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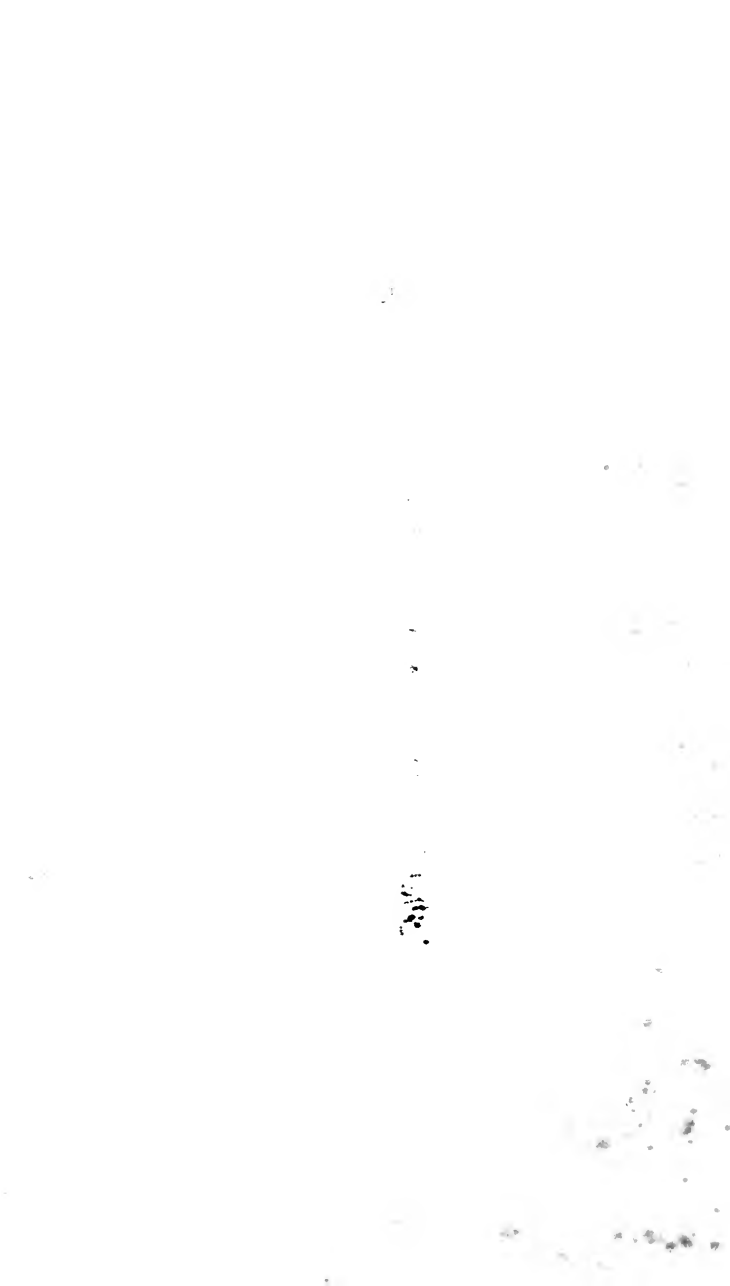
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Sheppard, John.

The suppliant, or, Thoughts
designed to encourage and





THE
SUPPLIANT:

OR,

THOUGHTS

DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE AND AID

PRIVATE DEVOTION.

[John Sheppard]

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P R E F A C E.

THIS interesting and instructive volume is (substantially) a reprint of an English work entitled "*Thoughts chiefly designed as preparative or persuasive to Private Devotion ; by John Sheppard,*" &c.—but, there are many changes in the construction and phraseology of sentences which the author might not be disposed to adopt or sanction, and to which therefore we should not think it proper to prefix his name.

The alterations are, for the most part, designed to make the admirable views of the author more plain and intelligible to the class of readers into whose hands the volume, (with its present imprint,) will be most likely to fall.

In adding to the Society's catalogue such a work as this, we have been influenced chiefly by the consideration that a right understanding

of the DUTY OF PRAYER is essential to any success or satisfaction in the service of God.

The SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER makes but little progress in his work, if his devotional exercises are not frequent, fervent and effectual. And when it is remembered how large a proportion of teachers are immature in years and experience, the necessity of helps and suggestions on such an important duty as prayer, becomes very obvious.

An attentive study of this volume will, we are persuaded, do much to correct erroneous impressions respecting the nature and design of this exercise, and to excite every rightly disposed mind to a more earnest and diligent cultivation of a devotional spirit.

THOUGHTS
ON
PRIVATE DEVOTION.

I.

ON A RIGHT SENSE OF THE DIVINE GREATNESS.

“HE that cometh to God, must believe that he is.”—How indisputable and self-evident a truth is this, that real worship implies a belief in the existence of its object. And yet have not I sometimes addressed the Deity with such carelessness and irreverence of mind as might well lead me to doubt whether I had any sense of that adorable majesty, that infinite grandeur which is essential to the Perfect Being, the Maker and Upholder of all things; and, consequently, whether I had any proper belief that He is, and whether my worship were any thing more than the result of some indistinct apprehension that he may be?

It is true, no finite, no created mind, however superior to the human, can contemplate or worship the incomprehensible God as He is; but, on the other hand, no mind, however feeble and limited, can really think of a Being who hath “stretched forth the heavens,” and “established the earth,” without a profound impression of his greatness. If, therefore, I “come to God, believing that he is,” I must come with a sentiment of deep veneration, with a solemn sense of his attributes. If this be wanting, my belief in his being must for the time be regarded as in a state of suspension or dormancy; and I come not unto Him, but to a sort of sign or name existing in my thought, but utterly inadequate to represent, even to the lowest capacity, Him whom it signifies. This may admit of illustration from the sublimest kind of idolatry,—the worship of the sun. If we could suppose a worshipper of that luminary to acquire the knowledge of its magnitude and distance which astronomy teaches, and yet to retain the belief of its divinity, regarding it as the corporeal vehicle of a glorious and beneficent spirit, the adoring wonder of this individual would be expected greatly to exceed that of persons who had no conception of the true grandeur of their idol. But it would exceed, probably, just in pro-

portion to the degree in which he actually considered the matter of his superior knowledge, namely, the vast spaces through which the solar light and heat are diffused, the dimensions of the sun itself, and the immensity of its sensible influence; with the correspondent immensity of the supposed spirit dwelling in all its spheres and in all its emanations.

Another worshipper, destitute of astronomical knowledge, but who had been an admiring observer of such facts and appearances as lie open to all, might, (if he were more intently meditating on these,) carry with him to the place and hour of prayer, a deeper sentiment of veneration.—If in vivid thought he pursued the seeming career of this god of day through the circuit of heaven; if he dwelt on the splendour of his rising, and the mild, ever-varied beauties of his setting; if he pictured to himself the expansion of his cheering and fructifying rays over whole continents, and then tried to form a conception of the multitude of living creatures awakened and gladdened daily by those rays, and of the still greater multitude of herbs and flowers opening to their visitation, and imbibing from them life and beauty—this employment of mind, though not accompanied with so accurate a knowledge, would, if more active and intent than that of the

former, doubtless, produce more suitable feelings. We may suppose both these to be worshippers at midnight, or after the light of their imagined divinity is withdrawn, so that their sentiments or contemplations cannot be immediately derived from outward perception.

We may conceive also a third idolater, who at the same hour having been habituated to prayer, engages in it like the others, not perhaps without some sincerity of desire: but not having been at all accustomed to the contemplation of nature, or not feeling the importance of realising the attributes of the object adored, he has no distinct thought concerning it. The only idea of the solar orb presented to his mind, is either the written name and title of the divinity, or the golden similitude of it which decorates his temple. Although he has an indistinct sense of his own necessities, and some apprehension, (still more vague,) of the greatness of the object worshipped, little else is really or clearly set before the mind than either a mere arbitrary name, or, at most, the very weak and petty resemblance which art has formed.

It is true that even the first of those supposed worshippers does not adore the sun as he is, because the bulk of that heavenly body, and its distance, small as they are in comparison with

the extent of creation, are far too great for the human mind distinctly to apprehend; they are objects of calculation, but not properly objects of conception;—and the second, however actively and poetically his thoughts may expatiate, cannot conceive at once any assignable portion of the sun's unnumbered influences on the individuals of the animal and vegetable world. But still the preparation for worship in the minds of both these persons will be acknowledged to be incomparably better than in that of the third. This last can hardly be said to believe that the sun exists. He believes in the existence of something so called; but not investing this object by stedfast contemplation with any of its attributes, the belief seems to be in a sign rather than in that which is signified.

Has not my worship of the infinitely glorious Creator, sometimes, for want of preparatory thoughts of his majesty, partaken of this character?—

Bethink thee, slumberer, whom thou would'st adore !
Not that illustrious idol ; but the Power
Who lighteth up its lustre ; in whose grasp
The fancied God by sages idolized
That knew not half its grandeur, the vast orb
Whose bright diameter a hundred earths
Would scanty measure, is but as a lamp ;
One midst the countless lamps his hand upholds

And feeds with brightness.—From this solar lamp,
Whose shining mass a million-fold exceeds
Our “atom world,” yet by remoteness shrinks
To a mere disk, He bids the radiance fall
On every rolling mountain of the floods,
On every trembling drop that gems the plains ;
Tinge with its rosy touch the giant peaks
Of the firm Andes, and the bending cup
Of the minutest flower ; exhale at morn
The dews that fertilize a hemisphere,
And dry some swift ephemeron’s folded wing ;
Blaze in its torrid strength o’er sandy zones,
Yet cheer the living microscopic mote
Which flutters in its glow.—Thou worshippest Him
Who fix’d this gorgeous lamp, but who can quench
And spare its splendour ; can reveal his works
And bless them, were that orb extinct, and heaven
Grown starless at his word ; who, when he made
Thee, conscious spirit, of the Eternal Mind
Reflective, wrought a work more marvellous,
More sumptuous, than a galaxy of suns !
He is the Sun of spirits, and his beams
Of all-pervading, all-awakening thought,
Irradiate every angel’s intellect,
Yet touch with gentlest light an infant soul !

II.

ON THE OMNIPRESENCE OF DEITY.

IT is an astonishing thought, yet strictly deducible from the being of God, that He who made and sustains the universe, has an universal and unceasing agency; and therefore an universal and unceasing presence with all that He hath made. To imagine a point of space, or instant of time, from which the agency of God is excluded, would be to imagine something independent of Him. It would be to think of Him as finite; to limit his empire; and, by denying his perfection, virtually to deny his existence. He who efficiently *acts* everywhere, *is* everywhere. The Deity acts indeed by innumerable instruments, or causes them to act mediately, and often reciprocally, on each other; but each one of these instruments, whether spiritual or material, must be kept in existence by his efficient and immediate agency, which implies his perpetual presence. Angels may fulfil "his commandment" in the remotest regions of the creation; but who "holdeth their

soul in life?"* None assuredly but a present God. The sacred Scriptures fully announce this truth; and the apostle expressed it in terms the most accurate as well as sublime, when he declared to the Athenian idolaters, "In him we live, and move, and have our being." It is no slight presumption of the divinity of the Hebrews' religion, that this people, amidst the gross and contracted notions of the surrounding heathen, and with no sound human philosophy to enlarge their own, entertained the idea of an all-comprehending Godhead. Not that this idea excluded that of a local manifestation of the Deity, a place and an appearance in which he peculiarly shows forth his glory. Without the idea of such a manifestation, we could scarcely conceive the personality, and still less the promised vision, of the Divine Being. The Scriptures everywhere speak of a heavenly throne, a place where the glorious and beatific presence of the Deity is peculiarly displayed; the centre, if we may speak so, of that presence which is universal and boundless. To this celestial throne, prayer is often figuratively considered as being addressed, and there the Deity is, in like manner, represented as acting. Thus Isaiah entreats; "Look down from heaven, and behold

* Psalm lxvi. 9.

from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory;" and the Old Testament abounds with similar language. It is often used also by our Saviour himself, who speaks in many of his discourses of God as "our Father who is in heaven," and dictates an invocation in the same form. But such language could never be designed to weaken our conviction or remembrance that the intimate presence of Deity is as real, as necessary, as perpetual, in every part of the universe, as it is on that throne before which angels bow. Those sacred writers, who used phrases the most distinctly indicating a local residence of the Divine glory, were not the less strongly imbued with a solemn persuasion of this Divine omnipresence. The same David who writes—"The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven"—inquires in one of his noblest odes, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" and describes with poetic sublimity the attribute which is "too wonderful" for him. Solomon, who repeatedly introduces this form of supplication, "Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place,"* acknowledges at the commencement of his petitions, "Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens

* 1 Kings viii. passim.

cannot contain thee." That Divine Teacher, who so often reminds us of the mercies of our "Father who is in heaven," enjoins us to pray in the solitude of the closet to our "Father who seeth in secret." No Divine attribute is more readily or more necessarily admitted by us, whether we consult reason or Scripture, than this of omnipresence. But is it at the same time realized, (we will not say in a degree at all proportioned to its importance, but even) in an equal degree with the other perfections which we ascribe to the Deity? From the slight impression which it frequently makes, one would infer that it cannot be so. For what thought can be calculated to strike the mind more deeply and powerfully, than that of an ever-present God?—And without a lively conviction of this truth, how greatly the force of the whole revelation concerning the Divine character is neutralized! We may acknowledge the abstract justice, purity, and compassion of Jehovah, but unless we really apprehend his omnipresence, there can be no imperative check to sin, nor any substantial confidence in devotion. If in the hour of sinful indulgence, or cold meditation, or listless worship, we could awake from our spiritual slumber, as Jacob awoke from his bodily sleep at Bethel, into the

strong sense of this momentous fact—should we not exclaim with as much awe as he did, “Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I knew it not!—This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!”

As yet, indeed, we are not summoned into the central apartment of his palace, who is the “blessed and only Potentate;”—we are not yet in the Holy of Holies, the inner court of the temple of God above;—but his palace, his temple, is the universe; the worlds are our “Father’s house.” We are in the ante-room,—in the courts already. “The King immortal and invisible,” “is not far from any one of us,” veiled by the symbols of his own “eternal power and Godhead.” We can be in no place, while conscious of the existence of our body and mind, without being assured of the uninterrupted continuance of the agency and presence of God; for this body and this mind, although the whole fabric of nature were concealed from us, would demonstrate a supporting Deity. We walk then, as it were, in a sacred chamber, whether in the field at eventide, or in the closet, or in the house of prayer. He who “filleteth heaven and earth,” Jehovah, the infinite Spirit, is with us, though unseen.—And it is a chamber of audience. “The God of the spirits of all

flesh" is actually and graciously "nigh unto all that call upon him." Indeed, these are but weak figures to describe the nearness of Him in whom "we have our being," who "is," as a divine has expressed it, "the soul of our soul." "We seem as if alone," (he adds) "in that interior sanctuary, but God is there more intimately than we."

The moral attributes of God being first acknowledged, this truth obviously affords a most complete encouragement to every kind of worship, and quite as much to silent mental prayer as to any other. Nothing but the belief of God's real omnipresence can make it at all rational to conclude, that the loudest prayers or adorations, whether of individuals or of multitudes, in different places, are heard and understood by Him. And the very same belief is alone necessary, in order to be assured, not only that he observes the whispered petition, the gesture, or the sigh which expresses thought and desire, but even the thought or desire itself unaccompanied by any sign. That would be a very low and unworthy conception of the Divine nature, by which the Deity should be imagined to understand the thoughts and desires of his creatures only through the medium of signs, whether verbal or otherwise. We are

apt to attribute to the signs of thought an importance which is not at all essential to them, but which arises, great as it is to us, merely out of our own imperfection. Thought, when unrecorded, (still more when unuttered,) is, to us, an evanescent thing; which, from its fugitive, unfixed character, seems hardly to have a real subsistence. And hence proceeds much illusion, both with regard to the extent of our moral responsibility and the nature of prayer. It is not only our imperfection which needs these signs, but they are likewise, although to us most precious, exceedingly imperfect in themselves. Language dies in the very utterance. Inscriptions even on brass and marble perish. Writings and books, the most valuable repositories of thought, are more perishing still, and can only be perpetuated by renewal. Thus none of those symbols of thought, on which all our present knowledge, even the knowledge of a Saviour and of eternal life depends, (and which therefore may be regarded as the best gifts of God's providence,) are permanent or indelible. They, on the contrary, are the truly evanescent things. When "the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up," those works in which the thoughts of human genius and erudition have been for ages treasured, and as it

were, embalmed, will become fuel for that awful pile, as many like them have already perished in lesser conflagrations, and by other modes of destruction. We know not that even the records of revelation will be excepted from this doom. But when all mortal signs both of error and of truth are effaced, truth will remain perfect and unchanged in the Divine Mind, where also every thought of every thinking being must eternally dwell, or at least can be obliterated only by Divine power. It would be a denial of God's omniscience, and a supposition of imperfection in the Deity, not to believe this.

We are not, however, hence to infer that prolonged silent or mental prayer is usually desirable for us, even in secret. On account of our weak and limited nature, it is probably, for the most part, not desirable. The utterance of words contributes to fix and form our thoughts, to give them order and connexion, and even to affect our hearts more deeply. We recognise more fully by this means the reality and continuity of prayer, and are more guarded against its distractions and inconstancies. Yet the firm persuasion that mental prayer is effective, and that we may really address an ever-present God, like that devout petitioner who "spake in her heart," (even although our "lips" should not

“move,” as did her’s,) is of great value, as encouraging a habit which can make every place and scene an oratory; a habit also which will best prepare us for those last moments or hours of earthly devotion,—we trust by far the most fervent and most blessed,—when the tongue, the lip, the hand, the eye, shall successively fail in their weak and transient offices, but when the spirit shall more closely commune with Him, as our Father, “who hath come unto us, and made his abode with us.” Meanwhile, it is not enough that God be with us; in order to the happiness and life of our souls, we must seek to be more and more in purpose and in spirit with Him. The Divine presence surrounds and pervades an image, a plant, an irrational animal, a sensual human being, who, though endowed with reason, and capable of immortal blessedness in the knowledge and love of his Creator, is yet living “without God in the world.” This is enough for the inanimate and the irrational, for it is all which, as far as we can tell, their nature admits. But surely it is not enough for the human nature, which is conscious to itself, when enlightened and awake, as soon it must be, of desires and capacities infinitely higher. Let us be grateful for the sustaining presence of God; but if we would not forfeit the noblest

privilege of our being, and incur a loss which is awfully irreparable, we must seek that gracious presence, that happy intimacy and communion with our Maker and Redeemer, which is the true happiness of a spirit. We must pray that the feelings and faculties of our souls may be increasingly "alive unto God, through Jesus Christ;" that we may exercise, in a growing measure, the confidence and love which his presence and his perfections excite in the glorified; that we may be able to say not merely "in Him we live,"—but for Him and unto Him we live; not merely "in Him we move," whether physically or intellectually,—but towards Him is the supreme, the willing movement of our affections and desires; not only "in Him we have our being," but in Him is our hope, in Him is our happiness; so that we can no otherwise think of a present or a future well-being, than in the enjoyment of filial union with our Father and our God.

III.

ON THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

ONLY so far as the unbelief of my heart questions the truth or Divine authority of that volume which everywhere encourages and inculcates the duty, can I consistently question the power and efficacy of prayer to God. Unless the recorded success of those devout persons, whose fervent and prevailing prayers the Scripture mentions, be fabulous or imaginary; unless the prophets have falsely pronounced the following as messages of the Most High,—“I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them;”* “While they are yet speaking, I will hear;”† “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered;”‡ “He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee;”§—then the true worshippers of the true God have always had reason to confide in the success of their supplications. And since

* Ezekiel, xxxvi. 37.

† Joel, ii. 32.

‡ Isaiah, lxxv. 24.

§ Isaiah, xxx. 19.

the coming of our Saviour, the grounds of this confidence have been rendered still more explicit and satisfactory; for, unless Christ himself was in error, or designed to mislead others, when he enjoined so urgently and repeatedly the duty of constant, persevering, and importunate prayer, when he recommended it by his own example, when he uttered the declaration of its universal success, "Every one that asketh, receiveth;"—then we have the strongest assurances that God is verily "plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon him."

This belief is inseparable from the simple belief of revelation. Except, therefore, I am unhappily and presumptuously inclined to renounce or to explain away the revealed truth of God, and with it the substantial and enduring hope of man, on account of certain metaphysical difficulties which may be raised on this subject, I must endeavour to engage in the duty of prayer, with a firm conviction that it shall never be in vain. But indeed those difficulties, arising from our unavoidable belief of the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," have in themselves no weight. My doubting, or slothful, or desponding temper of mind may suggest the thought,—How can I hope to move or influence an unchangeable

Being? "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." As reasonably might it be asked,—How can I hope, by taking food, to renew my strength, or prolong my life; or, by applying to the physician, to obtain the removal of my disease? God hath foreseen and appointed the term of my life, and the measure of my health and strength.

In these cases the absurdity of the objection is at once apparent. The means by which health is to be restored, strength sustained, and life preserved, are as much objects of the Divine foreknowledge and counsel as the ends connected with them. It hath pleased the Divine Providence to connect them; and the one will not be without the other. So it hath pleased God, as we learn distinctly from his revealed declarations, to connect the reception of spiritual blessings with prayer; the real welfare and prosperity of man with supplication to the Author of every good and perfect gift. They are as strictly united as knowledge is with study, or the continuance of life with the use of food. It is no more philosophical to doubt the efficacy and the consequence of the one means than of the other.

Am I then to expect a special answer to

every petition? Are my requests in prayer to be fulfilled without delay or disappointment? This depends on the character and terms of the requests themselves, and the conditions or reservations under which they are made. It would be not only unchristian, but irrational, for so short-sighted a creature as I am, to pray, absolutely, for any temporal possession or event, or even for the immediate communication of some spiritual benefits. If any thing be more certain than another, it is that I cannot foresee the effect of outward things upon my real good; nor do I even know what present state of mind and feeling will best promote my ultimate happiness. All a Christian's prayers, therefore, except for things which are universally and immutably good, ought to be quite conditional. They should be so with respect to the best of temporal blessings, such as the life of those most dear to us, and our own health. And they should be so even with regard to present spiritual enjoyments, such as a sensible experience of the Divine favour, or a full assurance and foretaste of future bliss. In all petitions for these, there must be a submissive reference of our most earnest desires to the wisdom and mercy of Him who knoweth all things, that they may be graciously imparted,

or graciously denied. And if this be not distinct enough, either in our words or in our thoughts, we must conclude, (when our desires remain unfulfilled), that our heavenly Father kindly interpreted those prayers as conditional, which in temper and language were too absolute. We must believe Him to say, in the refusal or postponement of our request,—My son, if thou hadst meditated more on my perfections and thy own position, thou wouldst have added, like Him who suffered for thee, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt:” and thus, in love to thee, for the sake of that illustrious sufferer, I have treated thy prayer.

Our heavenly Father has promised to “give good things to them that ask Him;” * *i. e.* to give at all times those things which are always good for man, in measures proportioned to the earnestness and frequency of the request; and to give those things, which are only good at certain periods, and for certain states of character, only when they will thus become “good things.” If this could be otherwise, we must suppose the all-wise and all-gracious God to give, not “good things” to them that ask him, but things which they erroneously suppose to be good for them; which would be fearfully

* Matthew, vii. 11.

contrary to the Divine attributes and to our welfare. It is evident, that the spirit of our prayers, and our hopes as to their efficacy, should be regulated by these considerations.

There are petitions which may be always unconditionally presented; such as for the influences of the Holy Spirit in general, for victory over sin, and growth in holiness; more particularly for strength in the fulfilment of known duty, for direction in doubt and difficulty where our duty is concerned, for help to exercise each Christian temper and grace, for deliverance from every evil disposition, for increasing conformity to Christ, and faith and love towards him. Yet even to these petitions I am not to expect sudden, complete, or sensible answers. This would be putting an end to my state of trial, and would be manifestly at variance with the order of God's moral government. The efficacy of these prayers is sufficiently evinced, if there be, on the whole, a progress in the attainments desired; and it is not disproved by occasional declension, whether seeming or real, any more than the efficacy of food is disproved by occasional debility or disease.

Probably I ought to ascribe, much more fully and strictly than I do, whatever right inclina-

tions, or purposes, or habits I am conscious of, to the direct efficacy of my daily petitions for spiritual good. They should be considered not only in a general manner as gifts of Divine grace, but as particular answers to my entreaties for that grace; supplies immediately connected with my renewed requests. It is true, I have even now cause to be profoundly humbled at the experience of evil in my heart and life; but, were it supposable, that, without apostacy, and through perversion of the understanding rather than of the will or affections, I might be induced henceforth to restrain or renounce all prayer, there is every reason to conclude that my spiritual state would thus be awfully deteriorated; that good wishes and designs would be speedily weakened and suppressed; that evil passions would gain strength; that the doubts which even now assault me would triumph, and exclude comfort from the soul; that my confidence in God would utterly fail; that I might be betrayed into some dreadful and irrecoverable fall, prompted by a criminal inclination or a despairing mind. We read of persons who “draw back unto perdition,”—“abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate,”—who are “altogether become filthy,”—who “search out iniquities,” and “encourage themselves in evil.”—

“ who say, in their heart, There is no God.” We see these scriptural statements verified in the dreadful example of some around us, in every class of society. These are men who never have truly prayed, or who have renounced prayer. And to what but prayer as a mean, (an essential and efficacious mean, because so appointed by the Father of mercies,) shall I mainly attribute my preservation from this wretched state? It ought to be ascribed with the deepest gratitude to the mercy of Him who “heareth us always,” that I, who am so fallible, so weak, so sinful, whose heart is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,” have still been enabled to “continue” in prayer; and have received a portion of those succours which prayer procures, far greater than the unbelief and languor of my approaches to God would have led me to expect. All these considerations should most powerfully operate to lead me constantly, with devoted praise and believing supplication, to his throne of grace, that I may still “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

IV.

ON APATHY AND DEADNESS RESPECTING REVEALED TRUTH.

I EXPERIENCE at present an utter averseness and reluctancy to meditation and prayer. But is this a reason why I should refrain from these duties, or defer them? Surely not; for my state of feeling implies a blindness with regard to the highest truths and interests and expectations, which it is most essential to my spiritual safety and happiness to have removed. And by what means can I promote its removal, except by sedulously exercising my thoughts in order to the excitement of my affections, and to the effectual solicitation of Divine aid? "Many are hindered, because they refuse to give themselves to prayer or meditation, except they feel themselves brought to it by devotion; and except it be when these duties delight them, and go to their hearts; otherwise all seems to them unprofitable. But this kind of men are like him, that being vexed with cold, will not go to the fire except he were first warm; or like one that

is ready to perish with famine, and will not ask meat, except he were first satisfied. For why doth a man give himself to prayer or meditation, but that he may be warmed with the fire of Divine love? or, that he may be filled with the gifts and grace of God? These men are mistaken in thinking the time lost in prayer and meditation, if they be not presently watered with a shower of devotion; for I answer them, that if they strive as much as in them lieth for this, and do their duty, and are in war, and in continual fight against their own thoughts, with displeasure because they depart not, nor suffer them to be quiet, such men for this time are more accepted, than if the heat and devotion had come to them suddenly, without any such conflict."

I perceive the justness of these arguments; and have the more need to be practically influenced by them, inasmuch as I am not merely like one so situated that food will not be brought to him if he be too slothful to seek it, but like one whose appetite is impaired; not merely like one "vexed with cold," but like one beginning to be motionless with cold, in whom sensation is partly blunted.—Rouse thyself, O my soul, from this spiritual lethargy! Remember that thy weak indifference cannot produce even the mi

nutest change or intermission in the sleepless course of things. Still, amidst seeming rest and inertness, the solid earth is rolling on its axis, and rushing through space.—Every planet flies with undiminished velocity through its vast orbit.—The pulses of animal life vibrate in thy frame, and its vital fluid incessantly circulates, while thy spiritual life is stagnating.—At every moment, unnumbered beings make their entrance into time, and a multitude take their flight into eternity.—The infinite energy of the Eternal Mind is awake to all the events of his universe, and governing them all.—The praises and melodies of heaven are unsuspending.—The laments of the miserable are wakeful and unassuaged.—The ever-prevailing Mediator continually intercedes.—The day of thy summons into an unknown world swiftly approaches by the unceasing lapse of time; and every little section of the dial or the watch, which the shadow or the index traverses, is a portion of thy unintermitted (never to be intermitted) progress towards the home of spirits.—“Behold, the Judge standeth before the door.”—It will be but a transient succession, a swift continuation of hours and minutes, and thou shalt have to look back upon the consummation of terrestrial things; upon the awful disclosures and decisions of the great retri-

butive day; upon the moment when thy own character, as viewed by the Searcher of hearts, shall be first revealed, and with it thy allotment in a new untried existence!—And now, while those scenes are yet future, every action, every temper, every purpose and bias of the mind, is to be regarded as a sowing for an eternal harvest. The influences of heaven, even of the Almighty and All-holy Spirit, are offered to him that implores them, and are able to produce in the soul “fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” A celestial and endless blessedness is set before thy faith, with every solemn promise and mighty work of Christ to guaranty its reality; and he who is gone to “prepare a place” for his followers, has engaged to “come again and receive them to himself.”

And is there all this animated activity in the creatures and operations of God?—All this beneficent energy in him who preserves and actuates them?—All this restless rapidity in the flight of time, and in the progress of events and dispensations towards their final period?—All this growing nearness, and amplitude, and splendour in the prospects of eternity? Do the records of revelation meanwhile open to me the exhaustless fountain of spiritual good, proclaiming, “Ask, and ye shall receive?”—Does He

that died for me utter the awakening words, "Behold, I come quickly,—hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown;"—"him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God?" And can I be languid and listless in the midst of these facts and these incitements? If they fail to move and stimulate my desire or fear; if, through deep stupor and somnolency of spirit, I am not affected or awakened by such thoughts, then how indispensable and urgent the necessity of solemnly applying (in however broken a manner) to the Father of mercies, entreating that he would dissolve the spell which binds my soul; lest at length "the thunder of his power" should rend it, and present to my view, not the mild light of grace, but the "fiery stream" of judgment, where "the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his holy One for a flame!"

