c., Ps. cxii. 9.—Freely; "willing to communicate." How hardly are some persuaded to give even a little!

Observe the different words which the apostle uses; Distributing appears to signify general charity. Give extensively; not to one or two persons or things, but to every laudable institution to which your means will extend.—Communicate; be socially benevolent. Be willing to share your good things with your fellow creatures. Be hospitably benevolent, see 2 Cor. ix. 5; Rom. xii. 13; 1 Tim. iii. 2; Tit. i. 8; 1 Pet. iv. 9.

(3.) *Live for eternity;* "Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come." Laying up is a phrase which surely the rich understand. Laying up for themselves.—For whom are you laying up? see Ps. xxxix. 6; Matt. vi. 20; Luke xii. 20, 21; 2 Cor. ix. 6.—"That they may lay hold on eternal life." Riches will not secure life. They permit their owners to perish; but a proper use of riches will end in everlasting life, see Luke xvi. 9. The apostle adapts his language and his ideas remarkably to the rich. They may still be rich,—they may lay up,—they may still trust in,—and still aim at high things. Oh that the rich were wise, that they understood these things! Oh that their riches, their trust, their laying up,

their high views, were all consecrated to God. But whether they will hear, or forbear to hear; we must not shrink from,

III. THE EXECUTION OF THIS CHARGE. It is easy to charge the poor; but when the rich are the subjects, who will dare to say plain things to them. Their property, their dignity, their very appearance forbid. But the command is, "Charge the rich." Allow us then, oh ye rich! not as "lords over God's heritage," but as messengers of the Most High, to charge you.

Recollect,—that though your riches give you great worldly advantages, they also expose you to very serious dangers; "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Unsanctified riches always prove a curse to their owners. Would you enjoy any of their real advantages? then, "Honour the Lord with your substance, and with the first-fruits of all your increase," Prov. iii. 9.

Beware of high-mindedness; and remember, that though some rich men are wise and good, yet riches may be associated with any thing, and almost every thing, that is mean, and low, and vile.

Recollect, too, that there is but one way of salvation, for the rich and the poor. Repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are essential to your salvation.

Finally, remember that a great day of reckoning and of judgment will come, when God will judge every man according to his works.

GAMMA.

XCI. A CAUTION AGAINST APOSTACY.

HEB. x. 35.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."

IN that variety of experience to be found in this various and ever changing state of things, it not unfrequently happens, that,

“many are the afflictions of the righteous;” whether from sickness, and the common calamities of life, or from the peculiar temptations of the wicked one, and the persecutions of his children. Let not such, however, as are thus exercised, increase their troubles, by supposing that some unusual and unheard-of thing has befallen them. A little consultation of the sacred oracles will convince them to the contrary. To go no further than this epistle; we find the apostle here reminding his readers, that in ancient times such had been the state of the world, that the pious had “trials of cruel mockings,” &c., chap. vi. 36—38; and on reference to their own experience, as well as what they had reason yet to expect, he found it necessary to give them this caution, “Cast not away,” urged home by this reason, “For it hath,” &c.

I. THE CAUTION GIVEN. “Cast not away your confidence.” In this caution three things are observable, confidence possessed, —danger of losing it,—and an intimation that it could not be lost but by their own fault.

1. *Confidence now possessed*: of which we consider, the nature, the subject, the grounds, and the proof. As to the nature of the thing in question; confidence, in its general acceptation, and in such application as the present, means, trust in a person of whose ability and disposition we have satisfactory proof, that he will afford us timely and sufficient help. It may be distinguished from presumption, which expects without warrant or reason; such is the case of the heedless sinner, Prov. xiv. 16; Jer. vi. 14; 1 Thess. v. 3; and of the hypocritical or backslidden professor, Matt. iii. 7—12; 1 Pet. ii. 15—21. It may be distinguished also from faith, which has respect to what has been already done in the way of atonement and reconciliation: and from hope, which has respect directly to blessings promised and expected, see 1 Pet. i. 3—9; whereas confidence more immediately respects the Being in whom we trust. Yet though distinct from, it is not unconnected with both faith and hope; as will be evident, if we consider,—The subject of this confidence: that God will continue to bestow all the blessings of the gospel of peace; whether relating to grace here, (as chap. iv. 16; xii. 28,) or to glory hereafter, as 2 Cor. v. 1—8. The grounds of this confidence appear to be, 1. What God has done for us, in redeeming us by his Son, Rom. viii. 32, and to this purpose

is ver. 4, 18—22. 2. What God has done in us; enlightening, renewing, comforting us, &c, by his Spirit, ver. 32—34; which Spirit attests our sonship, Rom. viii. 15, 16; Gal. iv. 6; produces its genuine fruits, Rom. v. 1—5; Gal. v. 22, 23; makes Christ precious, 1 Pet. ii. 6, 7; and thus emboldens our hearts, 1 John iii. 21, 22. And, 3. God's promise and unchangeable faithfulness, ver. 23. All this is confirmed by another interpretation of the word *παρρησιαν*, which renders it liberty or freedom; and which regards the Christian as having such freedom of access to God, (and, in consequence, such grace from him,) as enables him freely and boldly to profess his cause. This must indicate affiance in him,—expectation of his countenance and aid,—and this expectation founded in Christian and covenant relation. The proof of this confidence is found in a steady resistance of temptation, whether by pleasure, (chap. xi. 13—16, 26,) or by pain, (chap. x. 32—34,) and in a steady confession of Jesus through evil and through good report. Thus Acts iv. 19, 20; Heb. xiii. 13, 14. Inquire, have we this confidence? If so, the text intimates,

Danger of losing it. This may arise from the mere fickleness and instability of human nature. Some persons, like those mentioned, Matt. xiii. 6, 21, appear to be the subjects of religious affections; but as they are naturally fickle and thoughtless, they take up a profession without counting the cost, and presently cast it away without counting the consequences. This should be guarded against, 1 Cor. xv. 58. There may be danger from new and unexpected trials, 1 Pet. iv. 12; or from a wearisome, exhausting continuance of severe pressure. Such the case in which even Job charged God foolishly: and such, perhaps, the case the apostle had in view, see ver. 36—38. In every case our danger must be heightened by unwatchfulness, by neglect of duty, and by the craft and management of our spiritual enemies. Yet,

We shall not lose our confidence but by our own fault: “Cast not away,” &c. God, who has granted us this boldness and liberty, is unchangeable, and therefore will not capriciously or arbitrarily retract his own favours. Satan and his servants will attempt to rob us of it, but they cannot force, 1 Cor. x. 13. “Hold it fast.” Perhaps here is an allusion to the shield in ancient warfare. If the the battle frowns, cast it not away

through fear ; flee not. If the fight relaxes, and there be an apparent cessation of hostilities, cast it not away through presumption or carelessness.