V.

ON THE IMPERFECTION OF ALL HUMAN THOUGHT
AND LANGUAGE IN THE VIEW OF THE CREATOR.

A VAST mountain or successive ranges of perpendicular cliffs, are objects that powerfully excite in us the idea of grandeur. They are among the sublimest objects within the near scope and measurement of our senses. And it seems to be chiefly from comparing them with those lesser things to which our near view is usually directed, and particularly with the minuteness and feebleness of our own bodily structure, that we gain this impression of their stability and greatness. For we know, on reflection, that the grandeur, even of the Himalayan mountains, is merely relative; and that all the different inequalities of our earth's surface are, proportionally to its magnitude, but as the greater and smaller grains of sand or dust, (differing a little in size and aggregation,) which might be strewn and cemented on the surface of an artificial globe.

So there is, to us, a grandeur in human eloquence. To hear or read the expression of

thoughts, which (in our figurative way of describing them) are eminently clear, solid, lofty, and comprehensive; which are well combined, and conveyed to us by the most distinct and appropriate signs that language furnishes, is highly gratifying and elevating to the enlightened mind. And to minds which are at all spiritually, as well as intellectually, enlightened, there is no way in which true eloquence can appear more nobly exercised, than in prayer to God. False or affected eloquence indeed, is in no other use of it so deeply disgusting, because in this it is not only puerile but profane. The true eloquence of prayer is that simple greatness of thought and reverential fervour of desire in which lowliness and sublimity meet. With this a devout and well-ordered mind is elevated and charmed; charmed perhaps too much: that is, as far as the charm results from an admiration of superior thought and expression. For we know, or should know, on reflection, that the loftiness and compass of human eloquence are as merely relative as the mass and height of mountains; and that in the view of the infinite Mind of Him who "taketh up the isles as a very little thing," the differences between the most expansive and the narrowest, the most exalted and the humblest

modes of human thought and speech, are utterly inconsiderable. The disproportion between the conceptions and communications of Lord Bacon and those of a peasant, is to us immense; but to the All-comprehending Intellect it is only a difference in degrees of littleness: it is as the difference between Caucasus and a hillock unto him "who meted out heaven with a span." To us the thoughts of some few among our fellow men, and the medium through which they are conveyed to us, appear splendidly distinguished from those of the multitude: the difference is real; and is, relatively, great: but it is a difference between "very little things," and therefore, in itself, a very little difference.

The full and finished strain of the parent nightingale enchants us; the chirp of her brood has no power to please. Both however are but the feeble and limited notes of birds.—The eloquence of Cicero and Chatham transported their hearers; while a child or an uninstructed person can scarcely give distinct utterance to one interesting thought or emotion. Yet both classes speak only "with the tongues of men;" and thought conceived and expressed by means of so earthly and frail an organization as ours, is probably, even in its strongest conception

and best enunciation, exceedingly weak and circumscribed, not only in the view of the Deity, but of some created minds. Even to Newton, the difference between the acquirements of a child who knew the first rudiments of numbers, and of a student who could demonstrate the theorems of Euclid, must have appeared, comparatively, trifling; because he himself is said to have comprehended the latter intuitively. We cannot, therefore, doubt that intelligences of a higher order must look on the highest reach of human science as infantile, and the ablest use of language as a very indirect and defective method of signifying thought. Even we feel its inadequacy. How much more must they! And if, therefore, the differences of human thought and speech appear little, (when absolutely considered,) to superior finite minds, how little to Him that "fashioneth our hearts alike!"

These reflections may counteract the shock which imagination sometimes gives to faith, when we witness a peculiar limitation and feebleness of mental powers; especially when this intellectual feebleness augments in proportion to the decay of bodily health and life, so that all sensible indications oppose the idea of

capacity for a separate spiritual being, and of the near approach to such a state.

Paley, when combating that skepticism as to a future life which grounds itself on the general contractedness of the human faculties, very pertinently asks, "whether any one who saw a child two hours after its birth, could suppose that it would ever come to understand fluxions." But with regard also to what is sometimes termed second childhood, or to a comparative childhood of the mind through life; the thought which has now been dwelt on, (that is, the small absolute distance between the lowest and highest points of our intellectual scale,) tends to correct false and painful impressions.

"This is the bud of being," says Dr. Young. If a very young florist were taken at early spring, into a nursery of rose-plants, and saw but a few, of which the large buds began to show their crimson, seeming ready, *though but just unfolding*, to burst into bloom on the next genial day, while many of equal age, scarcely gave signs of vegetation, and many appeared checked and drooping from partial frost, withering rather than growing, he might think, with sorrow, that all must die, except the few which were budding so auspiciously. But the cultivator, with smiles at this fear, might say,—My

little friend, to you the difference is great between an opening and a quite unopened bud, or one that has been chilled by these easterly winds. But despair not of my charge. I shall soon transplant them to a better soil and position. In summer they all will bloom; and some of the humblest seedlings here, or of those which seem to you all but lifeless, may then bear the sweetest and noblest flowers.

This illustration, weak as it is, applies to the different degrees of development of the human faculties in our present condition.

To return to the consideration of eloquence, (one chief exercise and expression of human faculties;)—its great inadequacy may furnish us with one reason for that absence of the “excellency of speech,” which some have treated as an objection to the Divine origin of Scripture. Had Titian become a Christian missionary, and been stationed among savages who were used to express facts or thoughts by rudely-painted hieroglyphics, it is highly probable that he would sometimes have used the aid of his pencil in addressing them. But it is improbable that he would have used any of their colours, or selected those which it was their taste or fashion to prefer, or adopted their rules for mingling and applying these;

perceiving that neither their best materials, nor their rules of art, would be at all adequate to his subject. It would be much more likely, that, with some simple touches from a fragment of chalk, or sketches with a half-burnt brand, he should prove to them that his genius and his mission were from another world of painters.

The thoughts we were considering before this diversion are particularly applicable to the subject of prayer. They forbid me to indulge contempt or distaste for the prayers of the most limited or untaught, provided they express, even in the lowliest channel of thought and utterance, an unfeigned piety. "The Lord looketh on the heart." Incense may be presented in a cruse of the coarsest pottery, or in a classic vase of the most ornamented porcelain; it is of the same quality and value in each: the vessels indeed differ; yet each is but an earthen vessel; and though, in many respects, they are contrasted, yet, in reality, both abound in flaws, are soon defaced and easily broken.

It does not at all follow, that attention to manner and language, in social prayer, is improper or superfluous. And even in secret devotion, the connected clearness and unaffected energy of speech may be, as it respects many minds, a criterion of the real fixedness

of thought and concentration of desire on spiritual things. So far as it is an effect and proof of these dispositions, such eloquence, if he be ever conscious of it in the closet, must and should afford satisfaction to the Christian. But yet, the reflections which have been now dwelt upon, should equally guard him against vain elation in that consciousness, or despondency at the want of it. At one time, perhaps, he is happily borne on, in a strain of devotion which is fluent and forcible. Thoughts and words arise spontaneously, and connect themselves without effort. He "pours out his heart" with a copious and glowing freedom before his Father, who seeth in secret. And can petty "pride and naughtiness" find fuel for self-idolatry even there?

The most usual, and strongest rebuke of such a feeling is, "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" As well might the dumb, to whom our Saviour restored the power of speech, have prided themselves on the eloquence of their thanksgivings?

But a further rebuke may be drawn from the present topic. What is the amount of difference, in the ear of Him who heareth prayer, or even of His angels, between thy best addresses, and the meanest or most embarrassed words

of genuine worship which arise from the hut, the work-shop, or the field?

Perhaps, however, there may be more frequent occasion to apply this thought to the relief of discouragement. The worshipper's mind is confused; untuned by anxiety, haunted by some prevailing idea. Unrestrained by the presence of fellow creatures, and but faintly realising the presence of the Invisible Spirit, he utters incoherent petitions and praises; repeats the same thoughts and words, or uses such as are inappropriate: instead of distinctly soliciting particular blessings, deprecating special evils and dangers, acknowledging individual mercies,—his petitions are a sort of helpless summary of his wants; his confessions, a disorderly acknowledgment of sin and weakness; his thanks, a dim retrospect of half-remembered benefits. The review of such a kind of secret prayer, or the consciousness of its character while uttering it, mortifies and dejects the mind. Indeed, so far as it has arisen from a real decay of pious affections, or from distractions which it were a duty to shun, there is reason both to feel compunction, and to seek diligently the remedies of those spiritual ills. But so far as it is independent of such causes, (and none will doubt that it may sometimes be

so), the pain with which it is contemplated may be relieved by various considerations.

He "that inhabiteth eternity," has not said, "To this man will I look," and "with him will I dwell," even him who worships me with enlarged and varied thoughts, with lofty, and flowing, and well-arranged words;—but, with "him that is of a humble and contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." The publican's prayer, which our Saviour commends, is, though truly eloquent in its kind, such a brief and general supplication, as might be uttered and reiterated by the most enfeebled and discomposed spirit. And perhaps the eyes which that suppliant would "not so much as lift unto heaven," and the hand which "smote upon his breast," were signs of confession and entreaty more expressive than his vocal signs, in the "presence of the angels of God." "We know not," says St. Paul, "what we should pray for as we ought, but the spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." It is plain, therefore, that the aid of the Spirit does not necessarily, or always, consist in imparting or enhancing the eloquence of words.

These are the weightiest considerations; but the thought, which it has here been attempted to illustrate, may be auxiliary to them. For one

may justly say,—This feeling of the poverty and brokenness of my prayers, as compared with my own at some other times, or with the eloquent devotions of others, is a highly exaggerated estimate of difference between degrees of weakness, arising from the very minuteness of my whole range. To an insect, it may be much, whether the sun-beam paint his wings, and cheer him into a flight of some hand-breadths from the soil, or whether an autumn drop have so stained and chilled his wings, that he can but flutter from blade to blade: but in the eye of the eagle, or even of the little songstress who aspires to the morning cloud, what is this difference, or how much is it “to be accounted of?”

Perhaps the sublimest strain of worship that ever a mere mortal uttered, has been, in the estimation of higher intelligences, no more superior to these broken prayers, (supposing an equal measure of true piety to be in each), than the more graceful or significant gestures of one speechless petitioner would appear to me to excel those of another. The mode of communicating ideas is so extremely defective, that its differences claim little or no regard. Let me ever bear in mind that emphatic and gracious admonition, “My son, give me thine

heart." Our heavenly Father knows that his children have nothing else to give; and even this they give that it may be "formed anew." When its sacred renovation is complete, none can doubt that the intellectual power, the affluence of feeling, and the means of expression, will be perfected beyond all that hope can anticipate, or imagination reach.

VI.

ON THE GREATNESS OF THE BLESSINGS WHICH WE SEEK IN PRAYER.

WHO has over rightly conceived, when addressing himself to the throne of the heavenly grace to implore benefits for his immortal spirit,—the true greatness and worth of the favours that he is about to ask? Nothing but the revelations of a world "not seen as yet," can give a due impression of their nature: and immortality itself cannot appreciate their amount, because it will be everlastingly to come. Yet,

doubtless, a much stronger apprehension of the value of spiritual good might be attained, than that in which I have commonly rested. It will be attained at that period, (so inevitably sure, although so vaguely and dimly anticipated,) when I shall be a prisoner on the "last bed of languishing," where sensitive and earthly good must be viewed in its real insignificance and impotency; and I must feel with an entire, irrefutable consciousness, "All this availeth me nothing!"

What an incalculable importance and excellency will the possessions and prospects of the soul then assume in its own estimation! What words or thoughts shall then suffice to compute the preciousness of "eternal redemption," or of that "partaking of the Divine nature," which is the pledge of perfect and imperishable bliss!

We can imagine a subject of the great northern monarchy, sentenced, for some state offence, to banishment for life into the Siberian deserts. We can see him prostrating himself before his prince with intense anxiety for pardon, overwhelmed with the bitter thought of perpetual separation from all that is dear to him,—and the shame, and hardship, and desolation of that lingering, irreversible penalty. And should my heart be cold, when I fall be-

fore the true and universal Monarch, as an offender against the state and Majesty of heaven? When the favour which I have to entreat is that of a pardon from the righteous and uncontrollable Ruler of all worlds? What would be the intenseness of my solicitude to obtain this act of grace, and the satisfying assurance of its reality, if I could contemplate the unmixed gloom, the hopeless rigour, and unutterable ignominy, of a spirit's banishment from the Father of mercies, and from the society of the rejoicing millions that triumph in his love!

There is, indeed, this most happy difference, that, while success in entreating pardon from an earthly ruler, must be always, in a high degree, doubtful,—pardon from “the King eternal, immortal, and invisible,” if perseveringly pleaded for with a truly penitent heart, through the atoning mediation of his beloved Son, is declared to be infallibly sure:—“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” And this certainty, it would seem, must remove the deep and painful anxiety with which the suit would otherwise be accompanied. So, indeed, in the mind of the true penitent, it ought to operate. His solicitude should not long be of a nature inconsistent with substantial peace. Yet it is

to be remembered, that he has, in the present life, no external conveyance of this Divine pardon, and no internal sign, or ratification of it which will prospectively suffice. The well-founded assurance of its being really granted, can only be proportioned to the continued sincerity and faith with which we seek it, and to the unaffected contrition and unreserved allegiance of soul, of which we are lastingly conscious.

That precious seal of personal redemption, which the Holy Spirit is ready to impress day by day, continually, can find no place in "the tablets of the heart," except that heart be daily softened and made susceptible of the blessing by penitential prayer. Supplication for pardon cannot, by the enlightened and truly humble Christian, be felt or judged, at any period of his earthly course, to have become superfluous, or to be a mere formality. Although he has attained a peaceful hope of justification from that paternal Sovereign, before whom he has long bowed with unfeigned penitence and true contrition of soul, still, in order to maintain this state and sense of acceptance, he has ever to sue for the same inestimable gift of remission. What humble, self-examining mind will doubt that this is fit and needful, both in the review

of sins long past, and of recent offences?*" We must renew our requests for pardon every day," says a most pious writer: "It is more necessary than to pray for our daily bread:" and again, "Who can understand his errors? Who can enumerate the many defections from that straight rule of our duty?"

Nor is it pardon only, but it is the gift of the Holy Spirit; it is the inheritance of the saints; it is everlasting life, which I am about to supplicate. And by what measure can I fix in my mind the magnitude of these requests? If we had seen, in former times, a Castilian nobleman about to enter the Escorial, that he might solicit an appointment to the vice-royalty of Peru, should we not have expected strong marks of ambitious desire and deep concern for the issue of his suit to appear upon his brow? And yet how strikingly would such a sight exhibit the penury and fallaciousness of this world, where, while the object sought included power, wealth, and magnificence almost regal, the candidate would yet, in fact, be asking, with all the devotion of his soul, for a burden of splendid cares! When a Christian appears before the King of Kings, and asks to be prepared and qualified by divine influence, for a "crown of

* James, iii. 2; 1 John, i. 8.

life," it is certainly nothing resembling this earthly domination, or selfish glory to which he aspires. His requests are consistent with the deepest humility and self-renunciation, otherwise he "knows not what he asks."* The sum of his requests, when he asks aright, is, that he may be enabled perfectly to love and glorify God, and "be satisfied with his likeness," while all the praise shall redound to the infinite Giver. But he neither can, nor ought to hide from himself the vastness of these gifts, which he is encouraged and commanded to implore. He asks the Uncreated Energy to renovate and re-mould within him the very image of Divine perfection; and to fit an heir of frailty and guilt for incorruptible and eternal joys!

It might be a weakness, excusable even in a thoughtful mind, to be somewhat dazzled by the full splendour of earthly empire; to forget, while soliciting a pardon, or a dignity, at the the footstool of its loftiest possessor, that that imperial hand will soon be in the dust,—that I address only the dying tenant of a delegated power, whose successor may to-morrow reverse his pardons, revoke his donations, annul his investitures;—to forget, that even were the donor resolved to make his favours irrevocable by

* Mark x. 38.

himself, and no less sure to survive him who obtains them, still this pardon could only affect the "life which is a vapour;" these honours only extend to days which are "as an handbreadth;"—to forget these truths for the moment might be a natural weakness. But how strange, when approaching "the King, the Lord of hosts," the "only Ruler of princes," to experience an illusion precisely contrary to this; to have been dazzled by what is false and fleeting, and to be dead to what is real and eternal; and how inexcusable to yield to this illusion with a sort of supineness; to forget without a struggle, that I address Him who is "from everlasting to everlasting;" of whom "heaven is but the throne, and earth the footstool;" who hath the "keys of hell and of death."

When I enter on this employment of prayer, (which except when attended with "pomp and circumstance," many, that bear the Christian name contemn in their hearts, as an imbecile and superstitious observance,) I go to entreat what none but the Lord of the universe can give, a pardon sealed with the blood of that true Victim, who was "slain from the foundation of the world;" a pardon that shall be in force when "the heavens have been folded up as a vesture," and when unnumbered ages shall

have witnessed to the "heirs of promise" the faithfulness of Jehovah, and "the immutability of his counsel."—I go to entreat that principle of heavenly life, which, if it be kindled from and cherished by the Sun of Righteousness, shall gloriously assimilate my soul to Him, in whom "is no darkness at all."

And shall the sneers or the coldness of an infidel and sensual age persuade me that this is a weak or fanatical employment? Or shall the drowsiness of my own spirit degrade it into a lifeless task, an exercise that profiteth little?

But perhaps I plead in extenuation,—it is the frequency of the employment, which prevents my rightly feeling the importance of prayer, and the greatness of its object. Is it then thus with the children of this generation in their pursuit of wealth? They are found daily at the same desk; they return to the same details and inquiries and endeavours. They labour in the same routine of calculation. Every accession to the grand balance excites new diligence, and makes the unremitting toil more light. The hoped-for aggregate is still in view; and all the irksome steps to its completion are forgotten. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself." And shall I, who desire the infinitely nobler attainment of being "rich towards God,"

“rich in faith,” rich in the treasure of immortality, pretend to make the sameness, or commonness, or repetition of engagements which are the appointed means of this glorious acquisition. an excuse for pursuing them carelessly?

Have the suitors and aspirants after court favour, with an ever-growing sense of the uncertainty of success, yet persevered in their heart-sickening round of efforts and repulses.

“Twice told the period spent on stubborn Troy,”

or have they been induced, through successive years, as another of their number has mournfully recorded,

“To lose good days, that might be better spent;
To waste long nights in pensive discontent?”

And, shall a suitor to the court of heaven, believing the incomparable grandeur, and sure attainableness of the objects of Christian desire and hope, plead the long continuance and frequency of his suit as an excuse for not urging it still, with a reverential but untiring ardour? Surely, to those who receive the promises of the New Testament as divine, the truth needs no demonstration, even if it had not proceeded from the mouth of our Saviour himself, that “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” But it needed, as that heavenly teacher knew,

to be strongly enforced on our unbelieving and indolent spirits; and still must the grounds on which it rests be often reviewed by memory and conscience, else the seriousness and fervour of our prayers will bear no proportion to the magnitude of the hope set before us, or to the greatness and the mercy of Him who hath proposed it.

VII.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVINE INFLUENCE UPON THE THOUGHTS.

It is obvious to an observer of his own mind, that a great proportion of his thoughts are unsought or involuntary. Objects of sensation, (even the most minute or trivial,) are perpetually exciting new ideas. And so multiplied and diversified are the associations to which they give rise, that it is impossible to predict into what train of reflection any circumstance may lead us. And not only do outward objects or incidents excite different thoughts, in different

minds, and in the same mind at different times, but the subsequent thoughts, suggested by preceding thoughts, and not by anything externally perceived, are productive of others in a series which none can foresee. "So completely," says a distinguished philosopher, "is the mind, in this particular, subjected to physical laws, that, as it has been justly observed, we cannot, by an effort of our will, call up any one thought. The train of our ideas depends on causes which operate in a manner inexplicable by us. Notwithstanding, however, the immediate dependence of the train of our thoughts on the laws of association, it must not be imagined that the will possesses no influence over it.—Of the powers which the mind possesses over the train of its thoughts, the most obvious is its power of singling out any one of them at pleasure, of detaining it, and of making it a particular object of attention. By doing so, we not only stop the succession that would otherwise take place, but, in consequence of our bringing into view the less obvious relations among our ideas, we frequently divert the current of our thoughts into a new channel."

Admitting the last statement to be practically good and true, I would use those considerations which my own consciousness and the specula-

tions of others furnish, on this very obscure subject, to aid in deepening my conviction of spiritual influence.

If it be impossible for me to pre-determine, or foreknow, what thoughts will be suggested to my mind, even when I am engaged in a particular mental occupation, (and still more obviously so when my attention is not directed to any special study, or when a variety of external communications are made through the senses,) how can I possibly calculate in how high a degree a special Divine influence may or might regulate, quite imperceptibly, the succession of thoughts, and the consequent train of desires, purposes and actions.

As far, indeed, as the first suggestion of thought depends upon influence from without, I have to ascribe it to the general or providential government of God; but the association of one thought with another, and of that with a third, and the excitement, thus, of a very numerous succession of thoughts, is one of the most secret and mysterious processes of which we can conceive. It is a sort of generative or creative process, inexpressibly rapid, and indefinitely variable. To illustrate this by example:

I see a rainbow. It may suggest to me the heavenly messenger of the Grecian mythology,

and lead me, either to the poetry of Homer, or the temples of Athens; to the horrors of war, or the beauties of sculpture. Or, the brilliancy of its violet rays may bring to mind, either the flower of that name, or the rich plumage of American birds; and it may depend on which of these associations presents itself, whether I shall retrace a rural walk with a departed friend, or reflect on the conquest of Mexico, and the wealth or barbaric splendour of its monarchs. Or, the rainbow may be viewed as the token of God's covenant, no more to destroy the earth by a deluge; and I may thence be led to reflections on the doom of the antediluvians; to speculations on geology; or to thoughts on that predicted destruction, by an opposite element, which awaits the globe. Or, the first sight of the rainbow may suggest the Newtonian theory of optics; and this may conduct me, either to the telescope or to the microscope, thence to the history of insects, or the lunar influence on the tides; or, first, to the character of Newton, and then to the capacities of the human intellect. These are but a few of the obvious diversities of thought, which a familiar object may immediately bring into the mind. I know by experience, in this particular instance, that the first association has been often

utterly unlike any of these. And, if the first admits of such variety, how incalculable must be the subsequent multiplication of such variety! How immense is each one of those fields into which any one of the second or third series of associations that have been mentioned would introduce the mind, and how impossible is it to foresee on what track, or what point, in either, it would fix, and where it would begin to take a different or contrary course! How much contemplation that is animating to human hope; how much that should excite admiration of divine wisdom; how much that is connected with scientific inventions and designs, or with that awful consummation of all things which the Bible predicts; how many injurious and presumptuous doubts, or how many fruitless musings, or how many impure and seductive imaginations, or frivolous recollections, might arise in half an hour, in different minds, or even in one and the same mind, all originating in this single source!

Undoubtedly much will depend on the previous inclinations and habits of the understanding and the fancy. The theologian, the painter, the agriculturist, the mathematician, the lover of money, the voluptuary, will probably have each his peculiar associations at first presented

by the same object, and will all likewise be attracted respectively by such of the succeeding train as most accord with their desires or pursuits. This shows the deep importance both of our practical habits, and our habits of thought; and the duty of cultivating those which are good and profitable.

But still there is, most certainly, in the same mind, a vast diversity in the range of thought, according to the occurrences, the cares, the tempers, or passions, of different periods. The professed study or occupation of an individual, except in some cases of most intense devotion to one object, is very far from determining the occasional, or even ordinary, current of reflection. And one of the unnumbered ideas that have this hour flitted through a mind scarcely conscious of their passage, may at another hour be held fast, and become the source of continued meditation and serious action.

Nor does the view which has now been taken of this subject at all suffice to express the exceedingly minute, hidden, and often most improbable associations, by which the train of thought is incessantly liable to be changed or interrupted.

But all these considerations tend to show what illimitable opportunity exists for the ope-

ration of spiritual influence on the soul. That Power, in whom I exist, can not only present external objects to impress thought, but can determine which, amidst all possible impressions, shall take place. Or, at any stage, in the career of thought, he can suddenly and secretly alter its direction. One association may be selected from amidst a thousand which were as likely to occur, and which might all appear alike indifferent or unimportant; or, in the lapse of countless indistinct momentary conceptions, the most shadowy and fugitive of the whole may be arrested, and made to assume clearness and force.

It is not easy to understand what the philosopher, who has been cited above, meant, when he wrote of "the laws of association," and of "physical laws," as directing the train of our thoughts. It is probable he meant little more than to give a name to operations which he acknowledged to be "inexplicable." He could scarcely suppose general and invariable rules by which thoughts proceed from sensations, and from each other; for what could be less credible than this supposition to one who had so closely observed the endless varieties and anomalies in the suggestion and succession of his own thought? But even could that supposition

be maintained, his admission that the mind itself has a power to "stop," or "divert the current" of thought, evidently overthrows it; and if the mind itself have this power, how much more the Supreme and Almighty Mind, which formed and governs all its faculties!

The more carefully and analytically we reflect on this subject, the more shall we be convinced, that the influences of the Divine Spirit, (in the highest degree beneficial and efficacious,) may be exercised within us, and yet be entirely undistinguishable from the operations of our own mental powers. That I should have this idea rather than another; these passing remembrances or images instead of those; that flow of thought rather than a different one, is a thing so far from appearing extraordinary or supernatural, that it accords with perpetual experience, and excites no attention. And yet it may arise from the express and special agency of the Spirit of God, and may ultimately have the most important effects on my course through life, on my usefulness, on the well-being of others, on my eternal happiness, and theirs.

It is very material to consider, that this agency may, as I have said, be altogether undiscerned, and undiscernible by me; and yet

my best purposes, my purest actions, my escape or recovery from temptations, may be exclusively and directly its result.

It is reasonable to suppose that the actings of spirit on spirit will be incomparably more refined, more exquisitely untraceable, than those which take place on corporeal substances; and yet how incomprehensibly minute and refined are the vital functions and changes in the smallest visible creatures! He who can maintain and renew all the complexities of the vital system, and the system of instincts, in successive generations of animalcules, can surely bring into the mind a thought, seemingly inconsiderable in itself, which yet may be the sole original instrument of determining the temporal destinies of a kingdom, or the everlasting destinies of a soul.

On the whole, these reflections not only expose the shallow presumption and profaneness of those who deride the doctrine of spiritual influence, but they should also greatly heighten my persuasion of the paramount importance of prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit; of the unknown benefits which such prayer may have already procured me, by influences secretly leading to good, and diverting from evil; and of the still happier and more decisive results

which may be expected from continuing, more importunately, to entreat this unseen control and direction. Let me never begin the day without earnestly imploring, that the great Searcher of hearts would "cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit;" that he would turn the current of my soul, "as the rivers of water are turned, whithersoever he will!"

VIII.

ON EXEMPTION FROM SEVERE PODILY DISEASE AND HARM, AND ITS IMPROVEMENT.

It is only by a participation comparatively slight, (and, through the goodness of the great Preserver, very unfrequent,) that I have been experimentally taught the severity of those bodily sufferings to which we all are liable. In any part of this frame, so "curiously wrought," so variously assailable, subject to derangements so numerous—acute pain might be permitted at any time to arise, which would

absorb and oppress the mind, incapacitate it for either fulfilling the active offices or enjoying the comforts allotted to me, and induce distressful forebodings of a prolonged anguish which no human skill could remove. Or a partial, and in some respects, trifling harm, might confine me to one spot; forbidding all variety of scene or of exertion. The invaluable organs of sight, of hearing, or of speech, might be quickly destroyed or impaired, and then the principal employments of my life must cease, and many of the blessings of society must be at once resigned. Or some disease might assault me which should involve the hazard of contagion to others, or be attended with peculiar and extreme mortification to myself.

But are not these, and other bodily ills, incident to our earthly condition, so well known, so often suggested by observing the calamities of those around us; or have not they been so much dwelt upon in every form of admonition, that it is quite superfluous to recall and enumerate them?

Obvious, and almost inevitable, as may be the kind of reflection with they prompt, it has not yet been deep and efficacious, (and therefore claims to be presented yet again,) unless it produce a constant, heartfelt, and practical gratitude to God.

Have I to confess that his lenity and kindness are sometimes unacknowledged and unthought of, who has exempted me, notwithstanding multiplied provocations of his justice, from this class of grievous trials? Or, while daily presenting supplications for new mercies, am I frequently content to revert to these, which have been so long continued, or to recognise their actual continuance at this moment, with a mere heartless ceremonial acknowledgment? Then are there, indeed, humbling reasons for me to review more feelingly their variety and their value.

But besides this strong claim on me for cordial thanksgiving, the exemption from severe bodily calamity should also powerfully engage me to diligence in every duty; to a watchful concern for all spiritual improvement; to perseverance in prayer for all spiritual benefits. While such exemption is granted, I am not only more capable of bodily, but of mental activity; and especially am I more competent to regular and enlarged exercises of worship, than I can hope to be in seasons of great debility, or restlessness, or pain.

How weak and ungrateful, therefore, is it to repine under trivial indisposition, or yield to passing languor. Rather let me remember the sufferers who are "weary with their groaning;"

who are "full of tossings to and fro until the dawning of the day;" who obtain few and short intermissions of the most distressing and torturing sensations. On these, the mercy of Him, who "despiseth not his prisoners," will compassionately wait, and their "sighing" shall "come before him;" but for me, (while indulged with this ability and opportunity to wait upon my God,) there should arise the more ample and unwearied petitions for every sacred gift, that can renew and strengthen and purify and enrich the soul.