II. THE IMPORTANT REASON ASSIGNED ; “ It hath great recompence of reward.” Men usually act with a view to a reward, either present or future. That the confidence which we are exhorted to retain the recompence of is great, appears when we observe that,

1. *It greatly fortifies and supports the soul under present calamity.* Thus it was with the Hebrew children, Dan. iii. 16, 18 ; with Daniel, ch. vi. 10, 22 ; with Peter, Acts xii. 6 ; with Paul, Acts xx. 23, 24 ; 2 Tim. i. 12 ; see also 2 Tim. iv. 6, 8 ; Heb. xi. 35.

2. *It claims and realizes great privileges.* Amidst the storms of life, how comfortable to know that we are under the guidance of an unerring pilot, whom winds and waves obey ; In all troubles, how pleasing to have access to our heavenly Father ! &c., Isa. xxvi. 3.

3. *It is the great preventive of present disgrace and eternal misery.* If we cast away our shield we shall be pierced through with the fiery darts of the wicked. If we despond, we shall yield to the foe ; our souls will become spiritually dead and apostate ; and then what can we expect but such doom as that described in ver. 26—29 ?

4. *It looks at, and leads to, the great rewards of heaven,* 2 Cor. iv. 16, 18 ; Rev. iii. 21. Cast not away therefore your confidence. If others cast away theirs, so be it. There may be greater danger in times of defection ; but follow not bad example ; regard yourselves. Have any of you lost your confidence ? Oh hasten to recover it ! cry again to God till he give you back your peace and power. Then let past experience, (ver. 32—34,) and future unknown trials, induce you to hold it fast, ver. 36 ; Rev. ii. 10.

ZETA.

XCIV. THE NATURE OF THE HEAVENLY RECOMPENCE EXPLAINED.

HEB. xi. 26.

“He had respect unto the recompence of reward.”

IN this chapter, the inspired penman of this epistle sets before the Jewish converts to Christianity, a variety of illustrious examples of faith, under the Old Testament dispensation; and shows them what eminent acts of obedience it enabled them to perform, and for which they were renowned in their several ages. Among these, Moses is a memorable instance; the first-fruit and evidence of his faith mentioned by the apostle, is his singular self-denial. By faith he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and only child, as Josephus tells us. ‘She was called,’ says he, ‘Thermutis, and had adopted Moses to be her son, and given him a princely education;’ for Stephen asserts, that “he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds,” Acts vii. 22. And when he was full forty years old, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and therein renounced all the honours, and pleasures, and riches of the Egyptian court, which, at that time, was superior to any other court in the world for wealth and grandeur. This he did, not from any peevish, ungrateful principle, but from faith in the promises God had made to the patriarchs, and earnest desire personally to share with them in the ample blessings promised, especially the happiness of heaven, typified by Canaan. He knew that he could not inherit the crown of Egypt without forsaking God and renouncing the true religion; and therefore he preferred and chose a state of afflicted piety, before the dignities and pleasures of Egypt.

In the text, we have the ground of this his signal self-denial; —“for he had respect to the recompence of reward;” that is, he looked away from the things of time, to the giving or rendering of the reward. The eye of his mind was turned away from the

treasures of Egypt to the treasures in heaven. He looked by faith and hope to the happiness of the future state, which includes more glorious honours, sweeter pleasures, and richer treasures, than all the courts in this world can afford. His believing prospect of these future and superior excellencies, was the ground and motive of his self-denial. Here we may observe, that in the service of God we may and ought to have respect to the recompence of reward; it is not criminal and mercenary, as some imagine; but lawful, and our duty.

In treating of this subject, we shall endeavour TO EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF THIS RECOMPENCE OF REWARD. And, in a word, it is the happiness of the heavenly state, consisting in four things, which we shall briefly mention.

1. *The happiness of the heavenly state consists in the complete vision of God.* "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," Matt. v. 8. "When Christ shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," 1 John iii. 2. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face," 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Though the vision of God in heaven be not comprehensible (for that is impossible to finite creatures), yet it is beatifical, replenishing, and satisfying to every desire of the soul.

2. *In the full possession and enjoyment of God.* Here in this life much of him is enjoyed in the promises of the covenant, first-fruits of the Spirit, and spiritual ordinances; but this enjoyment is mediate and imperfect; in heaven it is immediate and full; every faculty of the soul is filled with as large a portion of divine manifestation as the whole capacity thereof is able to contain.

3. *In the most perfect similitude and transformation into the likeness of God in holiness and love, of which glorified saints are capable.* "When I awake I shall be satisfied with thy likeness," Ps. xvii. 15. "We shall be like him," 1 John iii. 2. The moral image of God shall be fully impressed upon the saints; for there is a glory to be revealed in them as well as to them, Rom. viii. 18.

4. *In complete satisfaction and delight, arising from all the former.* "In his presence there is fulness of joy," Ps. xvi. 11. In heaven God is clearly seen, fully enjoyed, and the soul impressed with his likeness whence arises complete satisfaction

and unspeakable blessedness; and the body, when raised from the dead, and brought thither, will be endued with incorruptibility, spirituality, power, and glory, 1 Cor. xv. 15, 42—44, in a conformity to the glorified body of Christ, Phil. iii. 21. This now is the recompence of reward that we may and ought to have respect to in our serving God. And it is a *sure* reward to all God's faithful servants;—"To him that soweth righteousness, shall be a sure reward," Prov. xi. 18. It is founded on immutable love, an invaluable purchase, and unquestionably faithful promises, of which true believers in Christ have the earnest in themselves, (Eph. i. 14.) and possession already in their glorified Head, the Lord Jesus, Heb. vi. 20. It is a *great* reward; it must be so, since God himself is the reward;—"Fear not Abraham, for I am thy exceeding great reward," Gen. xv. 1. It is a *full* reward, 2 John 8. It leaves no sin or sorrow unremoved, no desire unsatisfied, no faculty unreplenished. It is *eternal*; for "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him," Ps. ciii. 17: so long as God exists, shall those possessed of this reward continue in the enjoyment of it, without decay in itself, or dislike to them. It is impossible that the enjoyment of the highest and greatest good should ever be disrelished by the graciously prepared possessors thereof.

We see hence the necessity of being accepted of God on the ground of Christ's sacrifice, of deadness to the present world, and of religious diligence and exertion, in company with the religious, so that we may enjoy a pleasing hope and well grounded assurance of possessing this vast recompence of reward beyond the grave. All other objects are comparatively trivial, and of but little moment: but *heaven* is a consideration the most sublime—adapted to the utmost reach of our faculties—can satisfy our largest hopes—and will be commensurate with our existence. Here let our minds rest, and to this point let our strongest and most lively energies be constantly directed.

THETA.

XCV. HAVING RESPECT TO A FUTURE RECOMPENCE JUSTIFIABLE ON SCRIPTURAL GROUNDS.

HEB. xi. 26.

“ He had respect unto the recompence of reward.”

To be influenced in religion by right views and motives, at once equally remote both from base self and bold presumption, is necessary and beneficial. We cannot do better than adopt the sentiments, and copy the example, of those saints whose character is on record in the inspired writings. Moses is an excellent pattern of faith and obedience, and in all his religious services he had respect to the recompence of reward.

I. PROVE THAT CHRISTIANS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD MAY AND OUGHT TO HAVE RESPECT UNTO THE RECOMPENCE OF REWARD.

1. *God has proposed and promised it purposely to encourage our obedience to his commandments, and to support us under the difficulties and hardships of our Christian warfare.* See a few texts to this purpose;—2 Cor. vii. 1; 2 Pet. i. 10, 11; 1 Tim. vi. 17—19; Gal. vi. 9. In all these places it is proposed and promised as a great encouragement to obedience and holiness. It is set before us also for our support under sufferings, Matt. v. 10—12; Heb. x. 36; Rev. ii. 10. Thus we see that God has promised the recompence of reward, to encourage us both to faithful duty and cheerful suffering, to do and bear the will of God. Now to what purpose are all these encouraging promises, if no regard must be had to the promised recompence? In a word, all who are taught by the gospel to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,” are taught also to “look for the blessed hope,” Tit. ii. 11—13. And he that comes to God, must believe that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, Heb. xi. 6.

2. *This has been the approved practice of the saints in all*

ages. God expressly declares, that he was not ashamed to be called the God of the ancient patriarchs, because they sought a better country (than what they left on his call), "even an heavenly," Heb. xi. 16. Moses, here in the text, had respect to the recompence of reward, and this is recorded to his honour. David says, "I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even to the end," Ps. cxix. 112. So it is in our translation; but in the original, the words, instead of "to the end," are, "for the recompence," that is, with a view to the promised reward, and accordingly the seventy translate it; which is the end of evangelical obedience, Rom. vi. 22, and the end of faith, 1 Pet. i. 9. Many of the faithful under the Old Testament dispensation suffered grievously, refusing to accept of deliverance on sinful conditions; that they might obtain a better resurrection, Heb. xi. 35. No man was ever more remote from a mercenary spirit than St. Paul, yet he made the heavenly world his aim in the course of his service and sufferings, Phil. iii. 13, 14; and the prospect of it excited his courage, and supported his mind, 2 Cor. iv. 16, 18. Nay, the Lord Jesus himself, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, Heb. xii. 2.

3. *The nature, necessity, and usefulness of the graces of faith and hope evince the truth of the point.* These graces have only their uses in this life, for "faith is the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for," Heb. xi. 1; Rom. viii. 24, 25. The recompence of reward proposed and promised is the proper object of these graces, which, when it is obtained, faith will be lost in vision, and hope in enjoyment. Therefore, unless we may look at the recompence of reward, and expect it, these graces have, in a manner, no proper objects on which to be exercised. Yet all Christians are required to live by faith; "The just shall live by faith," Heb. x. 38: it is both their privilege and duty at the same time; and they are commanded to "hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto them at the revelation of Jesus Christ," 1 Pet. i. 13. But how can faith realize the future recompence, or hope give a present subsistence to it in the mind, if we must not have respect to it?

II. EXPLAIN IN WHAT SENSE THIS IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

1. *We must not have respect to it as the only reason of our obedience, without which we would not serve God: this would*

be criminal, mercenary, and servile. The great reason of obedience is the authority of God; "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently," Ps. cxix. 4; but we may have respect to the reward as the motive and encouragement of our obedience; reasons and motives are different things.

2. *Nor must we have respect to the recompence of reward as the ultimate end of our obedience.* The glory of God being in itself the highest end, must accordingly be so to us. "All things are of him, and through him," and therefore should be to him, Rom. xi. 36. Our ultimate aim in all we do in religion, or suffer for it, should be that God may be honoured and glorified; "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," 1 Cor. i. 31; and this is the habitual aim of all serious Christians, Rom. xiv. 7, 8. St. Paul says, "To me to live is Christ," (Phil. i. 21.) his honour is the highest and governing end of my life.

3. *We must not have respect to the recompence of reward as the result of our merit.* After we have done all things God has commanded us, we are to feel and confess "We are unprofitable servants," Luke xvii. 10. After all our best services and severest sufferings for righteousness' sake, the reward is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ, Rom. vi. 23. The promise of it is an act of unmerited favour; and though it be, with respect to the order and manner of bestowing it, called a reward, yet it is a reward of free grace, a rich and free gift, a largeness of divine bounty, purchased for us by Christ, and bestowed on us by the Father's good pleasure, in consideration of his merits. In reference to Christ, it is merit; but, as to us, it is mercy; (Jude 21.) so that we must have respect to it as a manifestation of God's rich bounty.

APPLICATION.

1. We may hence learn the abundant mercy and goodness of God to us, that when he might use no other argument to enforce our obedience than his own sovereign authority over us, yet is pleased to encourage us with the promise and assurance of a most glorious and inconceivably great recompence of reward.

2. Let us continually look to this recompence of reward, and, with the prospect of it, encourage ourselves to faithful duty, and cheerful suffering when called to it. A lively faith of it, and

due respect had to it, will draw forth all our active powers into the service of God, and inflame and feed our zeal for his glory. See 1 Cor. xv. 58. It will also fortify us against all the difficulties and sufferings of the present time, Rom. viii. 18. "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God:" but he whom we serve, and suffer for, intends to bestow on us a vast reward, which will be an abundant recompence for all we do and suffer for his sake. Let us oppose the glory of our hopes to all the abasement of our sufferings, and, with Moses, esteem the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world.

THETA.

XCVI. THE KINGDOM OF THE SAINTS.

HEB. xii. 28, 29.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

A SLIGHT inspection of this epistle may serve to convince us, that one part of its author's intention was to shew, that the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour is the noblest revelation of mercy which the compassion of heaven has granted to the necessities of man. Hence he begins by asserting the superiority of its *minister*, not only to the prophets of former days, (chap. i. ver. 1, 2,) but also to the angels; "inasmuch as he hath by inheritance a more excellent name than they," ver. 4. Here also he asserts the superiority of its *priesthood*, chap. vii. 11; and of its sacrifice, chap. ix. 13, 14; "For if the blood of bulls and of goats," &c. All along, however, the writer takes care to connect doctrine and use, to mingle improvement with instruction; and to shew that,

by how much greater are our privileges than those of persons who lived under the former dispensation, by so much greater is our obligation to bring forth the fruits of righteousness and piety. A specimen of his teaching, in this particular, we have in the context; "For we are not come," &c. ver. 18, 19: "But ye are come unto mount Sion," &c. ver. 22—24. Such is his doctrine. Then follows the practical *use* of this doctrine: "See that ye refuse not," &c. ver. 25 to end. Our text, which is the conclusion of the chapter and of the subject, may now be considered as affording an exhibition of Christian privilege, and an exhortation to Christian duty.