It cannot, or ought not to be unperceived by me, that, although I am thus favoured with bodily ease and health, the moral disorders of the spirit are many and variable; some more habitual and insidious, others more occasional and violent. The selfish and angry passions sometimes inflict a wound, which nothing but new supplies of the grace of humility can heal. Feverish desires, and aching discontents, and wasting anxieties, invade the breast, which resignation and the cordial of heavenly hope alone can soothe. That faintness or palsy of the will, which is evinced by a backwardness to self-denying duties, by shrinking from exertions which conscience claims, and by general "weariness in well-doing," may be found in humiliating

connexion with a physical health and strength, that have been denied to some of the most laborious servants of God, and most indefatigable friends of mankind. And whence, but from a divine energy, quickening and upholding my best resolves, shall these spiritual maladies receive an effectual cure? Conscious, as I must be, of some, if not of all those internal evils, how can I hope, even partially, to subdue and expel them, unless, (by a vigilant use of present advantages and facilities,) I embrace the favouring occasion which a gracious Providence bestows? Is not now the time for progress in his service, for alacrity and steadfastness in every good work, for zealously and importunately seeking, from the Author of good, that complete renovation and health of the soul, which should be the first object of my solicitude? If life itself be given and prolonged for this great end, then that measure of bodily health and ease, on which the full use of life depends, should assuredly be considered and appreciated and employed, with a reference to the same exalted purpose.

Our present condition,—in which a prevalence of these blessings is combined with such allotments of past and present trial, as have deeply imprinted on the heart the ills to which life is exposed,—is peculiarly adapted to promote the

earnest and successful prosecution of our highest good. Have our chastisements been numerous and severe enough most intimately to convince us, that we must look to Heaven for what is substantial and unfailing? Has the "Father of our spirits" imposed corrections which have sufficed (as instruments of his divine power) to awaken and revive a sense of our dependence, of our demerits, of our spiritual exigencies?—And yet, are these so graciously moderated, especially with regard to bodily suffering, that they still leave the capacity for pursuing active duties, and seeking spiritual supplies, in a great degree unimpaired? Can there be a more cogent reason for grateful and instant assiduity, both in action and devotion?

Even that exalted person who was alone entitled to say "No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself;" said also, (and the solemn declaration has more force than an injunction,) "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day;—the night cometh, when no man can work."—To us, not only a day of life, but a day of health, of strength, of ease, is a pure gratuity, which only Almighty power and goodness can confer; and, though this gratuity has been reiterated and multiplied so long—who can insure it for to-morrow?

IX.

ON INTERCESSORY PRAYER FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS.

BOUNDLESS and invaluable means of beneficence, both social and secret, are ever open to those who believe in the efficacy of prayer for others: which no one that truly receives the Scriptures can deliberately question. Has it been enough observed, how vast is the worth of the Christian revelation in this particular view: and how powerful an argument of its divinity, (so far as that is corroborated by every new aspect or development of its worth,) may be hence deduced? Without discussing the creeds of heathens, ancient or modern, it is plain, that in countries where Christianity prevails, those who do not seriously receive it, have generally no settled belief (if indeed they have any belief at all) in the direct benefits of prayer, whether personal or intercessory. Yet in some of these persons, the sympathies of nature are so far from being extinct, that they appear in the tenderest forms of emotion, and the most engaging acts of humanity.

I shall never forget the scarcely suppressed tears of a late amiable metaphysician and poet, when bidding farewell to the youthful assembly whom his eloquence had charmed, and who were then to disperse themselves from that scene of academic enjoyment, into the various and eventful paths of busy life. This indeed might be only a vague and transient sentiment of melancholy, on the occasion which always tends to excite it—THE LAST TIME. But how would the same refined and susceptible spirit have felt, had he, like Sir William Jones in India, prevailed with a beloved wife, languishing under dangerous indisposition, to quit him for Europe?

Even were there not other and far weightier reasons for our desire that both “the wise and the unwise” might believe the gospel, this one would seem sufficient; viz. the comfort derived from that benevolence which is exercised in prayer, towards those whom we may have little or no power otherwise to aid, or influence, or requite. There is no need that a continent or a sea be interposed, in order to deprive us of power to aid them. For a child in a distant city, for a relative in another province, for a friend in sickness or calamity, for one who has our best wishes, but whom painful circumstances forbid us to meet, how little can sometimes be done, or

even attempted, unless faith resort to that exercise of kindness, too often despised or distrusted by men, but chosen and prescribed by God, which entreats for them infinitely more than man can give? By the art of writing, and the facility of conveying what is written, (both which are subjects of gratitude,) I may, indeed, address to each some words of affectionate counsel or sympathy; but, besides that these communications cannot be very copious or frequent, and sometimes are wholly precluded, how small is their real value, (justly and highly as we may often prize them,) when compared with that of heartfelt addresses on their behalf to Him from whom cometh "every good and perfect gift." The affectionate wishes of a Christian friend should for this be most valued, that they may be accounted an intimation, and almost an implied pledge, of his affectionate prayers, which are far better.

It has been the pleasing compact of some, closely joined in heart, but widely distant in place, to look at the same hour at the moon, or at a star, and thus to imagine a kind of sensible union, by being alike and at once present to the same beautiful object. How does it heighten and substantiate this device of friendship, (which else is comparatively a fruitless and

empty refinement,) to commune not merely with a bright emblem of the divine bounty, but with the omnipresent Benefactor himself; to pour out mutual intercession before the "Father of" these heavenly "lights," "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning!" My dearest friend may be in another hemisphere; or, though but a few leagues divide us, a cloud may conceal that star from one which rises in brightness to the other. But if we devoutly intercede for each other's welfare, before him by whose presence all time and space are comprised,—our supplications, whether offered at one or at different hours, form a real and intimate communion with each other and with Him; a communion fraught, we trust, not only with soothing sentiments, but with real blessings. The showers of widely separated regions fall or flow into the same mighty deep;—so the tears of Christian sympathy "poured out to God," though shed in the remotest climates, may be said to drop into the same ocean of his loving-kindness, and to be mingled there.

But, besides this, our kindest thoughts and wishes for our friends cannot be freely expressed to them, unless our regard be strictly reciprocal, and our sentiments on the most im-

portant points be similar. The most faithful and thankworthy offices of kindred and friendship, are well known to be the most difficult. If I perceive or learn that those for whom I am interested, have imbibed false principles, or joined seducing associates; if I judge that their situation may invite to a course which will endanger their peace and prosperity; or that they have been hitherto thoughtless of revealed truths and of eternal prospects, or perpetually diverted from them; yet how hard is it, in any mode of intercourse, to convey, beneficially, such kind admonitions or expostulations as my regard would prompt! How generally distasteful, how strongly repulsive, sometimes, to persons of every age and class, is this sort of friendly interference! How do pride, and the passions, in their various forms, revolt from it, and view him that attempts it as officious or severe, censorious or timid, narrow, melancholic, or illiberal! Not that the risk of these imputations or impressions should prevent us from attempting the duty, though it should make us circumspect as to the fit manner and the fit opportunity. The duty involves self-denial; it approaches to what Saurin has emphatically termed "moral martyrdom;" and, therefore, if only as a test of sincerity and as

an exercise of Christian fortitude, it should not be wholly declined; but yet, must not the experience of its great difficulty, and the belief of its small success, nay, its apparent ill effect at times, lead me to prize ten-fold the free, indefeasible privilege of secret intercession for those on whose behalf I feel so deep concern; a duty far less difficult, and probably, in many cases, more beneficial? To my child, eager in the chase of some new pleasure; to my parent fixed in some growing habit; to my friend intrenched in his favourite opinions; to my kinsman earnest in some absorbing pursuit, my most guarded and affectionate suggestions may be unwelcome. But methinks it cannot be unwelcome to either, nay, that it must move the heart of each, to believe that the voice of my secret prayer entreats for him the checks and the incitements of an omnipresent Friend, the all-powerful monitions and blessed illuminations of a heavenly guide, the "repentance and remission of sins," the grace, and wisdom, and renovation from above, which insure unchangeable joy.

And who can say what are not, or shall not be the happy effects, immediate or remote, of our prayers "one for another?" Can I remember critical points in my own history, or have such been disclosed to me in the history of

others, when either bodily danger has been imminent, or different and greater perils have impended; when the mind, or the character, has been on the brink of a gulf, drawn on by a pernicious allurements, entangled in a hidden snare, oppressed with trials hardly to be borne, urged almost to desperation?—And who can say that the prayer of a departed parent, long since uttered and recorded, or the tender intercession of a friend far away, was not as the chosen invisible thread, which, in the hand of a gracious Providence, held me back from ruin? Who knows that it was not declared by Him to whom all power in heaven and in earth is given, or by some rejoicing minister of his compassion—The prayers of my servant, to whom thou wast and art so dear, have come up as a memorial on thy behalf? Those secret supplications are the instrument by which the fulfilment of my merciful purpose is procured. In remembrance of them, I rescue thee from this destruction. And, although every source of hope is liable to perversion, this can hardly encourage, in the minds of the irreligious, a delusive reliance on the prayers of others, as superseding their own. Guilt and danger would be consciously aggravated by such a presumptuous trust, which implies a measure of belief in

the momentous truths that are personally slighted. No one can rationally expect eventual benefit from the intercession of another, (at least as to this, his highest interest,) till he is effectually prompted to prayers and endeavours for himself. None, when so prompted, can be injured by the grateful and affecting thought, that his truest earthly friends may have instrumentally procured for him the awakening influence of that Supreme Friend, to whom he owes the deepest gratitude.

Nor let it seem more difficult to believe in the efficacy of intercessory, than of personal prayer, even towards the procurement of everlasting benefits. All prayer is but an instituted means, connected by the Almighty with his own gracious purpose; and when viewed in this true light, (apart from any idea of power or merit in the suppliant or recipient,) the one kind of prayer may be as readily and safely conceived to be efficacious as the other. It would, indeed, be unscriptural for the offerer (as well as for the object) of intercession, to believe that it can procure the spiritual and eternal good of another, unless it first instrumentally procure for him that change of mind, by which he shall be personally disposed to seek and obtain the prerequisites of happiness. But nothing forbids the

nope that it may conduce to these blessed results; on the contrary, the facts and promises of Scripture intimate that it often does so. Intercession for near friends is, in pious minds, a strong dictate of feeling; and ample assurances sanction our belief that these, like all our prayers, shall be, some way or other, not in vain. How delightful is it to hope, when we see the objects of fond solicitude in any degree answer our dearest wishes, that prayer has not been in vain!

Should this, however, be far from apparent: should I have to reflect, as many have with equal grief, that thus far my earnest and long-offered prayers seem fruitless;—yet how do I know, that although they have not yet procured the desired good, they have not averted far greater degrees of evil? How do I know but they will be fully answered at length, and the final effusions of gratitude both to the Author of good, and to me its feeble instrument, be abundantly increased by the greatness of His long-suffering, and the perseverance of my poor affection, itself derived from Him?—No doubt, in a future state, our gratitude towards the instruments of good will be more constantly and entirely subordinate, as a feeling, than it can be here: because the sensible presence of Him that

hath "so loved" us, must give an inconceivably higher tone to the respondent emotion of love towards Him. But this affords no sort of ground for supposing that our grateful and affectionate feelings towards the humblest instruments of good will be lessened. On the contrary, it is obvious that they may be delightfully augmented, and yet be more subordinate, relatively, to Him who is worthy of infinite praises, and who, probably, has destined all the happy to an immeasurable progression in love.

What then will it be for the perfected spirit to embrace, with grateful delight, those whom divine goodness prompted to seek its happiness, as well as to bow in rapture before that Saviour who purposed and prepared and dispenses all good, yea, who is himself "all in all?" With what feelings then shall the child bless his parent, the husband his wife, the friend his friend, before the throne of God, repeating with ardent acknowledgment—This was the unwearyed and tender suppliant for my happiness—this the beloved friend whom thy grace taught to intercede for me, that I might receive the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ my Lord!

And what will be the correspondent joy of those whose weak petitions shall be so remembered and rewarded!—How can I neglect such a duty as this, a duty which ought to be so

pleasing and consolatory now, and which will yield, (there is every reason to conclude,) so affecting and delightful a recompense hereafter ! How can I neglect, while observing in some measure the letter and semblance of the duty, to fulfil it also in “spirit and in truth ?”

X.

ON THE MEANS BY WHICH OUR THOUGHTS OF THE MORAL PERFECTIONS OF THE DEITY MAY BE ELEVATED.

It should be my study to obtain a stronger and more vivid impression of the moral attributes of God, than of those which are intellectual or physical only, or which so seem to us. For the former more intimately affect the well-being, and should therefore more deeply excite the joy and adoration, of His creatures.

The contemplation of the greatness and wisdom of the Deity, is one kind of measure by which to estimate his moral attributes ; though (I suspect) not enough resorted to for this pur-

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pose. It is a truth inseparable from the idea of God, that, in Him dwell all perfections in an infinite degree. But we know not how to conceive of perfection, and least of all, of an infinite moral perfection. The moral excellence which we have experienced or witnessed in fallen human nature, even in its most ennobled and purified state on earth, is so imperfect and so limited, that it affords no just analogy by which to rise to the notion of the moral excellence of the Deity. But the Creator having placed before our eyes the sensible proofs of his boundless power, of his immense wisdom, of his exquisite skill, we should attempt to measure by this vast scale, the immensity of his benevolence; the universality and exactness of his equity; the sublimity and refinement of his holiness; the boundlessness of his love.

No doubt, there is a contradiction in the very thought of measuring what is infinite; but, since we are of necessity unable adequately to conceive of what is infinite, we should aim at some approximation; and it will certainly extend our narrow conceptions *towards* infinitude, to avail ourselves of the grandest measures which the senses (and that scientific use of them which philosophy has made) can afford,

either in the way of figurative comparison, or more strictly, in the way of analogy.

When I look on the noon-day sun, and consider “the immensity of the sphere which is filled with particles” of light issuing from it, let me remember that this is an emblem, only a very partial emblem, of the munificence of the Creator; for He has fixed in space a mighty host of suns, from each of which light has been directed to my eye. Or, let me thus reason in the way of analogy:—The Creator directs, perpetually, particles of light to pass from unnumbered luminaries, throughout immeasurable spaces. Of the minuteness and velocity and multitude of these particles, it is impossible for the human imagination to conceive. Here, then, is exhibited a part of his wisdom and power. But the attributes of God are all alike inexhaustible or infinite. Therefore, there must be goodness and rectitude equal to the wisdom and power which are here displayed.

Dr. Paley has brilliantly set forth the view which the creation gives of the physical attributes of the Deity, when he says, “At one end (of the scale) “we see an intelligent power arranging planetary systems; constructing a ring for Saturn of two hundred thousand miles in diameter, to surround his body, and be sus-

pended, like a magnificent arch, over the heads of his inhabitants; and at the other, bending a hooked tooth, concerting and providing appropriate mechanism for the clasping and re-clasping of the filaments of the feather of a humming-bird. Let me apply this scale to the moral attributes. Reason tells me that they are equal to the physical; *i. e.* perfect and infinite. Revelation enumerates them. "A God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is He." "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "He is glorious in holiness." "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." "His compassions fail not." "God is love."

Do I wish, then, to augment my impression of the stability of this truth and faithfulness; or of the correctness and infallibility of this justice; or of the plenitude of this mercy; or the vastness of this love? May not an augmented impression be attained by considering a part of the greatness of a natural attribute, (which is visibly or demonstrably observed,) as equal to, and the representative of, some part of the greatness of a moral attribute?—For example:—As is that stability of divine power which continually sustains the planet Saturn, a mass one thousand times greater than our world, and

guides it, together with its immense ring, and its seven moons, in the same orbit round the sun, from age to age, at the distance of nine hundred millions of miles from that luminary, and with an hourly velocity of twenty-two thousand miles—so is a degree or part of the stability of divine truth.

Or again,—as are the diversity and exquisiteness of divine skill, which forms and discriminates in all climates, and in all ages, the rudiments of an emmet, and of the grain which it collects, causing each to reproduce its kind—
or which creates the particles of light of such an inconceivable smallness, that, although darted from the sun at the rate of two hundred thousand miles in a second, they strike, without wounding, the petals of the most delicate flower, or the retina of an insect's eye—so are some degrees of the extent and exactitude of God's retributive justice.

Or again,—as is that stupendous energy of attraction, by which the almighty ruler governs all the planets of our system, rushing through their vast revolutions, “enormous globes, held by nothing, confined by nothing, turned into free and boundless space,” and as is that mighty, yet gentle process of vegetative life, by which He calls forth the foliage on ten thousand

forests, and renews the plants, and fruits, and flowers, of every zone and region—so is a portion of the unsearchable strength and exceeding tenderness of divine love. “Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him.” For what are the herbs, or flowers, or insects of a single planet, (though the organization, and vitality, and reproduction of either of these classes, unspeakably transcend our thoughts,) when compared with the probable and inconceivable multiplicity of such wonders in the universe? Or what is the magnitude, swiftness, or unerring revolution of one world, or one system of worlds, (though each of these baffles all our conceptions of grandeur,) when compared with the vastness and multitude of those fixed stars or suns, some of which have been computed to be at least four hundred thousand times more distant than the sun which enlightens our earth? When, therefore, I attempt by such comparisons to estimate in part, any moral perfection of the Deity, (although my apprehension of it will certainly be raised far higher, than by more vague and cursory views and expressions,) I am well aware that the highest measures which our faculties can apply, with any sort of distinctness, are but indefinitely small parts of those which would be

attained by a wider survey, and more intimate knowledge of the works of God.

Divine revelation, however, affords me a different and a direct measure of the moral attributes of the Deity: a measure which is adequate also, (if we could but adequately conceive of it,) because it is infinite. I mean the union of the divine nature with the human, in the person of our Saviour. It will be acknowledged, by all who receive this amazing fact, that the primary design of it is the manifestation of those perfect attributes; including also human salvation, and probably many other glorious effects which eternity will disclose. Thus the grand design of what is made known to man, whether in the works or in the word of God, is to exhibit to him his Creator's perfections. And in both ways of communication, the Deity addresses his feeble creature in vast and sublime hieroglyphics, if I may use such an expression without irreverence. It is not by fleeting voices, or by mere written declarations, that he announces his perfections. When he would impress on us his omnipotent wisdom, he sets before us the earth and the heavens; the wonders of innumerable worlds. When he would make known the infinity of his holiness, justice, and love, he records, that the "Word

who was with God, and was God," "without whom was not anything made that was made," assumed our nature into personal union with his own divine nature, and, in that assumed nature, became a sacrifice for sin. It is true, this is (necessarily) recorded in words; for the stupendous fact, which is the subject of the record, could not stand permanently before the eyes of man, in the present world, as the facts of creation do, unless the Son of God, in his glorified state, had remained on earth; or unless his abode had become accessible or visible to us in our present condition, which would have been quite inconsistent with a state of probation, or "a life of faith." But it is the fact of the incarnation, not the record, which is the expression or measure of the moral perfections of the Godhead. Words are not adequate signs or symbols of the divine attributes: divine acts can alone declare these.

In other worlds, (possibly, at some period, to all moral beings), the fact of the incarnation of the "Word" will be sensibly displayed, by the view of that nature wherein he suffered, in its exaltation to the throne of God; and thus the moral attributes of Him, that "spared not His own Son," will be even more illustriously exhibited, than are his intelligence and power

by the spectacle of the material universe. "He that liveth and was dead," for ever occupies the "holy of holies," within the illimitable temple of creation, and proclaims to all creatures, "by the form he bears," that in the Deity there is infinite holiness and infinite love.

That kind of measure of these attributes, which was above suggested, is confessedly indirect and insufficient. It is an attempt to compare them with other attributes, exhibited in works which are in some sense, notwithstanding their magnificence, finite. But the "great mystery of godliness" displays these moral perfections by a deed of condescension, of which we cannot otherwise conceive than as infinite. If the incarnation of Deity be more astonishing (which the incredulity of many seems to prove) than the creation of the universe, by so much the more forcibly and eloquently does it express his moral attributes, than the creation expresses his intellectual perfection. For if those attributes of God which are moral, be more excellent than all others, (and this, I suppose, cannot be denied), it is reasonable to infer, that the manifestation of the most excellent would be the most astonishing and glorious; in other words, that the wonders by which perfect purity, justice, and

compassion are evinced, would far exceed those by which wisdom and power are displayed. It was worth the creation of the material worlds to exhibit to all spiritual natures the depths of the divine intellect ; but it was worth the incarnation of Him by whom "all things were made," to exhibit to all spiritual natures the heights of the divine rectitude and mercy.

Does the first kind of measure, by which I attempted to raise my thoughts of the moral perfections of God, become of no use when I contemplate the last unparalleled fact, by which the Christian revelation teaches me to estimate them ? Quite otherwise ; because while I learn the greatness of these moral perfections from the appearances of nature, I also find, in the agreement of this deduction with the declarations of Scripture, and with the inference derivable from the most wonderful fact which it reveals, a corroboration of the divine truth both of the declarations and the fact. And besides, if it were best to resort exclusively to the incarnation, as the direct and most sublime proof of the moral attributes of the Godhead, it would be not the less advantageous, frequently to meditate, first, on the "eternal power" and wisdom of the "Godhead," as 'understood by the things that are made.'

For when I would contemplate Him "whom God hath appointed heir of all things," "by whom also he made the worlds," and who "upholds all things" "by the word of his power," as having, by himself, made purification of our sins, it will surely enhance my sense of the wonderful condescension of this act, and of the moral perfections which prompted it, first to reflect distinctly on some of the phenomena of these worlds. When I have intently considered a single planet, or a single satellite, moving through the heaven; or have thought of that vast mass of waters which covers but a part of our own globe; or have attentively observed the shielded "gauze wings of the beetle," or the "jointed proboscis" of the bee, I have a much more exalted idea of Him who "made the worlds," and who "upholdeth all things," than if I had merely read these or other declarations of his power. And in proportion to my real apprehension of His greatness, will be my appreciation of whatever divine attributes are exhibited by his voluntary abasement.

XI.

ON SEEKING TO EXCITE IN OURSELVES A SPIRIT
OF JOYFUL PRAISE.

OUR worship seems but a strange preparative for heaven, unless praise and thanksgiving form a material part of it; and, indeed, unless our praise be accompanied with joyful feelings. Yet as he, who by constant and earnest practice, acquires great skill in music, although his present situation and temper lead him chiefly, and most naturally, to exercise himself in plaintive and mournful pieces, will be prepared, when in different circumstances, to pour forth animated and exulting strains; so, we trust, he that earnestly cultivates a more and more intimate converse with God, although it may now consist, in a great measure, of sorrowful confession and unsatisfied desire, will yet be fitted, by these very exercises, for the employment of the same devotional habit, the same heavenly science, in that region where adoration and gratitude shall be the unavoidable overflowing of a fulness of delight.

The musician, however, if he have reason to

expect that he is to take part, ere long, in some great festival, where every chorus, and indeed every note will be in the strain of gladness and triumph, ought frequently to attempt these exercises of his art, both in solitude and in society, though his pensive mood may not accord with them; for this is but fit respect to the patron who gave him his instrument, and who designed it ultimately for that most honourable and delightful use. He should remember also, that these cheerful exercises may, in some measure, dispel the feelings with which they disagree, and awaken those which they express.

The application is obvious; but it does not reach the difficulty of one who, when oppressed with sadness, would make "melody in his heart." The melancholy musician can produce the same notes of gladness, as if his soul was in every vibration of the strings, and with nearly the same vigour of expression and execution; but it is hard when the heart is depressed, even to utter a form of words, which conveys and implies the sentiment of gladness and thanksgiving; much more to excite and sustain the thoughts which such language expresses.

There would seem little need to enjoin the duty of thanksgiving on those Christians, who,

while on the one hand, they are unassailed by any acute pain or burdensome anxiety of this life, enjoy, on the other hand, a vivid hope of heavenly blessedness; or in whom, if the pains and anxieties of time become more severe, this pressure is overbalanced by a livelier foresight of the joys of eternity. Such persons, while these peculiar favours and supports are bestowed, must be, like the apostles, "though sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;" and it seems impossible that their gladness should not flow forth in fervent thanksgiving. But there is a state of mind, in which, without even imagining that we are absolutely destitute of Christian faith and hope, and indeed with a very deep sense of the value of these graces, we may yet find it exceedingly difficult to rejoice. This is often to be ascribed, at least in part, to natural disorder or debility, either secretly arising from the inexplicable and refined sympathy of the mind with the body, or from adverse events and circumstances which have affected both. In this state the imagination cannot freely act, but is strongly drawn towards thoughts of fear, doubt and sorrow.

Nor let it appear to disparage the genuineness or reality of the objects of religious joy, when the term imagination is used. However real,

or however great an object may be, whether earthly or heavenly, if it is not under the cognizance of the senses, imagination alone can set it in a lively manner before us. If it never has been subjected to the senses, and in our present state cannot be, then imagination can draw no aid from memory, and therefore requires to be more strongly awakened and exercised in order to embody it. The lively, joyful exercise of faith, is, in effect, an exercise not of belief alone, but of imagination likewise.

The apostle's expression, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at those which are unseen," justifies this view of it. If we would exercise a vivid, apprehensive faith, even in an object purely spiritual, (as in the Infinite Spirit himself,) it must not be by bare belief, but by an attempt to conceive or image to ourselves (though there be a necessary impropriety in this language, and in our narrow conceptions) the attributes and operations of a perfect mind. And with regard to all other celestial objects, we are compelled to view them under images of matter and form and place, in order to attain anything like distinctness, or reality of conception.—These imaginations are always more or less erroneous, as they are necessarily founded on human and earthly resemblances

alone; but while we may be quite conscious, and properly so, that the imagination of a glorious object—as of the exalted Mediator, or of the heavenly regions, and of their inhabitants—is, of necessity, very far from being, either adequate or correct, it will yet be right and profitable (within certain bounds) to cherish and encourage it, as producing a joy and thankfulness, which, without its aid, could not have been awakened.—There are seasons, when to some Christians, it is very difficult to do this; nay, to some it is habitually so: Probably the minds in which an extravagance or excess of imagination, in regard to revealed objects prevails, are few in comparison with the number in which the conception of them is faint and languid.

Cannot I then excite in myself the delightful temper of praise and joy, by endeavouring to place before my mental eye the wonderful and gracious acts of the Son of God on earth, when he came, in the fulness of his compassion, “to seek and save the lost;”—when he assumed “the form of a servant,” and, through that veil of humiliation, his revering followers beheld his spiritual glory, “the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth?” Can I not image him to myself, as addressing

from the smooth lake the more still and breathless multitudes—or dispensing to them miraculous supplies of food in that grassy seclusion of the wilderness—or gloriously transfigured on the mountain before his favoured and surprised attendants?—Cannot I trace, in every look, the ineffable union of dignity and tenderness;—and view the paralytic arising at his word;—and the blind rejoicing, at his touch, in the first beams of day;—and see in all his works the lively emblems of his far higher purpose, to heal the spiritual diseases, and conquer the spiritual death of a race that is self-destroyed?

Can I not find matter of grateful rejoicing even when stationed in thought by the brook Cedron, or “by the cross of Jesus,” and gazing on that meek and glorious sufferer, whose passion of unknown depth, and unsearchable intenseness, but transient and for ever past, there achieved “the joy set before him,” and made “propitiation for the sins of a world?”

And can I think, without delight, of this Redeemer ascended and interceding, having “led captivity captive, and received gifts for men,” “sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” preparing heavenly mansions for his humblest followers? Can I anticipate, without joyful emotion, his second coming, to receive

these followers unto himself? Even now he appears in "the presence of God for us,"

"Our Advocate before the throne,
And our Forerunner there."

But what will it be to be personally received by that sacred and sovereign deliverer, to whom we shall owe all the joy and blessedness that eternity can impart?

If I cannot conceive of the near and transporting interview with a Benefactor so august, let me think, at least, of some joyful messenger, commissioned to prepare my exulting, yet trembling spirit, for the honour and the joy! Let me picture in thought, a kind celestial guide, leading me (and those dearest to me) through some majestic avenue, towards the throne of his glory; a throne not decorated by the feeble devices of art, but formed, and surrounded, and approached by the sublimest imagery of nature. Let silent forests and shadowy mountains be the vista, and radiant clouds the canopy, and these, "and all the dread magnificence of heaven," but mere appendages to the majesty of Him, who, thus enthroned amidst the noblest wonders of creation, unveils the far nobler symbols and expressions of his own transcendent attributes; and

thence let me hear his mild, though awful voice, saying, (as once to his disciples on earth,)—
 “Be of good cheer, it is I! be not afraid!”

If we could raise our minds to a lively conception of scenes like these, would our worship be unaccompanied by ardent thankfulness and sacred joy?

XII.

ON THE DUTY OF MAKING EVERY PART OF PRIVATE WORSHIP SPECIFIC.

PRAYER is then most likely to degenerate into a mere form, when I allow myself to rest in general praises, confessions and supplications. The memory is so furnished with these, that the employment, when thus conducted, may include scarcely any exercise of the understanding; and still less of the affections. In public and social, and even in family prayer, a much greater degree of generality is obviously necessary, than in secret worship; but in this last I should be careful to shun it. When I acknowledge the goodness of God, let me dwell not only on

the more occasional and signal experience of it; but, in the ordinary course of my life, let me thoughtfully select, as peculiar topics of praise, those possessions and privileges, which, from my circumstances or temper, I most highly value. Do I, for example, especially need the counsels and supports of friendship? I have reason to make it an especial subject of thanksgiving, that I have never been without a true or confidential friend. Would the loss of sight be, in my case, a peculiarly grievous privation? Then I should, in a peculiar manner, bless the Divine Preserver, that this faculty is fully possessed, or has been so little impaired.