I. AN EXHIBITION OF CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom," &c. In different parts of the sacred oracles the privileges of the pious are variously represented. Sometimes, for instance, believers are a *family* of which God is the father; and for whose support and protection he pledges himself to provide. At other times, the plenitude and variety of their blessings are set forth by the enjoyments to be found at a *feast*; at the marriage feast of a king's son. On another occasion we are reminded of a *rest*, on which they enter, chap. iv. 3; or of an *inheritance* to which they are entitled, 1 Pet. i. 3, 4; and in our text, and many other places, they are described as partakers of a *kingdom*. This representation leads us to compare the kingdom here mentioned with others; in doing which, we find that this kingdom differs from and excels them in,

1. *The spirituality of its nature.* Every thing about *them* may be seen, felt, or otherwise apprehended by our bodily senses; they come with observation,—this is not with observation;—they are without,—this "within you." They are constituted on worldly principles, for worldly purposes; in this the Father of spirits reigns in the spirits of his intelligent human offspring. Accordingly, *The enemies of this kingdom are spiritual*; either pure spirits, as Satan and his angels, (Eph. vi. 12,) or spiritual enemies, as they injure our best interests, by preventing our intercourse with the source of spiritual good. And, *The prosperity of this kingdom is spiritual*;—consisting not *in*, however it may consist *with*, an extension of territory, increase of commerce, progress of arts, science, manufactures, &c.; but in a growth in grace, and more intimate union with the Holy One.

2. *The qualifications of its Governor.* Few human governors possess all the qualifications requisite to form a perfect ruler; and perhaps fewer still possess them in that perfection their friends could wish. But the King of Zion knows no defect. Is it desirable that a ruler should be *wise*? In our Mediatorial King "are hid all the treasures of wisdom," Col. ii. 3. And "known to the Father are all his works," Heb. iv. 13. Should he be *powerful*? see Col. ii. 15; Rev. i. 8. Should he be *good*? The goodness of God and his Messiah has given divine wisdom and power the best direction, as the work of redemption abundantly attests. And to crown the whole, he who has done so much is not a *fickle* man, but the *faithful* God, Heb. xiii. 8; James i. 17.

3. *The perfection of its laws.* Human legislation partakes of human frailty. But of our King it is said, "He is the rock," *his work is perfect*. His laws, it is true, prohibit many things; but it is because these things are *injurious*. And they enjoin only those affections, and that address and behaviour, which are calculated to promote the happiness both of the *individual* and of the *community*, 1 Tim. iv. 4; Tit. iii. 8.

4. *The characters of its subjects.* Other kingdoms include persons of every description, and consequently, some of the worst that wear the human form. But here the subjects are *new creatures*, John iii. 5; 2 Cor. v. 17; are "*transformed* by the renewing of their minds," Rom. xii. 2. Hence they are "*a holy nation, a peculiar people*," &c. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

5. *The abundance and variety of its supplies.* It is no strange thing for kingdoms to suffer scarcity and famine. This was recently the case with Ireland, and now with our settlements in South Africa. "The King immortal" has all the stores of nature and grace at his command. And "of his fulness have all we received," &c. John i. 16; Ps. xxxiv. 8-10; lxxxiv. 11.

6. *The stability of its foundation.* Ancient and widely extended kingdoms are oft-times shaken and overthrown. Witness the history of former and of latter times. "This cannot be moved." Against it the gates, the craft, malice, and power of hell shall not prevail. Almighty wisdom and love founded, and shall support it. Of its increase *there shall be no end*, Isa. ix. 6, 7. "The saints shall possess it" in all its *secu-*

riety, holiness, and happiness, “for ever and ever,” Dan. vii. 18. From what has been said, it appears that this kingdom consists of two departments—that of grace here, and that of glory hereafter. Yet in both, *the nature of this kingdom is the same*. Grace is glory in the bud: glory is grace in bloom, in fruit, in perfection. *The King is the same*. Jesus reigns, and shall “reign till he shall have put all enemies under his feet.” And if then he shall deliver up his preparatory, mediatorial kingdom to the Father, yet in his participation of Godhead, he shall reign, when “God is all in all.” *The laws are the same*. Piety and benevolence govern the redeemed both in earth and in heaven. And *the subjects are the same*. Whether in this or the higher department, they are those humble devoted souls who inquire, “Lord what wilt thou have us to do?” In short, “grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.” On this ground we have,

II. AN EXHORTATION TO CHRISTIAN DUTY. “Let us have grace, &c. Here,

1. *The object of our service is proposed*;—“Serve God.” Christianity, high and glorious as its privileges are, does not exempt us from responsibility; or authorise the supposition that we may have holiness and practical righteousness enough in another, without having any in our own persons. But the contrary, 1 Cor. ix. 21; Tit. ii. 12, 14. “Serve God;” not Satan, (Satan worketh in “the children of disobedience,” but we are saved from him, (1 John iii. 8, 9,) nor *the world and self*, Rom. xiv. 7, 8; 1 John v. 4.

2. *The manner of our service is specified*;—“acceptably.” God is our *lawgiver*, is a *spirit*, is *holy*, and *supreme*. To “serve him *acceptably*,” therefore, we must serve according to his laws, without hypocrisy or formality, in righteousness and true holiness, and all our days, Luke i. 74, 75; John iv. 24. We live *in God*, and should live *to him*.

3. *The general exhortation is urged*;—“Let us have grace, whereby,” &c. The word here rendered “*have*,” signifies to “*hold fast*,” to retain, as well as possess. Addressed to such as have not yet availed themselves of their gospel privileges, the exhortation is, “Seeing the kingdom of God is come unto you, seek grace to serve him with that ‘*reverence*,’ which becomes his

supreme excellence ; and with that ‘ godly fear’ which becomes a sinner standing in the presence of infinite purity.”

The exhortation supposes that grace *is attainable*, Heb. iv. 16 ; and that it is *needful*. Without it temptation and corruption will infallibly lead to God-provoking sin. “ Ask, therefore, that it may be given you ;” for, oh ! remember, that “ *God is a consuming fire.*” Think of the case of Sodom, Gen. xix. 24 ; of Korah and his company, Num. xvi. 34, 35 ; of Daniel’s representation of the Ancient of days, whose “ throne was the fiery flame,” &c. chap. vii. 9, 10 ; of the description we have of the day of judgment, 2 Thess. i. 7, 8 ; 2 Pet. iii. 12 ; then ask yourselves, “ Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings ?” Isa. xxxiii. 14 ; and beware of the “ unquenchable fire,” Matt. iii. 12.

The exhortation as addressed to real believers, is, “ Let us hold fast grace, to act suitably to our *increasing advantages and responsibility* ;” and it supposes that grace is *loseable*. Otherwise warnings, cautions, &c. were useless. Let us, therefore, be having more and more of grace ; and, in order thereto, let us also be found *asking it*, John xvi. 24 ; *guarding it*, Matt. xiii. 4 ; *using it*, Mark iv. 25. For the the apostle does not scruple to say, even to such as were actually “ receiving the kingdom,”—“ Our God is a consuming fire ;” to consume the sin or the sinner. Even to such, in his estimation, *awful* motives were legitimate. But for you, my brethren, there are other considerations also.

You have received the kingdom of “ *righteousness*,” &c. Rom. xiv. 17 ; and are entitled to be “ kings and priests unto God for ever and ever.” See then that ye *walk worthy* of your vocation, Eph. iv. 1. While journeying to take possession of the better country, *patiently* bear the trials of the way. And let the grandeur and beauty of “ the heavenly Jerusalem,” &c. (v. 22, 23,) invigorate your *hope* and *desire*, and prompt you to *holy exertion*, 1 Cor. xv. 58.

ZETA.

XCVII. A CAUTION AGAINST ERROR.

JAMES i. 16.

"Do not err, my beloved brethren."

WHEN the great Head of the church assended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men; and he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Some were sons of thunder; others, sons of consolation; some were employed in guarding the outworks of Christianity, and vindicating the doctrines of Christ against the insidious attacks of infidelity; such was Paul, who was set for the defence of the gospel. Others were raised up to reprove abuses, and to guard the interests of morality against the inroads of libertinism and licentiousness;—such was James, whose epistle was chiefly admonitory. One of his admonitions the text records; and we will notice what it assumes, what it implies, and what it enjoins.

I. WE ARE LIABLE TO ERR. This is an assumption we are justified in making, from the cautionary language of the text. We must confine our observations to religious errors. With the common blunders of mankind on science and commerce, we have at present nothing to do. We prove our liability to err,

1. *From the weakness of our understandings, and the limited operation of the human faculties.* Man is a feeble creature altogether. How frail in his body! How liable to be attacked by disease! How soon does his beauty fade away, as it were a moth fretting a garment! The faculties of his mind are still more feeble. How weak is his understanding! How slow in comprehending the truth! How little does man know! Even the knowledge which he seems to possess has more of conjecture than certainty, more of presumption than demonstration in it. The weakness of the human understanding renders man liable to error. Where the visual organs are de-

fective, things will be seen imperfectly, and erroneous ideas will be formed concerning them.

2. *From the awfully mysterious subjects to which our attention is directed.* The universe is peopled with beings; some visible, others invisible. We look around us and behold millions of objects. We view the heavens in all their glory, the sun shining in his strength, the moon walking in her brightness, the stars in their courses fulfilling the will of their Creator. We see the earth with its immense furniture, its cattle upon a thousand hills. We see the great and wide sea, wherein are creeping things innumerable. We see man, the lord of this inferior globe, going forth to his work and to his labour, until the evening. All these are the objects of sense. But who can say, that even in referenee to these, he has never formed an erroneous opinion? We have all fallen into mistakes, and imbibed errors concerning men and things: and if visible things deceive us, how much more are we liable to err as to invisible things! What awfully mysterious subjects does the Bible present to our mental view! Sin with its widely desolating effects.—Religion with its divine and glorious consummations.—Judgment with its tremendous consequences.—Hell with its indescribable horrors.—Angels, principalities, and powers,—and, above all, the Eternal Being, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, and clothed with light as with a garment. Who can presume to say, that we are not liable to err in our conceptions and ideas concerning Beings and things, so grand, so august, and so awfully mysterious?

3. *From the impositions and cheats practised upon us.* There is a spirit of error gone abroad into the world. “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.” He is the deceiver of the nations; whole nations are deceived by his infernal artifice. Look at the abominations of heathenism. What impositions does the enemy practise upon sinners generally! He takes them in his snare, and leads them captive at his will. But though error is so prevalent, yet the text implies,

II. THAT IT IS NOT NECESSARY; “Do not err, my beloved brethren.” If error were involuntary, it would be unnecessary to guard us against it. We need not err,

1. *Because we have a comprehensive and an all-sufficient*

directory. The Bible is an infallible rule of judgment and practice; we here know what we ought to believe, as well as what we ought to do. All the errors in the religious world originate in ignorance of the Scriptures. "Ye do err," said Christ to the Sadducees, "not knowing the Scriptures." We do not wonder at the errors of the heathens. The mariner may err, who has neither chart, nor compass, nor pole-star to guide him on the watery way. The traveller may err amidst midnight darkness. But we may make our appeal to the Bible, and know the truth as it is in Jesus. We need not err,

2. *Because have a perfect pattern and exemplar.* Jesus Christ hath left us an example that we should follow his steps. The most deadly errors in the world are wicked lives. Errors in judgment do not always endanger a man's salvation. A man may hold the head, and build upon a right foundation, but he may build wood, hay, stubble, and be saved himself, though his works may be burnt up. But a man with a bad life cannot be saved. We need not, however, fall into this error through ignorance, seeing we are taught, by the example of Christ, how to live; nor need we live wickedly, through inability to obtain a change, as Christ is able to save to the uttermost, &c., Heb. vii. 25. We need not err,

3. *Because we have an infallible guide to conduct us into all truth.* Besides the rules and precepts of revelation to instruct us, and the example of Christ to allure us, we have the Holy Ghost to guide us. Attention to the inward monitions of the divine Spirit will save us from all glaring errors, in principle and practice.—"For thine ears shall hear a voice," &c., Isa. xxx. 21. "If any man will do his will," &c., John vii. 17. "When he the Spirit of truth," &c., xvi. 13. "Ye have an unction," &c., 1 John ii. 20. But the text enjoins,

III. THAT WE SHOULD BE ON OUR GUARD AGAINST ERROR. "Do not err, my beloved brethren." Do not err through ignorance. Get your minds fully instructed in all the doctrinal, experimental, and practical truths of Christianity. Nor through prejudice. There is the prejudice of education,—of party,—of the multitude. Thousands decide in favour of a certain class of Christians, because their parents belonged to them,—there they were baptized; and that is the religion of the

multitude. Do not err through sinful habits. 'Faults in the life, breed errors in the brain.' Nothing is more difficult to abandon, than habits to which we have been long accustomed. Do not err,

1. *Because error is discreditable.* You are endowed with faculties, capable of discerning truth from error; you are not brutes, who know neither good nor evil. You have helps and facilities for the acquirement of correct ideas, and therefore need not plunge yourselves into errors, as abominable as those of heathens and savages. How disgraceful are those errors into which thousands fall even in this Christian land!

2. *Because error is uncomfortable.* There may be an imaginary consolation, and a delusive comfort in error; such a comfort as an infatuated maniac enjoys, who fancies himself a sovereign, thinks that his prison is a palace, his chains ensigns of royalty, and his keepers his subjects; but a man who runs into all the errors of sin, can have no real consolation, no divine peace, no holy joy, no internal quiet. Error creates inquietude here, and a looking for of judgment hereafter.