Still more should this particularity be the distinctive character of secret worship in regard to confession; that being a topic which in social worship requires to be most general. We cannot, in society, confess our own particular sins, as if they were the sins of others also; and even if we could ascertain that some present had cause to make precisely the same confessions with ourselves, they might often be of a nature quite unsuited to publicity. But when I "enter into my closet, and shut the door," it is of great importance that my confession should be specific; that I should recall and acknowledge my most prevailing and most

recent offences, so distinctly and circumstantially as to bring them strongly before the eye of the mind. I should notice their particular causes and aggravations; not yielding to the erroneous notion that such details are inconsistent with the majesty of Him whom I address. He knoweth all things; and no detail can be superfluous or unfit in his estimation, which tends to fix my spirit more deeply and repentingly on its own moral defects and diseases, and to evince more strongly its desire of being "made whole." If, for example, I am conscious of having lately given way to an anxious and impatient temper, let me not be content with acknowledging generally, that I have not "ruled my own spirit," but let me confess that I have not done so in that particular instance, where provocation or trial was to be expected; or that I have betrayed heat or peevishness where the youth, or old age, or ignorance, or known infirmity, or other circumstances of the party with whom I had intercourse, should have operated as a strong preventive. If I have indulged sinful musings and desires, I should call to mind the immediate source of temptation; such as injurious society, or pernicious books; (whether casually presented, or more deliberately sought); or the want of a

right occupation, or a distaste of what is good, prompting the unsatisfied or slothful spirit to resort for enjoyment to what is evil. It will be both an exercise and an incentive of penitence, to trace and to declare these motives before God.

If I have to charge myself with the omission or delay of some known duty, or with having performed it negligently, it is not enough to say in secret, what may suffice in public, "We have left undone the things which we ought to have done;" I should rather acknowledge to the Searcher of hearts—this duty, which conscience urged on me, I have deferred, through indolence and self-indulgence; and in that, which I nominally performed, the most difficult or important part was scarcely attempted, through false shame and imagined incompetence. Or, if I confess, more generally, the transgressions of past months and years, or even of the whole course of life since I became an accountable agent, still let my retrospect and my confession be as particular as the case admits. There has been, doubtless, one kind of sin which has most frequently or successfully assailed me, which has been inwrought, as it were, into the very texture of my constitution and habit; and there may be yet another and another, which

the review of my own experience will show to have been often prevalent. Now, even in what may be called a general confession, these predominant evils should be distinguished and specified. Their being so will give a realising and substantial character to my acknowledgments of guilt, and will deepen the corresponding sentiments and desires. For it is evident, that specific confessions prepare the way for specific supplications. If I only confess sin generally, though it were with many repetitions of the same words, or with many variations which are little more than verbal, I do not lay the foundation for particular requests. But there is no object more important in secret worship, than the seeking divine help and strength against each particular evil, and against each wrong habit or disposition of which I am conscious; and the kind of confession which I have now been considering, naturally and almost necessarily leads to a similar kind of petition; namely, that the Holy Spirit would succour and strengthen me against that particular sin which has been explicitly acknowledged, would excite in me those particular motives and convictions, by which it may be repressed, and impart that especial grace, or temper of soul, which may expel or subdue it.

Thus, if I confess the unhappy prevalence of discontent, respecting a particular branch of the duties which Providence has assigned me, or concerning an especial disadvantage attendant on my lot in life; such confession will scarcely fail to be followed by especial prayer, that I may henceforth learn to meet the difficulty, or endure the inconvenience referred to, with an unrepining and more acquiescent mind; that I may habitually compare this trial with the greater trials of some around me; that I may consider how utterly unentitled I am to ask a dispensation from this, or even from much severer duties and crosses, on the ground of desert; and that I may more approvingly and practically consent to that view of the present life, which the Scriptures give, as designed to be a state of labour and conflict. And so, in every other instance, specific confession, if it be heartfelt, will be succeeded by specific petition; and each may, in secret, be far more detailed than the hints which have now been given; because of course, it is not the object of these general reflections to enter upon individual and actual examples. It should also be remembered that prayer, besides its direct efficacy, is undoubtedly productive of indirect good; as being the most solemn kind of meditation, the

most serious review of our strong reasons for gratitude, submission, and diligence in "well doing," and of the various moral and spiritual evils which we have to resist; involving a resolution practically to foster the one class of habits, and to oppose the other. But this indirect advantage of devotion must wholly depend on its specific character; and therefore, it may be added, must chiefly attach to that which is secret.

We can easily conceive of great direct efficacy in the briefest and most general prayer, if offered with the whole heart; but to obtain those indirect benefits, there must be a distinct recollection of the blessings which are to be appreciated, and the duties which are to be pursued. Above all, there must be a clear recognition of the evil tempers to be subdued, the temptations to be resisted, the occasions to be shunned, the passions to be moderated or controlled. It is only when thus conducted, that secret worship can be in the highest sense a profitable and reasonable service, whether we regard its primary aim, or its general tendency. It will then be most remote from "vain repetitions," most reverential towards the God who heareth prayer, and most beneficial to ourselves.

XIII.

ON AIMING AT LARGE VIEWS OF THE PREVALENCE
OF GOOD IN THE UNIVERSE, AS DEDUCIBLE FROM
THE REVEALED PERFECTIONS OF ITS AUTHOR.

IF the Scottish "minstrel" boy, whose genius and sensibility have been so attractively delineated by Beattie, (himself perhaps partly the model of the character he drew,) had been born and bred up on a ground-floor, in one of the closest and narrowest passages of the Scottish capital, detained by some cruel guardian in perpetual servitude at a sedentary trade, surrounded by dismal and repulsive objects, and purposely kept in deep ignorance of

"the boundless store
Of charms which Nature to her votary yields;"

we can suppose what a confused desire and melancholy veneration would have possessed his mind, as he saw the sun and moon and stars, crossing by turns that narrow section of the pure sky, which was visible between the dark and towering walls around him. Imagine him then, on some happy night, suddenly libe-

rated, and conducted before dawn to the summit of the mountain which overlooks the city and the surrounding country; there, in full freedom, to view the day breaking on the whole expanse of the heavens, the river magnificently widening to the sea, its bordering towns and busy navigation, the noble city beneath him, and the varied plains and woods, mountains and islands, which combine to form that great panorama; and think what a new conception of nature and art, what a tide of delight and wonder, would rush into his spirit at the sight! —But is not this, in some sort, an emblem, though a very imperfect one, of the contrast of a Christian's present and approaching state, as to his view of the spiritual creation? We are here on earth confined in a narrow scene, which sin has pervaded; doomed by our fallen and mortal condition, to see and converse with nothing earthly, but what this bane of happiness has, in some measure, touched with its contaminating influence. There is, indeed, through the great mercy of God, a pure and heavenly light of divine knowledge, glancing on us from above, (if we will but raise the mental eye to meet it,) amidst all this moral gloom, and through the hazy atmosphere of ignorance and depravation. But when we shall be suddenly borne away, each

through some one of the thousand dark avenues of death, to a wide and free survey of the spiritual world, will not the astonishing and transporting contrast be incomparably greater, than that which would delight the captive minstrel boy?

In the meanwhile, let it not be forgotten, that the spiritual light of revelation, which has reached our minds, is a much more informing light as to the prevailing character of the spiritual universe, than the natural light could be to that youth, while so immured, as to the character and aspect of the material world. Revelation has, in some degree, though in a highly figurative manner, intimated to us the glories and felicities of other regions; but, (and this is far more important than any such intimations,) it has made us acquainted with the moral perfections of God; with that sovereign and infinite principle of good, which is greater than the universe, and which must eternally forbid that evil should predominate, or, in any large and relative sense, abound.

It is not to be concealed, that the whole volume of revelation,—whether it proclaims the hatred of the Supreme Being to sin, or relates his past judgments against transgressors, or denounces his threatenings for the future, or above all, declares that amazing sacrifice, by

which his judicial indignation against guilt has been manifested,—does unfold a far more awful view of the nature of moral evil, and the misery of its unprevented results, and consequently, of the spiritual state of a world which has “become guilty before God,” than was or could have been discovered by the depraved reason or conscience of man. But then it should be ever and attentively recollected, that the very same record by which this melancholy state of mankind, as partakers of a ruined nature, and obnoxious to condemnation, is unfolded, reveals likewise, (and alone reveals fully,) that infinite moral perfection of the Maker and Preserver of all things, from which we cannot but infer the greatest possible perfection in his works and designs. It should be considered that we have not a whit more revealed evidence, nor other or stronger scriptural testimony of the deep malignity of sin, and the dreadful penalties which the unpardoned sinner will suffer, than we have of the infinite holiness, goodness, love, and happiness of Him that ruleth over all; whence it is unavoidable to infer an immense,*

* Although the word immense is used by some of the best writers as convertible with infinite, yet as it may well bear the lower sense, of that which is unmeasured or not measurable by us, (which seems also to be its popular acceptance,)

if not infinite preponderance of good, and that for ever, in the universe which he rules. Indeed, the terrible fact itself, that sin, and its consequent misery, are so repugnant to the will and government of God, as to have needed and received an infinite atonement, involves the conclusion, that sin and misery, even as introduced into this minute portion of his works, form a dreadful infraction of the universal order, a tremendous anomaly in itself, though permitted for the wisest and most benevolent end, and, for aught we know, indispensable to the greatest final good. We have, therefore, strong reason to be confident, that the entrance of sin and misery is a mysterious exception to the prevailing perfection and stability of moral beings.

Since the Deity, as revealed to us in his word, has all natural and moral perfections, (that is to say, all the attributes which constitute and produce happiness), it is inconceivable that the sentient creation, as a whole, should not ultimately, as to the sum of natural and moral good or happiness, correspond, in the highest possible degree, to the character of Him who formed and upholds it. The moral evil which

I have in the present piece made this use of it, and of its derivatives.

exists, is, indeed, a mighty mass to us, who see nothing on earth that appears to be unmingled with it, or wholly unaffected by it; and could we much more clearly apprehend its extent, and its depth, in human society and human hearts, and estimate its penal consequences, it would then be a sight insupportable to our limited minds. He who sees a volcano showering its ashes on his native city, or a cloud of locusts, twenty leagues in breadth, darkening the whole sky, and spreading famine through the plains, will not easily reflect with attention and pleasure on the safety of a thousand other cities, or the unravaged fertility and plenty of whole regions and continents. But difficult as it is—while we look on a “world that lieth in wickedness,” and a whole terrestrial creation participating its penal effects—to expatiate, in fixed and rejoicing thought, over a pure and happy universe, yet faith and reason may rest assured from the revealed character of God, that the sum of evil can be relatively but minute, being certainly the least possible. And should any one, professing a steadfast belief in the moral perfections of the Deity, assume (in the total absence of scriptural proofs or intimations) that this least possible sum of evil in the universe may yet be

great, relatively to the amount of good, the assumption would not only be devoid of all ground of credibility, but would involve (as I apprehend) a gloomy speculative profaneness.

Let us then aim at the widest views; for they are the most effectual to cheer and sustain the meditative mind. Unless we habitually seek to measure the superabundance of good, almost by the infinitude of its Author,—we are in danger of being “shaken and troubled,” by the apparent magnitude and probable effects of evil. But if we could steadfastly adopt and maintain this just view of things, evil would become a sort of vanishing quantity. For even though the multitude of intelligent or sentient beings should be not infinite (though, understanding that word in the sense of ever-growing, or increasing without end, we can be no way certain that it will not be); and even though there were several races of beings, beside our own, subjected to moral and natural evil, (though we can have no right to presume that there are,) yet might the proportion of evil to good, in the whole of the divine dominions, be but as the smallest rivulet, to the ocean.

A Christian, called, as he evidently is, by his Divine Master’s example and command, to reflect deeply on the evil that is in the world, in

order to shun its influence, to escape its effects, and to aim at the diminution of it, will be liable to receive too gloomy and disheartening an impression from the view of its wide dominion, unless he can launch forth into contemplations of a contrary character, which are far more wide and vast.

Should one of our female philanthropists, from a misjudging devotedness to her object, instead of visiting the prison and the hospital, bind herself to constant residence within one of these, (as nuns within their convents,) it is hardly to be doubted, that a more oppressive sense of human wretchedness and calamity would weigh upon her mind. It would be more and more necessary to correct this feeling, by a frequent effort of reflection on the great excess of health and freedom over disease and bondage, which is found in the whole city, or the whole country.

And we, who, at the dictate of revelation, contemplate the world in which we dwell, as a great infirmary, where the fatal cases exceed the happy cures—have, surely, need to counteract the feeling which this situation prompts, by all the resources which the same revelation yields. It is probable, that superior and happy beings regard this abode into which evil has entered, and that abode where sin is punished,

as we should regard a solitary hospital and prison in a vast and well-ordered and flourishing capital; though, indeed, with this most joyful difference, that in the other countless mansions which they visit or behold, throughout the immeasurable "city of the living God," they witness, not a partial, but a total exclusion of moral evil.

The astronomy which has developed the incalculable magnitude of creation, is, in this view, auxiliary to our faith; for, in proportion as our knowledge is enlarged, as to the actual vastness of the divine works, we discover, so far, a correspondence between the facts in the existing universe around us, and the inferences we would draw from the revelation of the divine character.

Had the stars been neither mentioned in Scripture, nor visible in nature, still, from the moral perfection of the Deity, which is distinctly revealed, we should be led to believe in an immense predominance of happiness somewhere;—but, seeing a host of heavenly worlds, and learning that their number is beyond all computing, we make one grand advance towards our conclusion, on the ground of ocular and mathematical proof. Faith is relieved, as it were, from its work of creation. The mighty

structure of innumerable worlds is before us. Divine wisdom and power have actually done what we otherwise should only have judged they would do; nay, the boldest conception of faith, or of fancy, would never have gone a ten-thousandth part so far as the fact carries us. Here is ample room, then, in the actual works of the Deity, for a preponderance of happiness which may well be called to our feeble apprehension, infinite. The Deity is "just" and "holy"—"good" and "gracious," yea—"God is Love:" while we believe this, (and be it remembered, that when we cease to do so, all belief in revelation fails,) it is impossible not to believe that such an immense preponderance of happiness is both produced and secured.

This vastness of the works of God also evidently magnifies the love and condescension of their Author, in interposing, even by his providence, (much more by the astonishing method of redemption,) on behalf of our fallen world; which, had it been annihilated in its state of moral ruin, might have been, to other beings, but as a meteor gliding into darkness, from amidst the multitudinous grandeur of the heavens. And when we consider the ultimate, and even the present efficacy of that marvellous interposition, towards the recovery and salva-

tion of mankind, as far more extensive than some persons can allow themselves to hope, we dissipate, in part, the gloom even of this world's prospect.

It is not, however, this world's state or prospect to which we should confine ourselves, or on which we have now sought to dwell. It is a scene immensely greater; and to that greater, that universal view, it is the proper tendency of every devotional engagement to exalt us. For whenever we pray, we have always for the grand object of thought, (if our thoughts be truly elevated and expanded towards the perfections of Him whom we worship,) an infinitely good and infinitely happy Creator;—why not also, as a concurring or proximate object of thought, that which is necessarily to be inferred from the idea of such a Creator, the utmost possible sum of goodness and happiness in his creation? We should be deeply grateful for that revelation, which assures us of the moral perfection of God. Without it, although our knowledge of sin and its deserts would be far less painfully distinct, we should be left in a dreadful uncertainty as to the extent and duration of evil. We could not disprove that it prevails in all parts of the creation, and that it will everywhere and continually aug-

ment. We should, indeed, know much less of (what the human mind has so great a repugnance to admit)—the malignant essence of evil, its contrariety to the divine nature and will; but therefore, (on that very account,) we could not know that its dominion is limited, and that good immensely preponderates.

Deists may offer strong arguments in proof of a certain kind of divine perfection; but there is no ground to believe that they who altogether reject revelation have real confidence in the moral attributes of Deity; and it follows that they must remain either in fearful doubt, or stupid thoughtlessness, as to the ultimate issues of good and ill.

A Christian, on the contrary, may confidently regard all the evil, which is, or can be permitted by a God of holiness and love, as indispensably conducive to the production and maintenance of a good that will incomparably overbalance it. He sees in the works of Christ, in his perfect rectitude, purity, and benevolence, an "image" of the perfections "of the invisible God;" he has been taught by the words of Christ, that the Divine goodness so transcends that of all creatures, as to be in fact the only essential goodness; "None is good, save one, that is God."

From these assurances of Him, who is One with the Father, and who attested his words by miracles of goodness, the Christian may, I think, without presumption conclude, that if the universe, viewed by prescience in its whole extent and duration, had not been foreseen to contain an incomparable excess of good, the eternally good and blessed God would never have been its Creator.

We know that the follower of Christ cannot, in one sense, be too much occupied with the existence of moral evil; he cannot too strenuously oppose and contend against it, in himself and others, nor can he have any spring of action so truly identical with that which reigned in the soul of his Saviour, as a pure desire of preventing or counteracting its diversified effects. Yet, in contemplation, it is his duty often to "turn aside," and see a far greater sight; to anticipate the period when evil shall not only be extinguished in himself, but shall for ever cease to be prominent, perhaps even to be perceptible, in his view of the creation; and to lose all his present partial views in that "far more exceeding and eternal weight" of glory and blessedness, which will be as exhaustless as the perfection of Him that "fillet all in all."

XIV.

ON TORPOR OF MIND WITH REGARD TO SPIRITUAL
OBJECTS AND INTERESTS.

WHEN is it most necessary for me to meditate on things spiritual? Precisely when I have least inclination and ability to do so; when I take up the Scriptures, or a book of piety, with almost as little relish as I should a treatise of mensuration; when I seem unimpressible by what is exalted, or remote, or refined; when the mind is little better than the mere instrument of the animal, instead of the animal powers and organs being the mere instruments of the spirit. This, to one that has known and felt anything of its opposite, is a humiliating and comfortless state of the understanding and affections. What can account for it, but that prone and servile tendency of the human soul, induced by its fall from original rectitude? For, by the supposition, this is not a state of ignorance, nor is it, properly speaking, a state of unbelief, as to the reality and excellency of spiritual objects; since, were it either of these, there could be in it no conscious unhap-

piness or degradation. It is, in fact, far otherwise. The immensity and majesty of nature have been familiar to my eye, and the glorious secrets which the universe must have to unfold, have been contemplated with awful curiosity. The proofs of its incomprehensible Author's being and perfections have approved themselves to my reason and my conscience. The vastness and condescension of his revealed love have overwhelmed my thoughts. The possible discoveries of an endless life have oppressed me with their undisclosed multitude and grandeur, and this little theatre of sense has seemed to shrink into nothing.—And am I yet now compelled to say, with an application of the phrase sadly contrary to the connexion in which the apostle uses it, “None of these things move me?” How contrary this to the proper bias of that new and heavenly nature, which the Scriptures ascribe to the children of God?—I am like a traveller who has passed along the Apennine ridge, sometimes gazing on the far-empurpled sky; now on the vast masses of southern foliage below, and a bright river dividing the extended valley; then on the calm lake or boundless ocean stretching beyond, and who exclaims, with a glowing heart, How delightful, how magnificent! But soon afterwards he finds

himself enveloped in the chill vapour of the malaria, and looks in vain through the noxious mist, for all the wonders and glories of that splendid prospect. There is danger for the traveller, not only from the unwholesome air through which he passes, but lest, forgetting the refined enjoyments of other hours, he should seek amends in sensuality, for the lost pleasures of contemplation. But there is, in one view, more danger for me; because, in his case, the concealment of the objects does not take away or impair the conviction of their reality. But in mine, there is a sort of doubting, though not disbelief, induced by the want of mental perception. Suspended apprehension, respecting spiritual or "unseen" objects, is very much allied to doubt.

If it be possible for a reasoner, by dint of subtleties, to bring into question, as the estimable but paradoxical Bishop Berkeley did, the existence of "the things which are seen," how much more easy is it, through a cessation of the mind's acting upon objects of mere intellect, to lose all realising sense of "the things which are not seen!" There may be, and is, no actual, at least, no abiding disbelief in either case. Bishop Berkeley, it is presumed, could, only in a very occasional state of high abstraction from

the influence of material things, seriously feel as if that opinion were credible, which his dialogues maintain; and it is only in the state exactly opposite, viz., that of absorption in material things, (when the appetites and varying states of the body, or thoughts only terminating on what is earthly, quell and suppress the higher action of the soul,) that we are dead to the impression of what is spiritual. But from the lamentable readiness with which, in our degenerate condition, we take impressions and even laws from sense, this last is a common and natural state; while that of Berkeley, if he really doubted, or imagined himself to doubt the existence of matter, has been, probably, unparalleled in any sane mind. If I conclude, that he never could be under this illusion, it equally serves the present purpose to suppose, that some student of his system, whose sanity need not be contended for, sometimes really was under it. There is, we too well know, a contrary unsoundness of mind, which, though it excites no wonder and no ridicule in a sensual world, is in truth infinitely more to be deplored: that of feeling as if things spiritual had no existence. The herds of Babylon might naturally cease to wonder, if they ever wondered at all, that the king should take "his portion with

them in the grass of the earth, and have his body wet with the dew of heaven;" but an angel, ever blissfully awake to the realities and glories of the spiritual universe, probably regards the "brutish persons" who are dead to these, with more astonishment and compassion than I should regard that visionary, who might feel as if the material world were non-existent. No doubt these remarks apply most strongly to such as are manifestly not "renewed in the spirit of their mind," who are altogether what the apostle Paul denominates natural or animal men; but still they apply, in a degree, to that temporary and partial insensibility, which it is presumed every Christian sometimes feels.

And what, as a means, (in the hope of divine aid and influence,) is likely to remove this?

If the deluded follower of Berkeley had arrived at such a point of self-deception in his study, as to feel some repugnance to eat or walk, or to have little fear of a precipice, from imagining these acts and objects unreal, what would be the fittest remedy for him? Not, I conceive, to take a general and distant view of nature, even in its most striking scenes—but to lift some hard and massive body, to make proof of some highly pungent taste, to try the point of some sharp instrument.

Have we any resources similar to these, when we would seek to revive the deadened apprehension of spiritual things? They, it is evident, cannot be corporeally tasted, touched, or handled. But there are two ways of mentally viewing them, which have some analogy to the two ways of being conversant with material things, that were just mentioned.—I may attempt to contemplate the most sublime, illimitable and remote spiritual objects, to meditate on the nature and works of the Deity, on the person of Christ, on the day of judgment, on “the eternal states of all the dead;” and all these things, momentous as they are, may (without being disbelieved) appear, in the carnalized state of mind to which we have referred, as immense indeed, but shadowy and almost doubtful visions, which have no power to excite emotion.—Let me rather try, therefore, without looking abroad into the vast field of spiritual existence, to fix on a single point, and that the nearest. Let me return, with Descartes and Fenelon, to the first point of spiritual knowledge—“I think; therefore I am.” I will not use it for the same purpose that they did, or to deduce thence the proof of an infinite and perfect being; but for the purpose of intently recognising my own consciousness. This consciousness is one.

It is not divisible or dissoluble, like the material organs which it actuates, and which will so soon be dissolved. When a few years have passed, the whole frame will sink into irremediable helplessness; the last pulses will beat, the last respiration cease, the particles so wonderfully combined into organic life will be separated. Even they, however, will be only separated,—not destroyed. “We have no reason to believe,” (say the philosophers,) “that matter perishes, but only changes its form.” “There is no evidence of the destruction of anything since the universe was formed.” But my consciousness, which is not composed of parts, cannot be separated. And if matter which has parts, which is infinitely divisible, which is actually divided, be not destroyed, how much less that consciousness, which is one and indivisible! To annihilate, is, for aught we know, as much a divine and incommunicable prerogative, as to create; nor have we the slightest evidence, direct or presumptive, that this prerogative has ever been exercised on one material particle, or one spiritual essence. When this frame is dissolved, therefore, as it soon inevitably must be, my consciousness will still subsist. I, who think, shall be;—shall be somewhere; shall reflect; shall feel; shall be either

happy or unhappy.—It is a striking thought of a foreign writer, that even atheism cannot demonstrate to itself, on its own principles, that there will be no future and ever-during misery. As little, surely, can that vague and Epicurean sort of deism do it, which forgets God, or asks itself secretly, Does God indeed see and regard? Yet this is virtually the state of the Christian's mind, whenever its actions are sinful. Even could this questioning be unhappily converted into a well-founded affirmation; could it be shown that the proofs of God's holy providence are fallacious; this dreadful argument would not at all involve the consequence that the spirit is destroyed, while the parts of the body are only dissolved and changed; or that it has parts which may also be dissolved; or that its consciousness, in a new state, will not be unhappy.

The resort to this kind of reasoning does not imply either distrust or depreciation of that testimony which the Gospel yields both to the character of the Deity and "the life of the world to come." It is intended for those moments when external reasons of belief and expectation, however powerful, do not move the mind. It is intended, likewise, to endear the assurances and offers of revelation, by impress-

ing that awful prospect of an unknown futurity of being. For whatever depraved or listless torpor lulls my spirit now, that surprising instant will arrive, surely and soon, that instant of miraculous change, the first of a new mode of being! Can I easily revert in recollection to the hours of early childhood, when my present mode of being was new; and is it much less easy to anticipate the latest moments of this, the awful verge of another?—Am I not, meanwhile, consciously amenable to an inward law? Is not the sense of moral good and evil, of consequent weal or woe, more indelibly fixed in my spirit than words imprinted “with an iron graver, in the rock,” or on crystal “with the point of a diamond?” What is it but the never-dying echo of the eternal voice? These things are fully as sure as any thing material and external, any object of sensation, and they are incomparably more intimate and unchangeable. But if I be truly awakened to these, if I forethink this approaching entrance into an untried state of consciousness, which must be either holy or depraved, which must excite unmeasured joy or unutterable disappointment—can I, under such expectations, remain indifferent to the message of salvation, to the deeds and words of an Almighty Redeemer? Thus, then,

let me seek to arouse the dormant perception of spiritual realities, commencing the survey at home, contemplating the mysterious immortal inmate of my bosom. Hence let me ascend towards the throne of Him who is hid from mortal sight; hence fly to the cross of Him who stooped to mortal sorrows. But, O Thou Spirit of Holiness, who succourest mortal weakness, do Thou communicate to my soul the vividness of solemn thought, the depth of grateful sentiment, and cause me by thy power which is alone sufficient, to "abound in hope."

XV.

ON THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST AFFORDS TO PRAYER.

WHEN I consider how defective, how mean, and how defiled are the most solemn of my devotional services, I might well despair of their being in any way acceptable to the Deity, or procuring for me any communication of his mercy and favour, were it not for the peculiar

way of access and acceptance revealed. Not only my previous character as an offender, but the offences contained in my acts of worship, might suffice to defeat my hopes. If a petitioner were to approach the most exalted, benevolent and venerable of men, without manifesting any due impression of his dignity and excellence; if he were visibly and audibly to manifest the contrary, by unseemly gestures, and by wandering, incoherent, and even disgraceful expressions, mingling in every part of his professed supplication; if that supplication, though not a precomposed form, were evidently, in many of its parts, mechanical; a sort of half-conscious exercise of memory, combined with vague desire; while the mind was chiefly occupied with the irrelevant and often base imaginations, which seemed interposed as insults to the majesty and patience of the hearer:—what should we augur of the reception and success of such a suppliant? Would not the servants or friends of the personage addressed, be ready to remove the intruder, unanswered except by reproof?—But my addresses, to One who is ineffably more august and venerable than any created being, have often corresponded to this description, and have always, more or less, partaken of this character. For thoughts

and feelings, not expressed aloud, are quite as substantial and apparent before the Omniscient God, as those which are uttered. They form, undeniably, as real a part of the action of the mind, during any act of worship, as the confessions, petitions, or adorations, verbally pronounced. What then would be the texture and series of my prayers, if all the ideas and emotions which arise during their continuance, could be submitted to the view of others, and my own, as they unquestionably are to the view of Him "that searcheth the heart?" Would not the irreverent confusion and impious intermixture, of things sacred and profane, solemn and trivial, spiritual and carnal, be enough to mortify the pride of a Stoic, and confound the self-righteousness of a Pharisee? If such a copy of the acts of my soul, during secret devotion, could be faithfully made and set before me, it would certainly confirm, in a most humbling manner, my conviction of spiritual weakness and depravity, and might justly induce despair of such services being well-pleasing to God, were it not for the consoling and cheering assurance that Jesus "ever liveth to make intercession for us." "For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in

all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." It is in this belief alone, that I can, or ought to "come boldly unto the throne of grace:" but with this belief, notwithstanding the experience and the foresight of exceeding imperfection and unworthiness in my offerings, I may "have access with confidence." How should it endear this great High Priest and Advocate, to think of Him as pleading for the gracious acceptance of my praises, which, when compared with the claims of the divine grace and majesty, have been so negligent and formal; of my thanksgivings, which have been so cold; of my confessions, which have been so seldom prompted by a deep and tender contrition; of my entreaties, whose fervency has borne no proportion to the magnitude of the good besought, or of the evils deprecated; of my whole worship, which, as before described, has been often a shameful intermingling of incongruous and degrading thoughts with those of piety? Is it presumptuous to hope and believe that the divine Mediator intercedes for those who are conscious of defects so great, and offences so flagrant, in their approaches to Him who "knoweth the secrets of the heart?" I trust not; because many of the most devoted worshippers have confessed and deplored simi-

lar defects and offences in their attempts to wait on God. And though I cannot suppose, that in these eminent Christians they have been by any means so habitual or so great as in myself, I am not warranted in despairing of the acceptableness of my prayers, on account of the deeper degrees of evil which I may believe to pervade them. The compassionate aid and intercession of Christ, when on earth, were not withdrawn from those disciples with whom he had frequent reason to expostulate on account of the weakness and littleness of their faith; and who, in a season peculiarly adapted to excite their feelings, drew from him, by their heaviness and stupor, the affecting rebuke, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?" These failures of their faith and vigilance did not prevent his leaving with them that animating promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

At the same time, the hope that my imperfect and sinful offerings are accepted through this all-powerful and gracious Intercessor, can never, surely, admit so fatal a perversion, as to become a plea or refuge for indifference in that sacred employment; to place me at ease in the indulgence of wandering thoughts, in a supine or ungoverned state of the faculties and affec-

tions. Let me solemnly remember, that, in every act of worship, whether public or secret, there is only so much of prayer as the "understanding and the spirit" concur in. It is impossible to suppose that our exalted Saviour, who expressly declares—"They that worship God, must worship him in spirit and in truth," should intercede for the acceptance of those parts of our prayers, in which, though the lips utter them, the mind is not engaged; or in which, (although the memory and the reason, by a confused kind of co-operation, combine to produce them extemporaneously,) the desires and affections are wholly unconcerned.

The efficacy of prayer must be proportioned to the real amount of sincere and true devotion, which enters into any exercise of worship. If a mass of gold or silver ore be sent to the refiner, he will value, not the amount or variety of heterogeneous matter, but the amount of pure metal which is found in it. He may accept and prize it, notwithstanding the alloys and worthless substances with which it is debased, but it can be accepted only at the worth of the separated bullion. It is not meant to intimate, by this comparison, that our prayers, (were they ten times more unalloyed than those of fallen creatures can be,) would possess any

meritorious value. The mind and will, the ability and inclination, for these, as for all other services, are themselves the gifts of God. But he has chosen to connect his blessings with prayer, and encourages me to hope, that, through the intercession of the "One Mediator," he will accept even such prayers as mine.

And though they are accepted—notwithstanding these alloys and deplements—yet the result of them, or the blessings to be procured by them, can only have relation to the sum and intensity of real devotion. So that the hope that my real prayers are presented, and made availing, by so glorious an Advocate, should confer, in my estimation, an immense importance on the privilege of worship, and should make me incomparably more solicitous, that my prayers may be real, and that "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth may speak."

XVI.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF SLOTHFUL AND SENSUAL
INCLINATIONS.

How disgraceful and wretched a subjugation is that of the mind to bodily appetites and propensities! How low and narrow must be our ideas of happiness while we act or feel as if mere sensual ease or animal indulgence could secure it! When the spirit is "brought into subjection" to the body, what is its utmost bliss but that of a half-slumbering or half-besotted slave? And what captivity so ignominious as to be the slave of one's own indolent, weak, disorderly vassal? What "servant of servants" can wear a yoke more abject? Whenever I am conscious of the downward tendency to this worst of servitudes, oppressed at once by the thought of its sinfulness and its degradation, urgent, indeed, is the necessity of applying to the "Father of spirits" for strength to shake off the bondage of corruption. Have I forgotten that the blessedness of Him, who is independently and supremely happy, must be purely

spiritual, and that we can conceive no remission of blissful activity in the Eternal Mind? What then should creatures, originally made "after his likeness," endowed with spiritual faculties and desires, pursue as the best, the only perfect and sufficient kind of enjoyment, other than that which constitutes the happiness of their Creator?

Never, when most ensnared in slothfulness and sensuality of heart, let me consent to suspend devotion. Never let me fail to implore, with an early and strenuous resistance to the depraved bias of my mind, the renewal of that "right spirit," which alone is "life and peace." Never let the inebriating or stupefying power of sense overbear my conviction, that, under this dominion, the very life of life, the very element of heaven, would be extinguished. Never let me cease to solicit a new and deeper impression of those real joys, which arise from nearness and similitude and love to "the source and centre of all minds." He who made and upholds all things, possesses within himself all the stores of happiness which are or can be dispensed to his creatures. His "loving-kindness is better than life." What comparison can there be between pleasures in which reptiles partake and those which flow immediately

to the rational and immortal soul, from the infinite Spirit?

Even if these sublime enjoyments, for which I pray, be not soon or amply communicated, yet ought the very hope, or even desire, of such exalted benefits, to be more cherished and more acceptable than the fullest possession of mere bodily delights. There must be more real satisfaction of the mind in perseveringly aspiring to the noblest, the only substantial and enduring good, although one were not to be indulged, in the present state, with any assurance or consciousness of its attainment, than in the full acquisition of pleasures which we know to be insufficient, mean, and transitory.

How forcibly does the energetic Baxter urge this preference of the all-originating good, and a sacred scorn of all that would compete with it!—"Where do you think, in reason, that all the streams of goodness do finally empty themselves? Is it not in God, from whom, by secret springs, they originally proceed? Where else do all the lines of goodness centre? Are not all the sparks contained in this fire, and all the drops in this ocean? Surely the time was, when there was nothing besides God, and then all good was in Him. And even now the creature's essence and existence are secondary

derived, contingent, improper, in comparison of His, who is, and was, and is to come, whose name alone is I AM. What do thine eyes see, or thy heart conceive desirable, which is not there to be had? Sin, indeed, there is none; but darest thou call that good? Worldly delights there are none, for they are good but for the present necessity, and please but the brutish senses.—Do you fear losing or parting with anything you now enjoy? What! Do you fear you shall want when you come to heaven? Shall you want the drops, when you have the ocean? Or the light of the candle, when you have the sun? Or the shallow creature, when you have the perfect Creator.”

It is while these powerful considerations least affect me, while I am most prone to sink under the influence of that “carnal mind which is death,” and my soul, immersed, and, as it were, half imbruted in earth and sense, knows not how to taste, and scarcely how to contemplate, a spiritual and real blessedness—it is then that I have surely the most pressing occasion to ask the heavenly gift, of better thoughts and nobler affections, from the Fountain of spiritual light and life. He can enkindle within me a divine ambition—can cause my spirit to “thirst for Himself, even for the living God”—for “the

fulness of joy which is in his presence"—for that perfect righteousness which is the essence of his own happiness. To him, therefore, dull and insensible, or earthly and sensual, as I now am,—to Him let me approach, deeply feeling how essential to my happiness is his enlivening grace; and let this be the tenour of my earnest petition—"My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken Thou me according to thy word!"

XVII.

ON THAT PREOCCUPATION OF THE MIND WHICH UNFITS IT FOR DEVOTION; AND ON THE MEANS OF COUNTERACTING IT.

THERE are some trials which press on us heavily, and yet do not, like many other occurrences, tend to disincline or disqualify us for prayer. On the contrary, though they give a special direction and cast to our petitions, they promote solemnity and fervour; and lead to that greater abstraction and composure which is the effect of increased seriousness. Such are those afflictive circumstances in which we are

in a great measure passive ; when the event has come, or must come, immediately from the hand of God ; or when we are particularly called to deliberate or to act. Such are, sometimes, the death or sickness of friends, or the ills or disappointments which they or we may suffer from causes quite uncontrollable by us.—Such was the situation of Paul and his fellow voyagers, in the Alexandrian vessel, after they had been compelled to “let her drive,” had cast out her equipments, and, having no further power to direct her course, were “driven up and down in Adria;”—such, also, was that of the aged Jacob, when he was constrained to permit his Benjamin to be taken away to Egypt, and could only say, after an affecting prayer for his return, “If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved!” Who can doubt, that, when the youth was out of sight, when the melancholy train, which he followed with a father’s eye to the summit of some neighbouring mountain, had disappeared, he then offered more earnest and fixed and enlarged supplications for the safety of his beloved child? Prayer was then his only duty, his only office of kindness, or resource of affection.

There is another class of trials, which, though they ought to have the same influence, and in

the most pious minds certainly have so, yet have, at the same time, a contrary or disturbing force. It is that diversified class in which we are compelled to be active; more especially those in which speedy action is, or seems to be, required; as when, for example, ourselves, or those dear to us, are involved in embarrassing or hazardous circumstances, and must be extricated by means which require consideration and effort. Situations of this kind also are recorded in the lives of both the Scripture characters referred to; as when the patriarch heard of the approach of his offended brother with an armed band, and was in consequence "greatly afraid and distressed," but obliged to decide on measures for his own and his family's safety; and when the apostle, at Damascus, became acquainted with a conspiracy against his life, which required him to adopt instant means of concealment or escape.

These are occasions, (and there are many, far less pressing and important, that yet partake of the same character,) which, while they strongly prompt a good man to look up to God for strength and guidance, do yet, by the evident duty of action which they impose, tend to divert the mind from a calm and undivided exercise of devotion. At least they so operate

on some minds ; and not so much on powerful ardent, enterprising minds, formed for action, and which therefore we might suppose restless from impatience to begin it, as on those of an opposite complexion, to which decision and action are most arduous, and which are therefore most perturbed by the near prospect of such duties. These will undoubtedly attempt prayer, perhaps in many more words than the apostle or the patriarch, on similar occasions, uttered ; but their prayer will often be extremely distracted. Comparative brevity is suited to such occasions. Diffusiveness and prolixity are ill-timed. Indeed, prayer can never be computed by the sum of words and minutes, but by the amount of faith, reverence and desire. It is when these qualities seem lost amidst the confusion or perplexity of the worshipper, that the very essence of the duty appears to be wanting ; although, when this proceeds from mere infirmity, it will be mercifully regarded by Him who "knoweth our frame."

It were well, however, if only such exigencies could produce these effects. There are other feelings and situations, hardly deserving (in comparison) the name of trials, which yet, not seldom, excite in minds of the same temperament as high a degree of distrac-

tion, nay, sometimes a higher; because being in themselves less urgent or critical, the need of divine aid is not so deeply felt, while the counteracting or alienating impulses of thought are almost equally strong. Thus, in deciding on some new occupation or connexion for ourselves or others, or meditating some arrangement in which the tempers and views of several persons are to be consulted, the affairs in question may scarcely come under the grave denomination of "trials," and yet they may so possess the mind, as exceedingly to discompose it in sacred duties. Or, let some design engage us, which may be quite practicable, wholly blameless, or even praiseworthy—such as a scheme of personal advantage, undertaken in the most proper manner, and with the most upright aim; or a plan of administering charity or instruction; or an exercise of thought in some scientific or literary attempt; or a wish of publicly advocating some benevolent institution; none of these can be called trials, in the religious acceptation of the word, for they may be pleasurable rather than painful; nor can they, in themselves, be deemed temptations, for the supposed employments are "lawful and right;" and yet they may very readily become temptations; for they may so

engross and haunt the mind, as to incapacitate it for the right performance of duty to the Supreme Being.

It is far easier in this, as in many other cases, to feel and understand, and analyze the evil, than it is to suggest (much more to apply) an effectual remedy. The poet tells me, that—

“ A soul immortal _____
 Thrown into tumult, raptured or alarm'd,
 At aught this scene can threaten or indulge,
 Resembles ocean into tempest wrought,
 To waft a feather, or to drown a fly.”

Nor can the calmest reason account this figure extravagant, in representing the disproportion between our little and momentary interests here, and the nature and prospects of a spirit which is to exist for ever.

But even supposing it quite certain, (and one would be most reluctant to adopt the contrary belief which some have expressed,) that even this poet possessed the true devotion which many parts of his writings indicate, it may well be questioned whether their composition did not at times so occupy and swallow up his mind as to preclude or impede the direct exercises of piety.

Yet who would say, that the composition of the “Night Thoughts,” (or of “The Task,” by Cowper,) was a hurtful or unprofitable employ?

One corrective of that unhappy influence on spiritual comfort and improvement, which has been now described as arising from absorption of mind, or determination of thought to a particular point, will be found, perhaps, in allowing to our secret devotions that turn which most accords with the actual bent or current of the soul. Or, to express it differently,—by making our ruling thoughts for the time, a guide, as far as may be, to the particular cast and topic of devotion. For, where the understanding or the imagination is strongly occupied by an object, it seems more practicable to use this force than to expel or oppose it. Since the power of steam has been applied to navigation, it is become possible to propel a vessel directly against wind and tide; but there is no inherent force analogous to this, (at least none is found in some minds,) by which the earnest course of thought, strongly “setting in” towards a certain point, can be directly stemmed. What, then, is our resource, but to endeavour that the contrary current shall indirectly serve us; as in the ordinary way of navigation, the vessel yields to the prevailing breeze, and has her sails filled obliquely by that very gale, which, if her prow were pointed against it, would quite baffle and stop her course.

It may perhaps be said, some Christians are intently engaged in pursuits not at all censurable, (on which, therefore, in a general way, they can implore the divine blessing,) and yet so secular, that it appears incongruous, and even indecorous, to refer to them in their devotions. A mechanician, exercising his inventive talent on some new application of "power," or some improved adjustment of wheels and valves; or a chemist, profoundly engaged in the analysis of an earth or a fluid; or an artist, before whose "prophetic eye" the gradual idea of a fine group is mentally rising, must force himself, it may seem, quite away from the immediate object of thought, if he would rightly enter on devout worship.

Yet the incongruity, or remoteness, is (in these instances at least) more seeming than real. The inquiries and operations of science and art are all connected with the laws and works of nature;—and what are these but the presence and agency of its glorious Author?—We can imagine the illustrious Boyle absorbed quite in those celebrated experiments on air, in which mechanics and chemistry were combined; and that he, when suspending the most favourite studies of the laboratory in order to fulfil the solemn and beloved employments of the closet,

might conduct himself by some such gradual transition as this into the region of devotional feeling.—O Thou, by whom “all things consist,” who didst form the substance of matter, and impress on it the laws and properties of its being, Thou knowest it is my delight to investigate thy works; whatever discoveries I may be permitted to make concerning that unseen but wonderful fluid, on which Thou hast made animal and vegetable life, in this world, to depend, may they awaken me to deeper veneration for Thyself, the invisible Spirit, in whom, far more truly and eminently, we live, and move, and have our being! Grant, also, that the inquiries, in which I am so pleasurably engaged, on the subtile composition and qualities of aerial fluids, may strengthen my joyful belief, or facilitate my apprehension, of the indestructible nature of spirit, and of the promised resurrection of a spiritual body.

Nor is it more difficult to suppose the sculptor Bacon, who was likewise eminent for the union of talent and piety, bent on the study of the great Chatham’s monument, filled with the design which he was about to execute, or beginning with ardour to sketch or model it, and then retiring into his closet, not to break off suddenly and altogether from the object

which had preoccupied him; but to say—O Thou Eternal Mind, Source of all that is wise and great, how noble are the faculties which Thou hast given to creatures “made in thine image, after thy likeness;” how noble, sometimes, the expression and indication of those faculties, even in a frame so soon to be dissolved! Thou hast endued me with the talent of feebly imitating that frame which is so “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Thy indulgent providence has made this art an enjoyment. Bless it also, by thy grace, to my highest improvement. Help me to consider with adoration and thankfulness, while I labour to convey to lifeless materials some faint resemblance of the character of motion and of mind, how unsearchable thy power and skill, which can give vitality to inert matter, and unite intellect with the dust! And when I remember how that commanding form, which I am about to represent in marble, now lies mouldering, and how the spirit, which electrified the senate, is passed away—may these thoughts inspire new gratitude for the blessed hope of the gospel; for that sublime Visitor of earth, who himself broke the prison of the tomb, and rose a living monument of his own voluntary subjection to death, and eternal triumph over the grave.

If it be said that the employments of these excellent persons were of an intellectual kind; and that similar transitions to devout thought could not be made from the anxious affairs of commerce, or from the petty, yet perplexing routine of ordinary business;—this must be granted; but then, neither ought those concerns, in general, so deeply to absorb the mind, as it is the very nature of intellectual employments frequently to do.

Another corrective, however, of this mental alienation or prepossession, and one more available, perhaps, in the cases just mentioned, is to be found in the well-known expedient of using (at least in a way of preparation) the pious sentiments of others. The devotional parts of Scripture, and the reading or recitation of sacred poetry, have an obvious tendency to tranquillize and elevate the thoughts; and, perhaps, the partial or introductory adoption of forms of worship, in secret, will be sometimes profitable.

There may, indeed, be a wrong and profitless use of all these helps; and particularly with regard to forms of worship, it is conceivable, that some who desire to “pray with the spirit,” may yet needlessly resort to them as a customary resource from mental effort; yet, when

the mind is in the state now described, it may be found more practicable, (and that by Christians who are quite awake to the danger of formality,) to adopt from the heart the ideas and desires of others, than to collect and express their own; while those ideas and desires may be likewise in themselves more spiritual, more copious, more appropriate, than any which, in such circumstances, could be at once originated. If experience prove to an individual, that by such aid his "heart is" sometimes more "fixed" than without it, he, certainly, by its use on such occasions, consults the true ends of all worship—his own spiritual benefit and the glory of God.

But while every expedient is commendable, that really conduces to these ends, it is not the less certain, that a due regulation of mind is of the first importance to our religious, as well as secular interests. It will be for the happiness of all to cultivate, in every pursuit, habits of fixed attention, composedness, mental self-control; and especially to do so in the earlier years of life, before contrary habits and tempers acquire strength.

Even idolaters have felt the peculiar impropriety of not giving the whole mind to sacred rites. We learn from Plutarch, that, while the

Roman magistrate was employed in augury, or sacrificing, a herald admonished the people, "Hoc age!" Mind this!—a precept supposed by him to be derived from Pythagoras. How much stronger reason is there for us, when engaged in the "sacrifice of praise," or of "a contrite spirit," before the living God, to remember the more forcible precept of Paul, "In these things BE;"—or, "Give thyself wholly to them!" *

XVIII.

ON SPECIAL AND RECENT SIN AS FORMING AN URGENT REASON FOR CONTRITE PRAYER.

OH that my mind were more deeply and poignantly affected at the thought of having affronted the "terrible majesty" of the universal Judge, and abused the tender forbearance of

* 1 Tim. iv. 15. An injunction, which, though primarily applied to the official engagements of the evangelist, cannot but be eminently applicable to the devotional duties of the Christian.

my unwearied Benefactor; of having stifled the warnings of a conscience illuminated by heavenly truth, and rebelled against a holy and forgiving God; against Him who gave and sustains the very faculties by which I have transgressed; against Him who could instantaneously, by an agonizing correction, or a fearful judgment, teach me the omnipotence of his disregarded justice!

How melancholy and how criminal is that tendency which I discover in my heart, (after the first pains of self-accusation are past,) to harden or soothe, rather than humble itself; to extenuate the offence, or to argue with a calous and perilous sophistry.—So many have been the preceding offences, that this can have added little to the account of guilt.

What deadly qualities are united in this serpent evil, which fascinates, while it pierces the soul, and has a venom that not only corrupts, but benumbs and paralyzes also! It is true, the gospel of Christ invites and enjoins me to embrace the hope of abundant pardon: it forbids despondency after a genuine and penitential recourse to that divine Saviour, whose “blood cleanseth from all sin;”—but how shall I rightly resort to this pardoning mercy without a true and profound contrition of spirit? Or ought

even the assured hope of forgiveness to prevent or abate undissembled humiliation and bitter self-reproach, when I reflect that all past and present and future good, not only to the latest instant of this life, but through the boundless ages of the future can come only from the free mercy of Him whose gracious precepts I have so lately scorned or forgotten? Ought not such humiliation and self-reproach to fill my heart when I meditate on having chosen or tolerated that, on account of which it behoved the Son of God to suffer untold anguish, from pure love to the ruined victims of transgression? I acknowledge that the conduct or spirit of which I have been recently conscious, must, if unforsaken, alienate me for ever from the temper and the joys of heaven, and condemn me, by a dreadful necessity of nature, to an exile from happiness, even were I surrounded by its brightest tokens and manifestations in that kingdom where the righteous "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father?" Tremble, my soul, at such a thought! Shudder at having indulged for a day, or cherished for an hour, (or were it but for a moment,) that which, if perpetuated, were in itself "everlasting destruction;" that which has in it the accursed quality and savour of the "second death."

When I am penetrated with this appalling truth, that a Being, "glorious in holiness," hath "set my iniquities before Him, my secret sins in the light of his countenance;" that He "understandeth my thought afar off," and is "acquainted with all my ways;" that He could instantly lay open the record of my multiplied offences, and proclaim them by "the voice of an archangel in the great congregation of spirits and just men;"* that He could fill me with that "everlasting contempt" and incurable remorse which must be the portion of the impenitent and unpardoned; what should be my emotion at having exposed myself to such a doom; what fervency should inspire and pervade all my pleas for the benefit of that Saviour's atoning death, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;" and how abundantly augmented henceforth should be my love and devotedness to Him, through whom alone I can attain the peaceful hope that my "transgression is forgiven," that my "sin is covered!" And surely nothing, except unfeigned penitence, evinced by importunate

* Jeremy Taylor.

prayer, can justly afford me this testimony. I cannot, without the most dangerous and culpable presumption, account myself in a state of acceptance and reconciliation with God, except every known sin be followed by genuine repentance, thus heartily expressed. I can now have no evidence, (whatever may have preceded,) of being in a pardoned state, until this disposition and this act, have been solemnly renewed. "Repentance," says the excellent Bates, "is not an initial act of sorrow, but must be renewed all our lives. God's pardoning us is not a transient act, but continued; as conversation is a continued creation." And if our constant sins of imperfection and frailty make this at all times needful, then surely ought the sense of especial and peculiar guilt to constrain and stimulate us to proportionately earnest supplication. "Our desires," says the same author, "should be raised in the most intense degrees, in some proportion to the value of the blessing. They should be strong as our necessity to obtain it. The pardon of our sins is the effect of God's highest favour. It is the fruit of our Saviour's bloody sufferings. Without it we are miserable for ever. And can we expect to obtain it by a formal superficial prayer? It deserves the flower and zeal of our affections.

How solicitous and vehement and unsatisfied should we be, till we have the clear testimony that we are in a state of divine favour!"

And when I thus address myself to the Sovereign Source of compassion, it is indispensable to implore not only forgiveness, but heavenly strength against the future assaults of that sin, which has "pierced me through with many sorrows." It is indispensable that I should resume my sacred resolutions more strenuously, and with more deep dependence on that heavenly strength. I must entreat that the essential beauty and excellence of holiness may never more be eclipsed by the miserable and dying illusions of evil; that the intrinsic loathsomeness and malignity of sin may never more be cloaked or veiled from my spiritual sight, amidst, the fading allurements or specious deceits with which it can here invest itself; that I may never more yield to that wilful infatuation, which refuses to anticipate the dismal retrospects of a wounded conscience, and its yet more dismal presages; that I may never more become insensible to this momentous truth, that Christian uprightness, and purity, and spirituality, can alone arm the soul against inevitable trials—or prepare it for the region where a holy Saviour dwells.

XIX.

ON THE DUTY AND IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER FOR
OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS.

EVEN if I possessed no other part of revealed truth than the historical books of the Old Testament, yet, by faith and attention to these, I should find various encouragement to offer up intercession for the servants of God. The condescension of Jehovah to Abraham's repeated plea for the righteous in Sodom was an early and impressive sanction of this practice. The many prevailing prayers of Moses for the chosen people, by which, at one time, the "wrath" of the Almighty was averted; at another, "the fire which burnt among them quenched," and, after a signal instance of murmuring and revolt, their iniquity pardoned according to his word," evince its great occasional efficacy. The intense perseverance of that man of God, when, as it appears, he repeatedly "fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights," on their behalf, shows how deep a conviction he had of the importance of earnest and continued intercession, to their welfare; and the remarkable

words of Samuel in a like case, "As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you," imply that this was deemed by him an obvious and imperative obligation of piety.

But should I assume (what indeed would be a mere assumption) that the office belonged, chiefly or exclusively, to the prophetic or judicial character, and that private worshippers could infer no duty or expectation from the practice or success of these eminent individuals, I cannot examine the New Testament, without finding the general duty and efficacy of such prayers distinctly established. The duty may be strongly inferred from our Saviour's command, that his disciples should pray even for their enemies and persecutors, (which is enjoined as a mode of "doing them good,") particularly when we view this command in connexion with his own wonderful intercession on the cross. The precept is strengthened and urged by that divine example; and since the part of our Lord's intercessions, which is incomparably most difficult to our corrupt nature, was thus designed to be imitated by his followers—and was so, in a very striking manner by the martyr Stephen—we cannot doubt that other parts of them, which are far more easily imitable,

were also intended to guide the practice of Christians. Instances may be offered from the prayer for the support of Peter's faith, by his gracious Master; and the large and tender intercessions for his disciples, and for those who should believe on him through their word. It was in reference to an office of kindness, that our Saviour said, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you:" nor can it be conceived, that so natural a resource of friendship and sympathy would be neglected, with their heavenly Teacher's pattern in their remembrance, and with those and his other words on record, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you."

The efficacy of individual intercession is also pointedly declared in the epistle of James; "Pray one for another—the fervent, effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much:" and the apostle John directs Christians to pray for a brother who hath committed sin. But should either or both of these injunctions be thought to relate only to the prayer of those endowed with spiritual gifts for miraculous healing, there remains, in the writings of St. Paul, a store of scriptural proof, as to the general duty and efficacy of intercession for our fellow Christ-

ians, so abundant and explicit, that, if his apostolical claims be acknowledged, this conclusion cannot be evaded. Not only does he exhort to "intercessions for all men," but especially to "the greatest perseverance in prayer for all the saints." He also declares, in various forms, the constancy and earnestness of his own prayers, both for Christian communities and individuals. Thus to the Roman and Ephesian churches he writes:—"Without ceasing, I make mention of you always in my prayers;" to the Corinthians, "I thank my God always on your behalf," and "I pray to God that ye do no evil;" to his friend Philemon, "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers;" and to his convert Timothy, "Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day." In other places he states more particularly the subjects of these intercessions. And it is clear that he does not regard the duty as solely or peculiarly belonging to his apostolic character, for he informs the Colossians, "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God;"—and, what is still more to our purpose, he often solemnly entreats the intercession of

Christians for himself and others. Thus, addressing the church at Rome; "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." Similar requests occur in at least four other epistles. The apostle also distinctly attributes powerful effects to the past intercessions of his Christian friends; for he ascribes to these (at least as a partial means) the deliverance of himself and his companions in Asia, when they had "despaired even of life;" "you also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed on us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf:" and he expresses a similar expectation as to other events. Thus, after naming to the Philippians a particular trial which he was enduring at Rome, he adds, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ." It appears, therefore, to have been particularly designed, that the epistles of Paul, among many other most important instructions, should specially enforce this duty, and encourage us in the persuasion of its benefits.

But, notwithstanding this fulness of encouragement from the Scriptures, have I a higher degree

of secret distrust as to any real good which may arise to Christian friends or communities, from my exercise of this duty, than as to the efficacy of my petitions for personal blessings?—What is the source of such distrust? Is it that I suppose certain scriptural declarations to imply, that the prayers of Christians for themselves will be always sufficient to secure their real welfare, and that, therefore, intercessions for them may not be, strictly speaking, needful or beneficial? This would be imputing to the sacred writers acts and admonitions which were insincere or erroneous. If the opinion that intercession would be superfluous could in any particular case have been allowably indulged, it might have been by those converts of St. Paul, who had witnessed his miraculous endowments; and by himself, who yet more surely knew that he was constituted a messenger of Heaven, under a special assurance of protection and success. But such independence of human aid would have nourished a pride and self-sufficiency, to the dangers of which the apostle was not insensible. He was made, therefore, habitually to feel, that this protection and success would be dependent on the whole system of means fit to be used, both by himself and others, and that among these a principal

one was the divinely instituted duty of intercession. On the same conviction the first Christians also acted, even with respect to the chief apostles. From the unceasing prayer of the church at Jerusalem, for the release of Peter, (who, in the same city, had proved his divine commission by so many miracles, and from the prayers of the Corinthians, (to which Paul refers, as having contributed to his own rescue from impending death,) we learn that no eminence, personal or official, in the objects of the pious regard of these believers, made them imagine intercession on their behalf to be needless. Much less ought we to doubt its importance and value in respect to ordinary Christians, however superior we may account them to ourselves, or whatever certainty we may feel of their genuine devotedness. St. Paul expresses an entire assurance of the perseverance and perfection of his Philippian converts: but almost in the next sentence he offers a prayer for their growth and stability in various graces. And with our intimate sense of the defects and inequalities of our own prayers, and our observation of the numerous imperfections and severe trials of other Christians—have we not every reason not only to desire the intercession of our brethren, but to conclude that they may justly

desire a part even in ours, and to believe that these reciprocal exercises of faith and love, are, through the sovereign and wise appointment of our heavenly Father, mutually needful, and will, through his mercy, be mutually availing?

The fact that many intercessions may conduce to the perseverance and perfection of the believer, is analogous to another very familiar fact, viz: that various causes, seen or unseen, are often made to conduce to success in any secular design. When a person aims at some honourable office, his own diligent preparations, and perhaps solicitations, are indispensable; but still a few unsolicited words, uttered in his favour by real friends, may just fill up that measure of influence, on others or on himself, which is requisite to the fulfilment of his hopes. And as in other cases, so particularly in reference to spiritual interests and attainments, we can discern (as was hinted before) some weighty reasons for this appointment. If our sense of the need and value of mutual help be one great bond of civil society, yet more is it adapted to be a bond of Christian society, for it promotes those tempers which are distinctive of the Christian character—humility and love. If I believe, with St. Paul, respecting my fellow

Christians, that all things shall turn to my salvation "through their prayer," in conjunction with my own, then I have not only to be grateful for the fountain of "living water," "the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ," but for the various channels, known and unknown, through which it is partially derived and conveyed. The lowest Christian whom I have sought to benefit, or possibly whom I have overlooked and neglected, may be the instrument of averting from me an evil, or procuring for me a good, the extent of which, neither of us can in this world calculate. Such a belief cannot but promote both "lowliness of mind," and a sentiment of affection towards all whom I may believe to fulfil sincerely this office of pious friendship; for every such person, however unable in other respects to aid me, thus assumes the position of a real benefactor. And this kind of obligation, from whatever quarter it be incurred, is not, like many others, felt to be a burden. We know that they who affectionately offer prayers for us, enlarge and satisfy their hearts, while, in this benefaction, they present nothing with their hands. We hope, also, that we can return for these expressions of their love, intercessions not less genuine. And besides this, there is no doubt, that many a devout

and grateful heart has felt itself relieved from the oppressive sense of other bounties, when, having nought else to render, it has poured forth in secret its best desires and petitions for their dispenser, to their Divine Author. I have been told that a Christian, distinguished by his large pecuniary beneficence,* strictly enjoined his almoners to prevent the objects of it from thanking him, either personally or by letter, for his ample gifts. He justly alleged the multiplied claims on his time as a reason for this prohibition; and probably the knowledge of his own heart suggested another secret reason of equal force. But the restriction was so painful to some grateful receivers of his bounty, as to be submitted to with the utmost reluctance. We can well conceive a pious beneficiary who was compelled to this unwilling silence, taking refuge from that constraint with greater earnestness in the devotions of the closet; and the feelings of a full heart, like waters forcibly compressed, rising the more suddenly and strongly towards heaven, because debarred from their natural course on earth. We can imagine such an individual entering on fervent intercessions for that munificent

* The late Henry Thornton.

friend with sentiments like these;—You have forbidden every expression of my gratitude to yourself, and I feel this deeply as a hardship; but you cannot prohibit or impede what I trust will be a more effectual, as well as more unequivocal testimony of it, my solemn and affectionate supplications for your eternal gain, which, I humbly hope, will be known by their fruits in the great day of account.