3. *Because error is unsafe.* It is ruinous to body and soul; and nothing that the human mind can contemplate is so alarming as danger; especially danger from the wrath and curse of God, Ps. xcv. 10, 11, cxix. 21; Isa. ix. 16; 1 Tim. vi. 10.

Are any of my hearers involved in sin?—Yours is a foul and a destructive error. Oh hasten to extricate yourselves from it! Ere long, if you persist in urging your downward way, your error will be irreparable.

Have any of you 'clean escaped from them who live in error?'—Read 2 Pet. ii. 20—22, iii. 17, 18.

BETA.

XCVIII. THE VITAL EFFICACY OF FAITH.

JAMES ii. 26.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

THE subject of discussion in this chapter, is the practical tendency of genuine faith. It appears that many persons in the apostolic age perverted the doctrines of the gospel. Though they professed to embrace Christianity, their faith did not produce the fruits of a holy life and heavenly conversation. The apostle, therefore, shows them the utter insufficiency of such an empty profession; and the absolute necessity of that faith which invariably demonstrates the genuineness of its character, by the efficacy of its influence. He faithfully reproves them for their unjust partiality, and affectionately inculcates the practice of piety as the result of unfeigned faith. And, to enforce this impressive doctrine, he appeals to certain well-known examples of faith and obedience. He distinctly specifies Abraham and Rahab, who evinced the reality of their faith by their works; the former, “when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar;” and the latter, when at the peril of her life she concealed the Jewish spies. From these premises the apostle draws the interesting conclusion in the text; “For as the body without the spirit,” &c. These words bring before us the subject of Christian faith, and suggest to our consideration, the necessity of its possession, —the excellency of its character,—and the efficacy of its principle.

I. THE NECESSITY OF ITS POSSESSION. This the apostle assumes; nor does he enter into any general description of its abstract nature. He simply represents it as an essential and vital principle of genuine piety, which displays the reality of its existence by the purity of its influence. And, as the spirit is necessary for the existence of the body, so faith is indispensable to the possession of pure and undefiled religion. And hence,

1. *It is a duty divinely required.* It is the very foundation and principle of vital godliness. The existence and perfections of the Deity demand its vigorous exercise; for without faith it is

impossible to love or please God, Heb. xi. 6. The written revelation also of his will, is the ground and rule of living faith; and enjoins it as the indispensable duty of mankind, 2 Chron. xx. 20; John vi. 28, 29, chap. xx. 31; 1 John iii. 23. And whatever is commanded by God, is unquestionably the incumbent obligation and reasonable service of his intelligent creatures; for he requires nothing but what is perfectly wise, "holy, just, and good."

2. *It is the only way of salvation.* We are condemned by the law as transgressors; and we cannot escape its final penalties by any thing that we can do or suffer, Rom. iii. 19, 20. "But Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He is therefore the *way* to the Father, and the only medium of salvation, John xiv. 6; 1 Cor. i. 30. But it is only *by faith* that we can realize an interest in him as our Saviour; "He that believeth not is condemned already," Mark xvi. 16; John iii. 16—18; Acts x. 43; chap. xvi. 30, 31. Some, however, have thought that there is a manifest opposition between St. Paul and St. James on this subject; but this cannot exist in reality, because they both wrote by the inspiration of the same Spirit. But, in describing the same doctrine under different views and circumstances, they naturally adopted a different mode of expression, while they maintained perfect unity of sentiment, Rom. iv. 3; James ii. 23.

3. *It is an essential property of religion.* It is the most distinguishing principle of Christianity, and the distinctive character of the righteous. Without faith all external professions and ceremonies are vain, Gal. v. 6. It is necessary for the attainment of every spiritual blessing, and the performance of every Christian duty, "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." It is connected with every hallowed principle, disposition, enjoyment, and practice; and is the very *life, spirit, and energy* of personal religion, which is significantly called 'the *work and profession* of faith.' And as closely connected with the necessity of this gracious principle, we must consider,

II. THE EXCELLENCY OF ITS CHARACTER. This is evident from the Scriptures in general, and especially from the testimonies of Jesus Christ and his apostles. It is emphatically called "precious faith," and exceedingly great and glorious things are spoken of it in the inspired memorials of the saints. In this

chapter St. James admirably describes it as a principle of inestimable value, and the distinguishing excellence of our holy religion. And this will appear, if we observe,

1. *Faith is divine in its Author.* It is not the mere effort of reason; it is the special *gift* of God's grace, Eph. ii. 8; Col. ii. 12. He reveals the object—enjoins the duty—imparts the power—and inspires the grace of faith.—But still it is a *personal act* of the mind, by which we credit divine truth—embrace the Saviour—and obtain salvation. No man can believe without supernatural aid; but, by the ability which the Lord bestows, the obedient penitent “believes with the heart unto righteousness,” and continues coming, trusting, and “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith,” Heb. xii. 2.

2. *Faith is vigorous in its operations.* It is not an empty *notion*, but a living *principle*. This distinction is very important, and is clearly described by our apostle, ver. 18—20. (It is possible to have many general notions and speculative opinions in religion, when we are utterly destitute of living faith.) When faith is merely notional, it is fruitless; but when it is genuine, it produces the most gracious effects. As a principle of spiritual life, it quickens all the powers of the soul, and brings them into constant exertion, Gal. ii. 20. It grasps the Deity—lays hold on the Saviour—renders him precious to the soul—embraces the divine promises—resists evils and temptations—promotes stability and diligence—and endures tribulations, as “seeing him who is invisible,” 2 Cor. v. 7; Heb. x. 38.

3. *Faith is consoling in its prospects.* It looks not at the things which are seen, but at those things which are not seen. It is accompanied with a consciousness of the divine favour, and an assurance that “all things will work together for our good.” It affords consolation under every trial, and enables the Christian to “glory in tribulations.” It far exceeds the glimmering rays of reason, and mysteriously penetrates and grasps the invisible realities of immortal bliss, 2 Cor. v. 1; 1 Pet. i. 8, 9. Faith thus cheers the mind, encourages the hope, and animates the pursuits of the believer, and supplies the place of present vision, by becoming “the *subsistence* of things hoped for, and the demon-stration of things not seen.” From this description of the excellency of faith, we may easily discover,

III. THE EFFICACY OF ITS PRINCIPLE. This is distinctly as-

served in the text. The comparison is peculiarly elegant and impressive. As there can be no living human body without a spirit, even so there can be no saving faith without good works; "For as the body," &c. When faith is genuine, it always promotes,

1. *Works of purity and holiness.* It teaches its possessors to "come out from the wicked, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing." They are deeply convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and abhor it as that "abominable thing which the Lord hateth." They also discover the moral beauty of holiness, and practically "adorn the doctrine of their Saviour in all things," Tit. ii. 11—14. Their faith produces a hallowing influence, both on their mind and morals; and as a tree is known by its fruits, so true faith is distinguished by its legitimate effects of "holiness and righteousness of life," Matt. vii. 17—20.

2. *Works of conquest and triumph.* The warfare of Christians is called "the good fight of faith." They are surrounded by numerous enemies, Eph. vi. 12. But *mighty faith* subdues sin—resists Satan—conquers the world—and triumphs over affliction, death, and the grave, 1 Cor. xv. 55—57; Heb. xi. 24, 25; 1 Pet. v. 8, 9; 1 John v. 4. Thus by faith the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles were "more than conquerors through him that loved them," and obtained the crown of eternal life, Heb. xi. 32—39; 2 Cor. iv. 10—13.

3. *Works of love and benevolence.* When we believe in Christ, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts; for faith worketh by love to God and all mankind; even to our enemies, Matt. v. 44.

4. *Works of zeal and perseverance.* The true believer is always zealously affected in the cause of Christ. He greatly rejoices in the prosperity of Zion, and mourns when she declines. He prays for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and endeavours to promote the cause of righteousness and peace, Hab. iii. 2; Rom. x. 1. Under the animating influence of faith, we shall never grow weary in well doing, but "always abound in the work of the Lord, till we receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls."

We may learn from this subject,

1. The necessary union between faith and works.
2. The duty and importance of self-examination.
3. The peace and felicity of "holding fast faith and a good conscience."

XCIX. THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY AND HOPE.

1 PETER i. 13.

“ Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

ONE of the evidences of the truth and divinity of the Christian religion is, that it obtained establishment in the world not only without any assistance from human governments, or from the corrupt principles of human nature, but in opposition to both the one and the other. Nature loves sensual indulgence: Christianity requires self-denial. Nature shrinks from pain and persecution. But the early Christians had, in consequence of their profession, to endure fiery trials, ch. iv. 12. Hence the encouragements and supports afforded them in the former part of the chapter; and hence the exhortation to “a patient continuance in well-doing,” contained in our text itself; which points attention to the Christian's duty, and his expectation.

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY:—“Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end.”

1. “*Gird up*,” &c. Here is an allusion to the manner in which persons in eastern countries usually dispose of their long flowing garments, when circumstances would not admit of their wearing them at full length. This was the case; that is, they confined what was loose and inconvenient by means of the girdle about the loins.

(1.) *In their journeying*. See Exod. xii. 11; 1 Kings xviii. 46; 2 Kings iv. 29. The advice, therefore, reminds us of our present state of *pilgrimage*, as chap. ii. 11. We are but too much disposed to call our lands our own, and to take up our rest here. But the text tells us that we should hold ourselves in readiness to leave the world. *Convinced*, like the Psalmist,—“I am a stranger,” &c. Ps. xxxix. 12,—we should, like him and other ancient worthies, “*declare plainly*” our conviction and desires, (Heb. xi. 13—16.) by *acting* accordingly. “Gird

up the loins;" have all things, whether temporal or spiritual, in readiness, as Israel to leave Egypt, &c. 2 Kings xx. 1; 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

(2.) *This "girding up," &c. was practised by servants, when they waited on their masters.* "Gird thyself and serve me," see Luke xii. 35, 37.; xvii. 8. In this view it may denote that *cheerful and ready devotion* with which the Christian, renouncing self-will and self-pleasing, should ever ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He should gird himself for any service, however mean, laborious, painful, or protracted, chap. ii. 13—21.

(3.) *Soldiers girded themselves for battle.* "Having your loins girt about with truth," Eph. vi. 14. This shews us the Christian in his *militant state*, engaged in warfare with his threefold enemy: and reminds us—that opposition is to be expected, ch. iv. 12—14;—that we should be always prepared for resistance, ch. v. 8, 9;—and therefore should have all the accompaniments of the girdle of truth; namely, "the breast-plate of righteousness," &c. Eph. vi. 10—17; and thus prepared, and praying always, (ver. 18.) should *follow our captain*, and be led to certain victory.

2. "*Be sober,*" (or vigilant, Parkhurst,) a state equally distant from stupidity and carelessness, on the one hand, and the rashness of intoxication on the other. The opposite of intoxication by *strong drink*. Drunkenness, a swinish, abominable, ruinous practice, Isa. xxviii. 1—8; Prov. xxiii. 31, 32; 1 Cor. vi. 10. The opposite of intoxication by *excessive passion*, whether fear, anger, love, or any other, Prov. xvi. 32; James i. 19. And consequently the opposite of intoxication by *worldly cares*, compounded of unholy love, desire, fear, anxiety, &c. in fearful and fatal mixture; or by *carnal pleasure*, which enervates and destroys, Luke xxi. 34; Isa. v. 11, 12; 1 Tim. v. 6. This wakeful sobriety is *valuable*, inasmuch as it enables a person to see his danger, and to provide against it; and to perceive his advantages, and avail himself of them. And it is *necessary*; because without this the mind must be so distracted as to be a prey to every enemy; and especially to our vigilant and crafty spiritual foes.

3. "*Hope to the end.*" We speak here of the *duty* of hoping or trusting amidst difficulties and discouragements. God gives

grace; it is our place to exercise it on proper grounds afforded. Here they had to repose on the work of redemption performed, ver. iii. 6; the *word of promise afforded*, ver. 10—12, 25; and the blessed effects already produced in their experience, ver. 7, 8. This leads us to,

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPECTATION;—"The grace that is to be brought," &c. The word "grace," means any favour or benefit; the *revelation* of Jesus Christ, his coming to judgment, called, ver. 7, "his *appearing*."

1. The word "*revelation*," seems to refer to his *appointment* by him who makes the revelation,—the eternal Father who has appointed the day, and committed all judgment to the Son, Acts xvii. 31; 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16.

2. And it would lead us to consider the *manner*, the *purposes*, and the *results* of this revelation.—The manner *awfully glorious*: In the Judge's announcement, attendants, equipage, &c. Not now as formerly, (Isa. liii. 2; John i. 10.) but with the trump of God, angels, flaming fire, &c. Luke ix. 26; 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17; 2 Thess. i. 7, 8; Rev. xx. 11—13. The purposes *awfully righteous*: to manifest the holiness and equity of God's government; to convince and confound the ungodly, and to vindicate the righteous against the accusations of Satan and his sons, Matt. xxv. 31—40; Jude 15; Rev. xii. 9, 10. The results *awfully transporting or terrific*; Matt. xiii. 41—50; xxv. 41—46. In the one case, all the bliss of heaven! in the other, all the woes of hell.

3. But this will be throughout to the saints a revelation of *grace*. Their bodies shall be *graciously* changed, Phil. iii. 21. In the separation, they shall be graciously placed on the right. In *gracious* accents shall the Redeemer express his approval. Angels shall *graciously* conduct them; and Jesus graciously "present them before the presence of his glory," &c. And in every case the grace shall be heightened *by contrast*. We would therefore,

1. Propose the solemn questions, Rom. ii. 3—10.

2. Enforce the important advice, "Acquaint *now*," &c. Job xxii. 21. And then urge the apostle's exhortation in our text, and join in his prayer, chap. v. 10, 11.