Love is cherished in the mind, not only by the belief that others will benefit us, but also by the belief that we can, in our turn, confer real good on them. Simply to think of a friend with affection, is a very inefficient, and, sometimes, a melancholy employment; but if I can perform a real kindness towards him, however secretly, I do that which is pleasurable in itself, and tends, by bringing him often into my thoughts as an object of regard, to unite me more and more with him in heart. If you can carry to a sufferer food or medicine, or advice, or consolation, you will probably visit him frequently, and your concern for him will increase. If you could bestow nothing but a look of grief, which you know would be fruitless, you would be likely to turn aside from his door. So he who really believes that he can substantially benefit his Christian friends by prayer on their

behalf, will often bring their characters and circumstances in review before his mind, and by every such mental act, will strengthen the habit of sympathizing affection. And while the practice tends to promote humility and love on earth, the retrospect of it may have the same effect, more eminently, in a future state of social blessedness. How delightfully endearing, in that perfect state, for the circles of pious friendship, and those intimately connected here in Christian communion, fully to feel and know that the eventual happiness of each is to be traced in part, instrumentally, to the intercession of all; so that, in heaven, as well as on earth, "thanks may be given by many," to God and to each other, on behalf of their associates and themselves! May we not suppose, that the most near and tender friendships of the heavenly world, will subsist between those whose prayers have been most earnest and most prevalent for each other, while they sojourned here?

And if we can thus perceive a present improvement of the most valuable graces, and a future augmentation of pure and never-ending enjoyments, to be the natural results of this divine institute, truly here is enough to repress and to rebuke every doubt of its importance.

But perhaps my misgiving as to the efficacy

of my ordinary intercessions, arises from this—that I cannot habitually intercede in a copious or distinct manner, even for the near circle of my Christian friends; still less when the connexion is more remote. In the latter cases, my petitions are, of necessity, quite general; and as to the former, if I include in my daily prayers, all, or most, of those who have some special claim on my remembrance, want of time must prevent these intercessions from being specific or enlarged.

On this it may be observed, that we cannot suppose a devout Christian will often omit daily intercession, though it be necessarily brief, for the few who are most near and dear. But with respect to other friends, it seems most natural and expedient, that our prayers should be but occasional, in order that they may then be more prolonged. There are very few, even of our best friends, whom we can visit daily. How happy would some be if they could meet even yearly! But if we made it a rule of piety and kindness, daily to offer up particular intercession for one individual, or one household, and thus successively for each, these secret visits of the heart would, in many instances, be far more frequent than our personal or epistolary intercourse can be. Amidst the inclemency of

winter, or in the chamber of sickness, we might still make our swift excursions, and offer the best though unheard salutations, of Christian affection:—those friends of course claiming precedence in our thoughts, whose feelings or circumstances were known to demand at the time peculiar sympathy or interest.

In cases, however, where brevity is necessary, the mistrust which may arise from it is an illusion. No number or variety of words can constitute the essence or effectiveness of prayer, as viewed by the divine mind. If, indeed, our prayers for ourselves were needlessly brief, scanty and general, this would indicate an absence of desire; a want of sensibility to our own particular sins and defects; an undue preference for other engagements; and a distaste for converse with our Supreme Benefactor. Besides, the attainment of pardon, renovation and final perfection, is our great personal concern. It were unreasonable and impracticable, in this as in other affairs, that men should ordinarily give as much time to the concerns of various friends, severally, as to their own. But the brevity of prayers, even for personal blessings, when they are offered amidst really urgent occupation, or under sudden temptation, cannot be supposed to render them less effectual, than

when in other circumstances, our emotions and wants have been ever so copiously developed. Those affecting and sublime words of our Lord, "Father, save me from this hour;"—"Father glorify thy name;"—if we may venture reverently to appropriate them in the crisis of danger or distress, will surely, at such a moment, express as much before God, as if our need of succour could be fully unfolded, or our submission largely declared.

And thus the necessary brevity of many of our intercessions, provided there be in them the real sentiment of Christian love, cannot be deemed to lessen their efficacy. It is this sentiment of "fervent charity," in which we so much need to "abound more and more," that would give to our briefest and most general intercessions a new vitality and power. It was this which melted and shed abroad, in a thousand glowing currents, (if one may speak so,) the heart of the converted Paul; so that "the whole world," as Fenelon observes, "was too narrow for this heart:" and Chrysostom finely remarks on the affection expressed by that apostle for the church at Philippi: "It was much 'to have them in his heart,' but much more when in chains; yet more when engaged 'in the defence and confirmation of the gospel;' for he seems to refer to the time

when he was brought before his judges, and underwent the extremity of peril. Even standing there, (he seems to say,) I meditated not how I should be rescued from imminent dangers, or how escape the snares of conspiracy, but I was delighting in your love, and in converse with the absent. Not length of distance, nor the crowd of cares, nor the magnitude of perils; not the fear of rulers, nor the insurrection of multitudes; not death impending, not naked swords, not the array of executioners, nor any other object, could sever me from the remembrance of you.—For nothing is more imperious, nothing more sublime than love; it flies above all such weapons; it is loftier than the darts of the great adversary; from the topmost heaven it looks downward on them all, and as the vehemence of a mighty wind sweeps away the oppressive dust, so the force of love sweeps away the turmoil of all other passions. Thus it was with Paul. In all events, he had sufficient consolation, the salvation and the remembrance of those whom he loved.”

XX.

ON ENDEAVOURING, AMIDST DEJECTION, TO "LOOK AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE UNSEEN."

ALL earthly things appear to thee more dark and cheerless than the clouds of a November day. But why not, by an effort of contemplation and by the grace of faith, enter into other scenes and rise to glorious and unchangeable realities? Knowest thou not, that all the disappointments and disgusts of this life will, ere long, be as if they had never been? and has not the word of God assured thee of a mansion, nay, of "many mansions," where all is grandeur and serenity and love?

A prisoner confined in the darkest cell, or an artisan wearied with the most irksome sameness of employment, may transport himself, in thought, to the charms of the fairest landscape, or to dwellings of ease and social pleasure. And although his despondency may be, in some cases, justly deepened, by a well-grounded fear that these enjoyments will never become his, thou,

who art about to worship the "Father of mercies," by that "new and living way," which Christ "hath consecrated for us," art surely not authorized to cherish the same gloomy apprehension with regard to things eternal.

The sacred intercourse with Heaven, in which thou art preparing to engage, implies, if it be sincere, a true desire of celestial good, and of that holiness which qualifies for its possession. And will such a desire be disregarded or frustrated by "the God of all grace?" The Divine Teacher and Saviour hath solemnly proclaimed, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Seek then to realise, even as at this moment subsisting in all its glory, a world of perfect purity and joy. Think of the full displays of the divine excellency, which there fill with unmingled delight every adoring inhabitant. Try to conceive of that inexpressible peace, combined with an unspeakable energy and ardour of love, which a present God can infuse, and is at this very hour infusing, into happy spirits that encircle his throne. Even at this point of time, while thou art depressed by saddening thoughts, and the heavy rain-drops only remind thee of the gloom of external nature, there is a joyful assembly raising the ceaseless anthem of praise.

which fills with rapture every being that unites in it. No petty cares, no painful regrets, no distractions of thought, no infirmities of the body or the mind, impede that consentaneous flow of love and ecstasy. Every spirit is absorbed in blissful emotion, incapable of satiety, in deep sympathy with the rest, yet supremely fixed on the overflowing source of all their joy. If it were not for the space that interposes, or perhaps the mortal weakness which forbids, an enrapturing view of the felicity which God imparts to unfallen or restored creatures, might this moment burst upon thee. These particles of light which have just reached thine eye, come tinged with a sort of congenial sadness as they gleam between wintry clouds; yet, it is only eight minutes (as the calculations of science assure us,) since these very particles issued from the glowing sun, the fountain of warmth and radiance. Were it ordained that one or more of them should become the organs of thy disembodied being, and in their return—(not swifter than their journey hither,) should bear thee to the orb whence they emanated, fewer moments than thou hast now occupied in one low circle of anxious thought, would suffice to carry thee into the very focus of the light. The full harmony of the spheres, might, long before that,

enchant thy new and finer sense; the glorious companies of the happy might visibly surround thee with smiles of gratulation: the cares and dark imaginings of this little scene would have died into remoteness and, perhaps, oblivion. Or possibly, not even any change of place were needful to this change of scene. There might only need to be the fall of the grosser frame, the dissolving of this "tabernacle," to reveal a world of blissful existence even here; as the mountain in Dothan, when God opened the eyes of the prophet's desponding servant, was full of "horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

But whatever be the fact (as to nearness or remoteness) with regard to created glories, the Lord of glory is ever with thee. He who gives being and perpetuity to all those unseen joys is here. "Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Wilt thou then approach, as a worshipper, this God of glory, with a dull and unmoved heart? After one glance at what is now existing and transacting in some other region (perhaps even in this region) of his works, wilt thou be faint and feeble-minded to implore his Holy Spirit—the earnest of a participation in his own felicity? Has not "the God of all patience and comfort," by the lips of his

beloved Son, most emphatically promised to them that ask him, this divine gift, this inestimable pledge? Is it a gift to be sought coldly, or entreated carelessly?—even the sovereign blessing of Him that has all the springs of joy?

Surely the indifference or distaste which is now experienced by thee with regard to the ordinary comforts and occupations of this life, will not be allowed to extend to those heavenly hopes which are essentially and everlastingly worthy of thy warmest pursuit. They will not be allowed to reach that state where there will be an eternal plenitude of spiritual delights, adequate to the satisfaction of immortal desires, and where these hallowed desires can themselves never languish or decline. Awake, O candidate for an incorruptible crown; address thyself to “the Father of lights,” as if some ray from the glory and beauty of his heavenly temple were poured upon thine inward vision; as if some faint echo of the hallelujahs of the perfect had fallen on thine ear!

XXI.

ON THE DUTY OF REMEMBERING, (IN A SINFUL OR INSENSIBLE TEMPER OF MIND,) HOW THE ALMIGHTY CAN CORRECT.

THE thought of our own death, and of the life which follows, (when impressively presented, and deeply received into the mind,) is a thought of unequalled power. But it is not the only thought which can produce a salutary dread, or revive our impaired sense of the awful truth, that "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." There are possibilities and probabilities, which, by their number, their variety, and their apprehended nearness in point of time, may affect me more than the foresight of that last event, which, though inevitably certain, is generally thought of as distant.

Now that my mind is, in a great measure, unmoved by the truth or awfulness of God's moral government, and the infinite importance of his favour, I should endeavour to call up the reflection how entire is my dependence, and in

how many ways I am vulnerable. When the great poet of mythology represents "the Lord of the unerring bow," as bending it against the Grecian hosts, and discharging arrows "bright with an immortal's vengeance," he does but use the same figure (though with a peculiar and beautiful appropriation of it to the destructive sunbeams) which the poets of the true theology had before applied to the visitations, (whether visible or invisible,) of a power really divine. Job had exclaimed, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me!" David cried out in anguish, "'Thine arrows stick fast in me!" And what figure can more truly or forcibly, represent our exposed condition here, than that which the former of these sacred writers adopts, when he says, "God hath set me up for his mark; his archers compass me round about." Mine is the condition of one who is open to the flying points of unnumbered arrows. How silently, how secretly, may the darts of bodily or mental suffering reach me! The shaft of death may strike suddenly and in succession those that are dearest, till I am ready to adopt that mournful expostulation, "Insatiate archer, could not one suffice?" The viewless dart of pain may touch a minute vessel, or a minuter nerve, and all earthly comfort be suspended,

while that hidden wound is unhealed. Or what is still more keen and often less curable, the barb sharpened by calumny or unkindness, by the misconduct or calamities of another, or by spiritual dejection and terror, may "enter into my soul." Of all these kinds, (and how innumerable the individual varieties of each!) are the weapons of the just and holy God, "the arrows of his quiver." They are sometimes the missiles of an instant, more rapid than the darting beams that glanced pestilence on the dying Greeks. Would not the actual pang from but one of these, at once painfully awaken me to my need of divine help and healing? And can I doubt, that, amidst my numberless provocations, on me also he hath, as it were, "bent his bow, and made it ready?" Yet how seldom has the arrow flown! And how frequently has it come like an arrow spent or blunted, which might have had a tenfold force or keenness, but for the forbearance or gentleness of that mighty arm which directed it? What multiplied occasions have I had to acknowledge—"He maketh sore, and bindeth up;—He woundeth, and his hands make whole!"

Nor ought I to consider these arrows of the Almighty, even when their wound has been the deepest, and still rankles, as sent, (like those of

the fabled divinity,) in vengeance. Never can this be supposed, except when they are commissioned against the utterly hardened and incorrigible. What can be more agonizing than those wounds both of the body and the spirit, which Job describes?—"He cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; He poureth out my gall upon the ground." And yet it is most manifest that these were the "faithful wounds" of a heavenly "Friend." He who "corrects in measure," may have "bent his bow like an enemy;" indeed, He says more than this by the prophet to his servant Israel: "I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one;" which incontrovertibly shows how "grievous," how apparently "incurable," may be the pang that is yet at other times inflicted in mercy. For what is the sequel? "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord."

Finding in the Scripture such facts and such assurances, I should wrong and affront the divine perfection, by imagining that present chastisement, even when it is the immediate effect of sin, is inflicted for any other than a restoring purpose. It were comparing the righteous and merciful God to the most evil

and merciless of men, to account his arrows envenomed. Rather let me believe that the sharpest are dipped in balm. It is true, the patriarch, in the impassioned language of suffering, says, "The poison thereof drinketh up my spirit;" but the poison originates and ferments only in the disordered frame which is pierced. Even when revengeful men and malignant spirits are employed as the "archers" of Him who corrects man for iniquity, still he has all power and grace to make their enmity subservient to the purposes of his own loving-kindness.

But while this consolatory caution with regard to the gracious designs of Him who is all-powerful, cannot be too deeply impressed on me, let me not forget the situation in which I really am, while on earth, and which the scriptural metaphor so aptly expresses. Still, even to the end of my course, I shall be like a pilgrim "in the wilderness of Paran," among the predatory tribes of Ishmael, "a mark for his archers." The next moment can wing an unseen arrow, and fix a smart which no human skill may avert or mitigate, or perhaps discern. I see continually the effects of these darts on some around me; but there is a far greater multitude which are unobserved, and many in whom the

wound is as latent as the weapon's flight. Not that this exposed state of our pilgrimage should occasion dismay. The soldiers of a wretched ambition, (even unshielded as they are in modern warfare,) have exhibited astonishing intrepidity and calmness in the thickest perils of battle; a temper of mind which denotes insane presumption, when we consider the cause in which they have been engaged, and the flagrant contempt of God's power and law which their lives have often evinced. But he who venerates the ever-present power, has all reason for courage and confidence. Our God at once directs the assailants, and provides the defence of his servants. Though "his troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tent;"—"the angel of the Lord encampeth" (more closely) "round about them that fear him;" not indeed to ward off every assault, or avert every weapon, but to afford such aids as the all-wise and gracious Ruler has himself appointed.

Yet nothing can be more apparent than that a remiss, unwatchful, and, if I may so term it, unincinctured frame of spirit, is entirely unsuited to a state in which pains and perils continually impend; that indulgence in what is wrong, or neglect of what is right, gives actual cause for

these chastisements. So that when they are inflicted, conscience, except it be seared or stupified, will interpret them as penalties, and sometimes with the dread that they are merely judicial, not corrective; an apprehension which, though it be erroneous, yet, while it continues, awfully increases their severity. Besides, that many of the ills of life are express and special penalties, (though of the merciful and corrective kind,) no believer of the Scriptures can doubt. God himself says, "I have wounded thee—for the multitude of thine iniquities, because thy sins were increased."

Even if I could always maintain the alleviating persuasion that punishment is designed in mercy, this does not wholly change its nature as punishment; still less does it therefore cease to be "for the present—grievous." Though the arrow be commissioned to do the healing office of the lancet, I can scarcely expect to feel assured of this when it pierces me. But if I should, it may yet be clear that I have brought on myself the disease which calls for so sharp a remedy; nor may the wound in itself be less deep, nor the pain less acute, than if it had come from an enemy's quiver. Am I then slumbering when I should press onward? Have I not to expect, continuing in this position, to be

speedily roused by some quickening dart? Am I loitering, while the sun of life declines, or have I diverged into some path "the ends whereof are the ways of death?" May I not then, with certainty, conclude that He who "marketh all my paths," has even now "made ready his arrow upon the string," and that if I persevere, I shall not return without a bleeding heart or a wounded spirit? Unless love to God (that pure and delightful motive to vigilance against all sin, and zeal in every duty) were perfected in me, I cannot but need the harsh checks and incentives of fear: and if I fail to contemplate feelingly the more awful, but more distant objects of fear, it behoves me to reflect on those which are at hand; the terrors or sufferings which, if God will, "shall make me afraid on every side." Have I endured "corporal sufferance" and mental anguish in time past? Do I remember, if not the nature and degree, yet the effects of each, so as thus to compute, in some measure, what was their intenseness? Do not I know to what an excruciating extremity these might be raised by Him who sustains my very existence? Am I not well aware that the same Power that "redeemeth my life from destruction," can cause me, before another sun shall rise, to "water my couch with my tears?" What stronger or more

immediate temporal motive for thanksgiving can I have than the present undeserved forbearance of God? What more pressing argument can be addressed to me than these "innumerable evils" to which I am obnoxious, to excite constant and earnest prayer for his holy keeping, and unrelaxing watchfulness against those transgressions and neglects, which, doubtless, are often the direct cause of suffering, and which always form its bitterest aggravation?

XXII.

ON THAT DISCOURAGEMENT IN PRAYER WHICH
ARISES FROM THE WANT OF SENSIBLE FER-
VOUR AND JOY.

FENELON expresses the remarkable opinion, that "We never pray so purely, as when we are tempted to believe that we are no longer really praying because we cease to taste a certain pleasure in prayer." This is adapted to afford to some minds a most valuable encouragement, provided they are convinced that it is

founded on truth, and may be received with safety. But the very state of mind to which it applies, is that in which we are prone to view all encouragement with suspicion.

It may be right to premise, (in order to preclude any perversion of the sentiments which follow,) that there is a kind of suspicion, which it is a Christian's duty ever to investigate. The want of enjoyment in devotion may doubtless be often traced to the indulgence of some sin. It should, therefore, lead us the more seriously to faithful self-examination, extending to the allowed state of the thoughts and affections; and should induce redoubled watchfulness against all that is evil, as a canker at the root of spiritual joy.—On the other hand, it would be most unwarrantable to affirm, that Fenelon, so distinguished for a self-scrutinizing and self-denying piety, was grossly deceived as to the state of his own heart. It would be presumptuous to suppose that the Father of our spirits cannot, or does not, try his servants by spiritual privations, as well as in any other manner, without peculiar provocation on their part. And it would be cruel, as well as presumptuous, to decide for the individual who mourns under such destitution, that it necessarily flows from his own sins, (otherwise than as all suffer-

ings originally spring from that source,) or that it is absolutely removable by his own efforts.

It is undeniable, that perseverance in a duty when unattended with pleasure, is a stronger test of principle, than the most ample indulgence in a privilege which proves its own immediate blessing.

But while we must admit that some principle is evinced, we are apt (under that painful privation of devotional enjoyment) to inquire, Is it the principle of faith by which I am actuated, or is it a mere effort of conscience, which, to appease its fears, attempts to feign a sacred engagement? Can we be said to exercise real faith, except our prayer be not by self-constraint, but willingly; and unless, in the course of it, we attain some joyful or pleasing views of the divine perfections and promises?—I apprehend we may; and even that a much stronger exercise of faith may be inferred from our “continuing instant” in stated prayer, while such views are not imparted, than from the greatest copiousness of devotion, amidst the fervour of elevated and hopeful feeling.

It was indeed elsewhere observed, that a lively, joyful faith, is an exercise not only of belief but of imagination, (or vivid conception;) but it is far from following, as a just

consequence, that faith, without this cheering auxiliary, cannot be genuine, steadfast, or tenacious. We are accustomed to speak of the light or the eye of faith; by which we mean belief combined with that powerful conception of its objects which is highly gratifying, and doubtless, sometimes, highly profitable, to the mind possessing it. But the devout and eloquent author whom I have quoted, often speaks of the "darkness," the "profound night of pure faith," by which he means a mere belief, divested of those accessory aids of imagination and sentiment. And it is manifest, that such a mere belief, if it prompt to supplication and to action, attests its own strength far more clearly, than that which is reinforced and sustained by pleasurable emotions. It may indeed have much more of doubt to contend with; for suspended apprehension, regarding spiritual or unseen objects, is very much allied to doubt. But then the continued life and action and conflict of faith, amidst such doubt, give powerful proof of its reality and force.

We can imagine two seamen navigating opposite shores of the same broad ocean.—On one, the sun has genially risen, and cheers his heart as it scatters brightness over the rippling waves. A favourable gale springs up. He is bidden to

weigh anchor and hoist all sail. He obeys with alacrity and delight. There is no sense of fatigue or reluctancy. With every strain of the cable his heart bounds homeward. He seems to descry already the cliffs of his native shore, and his loud cheers keep time with his animated efforts.—On the other, the dew of night is falling, or the sharp blast whistles around him. Every star is hidden. The vessel makes no way. Nothing can be seen, and he hears only the gloomy dash of the billow. He is directed to ascend the mast, to reef a sail, to labour at the pump. He steadily obeys: but it is in sadness. His heart is heavy, and his eye dull. No lively anticipation of the desired haven visits his mind. No note of animation or pleasure is heard. Still he continues instant in toil. Will it be said that this man shows no genuine trust or fidelity? Rather, surely, that the principle of faith or confidence is much more decisively proved and exhibited by him, than by the first named.

• Discouragements of the kind now referred to, may further be alleviated by some other considerations. If it were the fact that prayer cannot be true or effectual, unless attended with some degree of pleasurable excitement, then, (as it would be strictly what I have termed it,

indulgence in a privilege,) there could be little or no place for our Lord's injunction, "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" or for the parallel admonition of St. Paul respecting it, that believers should "watch thereunto with all perseverance." In an employment which was always gratifying, there could be little danger of our fainting, except, indeed, from the exhausting action of continued pleasure on our present feeble faculties. And it was obviously not to such fainting that our Saviour referred, but to that which arises from weariness in an arduous pursuit, when not immediately or speedily requited. If prayer were habitually a highly pleasing occupation, we must employ a strenuous self-denial in leaving it for the ordinary duties of life.

Some contemplative and fervid minds have actually had to practise this self-denial in turning from the pleasures of devotion, even to the labours by which they were spiritually to benefit others, and much more to those secular engagements which they deemed quite inferior. Such was their kind of trial: and a most enviable kind of trial it appears; inasmuch as the very temptations of such persons have been towards the highest good, and their very tendencies to error have contained the proof of their spirituality.

Our trials may be of an opposite and humiliating character. But it is a lesson which, in the school of Christ, we are often early and impressively taught, and may need to be taught yet more, that we are not to be the choosers of our discipline; that we are not to select the class in which we will be placed, nor the tasks we will attempt, nor the mode of their inculcation, nor the sort of correction we will endure.

If we were indulged in this selection, who doubts that we should decline all chastisement but what is almost nominal, all tasks but what are brief and easy, and involving in them some portion of excitement and self-applause? By a half unconscious artifice, we should allot to ourselves those penalties, and those performances, which, while they might prove grievous or difficult to some others, would be comparatively light to us, and at the same time would foster self-complacency. Our self-imposed crosses would be, like those made of amber by the Papists of Sicily, of the lightest material that could gratify pride.

But in all this there would be nothing to promote the spirit which befits all creatures, and, most of all, apostate creatures;—the spirit of unreserved, undissembled submission to the just sovereignty of God.

Let me then, in spiritual, as well as in temporal things, seek that temper which knows "how to be abased," as well as "how to abound." Let me persevere in prayer, "watching thereunto," from pure confidence in the Author of good; from mere faith in his perfections, though not feelingly discerned; from a desire of that final blessedness which will glorify Him, without impatience even for the smallest portion of that present joy, which might "exalt me above measure."—It may be added that it is not, perhaps, sufficiently considered by susceptible minds, how small a portion of heavenly joy, (awakened by a disclosure of divine favour and approaching bliss,) might produce mental alienation or bodily disease.

But we may be, sometimes, tempted to argue—that destitute as I am of lively enjoyment in devotion, where is my pledge or token of preparedness for the sacred pleasures of heaven? Is there not rather a fearful intimation of my spirit being un-attuned for the employments of that blissful society? Rather let me admit, that perseverance in pious exercises, under continued humiliation and discouragement, may be accepted as a proof, that a divine hand upholds my steps, though it scatters no flowers on my path; that it gives strength, though not buoy-

ancy; that a sacred influence prompts my desires, though it does not sensibly gratify them.

If we saw a youth, in hours of full health and vivacity, and under some peculiar stimulus from circumstances, applying himself to scientific researches with ardour and delight, we might predict—that he will distinguish himself at college. And he too might secretly join in the prediction with a sanguine self-congratulating spirit; but if we saw him under languor and discouragement, forcing himself to pursue his object, from a conviction of its excellence, although with very little vigour, and with no sense of pleasure, we should not infer, that he could not be prepared in other circumstances, to excel and to enjoy. We should rather say—Here is a principle which nothing can wholly subvert, a taste so deeply implanted, that nothing can eradicate it. Here is vegetation under the snow; shall we despair of the ripening of the grain in due time?

Some Christians may, perhaps, best account for this severe kind of inward trial, by considering more practically the express scriptural assurances, that real chastisement is the needful portion of the sons of God. This needful portion must be, in some way, effectually dispensed. In several ages of the church, it has

been externally and conspicuously great and severe. But in the present age, there are a vast majority, to whom it has not been dispensed, as of old, in the form of persecution, in fines, or bonds, or scourges, or cruel mockings. Many have not encountered it in the opposition of friends, or the malice of foes. Many, likewise, have not endured poverty or open reproach, nor suffered the most aggravated of relative afflictions. But where the external dispensations of Providence are thus comparatively indulgent, were there no internal pains to balance the account, the Christian would pass through his state of pupilage without any decisive experience of that chastisement, "whereof" (an apostle declares) "all are partakers." And since he plainly adds, that our spiritual adoption would be disproved by its absence, how just the fears to which such an exemption might give rise! We may be grateful, therefore, (amidst secret privations and pains,) if our heavenly Father employs those hidden resources "to humble us and to prove us," that so we need not question our filial relation to him, on account of being screened from a "great fight of" external "affliction."

Will it, however, still be asked, since these resources of paternal chastisement are bound-

less, why this particular trial, this destitution of enjoyment in his own service? The question still proceeds on a presumed ability and right to choose; and yet, if other modes of inward trial were offered, which would we accept? Would we be assailed by sudden and excruciating temptation? Would we exchange our present privations for the actual infliction of the acutest bodily pain, or for that horror of spirit with which some devout minds have been overwhelmed?

If those trials, as being perhaps more temporary, would be really less difficult to bear, may not that be precisely the reason why this trial has in wisdom and mercy been assigned us? What is it we prize and desire the most? Is it spiritual joy? Is it tenderness and complacency in devotion? Is it the sense of God's gracious presence? Here then is the point at which the self-renunciation demanded in the gospel is thoroughly put to the proof. We are to trust God with our all; with the best and noblest enjoyments, as well as those which are inferior. This is the ultimate test. He can prolong our deprivations as he sees to be best; but He can, also, at any moment, terminate them, imparting "manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

XXIII.

ON THE MEANS OF MAINTAINING A DEVOTIONAL HABIT AND SPIRIT IN A LIFE OF BUSINESS.

A LIFE of business, (taking the term in its largest sense,) is a more usual life than some persons imagine. The great majority of men are actively engaged in secular pursuits, and obviously cannot command any large share of time for retirement. The multitude labour with their hands; and the middle classes, either in a lighter sort of labours, or in superintending those of others, have more exercise of mind, with sometimes not much less fatigue of body. In the higher departments of commerce, and still more in the employments called professional, this mental application is often unremitting and arduous; and even there it is frequently combined with much bodily exertion. Nor can he have seen much of society, nor reflected much on its constitution, who supposes that in the sphere where acquisition of property ceases to be the object of industry, there is no such thing as a life of business, properly so called. The contrary is most apparent with respect to sta-

tions of public service, such as those of the legislator and magistrate; and of Christians who dedicate themselves, with a far higher aim than temporal emolument, to the ministry of religion.

But, not to speak of these situations, even a life called private may be a life of business, by the diversity of engagements which it rightly and in most cases necessarily includes. Indeed the prudent management of that property which confers leisure, generally requires frequent personal attention. And even where such attention can be deputed, there will still be many cases which cannot be wholly devolved on others, but to which the principal's time is also claimed. Besides this, many undefined and occasional occupations, which cannot well be avoided, though it would be difficult to class or enumerate them, enter largely into every one's expenditure of minutes.

An ingenious French writer has constructed a systematic register for noting with great brevity the several employments of time; and the classes of occupation to which separate columns are there assigned, (even omitting those which are quite optional, and those in which a devotional person is not likely to engage,) will show that even in private life, or what is termed a

life of leisure, each period of twenty-four hours must usually be divided into not a few sections. "Sleep," and "repasts" cannot be excluded, though they might sometimes be abridged; while "bodily exercises" ought in many instances to be prolonged: "religious exercises" are the object of our present remarks; "domestic relations," "affairs of economy and order," cannot with justice or comfort be neglected; "reading," "correspondence," "society," have more or less their several claims. We may add, that the characteristics of the present age, particularly the habit of an increased mental culture, and the many institutions for promoting the good of the community, present such demands on the time of the less occupied, that a man of leisure, (except secluded in his residence,) must resolutely shun what appear to be just claims for attention and exertion, in order not to lead something very much like a life of business.

Nor does this apply exclusively to our own sex. Though it will not be attempted to detail the engagements of the other, observation assures us, that without being either frivolous or inappropriate, they may often be sufficiently numerous and engrossing, to constitute, if not a life of business, yet certainly a busy life.

All this, the progress of wealth and knowledge has promoted. In the ruder state of society, toil is chiefly bodily, and, where not urged by an oppressor, has considerable intervals of inaction. To a numerous class, civilization renders daily life less laborious, but more entirely occupied. Especially it augments, for many, the toils of the mind; and even where these are not stated and obligatory, it yet multiplies our mental occupations and cares. Nor do we question the good tendencies of this; for it has been truly said, "Man is born for action, as the fire tends upward, and the stone descends. Not to be occupied and not to exist is for man the same thing." Dr. Isaac Barrow treats with severe contempt "the passable" (popular) "notion, What is a gentleman but his pleasure?"—"If this be true," (he observes,) "if a gentleman be nothing else but this, then truly he is a sad piece, the most inconsiderable, the most despicable, the most pitiable and wretched creature in the world."—"But" (he adds) "in truth it is far otherwise. To suppose that a gentleman is loose from business is a great mistake; for indeed no man hath more to do, no man lieth under greater obligations to industry than he."

Yet multiplicity or abundance of occupation, whether it be imposed on us by circumstances,

or voluntarily engaged in, will be attended with evil, if it prevent the right performance of any important duty; if, from over-pressure, or dissipation, or exhaustion of mind, we have not calmness, or elasticity, or strength, for what is incumbent on us. Different minds are qualified to bear, (and even require, in order to their complete action,) different measures of labour and responsibility; as certain machines require to be regulated, some by appending a less and some a greater weight.

Among the hazards incident to much and diverse occupation, (probably the greatest, in the Christian's view,) will be that of its impairing the spirit of devotion. One is, however, very reluctant to believe, (unless it be in other respects too weighty and various for the mind embarked in it,) that it can of necessity have this effect; because full employment, besides being necessary to the comfortable subsistence of most persons, is in many points so beneficial to all; and because, also, it agrees so well with the short term of human life and with the variety of human wants. It is, therefore, of great importance to consider, whether we may not, to a certain point, diligently employ our time and thoughts in active duties, without any detriment to devotional habits.

That there is less choice of time, and less amount of it in any single undivided portion, for persons, so employed, to devote to contemplation and prayer, is evident. There appear, however, to be well-trying means, by which, if faithfully pursued, they may hope to secure an equal share of the substance and spirit of piety.

One of these is the rigorous reservation of a certain and fixed period, in each day, for religious exercises, which no claims of business, or of any other ordinary kind shall infringe. In order to this, the practice of early rising, on other accounts so advantageous and commendable, is to a Christian actively engaged in business, indispensable. The earliest hour is with some the only season secure from interruption; and even were a late hour of evening equally so, this time, though doubtless proper for devotion, is by no means so favourable to its vigorous, enlarged and profitable performance. If there be any season when the mind is unwearied and unruffled, it must, (in an ordinary state of health and of domestic affairs,) be the first morning hour. An imperative rule of early devotion, were everything really made to bend and yield to it, would very much govern the whole scheme of life; for by rendering necessary, to most persons, a proportionably early

time of retiring to rest, it would preclude those midnight toils and midnight recreations, (though the latter term can be applied but in irony,) from which piety and health, it is believed, have suffered like loss. While tenacious of this early hour of solitude, the man of business, except his best desires be dormant, will be fully awake to its value. Well knowing that he cannot, like the recluse, choose among other hours, he will solemnly apply himself to improve the consecrated moments which he has redeemed from indulgence, and guarded from intrusion. Were we debarred from uninterrupted intercourse with the dearest relative, except daily or weekly at a fixed hour, as some state prisoners and victims of persecution have been, it is possible that more affection would be expressed, more consolation sought and obtained, in those limited interviews, than while in the possession of constant and undisturbed access. Thus we may believe, that, where the heart really craves spiritual blessings, a season of devotion is more beneficially used by the man of business, in his treasured allotment of sacred time, than by the hermit in his cell or wilderness, where nothing need interrupt a free and protracted intercourse with Heaven.

The case, however, of the most busy among

Christians is far from analogous to that of the prisoner, restricted to a few stated interviews of affection. We cannot forget the privilege which enables the most active to multiply their opportunities of devotion; that of seizing brief intervals of mental engagement, for devout thoughts and aspirations. No restraint, no society, no interruption, can wholly forbid access to a Friend ever present and invisible, "to whom all hearts are open." If we could happily so control our minds, that they should turn and ascend, (even in our unclaimed moments,) to the best objects of meditation and desire, then the most conscientious economists of time would not have to reckon those portions of it lost in which they had resorted to no visible employment. They are lost, only because we are slow, and poor proficient in the secret direction of the mind: or they are partially lost, because we are not so "fervent in spirit" as to render the contemplation intent, and the prayer definite; which alone could give a substantial character to each.

Fenelon, a man full of cares himself, gives the following counsels as the dictates of long, personal experience:—"We must reserve the needful hours for communion with God in prayer. Persons who are in considerable

offices, have so many indispensable duties to fulfil, that scarcely any time remains to them for communion with God, except they strictly apply themselves to its regulation. It is necessary then to be firm in adopting and observing a rule. Our rigour in this may seem excessive; but without it all falls into confusion. We are dissipated and relaxed. We lose our strength. We are insensibly at a distance from God." On the other point, (frequency of mental devotion,) his advice is more explicit and minute:—"We must turn all our moments to account; when waiting for some one, when going from place to place, when with persons so willing to talk that we have only to let them proceed, one lifts up the heart for an instant, to God, and one is thus renovated for further engagements. We must lay hold of all intervening moments. It is not with piety as with temporal affairs. Those demand undisturbed and stated periods for unbroken and long application; but piety needs not an application so lengthened, close and continuous. In a moment one may recall the presence of God, love him, adore him, offer to him what is done or suffered, and tranquillize before him all the agitations of the heart."

To the same purpose he elsewhere says, "If you are not at liberty to reserve large portions

of time, do not neglect to economize the less. Half a quarter of an hour secured, by this care and faithfulness, from amidst pressing avocations, will be in the sight of God worth whole hours given to him in times of freedom. Besides, several little intervals collected through the day, will together make up something considerable. You will even perhaps derive from this method the advantage of remembering God more frequently, than if you gave to Him only one assigned period."

It may be desirable to subjoin to this the testimony of a layman, whose claims to the character of a man of business are, if possible, still less questionable. Sir Matthew Hale of England, filled the successive offices of Chief Baron of the Exchequer and Chief Justice of the King's Bench, during fifteen years; and, besides a previous judicial appointment, had passed his life in the laborious pursuits which qualify one for such a station. After having for a time neglected study at Oxford, (where he was noted as robust and expert in fencing,) at the age of twenty he entered at Lincoln's Inn, where for many years he studied sixteen hours a day.*

* Dr. Burnet's Life of Hale. We have also his own testimony to the variety and amount of his employments:—"I

In one of this judge's papers, "The account of the good steward," which the friend who published them calls "his very picture," he states, "I have endeavoured to husband this short, uncertain, important talent (time) as well as I could—by dedicating and setting apart some portion of my time to prayer and reading of thy word; which I have constantly and peremptorily observed, whatever occasions interposed, or importunity persuaded the contrary." We see, therefore, that he gives advice founded on his own practice, when in another place he enjoins, "Be obstinately constant to your devotions at certain set times;" and we may form the same opinion as to the following observations and counsels:—"Whatever you do, be very careful to maintain in your heart a habit of religion. This will put itself into acts, even although you are not in a solemn posture of religious worship, and will lend you multitudes of religious applications to Almighty God, upon all occasions and interventions, which will not at all hinder you in your

have been near fifty years a man as much conversant in business, and that of moment and importance, as most men;—my hands and mind have been as full of secular business, both before and since I was a judge, as it may be any man's in England."

secular occasions, but better and further you. It will give a tincture of devotion upon all your secular employments, and turn those actions which are materially civil or natural, into the very true and formal nature of religion; and make your whole life to be an unintermitted life of duty to God. For this habit of piety in your soul will not lie sleeping and unactive, but almost in every hour of the day will put forth actual exertings of itself in applications of short occasional prayers, thanksgiving, dependence, resort unto that God that is always near you, and lodgeth in a manner in your heart by his fear and love and habitual religion towards him. Thus, (he adds,) you doubly redeem your time. 1. In those natural and civil concerns which are not only permitted, but in a great measure enjoined by Almighty God. 2. At the same time exercising acts of religious duties, observance and veneration, by perpetuated, or at least frequently reiterated, though short acts of devotion to him. And this is the great art of Christian chemistry, to convert those acts that are materially natural or civil, into acts truly and formally religious; whereby the whole course of this life is both truly and interpretatively a service to Almighty God, and an uninterrupted state of religion; which is the

best and noblest and most universal redemption of his time.”

These extracts, even here abridged, are not recommended by a neat or concise style; they were the extemporaneous unrevised writing of a man of business, published not only without his knowledge, but against his wish. While valuable for their piety and wisdom, they are more than doubly so as exhibiting what must be supposed, in a great measure, the writer's habits and rules of life. If there be any case in which we may conclude a substantial and steadfast practice to have been the basis of excellent rules, it is that of a character so firm and regular as Judge Hale's, sketching a plan of religious life, not for the public eye, but only for the eye of his children and intimate connexions.

The temper of mind which these eminent persons have described, should by no means be considered as adverse to a well-regulated cheerfulness and freedom of spirit. Fenelon warns his correspondents against constrained, austere and absent manners. A fund of genuine cheerfulness should be created in the mind, by the heartfelt consecration of ordinary acts and circumstances to God's will and service. The habitual reference of all our customary pursuits to his good pleasure, is sufficient to adorn and dignify them all.

XXIV.

ON THE PREVALENT UNBELIEF WHICH FRUSTRATES PRAYER, AND THE IMPERFECT FAITH WHICH MAY BE ERRONEOUSLY IMAGINED TO DO SO.

It is evident that the founder of our religion and his inspired followers have treated faith in divine revelation and unbelief of it as qualities or acts of a moral kind, the one acceptable to God, the other criminal in his sight. This statement has been cavilled at by rejecters of the gospel, who have plausibly argued, that our viewing a narrative or a proposition as true or untrue, is an act merely intellectual, and in no respect moral. But even if it were not observable, (in contradiction to this,) how greatly the wills and passions of men influence their intellectual acts and habits, yet might those reasonings be sufficiently refuted by considering the natural and proximate effects of such unbelief. If a chemist should show me a vase of apparently clear water or pure air, and say—On strictly analyzing this, I can detect no deleterious ingredient,—great as may be his skill, and unable as I may be to confute him scientifically, yet if I find my own

health, and that of others, impaired by tasting or inhaling the fluid, I shall rather trust in experience than in the most skilful analysis.

This comparison might serve if we could only ascertain some latent connexion between unbelief and moral evil, without being able to discover a reason of that connexion. But the reason is easily discerned. Unbelief of divine truths is a destitution of the only efficient principles by which the moral and spiritual life can be sustained. The experimentalist may display a vessel from which air has been more or less exhausted, and may tell us there is nothing pernicious in it; but if we discover a deficiency of support for animal and vegetable life, we shall think him guilty of a poor equivocation. An exclusion of those truths which are super-eminently moral, such as the perfect holiness or rectitude of God, and the proper duty of man to glorify and enjoy him, (truths which revelation alone demonstrates,) is an exclusion of the only sufficient aliment of true virtue. We may as well expect life and sound where there is no air, as to expect the genuine exercise of real goodness from him who has no faith in God.

It may however be said, that the physical vacuum is artificial, and that he who creates it is

accountable for its effects; but the destitution of faith is natural and inevitable to my mind.

This we should dispute, even were it possible for the mind of any man to be in this void or negative state with regard to moral opinions: we should say, although it be natural, it may not be inevitable. Prejudice and insensibility have closed and sealed the mind against the admission of what is good and true: let these be removed, and the most essential and valuable truths will then find entrance. But such a moral void, such a blank and neutral state of mind is not in fact possible. Evil thoughts and principles must rush into the heart of man when good ones are excluded; nay, the former are already there; and to describe unbelief under the figure of a vacuum, is merely to say that the mind is void of the principles of good, because it is pre-occupied and filled with those of evil. The less there is of religious belief, the more there must be of irreligious sentiment; and the greater the evolution or the influx of this, by the agency of bad passions or of bad associations, the more completely is religious faith excluded.

This figure is indeed founded on a view of faith and unbelief, which some have thought incorrect, namely, that they admit of degrees; but it is a view which the language of Scripture

amply sanctions,* with which experience accords, and which enables us to apprehend how an act of prayer may be performed, and be in some sense real, while there is yet a prevalence of unbelief which frustrates it.

That such is the fact, I believe many persons who practise secret prayer, must be painfully conscious, although its explanation may not be easy to them. He who is not conscious of sometimes praying with a measure of unbelief which it may be justly feared will render his prayer ineffectual, is either a person of great singleness and fervour of spirit, or else has not searched far enough into the folds of his own heart. For we appeal to those who closely examine the motive and temper of their devotions, whether it be not too possible to pray, even in secret, with a deplorably imperfect exercise of faith. We may be actuated by habit, together with a general conviction of the duty and advantage of prayer, and the sinfulness of its omission; by a feeble wish, even at the worst, to avoid evil and pursue good; but still we may have a secret presentiment that our prayers will not at this time overcome the

* Various passages speak of "great" and of "little faith:"—of its "increase" or "growth:"—of its "weakness," "strength," and "fulness."

corrupt bias. We may pray, to soothe and pacify conscience, and to acquire the specious plea that we have sought divine help, but we may yet have no firm desire or design to unite our best efforts with our prayers, in reliance on the help which we seek. The suppressed language of the heart, in such cases, seems to be this;—If God will work irresistibly, if He will check and turn my inclination so powerfully that it shall be at no cost of mine, I shall be rescued and thankful. I will pray therefore, although my prevalent desire runs counter to my prayer; but I scarcely expect success. Have we never, before secret devotion, had some such indistinct views in the mind as these—To-day I shall be tempted to the edge of a sinful pleasure, or to the neglect of a self-denying duty? I feel how great a weight there is in the scale of wrong inclination. I must put some weight into the other scale, that of wisdom and piety. I will therefore pray as I am accustomed to do. I will ask for spiritual strength and grace to be kept from evil: but yet I foresee that unless far more be given than I at present expect or desire, the scale of inclination will preponderate. There is in this temper of heart an awful approach to trifling with Omniscience; a sort of prevarication with Him “from

whom no secrets are hid;" which as far as it prevails is no less unbelieving than presumptuous. While the mind acquiesces in such a kind of self-deceit, it cannot be supposed, nor is it indeed anticipated, that prayer will be effectual.

Such being our distressing experimental knowledge, (that an act of secret prayer may take place, and yet be frustrated by prevailing unbelief,) we may add that the explanation of this fact seems to depend on the principle before named; that faith and unbelief admit of various degrees, and may thus co-exist in the mind. If they were not only contrary qualities, but each necessarily complete and exclusive of its opposite, it would not be conceivable that any one under the power of unbelief should intend or attempt prayer. If he appear to pray, it must be an act of mere hypocrisy. But admitting that proportions of faith and unbelief may be mingled in the same mind, that the habitual predominance of faith implies or includes an effective reception of the gospel, and that there are cases in which this predominance is for a time doubtful, and others in which, without an entire absence of faith, unbelief either habitually or occasionally prevails,—then we have scope for a supposition which agrees with experience, namely, that there may be a degree of faith

which prompts even to secret prayer, and yet a prevalent unbelief which frustrates it. Now, it is very important for all who are conscious of a lamented measure of unbelief, to ascertain whether their state of mind needs to be essentially changed and rectified, in order to the success of prayer; so that if it do, this change may first be sought; that if it do not, groundless mistrust and fear may be removed.

The true indication of that predominant unbelief, whether temporary or habitual, which, while it continues, must prostrate prayer, is a prevalence of insincerity in purpose and desire; a practical bent towards evil, while we are yet in some lesser degree desiring, and in some sense imploring, that which is good. Faith, if we may extend the former figure by alluding to the phenomena of the air, is like the rarefied fluid which causes the æronaut to ascend; unbelief, (or that stream of evil thoughts and tendencies for which unbelief makes room, and which therefore may borrow its name,) is like that gross atmosphere which enters or acts as the rarer fluid is displaced, and brings him down to earth. But the principles of faith and unbelief are less perceptible and measurable than the fluids by which we would illustrate their operation. As it is by his actual ascending or de-

scending motion that the aeronaut must often judge what is the state of the balloon; so it is by trying to ascertain the practical bias and tendency of the soul in our devotions that we must judge whether faith or unbelief prevails; consequently, whether we are likely to attain the blessings we ask.

If some professed Christians were to watch the movement of their own hearts, would it not be found, that, even amidst their devotions, there is an internal dispute with themselves, and serious wavering on the whole question, whether they will give themselves to God or no? Whether they will, in very deed, and heartily, accept the Son of God as a Saviour and Ruler, or only receive him vaguely as the world receives him? Whether they will unreservedly dedicate themselves to Jehovah, or whether they will go on to compromise between Him and their own corrupt inclinations and various idols; and all this with a certain leaning and preference toward the wrong?

A person who thus habitually and yieldingly wavers toward evil, cannot reasonably expect success in his entreaties for the blessing of a holy God. Could we suppose a prince would be likely to grant the petitions of a subject whom he had secret means of knowing to be still disaffect-

ed in heart, still disposed to withhold or defer a genuine and grateful submission, and sometimes meditating the transfer of his allegiance to an usurper? When, without renouncing prayer, we "regard iniquity," we are in effect making the vain attempt to "serve two" (or many) "masters." Such a state has been aptly compared in scripture to the motion of a wave, "driven of the wind and tossed." There is no steady current in the soul, bearing it towards God and happiness; but it is like a billow, sparkling, perhaps, while scattered, but scattered not the less; dashed upon rocks—rolled over quicksands—lost in the whirlpool.

But there may be a more apparent and promising desire to serve God than exists in the character just referred to, and yet, it may be, attended with a self-delusion which frustrates prayer. Piety may only have its turn with many changing inclinations of the soul. The feelings and imagination are perhaps sometimes as sensibly borne in this as in other directions. But the fluctuating desire of the best blessings is succeeded by a stronger, more effectual and more enduring bent toward what is sinful. He who has been accustomed to these unhappy variations, cannot but, in some measure, suspect, even while he feels pious wishes, that they

have no root, but will be displaced and supplanted, like many which preceded them ;—that he is himself “unstable as water.” For, we apprehend, there is a difference in kind, and this not undiscernible, between a steady desire that the word and spirit of God should rule us, and a flow of feeling which is deceptive in its rise, and soon fails. The fallaciousness of this may be estimated, even while it exists, from its similarity to other emotions which have passed away. Such a mind is not so fitly imaged by a wave, in the ordinary sense of that word, as by irregular tides, often flowing and ebbing with unlooked-for frequency.*

Now while the subject of this allowed fickleness, frames his devotions on the supposition that his heart is right in the sight of God, he cannot reasonably expect the benefits of prayer. Let him rather, in his best moments, never seek to disguise from himself his unhappy instability, but fervently implore of the Holy Spirit to fix his wavering will, and give constancy to every pious affection. Thus praying, he may justly appropriate to himself much scriptural encouragement.

* Such a remarkable tide was witnessed in several ports of Great Britain in the summer of 1824, running in contrary directions, hourly, or half-hourly.

If a youth, who has given many and recent proofs of caprice and unsteadiness, go to his parent, or tutor, and beg to be assisted in some art, or to be indulged in some privilege, which requires the exercise of opposite qualities to these, the discerning friend who detects the prevalent temper even in the midst of his solicitations, may well reply—No; because to-morrow or next week you will desire no such thing. You are even aware of this at the present moment, if you will but consult experience, and examine your disposition strictly. Ask me rather, first to teach you a right estimate of things, and influence you to a just steadfastness of purpose. When these are acquired, you will be prepared to receive other benefits and further enjoyments; which, you well know, I shall rejoice to communicate.

The two states of mind which have been glanced at, evince a strong prevalence of insincerity and unbelief; not only sufficient, while it subsists, to frustrate prayer, but also disproving the fact of spiritual renovation. It is here, however, requisite to observe, that, under the force of particular temptations, there may arise a sinful wavering, and even averseness to what piety dictates, in characters essentially differing from each of those described: even in those who

possess (in the judgment of charity,) a renewed mind, and who have a consciousness of desires to serve God, and to partake his favour, which are genuine, and which ordinarily prevail. The heart, for a season, may be faithless to these its best purposes and convictions; hurried from its most settled aims by the revolt of passion, or "drawn away by its own desire, and enticed," and making but a faint resistance to this misleading force. Now, when prayer is offered in such a disposition, there is, for the time, a prevalence of unbelief and insincerity in it; and consequently, little reason to hope for its success. This is indeed the state of feeling which I attempted to trace when arguing the possibility of praying in secret without prevalent faith. We do not speak of a mere conflict in the mind, but of a sort of treachery, for the time, among its better principles; a meditated concession and surrender of its convictions to unbelief and sin; like the temper of a garrison, who almost consent to yield and capitulate, while they still raise the signals of opposition, and adhere to the forms of defence.

Whenever we are conscious of this temper, we have a most melancholy internal proof of the duplicity and depraved weakness of our moral nature; and such as must always induce,

while we have any tenderness of conscience, or remains of genuine faith, very painful doubts as to the reality of our conversion; for, its not inducing any such doubts, would certainly show that no faith, founded on scriptural principles as to the evil of sin and the necessity of holiness, exists within us.

Yet it would be wrong to despair of our spiritual state on account of the occasional prevalence of unbelief and insincerity in our prayers; or to conclude that this, their temporary character, (if it be the subject of grief and penitence,) will frustrate those which are offered in a better spirit.

No Christian, perhaps, will pronounce himself absolutely free from an admixture of unbelief and insincerity of heart. It is therefore very important to our spiritual advancement, as well as comfort, not to imagine that this alloy can disprove our possession of real faith, or render all our prayers fruitless.

I would, accordingly, remark, that there may even be a temper of mind not so occasional as that last mentioned, and, indeed, in appearance, nearly allied to the two former, yet in fact far from being identical with those, or similar in its consequence. For there may exist a yet unsubdued degree of practical vacillation, or there

may be still a remaining struggle, as to the entire renunciation of sin, and the unhesitating choice of God's service, or as to the absolute and confiding acceptance of sovereign mercy through a divine Redeemer—which should by no means lead to the conclusion that prayer will be inefficacious, provided there be a sincere and usually prevailing desire in the heart of him who prays, (although combatted and almost overborne sometimes by opposite desires,) that the will of God be done, and his truth received; that heavenly light and guidance may be obtained, that grace and strength may be given, and that good may overcome evil: and provided also that these devotional desires be attended by a practical effort to “keep himself from his iniquity.” It cannot be doubted that somewhat of this struggle subsists in the mind of young inquirers, and unconfirmed believers; and it would be most erroneous to infer from it that their supplications will be vain. If amidst every varied conflict, the suppliant still in some sense “consent unto the law that it is good,” if he in any measure “delight in it after the inward man,” if he long to be delivered from all secret reluctance and enmity—there is the strongest encouragement to a steadfast hope that he shall be heard and sustained, and that

“the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus” will at length “make him free from the law of sin and death.”

Still less can it be concluded that he who endures inward conflicts of a more speculative or theoretical kind, is to despond of the success of prayer. We may, (whether by suggestions of human or superhuman adversaries, or by some inherent causes,) “be shaken in mind,” and “troubled” as to the very basis of religious faith—such as the truth of the Scriptures, the meaning of their weightiest doctrines, the mysteries of Providence, or the very existence of God. Some eminently pious men have left it on record that such reasonings and suspicions have occasionally harassed and distressed them even in acts of solemn worship, or in the prospect of those exercises. The mind has been deeply agitated with doubts, and in this sense has resembled the driven and restless wave; but who will maintain that, while “instant in prayer,” under these adverse and oppressive feelings, they did not “ask in faith?” Their faith was surely proved and manifested by their perseverance in the duty of supplication, and their adherence to the hope which prompts it, amidst these sore disquietudes. Though moved like the broken billows, they resembled more truly the vessels anchored on those billows, or moored to the

rock which they vainly assault ; though “tossed with tempests” long and vehemently, they were still securely holden, and at length, “there was a great calm.”

And if these internal conflicts, even respecting fundamental truths, cannot be supposed to frustrate prayer, still less can the want of full assurance as to our personal interest in the blessings of the gospel, be thought to do so. The number of Christians in modern days, who combine a full assurance of salvation with a spirit of unimpeachable humility, I have not observed to be great. There would doubtless be much oftener a happy approximation to it, if we exercised, together with a more simple, grateful confidence in the divine promises, a higher measure of devout vigilance, and of consistency in Christian deportment. Those persons, however, if such there be, who account this full assurance a necessary mark of true faith, must at least be deemed to err far more widely, than certain divines of great piety who seem to have thought it unattainable.

The painful fact remains unaltered by reasonings, that many do entertain habitual fears as to the genuineness of their own faith, (consequently as to their real conversion and eventual salvation,) which we have reason to hope are groundless ; that many others have similar apprehen-

sions and suspicions which do not appear unfounded; and that many whose general piety we cannot question, are yet brought, by occasional declensions and relapses, into that state of temporary doubt and despondency which is their natural, although distressing effect. Now, different as these characters and their respective states may be, there is this agreement in them, that each entertaining doubts whether he has real faith, no one of them can be sure that he really "asks in faith." But it would be a pernicious subtlety, fatal to his spiritual progress, working the very evil which it presupposes, to imagine, that on account of this uncertainty, prayer will be ineffectual. It would imply that nothing but that "full assurance of faith,"* (which if it exist on earth in the sense some attach to it, must be the perfection, the ultimate limit, of spiritual attainment,) can in fact qualify us to ask with success for spiritual blessings; so that the pre-requisite for effectual prayer would seem itself to render prayer superfluous.

Let those who are visited with such self-impeping refinements of distrust, first undertake to prove (not by vague and dark suspicions, but by a strict demonstration, which they never can produce) that they possess no grain or spark of

* Hebrews x. 22.

faith; and then let them begin to conclude that prayer will be necessarily fruitless. They may indeed be "of little faith;" so little as to induce doubts of its existence; but our Saviour ascribed miraculous efficacy to that minute measure of faith which he compared to the least of the seeds that are in the earth. And if such a measure of faith "wrought miracles," why shall it not obtain divine blessings from Him who "giveth to all men liberally," and who says, "Every one that asketh receiveth?" As a further scriptural confirmation, it may be observed, that were the various conflicts of unbelief or fear with weak and imperfect faith which have been mentioned, to be regarded as frustrating prayer, then he who entreated of Jesus the cure of his suffering child, and said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," had no ground to expect success: for this language itself, and his previous address, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us," strongly imply a conflict of doubt and distrust, both as to the power of Him to whom he prayed, and as to his own possession of the requisite state of mind. Yet the benefit which, (though with a faith thus feeble,) he implored in earnest sincerity, was at once conferred.

Nothing which has been here advanced on

the compatibility of a low degree of faith with success in prayer, is to be so construed as to conflict with the position first defended, that unbelief in divine truth is strictly connected with moral evil. The connexion is doubtless with different modifications of evil, and these differing greatly in malignancy; but we suppose it is never wholly absent.

With respect, for example, to the last temper of mind adverted to, that of doubt as to the reality of our faith and conversion; I think we may affirm that it is always, in part at least, excited by the subsistence and perception of moral evil in ourselves. It could have no place in a mind perfectly renewed in holiness, absolutely freed from sin, unless we can suppose that such a sinless mind might be subjected to the malady of utterly false perception. The void of faith and piety, which we sometimes may mournfully apprehend to exist within us, is partially real: and so far as it is real, it is formed by that "body of sin" which our inward view discovers. Without doubt, in morbid cases, the spectre is exceedingly magnified and multiplied; so that evil may be conceived to reign throughout the soul when this is very far from being the case; though there is more or less of evil existing, upon which the illusion founds itself. There

is a real foe, though fear has invested him with a seeming ubiquity and dominion which are not real. However distressful these doubts, and however inevitable they may appear, sin is their prime source; and having such an origin as well as subject, it is no wonder that they are deeply afflictive.