C. BROTHERLY LOVE.

1 JOHN iv. 11.

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

“ A NEW commandment,” said our blessed Redeemer “ give I unto you, that ye love one another ;” and again, “ By this shall men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another.” To the honour of many primitive Christians, their very enemies frequently said, “ See how these Christians love one another :” how, in affliction, they sympathise with one another ; how they bear each other’s burdens ; how they defend each other’s reputation ; how in honour they prefer one another ; and with what zeal they labour in every possible way to promote each other’s interests. Happy had it been for the church and the world, and honourable to the Christian name, could this always have been said ! But, alas ! the reverse has too frequently been the case, and the enemies of Christianity have had but too much occasion for saying, See how these Christians *hate* one another ; how they oppose each other’s measures ; how they defame each other’s character ; how they persecute, and bite, and devour one another ; and how zealously they labour to make each other despicable and wretched. All this is deeply to be deplored, as a virtual renunciation of Christianity, a total apostacy from its spirit, and a rejection of the primitive badge of discipleship. Let us labour to avoid this. There are many reasons why we should ;—our text furnishes one eminently powerful,—the *example of God*,—*God loved us* ; but “ if God so loved us, we ought also to love another.” Let us,

I. CONSIDER THE LOVE OF GOD. “ God is love.” This is his name, and a name eminently descriptive of his nature. Its manifestations have been various. The manifestation referred to in the text is the incarnation, and sufferings, and death of Christ. “ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son,” &c. The subject of admiration is not that we loved God, for we did not ;

and had we, there would have been nothing wonderful in this, seeing that God is infinitely lovely, and that we were under infinite obligations to love him. No, the point of admiration is that God should so love us. The greatness of divine love in our redemption will appear from the following considerations :

1. *From the character of the redeemed.* Not angels, but men.—They are little. When compared with beasts and reptiles, man appears a mighty and a glorious being, even

‘ The dim miniature of greatness absolute.’

But when he ascends the scale of being, and extends his views to the celestial spirits before the throne, and especially to the throne itself, his glory vanishes, and his mightiness is reduced to absolute insignificance. They are not only little, but vile. They have revolted from God :—have joined his adversary.—This has been done, not by a few, but by all.—Not in one place or age, but in all places, and in every age.

2. *From the character of the Redeemer.* He is not a sinful man, nor merely an eminently good man, nor an angel, nor a super-angelic being. But God in union with man, “ the brightness of his glory,”—by whom the world was made, is governed and sustained, and hereafter will be judged. Such is the character of the unspeakable gift. When the dignity of the Redeemer is considered in contrast with the worthlessness of man, who can help admiring the riches of divine grace ?

3. *From the nature and extent of his sufferings.* Remark, 1. His deep humiliation. Had he taken upon him the nature of angels,—or, if necessary to assume our nature, had he appeared in the person of some mighty potentate, surrounded by all the wealth, and talent, and splendour of a nation ; this would have been infinite condescension. But he descended lower, his parentage poor, himself poor, his associates poor. His death of all others the most humiliating. Remark 2. The peculiar nature of his sufferings. On this subject the views of people in general are exceedingly defective. Speak of his sufferings, and instantly they think of his poverty, the persecution of his enemies, the defection of his friends, or the pains of crucifixion : and they think of no other. These were the mere shadow of what he suffered—his agony in the garden cannot be traced to

any of these—his sufferings were those of the soul, when bearing away the sin of the world, Isa. liii. 4—6, 8, 10, 11.

4. *From the benefit resulting from these.* Rebels are pardoned, Eph. i. 7. The pardoned are adopted, Rom. viii. 15. The adopted have free access to God, Rom. v. 2;—have support, patience, comfort, sanctification, and, hereafter, eternal glory, 1 Pet. v. 10.

II. THE APOSTLE'S INFERENCE. “*If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*” That we ought to love one another might be inferred from the common relation in which we stand to each other as creatures; from our being liable to the same evil, and capable of participating in the same blessings; from our being members of the same spiritual family, and heirs of the same glory. But, waiving these for the present, we prove it from the *example of God*. No reason can possibly be assigned why we should not love another, but which might be assigned with infinitely greater force against God's loving us. The casual hinderances to brotherly love are,

1. *Inferiority.* Some persons, who, by the favour of Providence, are elevated, look down with neglect, if not contempt, upon their humbler brethren. Such persons seem not to know that riches and poverty are merely adventitious circumstances. With them poverty and baseness, and riches and excellence, are, if not always, yet in most cases associated. The reverse in multitudes of cases is true. But put the case in the strongest light; imagine them to be as much superior as they suppose; is this a reason why they should not love their inferior brethren? Suppose the divine being to act on their principle, what would be the consequence? For what is the disparity subsisting between the richest and the poorest, the most learned and the most ignorant, in comparison of that which exists between God and the first created intelligence in the universe? Yet God loved us; therefore we ought to love one another.

2. *Inutility.* Some professors, from the pride and selfishness of their nature, seem to say, Why should we love those from whom we have never derived or hope to derive any good? They forget that, but for the labourer and the artizan, they could neither obtain the luxuries, the comforts, nor the necessaries of life. They forget that the pious poor are Christ's brethren,

and that whatever is done for them will be rewarded. And, finally, they forget that in the patience, and resignation, and heavenly joy, which frequently accompany their deepest afflictions, they may have their faith in the truth and excellence of Christianity confirmed and strengthened. But suppose their inferiors could not in any way promote their interest; what then? Shall they for this reason withhold their love? Were God to act on this principle, what would become of us? for we cannot profit the Almighty. Yet he loves us.

3. *Injury.* To love those who love us is in general easy. To love those who possess much excellence, though they may be ignorant of us, is not difficult. But to love those who have deeply injured us requires something more than we inherit from the first Adam: especially injuries affecting character. Never admit without evidence that any good man has so injured you. Observations most innocently made have, by a little alteration, or addition, or omission, or change of emphasis, by an inattentive or ill-natured hearer, been changed into something exceedingly offensive. Before you give credit to any thing which may be reported to your injury, trace it through its various stages to its origin, and in most cases it will lose something at every stage; and when you arrive at the last, you will find little to censure. But admit the worst; are you to hate and never forgive? Suppose God had thus acted towards you? Remember the servant whose master forgave him a great debt, who himself threw his fellow-servant into prison for a small one, and avoid all resemblance to him.

IN CONCLUSION, REMEMBER,

1. That he who professes Christianity without *love to the brethren*, is a liar, 1 John iv. 20.
2. That where love reigns, piety, comfort, and usefulness are promoted.
3. That brotherly love removes a great impediment to the conversion of the world, John xvii. 21.

OMEGA.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