And in regard to speculative questionings or misgivings concerning religious truth, even though they should be invariably matter of unfeigned sorrow and repugnance, (which would go nearest to prove that he whose mind they assailed was not morally culpable in respect to them,) yet might it be asked—Was there not a past period of life, when they were welcome to the mind? Did not pride and sensuality formerly invite them? Were not early habits of thought and practice formed, by which these “evil reasonings” were nurtured in the heart? And now, according to the well-known laws of human nature, must it not be expected that the same trains of speculation, however grievous to the renewed mind, should continue sometimes to haunt it; especially when pride or sensuality, by the agency of temptation, evolves itself in the soul, producing (to revert to a former illustration) a proportionate void of faith?

If we ascribe these unbelieving thoughts to Satanic suggestion, (as their sudden and violent incursion has induced many Christians to do,) this may seem, at first sight, to take away the moral evil of their mere existence from the individual; yet it should be remembered, that if the guileful enemy of truth inject a poison, it is because he detects room for its admission; there is, as it were, some recess within the soul, which he "findeth empty" of pious truths and sentiments, because replete with a subtle element of evil, in affinity with the dark mischief he would infuse.

We may in this manner regard all unbelief as having, although in different modes and measures, a connexion with sin: and yet in perfect consistency with this, we may maintain the encouraging view which has been urged, that nothing but an unbelief habitually predominant can frustrate prayer.

And on this last state of mind, (which was the first delineated,) I would observe, in concluding, that however it may annul, (while it subsists,) the benefit of prayer, it cannot annul the duty. He who is conscious of a general repugnance to God's will, or of a very unstable, fallacious wish to fulfil it, is not therefore released from the duty of praying; for no crea-

ture capable of volition can be exempt from the duty of seeking his Creator's approbation, and his own true happiness. So long as his prayers (if offered) continue to be forms of hypocrisy or acts of self-delusion, they must continue fruitless. But he is bound to pray for "a new heart;" for the true "quickenings" of the "incorruptible seed;" in order that he may afterwards receive those successive "showers of blessing" which the Giver of life will not withhold; which will rear it into a fair and vigorous plant, and cause it to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. If he refuses to entreat that primary gift, it is a moral incapacity, a depraved will, which influences him. If he really and perseveringly implores it, the word of God declares "it shall be given;" and then, without question, he will gratefully record, that it was God's preventing mercy which inclined him to seek the heavenly boon.

If, however, we cannot disprove, and dare not deny, that the beginnings of "a right spirit" have been given us, that we may have some abiding desire for spiritual happiness, and some kind and degree of faith, (however weak and diminutive,) in the great things which revelation declares, then it behoves us to pray with a more hopeful and confiding spirit; to grasp, (though

it be with a feeble hand,) the inestimable promise; and by the very act and exercise of faith, and the aids it will procure, to give to it a new expansion through the soul, that it may rise superior to the noxious vapour which now depresses and obscures it.

XXV.

ON THE DEVOTIONAL TEMPER PROPER TO CONVALESCENCE.

Not only is the human frame, in some instances, so constituted, as to be able to resist or exclude, in a great measure, painful and debilitating sensations; but there appear to be minds possessing so happy a degree of independence on the body, as to be far less affected than others by equal measures of fatigue or weakness, disorder or pain. Whether this privilege be the effect of a mental and moral strength intrinsically greater or more able to control or withdraw itself from mere sensation—or whether it arises from a less strict and sympathetic con-

nexion between thought, or those organs which develop it, and the other organs, no earthly physiologist can tell. The question cannot even be stated with precision. It turns on that close secret within us, which the acutest reasoner should be humbled by his incapacity to unlock, viz., the subsistence of a thinking power in a material structure.

But many minds, (and those not among the least perspicacious,) so far from enjoying that peculiar independence, are exceedingly influenced by changes of bodily feeling. Slight ailments produce in them such indisposedness for thought, as nothing but the strong sense of duty or the impulse of circumstances can overcome. When the sensations are heightened into positive pain or unequivocal debility, then intellectual vigour (except by some special counteraction which cannot be ordinarily looked for) is proportionately broken or relaxed.

There is beauty in that simple scriptural figure, (as applied to the moral and religious constancy of a patriarch,) "his bow abode in strength;" and it is no unapt image of that bodily vigour without which devotional energy is often found to languish. Perhaps this sense is included in the figure as used by Job, "My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was re-

newed in my hand." The bow is a delicate, though a primitive weapon. Too much tension makes it unelastic; and dampness may so relax the string, that it will abide in strength no longer.

How painful to the Christian, if in seasons when he is most admonished of dependence on the Sovereign of life, and when mortal disease, though not perhaps imminent, is far more feelingly anticipated than in days of health, he thus finds a diminished power and readiness to commune with his divine supporter; with Him who, when "flesh" shall irrecoverably "fail," can alone be "the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever!"

Yet, although the tone of health which conduces to mental animation be rightly termed a privilege, we can conceive that to some minds its partial absence may be always salutary; and that its greater occasional interruptions are, to all Christians, a means of spiritual good; though it may only serve to disturb that "temple-haunting" pride, which, even amidst the warmth of real devotion, "hath found a nest for herself." The snares of false worship are remote from our eyes and from our thoughts. Even if our birth-place did not preclude temptation to gross and palpable idolatries, few could "set up a golden image in the plain:" but many

may resemble the Assyrian in the dreams of pride, setting up a visionary image in the heart. Not that these dreams are sent of God, but He permits our vanity to raise them, and would teach us the lowliness of wisdom by their fall. When the faculties are well tuned, and the expansion of thought and exuberance of feeling in prayer or contemplation elate the soul, then, amidst all our humiliating tenets and fluent confessions, the personal idol shines unseen, a "form" not indeed "terrible," but full of grace, whose "brightness is excellent." But let sickness assail the body; let a distempered langour overspread the mind; and where is our household god of talent and elocution now? His showy attributes have vanished; his wand and his wings are "broken together;" he is become "like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor." Thus are we taught, like the men of Lystra, to "turn from these vanities," (which, though in our case latent, are not unreal,) and to bow in fainting humility before the living God; "cast down" under the conviction that self is nothing, and that He is All in All.

But there is a further good tendency in the disabilities and depression which sickness creates; whether as they respect the duties of active life or those of worship.

Even were it certain that the servants of God on earth, (taken collectively,) honour him more as agents than as sufferers, still might each intermission of bodily and mental strength eminently promote his service on the whole, did we always rise or emerge with a chastened ardour, with a purer, steadier zeal, to improve the precious intervals, which may each be brief, and which must all terminate ere long.

Some of the northern rivers have their course suspended in successive lakes. The stream which was rapid before, but tinged with earthly mixtures from many rills, here becomes passive. Lately, it could bear forward the laden barge with swiftness; now, the lightest canoe scarcely drifts upon the outstretched waters. But this inaction is purifying. All that was turbid subsides. And, when liberated from their bed of supineness, these clear, smooth waves rush with accumulated strength down new and longer rapids, gliding amidst all obstacles, strong for every burden, hastening to the sea.

Will it not be thus, in some measure, with the convalescent Christian? When mercy first "opened his heart," as it "clave the rocks in the wilderness," and waters of devotion and benevolence gushed forth, they flowed (it may

be) with a degree of turbulence; their course was not quite noiseless; they were not unstained by the passions or unswollen by pride; but He whose word created and called forth the stream, "turneth it whithersoever He will." He has brought it into a wide and lengthened valley "of the shadow of death;" He has said, "Be still, and know that I am God;" He has made it languish, but not stagnate, only to be quieted and defecated there. And now when He is pleased to give it egress, and bids it renew its full career in a channel prepared for its accelerated force, will it not flow forth, not merely more swift and strong, but more deep and pure and silent, than if it had never been "poured out" in that unwelcome suspension?

Surely thus, at least, it behoves the Christian to resume his course after a season of restraint and inactivity. Besides having been incapacitated for other accustomed pursuits, he has, perhaps, found it often impracticable to lift up his soul continuously to God. By reading or even hearing the Scriptures, his weakened and susceptible frame has been quickly exhausted. The alleviation of pain, or present repose, has been more thirsted for, than that sovereign good which he accounts his treasure; more consciously valued than those promises which

suffering ought to endear. As yet he cannot have forgotten these mortifying accompaniments of disease. The healthful should not willingly forget them. Rather ought they (by express effort) sometimes to recal or anticipate feelings which (except by a most unusual immunity) must be shared by themselves in days or years that "draw nigh." But to the convalescent this is no effort. Those recent feelings are still vividly depicted on his mind. If then he be yet in doubt as to his genuine participation of revealed blessings, what recollection can more strongly prompt the "diligence" which would "make his calling and election sure;"—sure in the impartial testimony of conscience, and by the faithful tests of Scripture? What can stimulate us to this augmented diligence, if not the uneffaced perception that a few hours of sickness may suffice to enervate the mind, perhaps irretrievably till death? If, on the contrary, an enlightened and cheering hope had been attained, and was not obscured during bodily illness, or is already brightened with reviving health, this happy state can never make pointless the striking admonitions which are addressed, by such changes, to the heart of a true servant of God. He who only assumed "the form of a servant," that beloved Son who

is the Father's "sole complacency," asked, with reference to his own course, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" He spoke, with intentness, of "the works which the Father had given him to finish:" and he said in prayer, with holy joy, at the retrospect of his labours, and the foresight of that decease which he was just accomplishing—"I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do."

The distance from the moral perfection and effective greatness of His works, to the adulteration and littleness of ours, is by no means forgotten. It does but give strength to our inference, that the fullest certainty of already possessing the divine approbation can be no plea for slighting one precious and precarious opportunity "to do God service." What an unfilial contrast would such a plea present, not only to the temper of God's "own Son," but to that of his faithful missionary; who made the sure and swift approach of full felicity his chosen argument for new devotedness!—"Now is it high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer."*

Whether the period of bodily convalescence

* Romans xiii. 11.

be that of spiritual confidence and gladness, or not—it must, in either case, be a season for peculiar gratitude; in the one, that time and strength are given for attainments yet unsecured; in both, that what was “grievous” is removed, and that new means are given us of serving our Divine Deliverer. These will now be far the more justly appreciated. The Christian may become, (to the thoughtless visitors of that chamber which he is about to quit,) like the prophetic watchman in the oracle of Dumah. They ask him—“What of the night?—How have you passed these hours of wearisome seclusion?”—He answers, “The morning cometh:—and also the night! If ye will inquire, inquire ye. Return,—come.” The prophecy, as such, is among the most obscure; but this moral use of it would be no enigma. You ask me, “What of the night?”—it were fruitless to describe the sensations of this constrained retirement, which you could not realise. Rather let me say, with grateful acknowledgment, “The morning cometh.” I hope to use what may remain of this life’s brief and changeful day, with far more fervour of spirit and oneness of purpose. For now I am struck with the heartfelt conviction, that, there cometh “also the night;”—that night, which, for these mortal eyes, shall be followed

by no daybreak, till they are unsealed to the awful splendour of "the new heavens and the new earth." Oh, could I transfuse into your mind the sentiments which now fill my own, and perpetuate their impressiveness in both! "If you will inquire" into the will of the Supreme—into the moral state, the real wants, the vast capabilities of your spirit—into the crisis and the prospects of an illimitable being;—"inquire" now—while health remains unbroken, and your powers are unoppressed! "Return" from the wanderings of fancy, from the day-dream of sublunary hope, and muse awhile on those unimaginable visions which the night of death will bring! "Come," now, before your day declines, "and the shadows of evening are stretched out," and accept from redeeming mercy the pledges of admission to that heavenly dwelling, of which it is predicted, "There shall be no night there." "Behold the Lamb of God!"—he is "the light thereof;" he must be the light to guide you thither: his righteousness your sole title, his spirit your sole meetness, for that inheritance.

Thus might a convalescent Christian, (imbued with the deepened sense of revealed truths,) be led to address others, and in part to admonish himself. At least that ancient warning from a royal pen cannot fail to be, from recent experi-

ence, more deeply graven on his heart—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device—in the grave,"—nor, probably, in the nearer and darker paths which lead to it.

Not that we can infer with certainty, from a past degree of inability for devout exercises in sickness, that this will be augmented in the closing scene, or even that it will not be greatly removed. The waters which are spread powerless and passive in the valley (to resume our former figure) may there be made the mirror of a glowing sunset, and "airs from heaven" may waft the bark on their calm surface, which itself seems motionless.

While Doddridge, emaciated by deep seated consumption, was on his voyage to a grave at Lisbon, he several times said to his beloved wife—"I cannot express to you what a morning I have had; such delightful and transporting views of the heavenly world is my Father now indulging me with as no words can express." Before his embarkation, he said to a friend—"My soul is vigorous and healthy, notwithstanding the hastening decay of this frail and tottering body. The most distressing nights to this frail body have been as the beginning of heaven to my soul. God hath, as it were, let

heaven down upon me in those nights of weakness and waking."

Still more instructing and consolatory, because more copious, are the dying conversations of Halyburton,* who has himself recorded his previous severe and frequent conflicts, through many years, with speculative unbelief and various temptation. While enduring extreme debility and pain, he said to his physician—"Verily there is a reality in religion. Few have the lively impressions of it.—The little

* He was a learned and pious minister in the Scotch church, professor of divinity at St. Andrew's; who died September 23, 1712, æt. 37. In the year preceding his death, was born his philosophic countryman, who found it "as clear as any purpose of nature can be, that the whole scope and intention of man's creation is limited to the present life; and that those who inculcate the doctrine of a future state have no other motive than to gain a livelihood, and to acquire power and riches in this life."—See *Monthly Review* for June, 1784, vol. 70, p. 428.—A brother philosopher has invited the world to admire the satisfied and facetious exit of Hume; but simple people will still prefer the last thoughts and prospects of Halyburton. It may be that some refined reader will have a degree of involuntary distaste for the mode of expression, in part, of the following quotations: (and it would be increased by reading the whole memoir;) but, besides that this was the language of Scotland, and of the seventeenth century, what sort of taste do we detect in ourselves, except a taste for fiction, when we would have research of words and elegance of style from the dying?

acquaintance I have had with God within these two days has been better than ten thousand times the pains I have all my life been at about religion." At another time—"These fourteen or fifteen years I have been studying the promises; but I have seen more of the book of God this night than all that time." To his students—"If I had you lads all about me now, I would give you a lesson of divinity: however, this will be a standing witness of the reality, solidity, power and efficacy of these truths I taught you; for by the power of that grace revealed in these truths, here I lie pained without pain, without strength and yet strong. I think it would not be a lost session this, though you were all here." On the sabbath, two days before his decease, he said—"This night my skin has burnt, my heart has panted, my body has been bruised on the bed with weakness, and there is a sore upon me that is racking my spirit, and my heart has been sometimes like to fail; and yet I cannot say but the Lord, after all this trouble, holds me in health in the midst of all. If the Lord should give such support, and continue me years in this case, I have no reason to complain." On the next day he observed to a minister—"I think, brother, my case is a pretty fair demonstration of the immortality of the

soul." And afterwards—"Indeed I am patient, and yet 'not I, but the grace of God in me.'—Could I have believed that I could have had this pleasure and patience in this condition! If ever I was distinct in my judgment and memory in my life, it was since He laid his hand on me. Glory to Him! what shall I render to him? My bones are cutting through my skin, yet all my bones are praising Him." After taking refreshment, he said, "I listened to unbelief since I came to this bed, and it had almost killed me; but God rebuked it. I sought the victory by prayer, and God has given it. He is the hearer of prayer. I have not much more to do with death. Another messenger comes for me, a cough. Oh—I am kindly dealt with. Hezekiah said, I am cut off 'from the residue of my years;' but I will not say so. God is giving me this to make up the residue of my years. The Lord is even wasting away my body, to let me see that my spirit can live without it." "My body is wasting" (he remarked soon after) "like a piece of brae by a mighty current; and yet the power of God keeps me up." "How have I formerly fretted and repined at the hundredth part of the trouble I have on my body now! Here you see a man dying a monument of the glorious power of admirable astonishing grace!"

—“ Study the power of religion. It is the power, and not a name, that will give the comfort I find.”

This is but a small selection of the many striking declarations uttered and repeated by him in various forms through the last week of life; and in his dying moments, when an attendant said—“ I hope you are encouraging yourself in the Lord,” he “ lifted up his hands, and clapped them,” as a token of his joy, when the power of speech was gone.

Had there been a temporary restoration of the frame inhabited by a spirit such as this, could it be rightly named convalescence? Or should we better describe it by the phrase which this dying believer twice used, when partial symptoms of recovery were felt—a being “ shipwrecked into health again?” Is it not in truth, and sensibly, the convalescence of the spirit, to be thus casting off, with triumph, the death-struck form that encumbers it, “ renovated day by day,” while the “ outward man” is “ perishing,” and the earthly “ tabernacle dissolving” into dust? What is it but the earnest and the beginning of that immortal vigour, which no “ fierce diseases” will assault, and which no hidden decay can undermine?

If—with submission to the Great Disposer—a Christian cannot but devoutly long for so blessed a departure, offering to beloved mourners some bright disclosures of endless life, (like morning twilight before a vernal sunrise,) while they gaze upon the image of ruin—then is it too much for him to be more fervent in prayers and in labours more abundant, through the short term of bodily health, or its uncertain renewal, if by any means he may attain unto that farewell blessedness; if the soul may be made perceptibly convalescent, while the body sinks in its last anguish, and gives promise (even in dissolution) of a glorious and unfading health, “when Christ who is our life shall appear?”

XXVI.

ON ANNIVERSARIES, AS PECULIARLY PROMPTING
US TO SERIOUS DEVOTION.

IN the earliest stages of life we can have but few private anniversaries. The year is comparatively unmarked by memory, and all its days are given to hope. Even the birth-day, which is early distinguished by parental notice, and the new-year's day, which general feeling or habit observes, are rather viewed in connexion with the future than the past. But the memorable days which succeeding years will recal, must multiply for each of us as years revolve. There arises gradually a calendar of our individual history: and its anniversaries are far more affecting to ourselves, than most of those which the almanac presents.

The period of our attaining some desired success; of our entrance on some important employment; of our embarking for some distant enterprise, or returning from it in safety; of our solemnly assuming new duties; of an endearing connexion commenced; of other fond relations ensuing; of some signal preservations,

and of some poignant griefs, among which must be the successive dissolution of the tenderest ties of life;—all these, in some minds, already crowd the record; and some of the last must, in almost every mind, continue to augment it, till our mortal records shall be closed.

Perhaps there are those so awake both to grateful and to pensive recollections, that this unwritten register, amidst all the scenes of passing months, rarely fails to be reviewed; so that few such anniversaries escape, without a degree of lively remembrance and appropriate feeling. To some others, a calendar thus inscribed, (still noting the additional days which are signalized as life goes on,) might be more profitable than many a treatise. It would be the briefest and most impressive sort of diary; and not omitting the seasons which nature or Christianity celebrates, it would add a still increasing number, which must awaken, as powerfully, the serious thoughts and emotions of the individual. These emotions would indeed be dissimilar in kind and in degree; but all anniversaries have this one very obvious and important office in common—that they most strikingly measure out and proclaim the lapse of time. It is true, that waning moons, and returning sabbaths, and every setting sun, and

every passing hour, much oftener speak the same monitory language; but none of them with so distinct and powerful a voice. Anniversaries of events long past, which have therefore often recurred, already remind me how very large a portion of my mortal course is run. They stand like pyramids on the great plain of time, remote, yet still distinct, and show us how far we have imperceptibly journeyed. But each, even at its first occurrence, marks and announces that a year of life is fled; that the material world on which I dwell, (vast in my view, but minute in the sight of Him who guides unnumbered worlds through the abyss of space,) has fulfilled one more of its mighty revolutions. A thousand times a thousand leagues are but a small portion of its annual flight. And in the same swift period, this ever-moving spiritual world within, (little in its attainments while linked with feebleness and death, but vast in the view of Him who comprehends its eternal prospects,) has run through its myriads of successive thoughts and wishes, hopes and fears. But its circuits, if they may be called such, are not like those of the globe on which I tread. The soul of man, as its hasty years revolve, should be compared rather to a world which, like the comets of our system, is rapidly receding from,

or approximating to, the source of life and light. Either with each day and year the voluntary distance is widened, till it awfully plunges in the "blackness of darkness for ever,"—or else the transforming attraction strengthens, and with each circuit of time the spirit draws nearer to the Sun and Centre of all worlds; soon to be immersed in that nearest brightness, where all its waste places shall blossom and bear fruit unto perfection, through an endless summer. How stupendous, how immeasurable the alternative!

Every greater division of time, such as these anniversary seasons indicate, should lead me, not only to meditate on my own fleeting life, but to "consider the years of many generations;" to mark with how sure and ceaseless a progression the secrets of eternity hasten to their development. Like the great movements of visible nature, like the travelling of sunbeams, and the courses of the stars, the destined course of ages is to us noiseless and insensible; but it has a silent grandeur, an equable, irrepressible celerity, which is full of awe.

"Yet a little while," exclaimed an apostle, glancing through all the drama to its glorious consummation—"yet a little while, and He that

shall come will come, and will not tarry!" "Behold, I come quickly," says the Lord and Inspirer of apostles, "and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be." That great crisis which is yet future, must one day be for ever past. "At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!" Overwhelming summons! Why does not the very forethought startle every drowsy energy of my immortal spirit? Does it not appeal to me by all that is solemn and all that is transporting? Does it not hurry me, as with an angel's hand, through the brief circuits of this dreaming mortality, and bear me, as on an angel's wing, up into the regions where none shall slumber?

But the mind soon reverts to that great personal change which is most surely near; and the impression of which is much stronger, because it is much more definite. "When a few years are come," (said the patriarch, amidst his multiplied calamities,) "then shall I go the way whence I shall not return!" He must often have made the same reflection afterwards, and, perhaps, with equal sensibility, in the midst of his restored enjoyments.

Every anniversary suggests to the thoughtful

mind that reflection, and neither its antiquity nor its simplicity can impair its force. What distinction, what circumstance, so weighty, so affecting as this?—"I shall not return!"—When, towards the close of life, a voyage is undertaken to another hemisphere, to a shore whence the adventurer never expects to revisit the land of his fathers, if he be of a reflective and tender spirit, what preparations does not this voyage demand; what objects does it not endear; what emotion does it not awaken!—But "when a few years are come," (may every Christian say,) when a few more anniversaries have glided by—what a voyage is in prospect for me!—that vast and unknown voyage, whence, "till the times of the restitution of all things"—I shall not return!—not return to the seasons of sacred retirement, or social devotion, those golden hours to fit me for the skies; not return to that abode where alone I can imitate my descended Lord in doing and in suffering, where he found labours enough to occupy an untiring zeal, and to engage, till the last moment of his sojourn, a celestial benevolence. He left a world replete with sorrows, (though, for his true disciples, he bore away their sting,) and I soon must leave it also. Then I cannot return!

—no more opportunity will remain to me to wipe away one tear of affliction—to lead back one wanderer from the verge of ruin—to guide and help and comfort those who are most dear—to soften the adversities of this life, or invite to the joys of another!

And shall I pass these quickly-circling years as if there were nothing to be done, to be subdued, to be acquired, to be imparted, before I launch my bark on its voyage to that “undiscovered country?”

If the anniversaries which are calculated to affect us most deeply, should call forth sentiments at all resembling these, surely they should also impel us to seek, with unwonted earnestness, the communication of heavenly strength, that we may be enabled to pursue a course in some measure accordant with such feelings.

Contemplating thus the funeral procession of centuries, the hand's-breadth of our own earthly career, and the vast gulf of duration beyond, in which all finite periods are alike absorbed and lost, whither shall we look but to Him that enfolds the universe in his parental embrace, and comprehends, by his infinite Being, that eternity towards which we tend?

If we solemnly desire to improve and conse-

crate to God the remnant of these fugitive years and days, whither shall we resort for the spirit of fortitude and wisdom and fidelity, but to Him that worketh in us "to will and to do of his good pleasure;" even "according to the working of his mighty power?"

XXVII.

ON THE CAPACITIES FOR WORSHIP IN HEAVEN.

THE frail constitution of our mortal nature sets narrow limits to spiritual knowledge and delight. The organization by which the soul now acts, may be compared to that little modern instrument of music, whose vibrations are produced on glass. A touch, one degree too forcible, would break the material and annihilate the melody. If the benignant influence of the natural sun-beams could be made so destructive by the mirrors of Archimedes, how much more might a concentration of spiritual glory, though

conveying the most sublime and joyful impressions, disarrange and subvert our present mode of being!

In the sublimest revelations made to prophets—(as to Moses, when he beheld from the cleft of the rock the retiring glory of Jehovah; to Ezekiel, when he looked on the mystic wheels, the flashing cherubim, the sapphire throne, and the likeness of the glory of the Lord; or to the apostles Paul and John, in their heavenly visions;)—we must suppose, either, (as is sometimes intimated,) that the body was miraculously sustained, or, (as St. Paul seems to conjecture,) that the connexion of the body and mind was miraculously suspended.

The eminently pious and learned John Howe, a man of sound, calm and capacious mind, left these words written in Latin on a blank page of his Bible:—

“December 26, 1689. This very morning I awoke, for the first time, from the following most delightful dream. An amazing emanation of celestial rays from the supreme seat of the divine Majesty, seemed infused into my open and expanded breast. Often since that memorable day, I have recalled, with a grateful mind, that signal pledge of the divine favour,

and with reiterated pleasure have tasted of its sweetness. But what I experienced of the same kind, by the admirable bounty of my God, and the transporting influence of the Sacred Spirit, on October 22, 1704, entirely exceeds all my resources of expression."

It is not distinctly stated in this very interesting memorial, whether, on the second occasion, as on the first, these beatific communications were received during sleep, but it seems implied; and we may well believe that this partial suspension of the animal functions was necessary to life, or at least to health, under such emotions unless a counteracting miracle were wrought. But when, from the dissoluble elements of our present frame, there shall be educed, by divine power, a "spiritual body," we can conceive that it will be completely adapted to receive the full intenseness of those impressions which are needful to perfect felicity.

A poet who has attempted to describe that awful period, when "many bodies of the saints, which slept, arose," represents their spirits, in the luminous vehicle of the intermediate state, descending, by divine command, to contemplate their own sepulchres. Rachel, the mother of patriarchs, attended by her guardian angel, approaches her lonely grave:—

" And as she spake, there stream'd from forth the tomb
 A soft-ascending vapour, like the dew
 That moistens roses, or the silvery mist
 Around a vernal bower. Her spirit's gleam
 Brighten'd the vapour, as a setting sun
 Tinges the dewy west. She marks it wave
 And soar and sink and fluctuate gently still
 Near her, and yet more near; and venerates
 Creation's changeful mysteries, profound
 In grandeur, in minuteness as profound;
 Nor knows the fond affinity, nor deems
 How soon with that soft-floating ambient veil
 Thy voice, Almighty Saviour, shall involve
 Her own enraptur'd being. Yet she bends
 To watch its beauty with a strange delight,
 While the companion-seraph eyes the scene
 Elate.

Then spake the all-transforming voice:
 She sank;—she seemed to melt in tears away;
 Delicious tears; as if her being stole
 Through some cool glade, and thence emerged in light,
 Amidst the fragrance of a flowery shore.
 —She wakes; she sees; she feels herself enshrined
 In a new form, bright, indestructible;
 And with intenser blessedness adores
 Him that hath summon'd this access of joy
 From the sepulchral shade!"

The achievements of modern chemistry facilitate and elevate our idea of that splendid change which may pass on the meanest relics of mortality. We had seen, it is granted, more wondrous transformations in nature; so early

indeed, and so often, that we forgot to consider and admire them. We knew that He, by whom "all things were made," must have an energy "whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself;" but when a human artificer, who confessedly knows nothing of the substance of that matter on which he operates, or of that mind by which he investigates its properties, obtains by sure processes, a vital fluid from a coarse mineral; an inflammable air from water: and shining metals from the ashes of wood, or of seaweeds; philosophy thus seems, by her own advances, to cast more and more of practical scorn on her own incredulous question, "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?"

Shall a frail and puny inquisitor of nature, whose hand and head must soon return to dust, effect changes thus surprising; and He that created the operative hand, the inquisitive eye, the inventive mind, shall He not show us "greater works than these, that we may marvel?" Measure the probable excellence of the work by the infinite superiority of the Agent, and then conceive how magnificently He is likely to verify the prophetic words—"It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

Those who have had the most distressing experience of the effects of corporal infirmity on the mind, will estimate most highly the value of such a glorious change. The delight of possessing a frame which may be as unsusceptible of weariness or debility, as the tide in its flowing, or the moon in her orbit; able to receive the amplest communications of light and love, adequate to the noblest exercises of the intellect and the affections, and endlessly invigorated by their endless expansion.

And it would seem, that this very change, which will impart to the compound being of the risen saints, a physical capacity for the highest spiritual enjoyment, may be the chief means of obviating that moral danger, which, in their present condition would arise from a far more exceeding and unvarying delight in the service of God.

The felicity to which that change will exalt its subjects, must essentially and supremely consist in what has been called the "beatific vision;" or the vivid consciousness of a most intimate and gracious presence of the Deity. And this, while it will necessarily be an unfailing spring of the highest blessedness, must also be the exhaustless source of moral perfection. It will be so by a directly communicative and assimila-

ting energy;—"We shall be like him," (says an apostle,) "for we shall see him as he is."—"I shall behold thy face in righteousness;" (says a prophet,) "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

But, besides this, we cannot doubt that it will be so indirectly, by precluding all self-importance in the possession of that glorious likeness and all pride in the enjoyment and perpetuity of the richest donation that can be made to a creature.

If we supposed the most devoted and humble of Christians to attain, in the present life, an uniform elevation of delight in worship, which approached to that of an angel—yet not possessing, together with it, that vision of the Deity which the mortal nature could not, without a miracle, endure; it is difficult to conceive that such a state of mind could subsist, without generating a subtle pride and self-idolatry. A miraculous change in the whole constitution of the soul would be as needful to prevent this effect, as it would be in that of the body to capacitate it for the vision which it could not naturally support. Accordingly, we find that those who have been indulged in this life with the most rapturous devotional pleasures, have had frequent fluctuations and declensions of feeling; intended, as it appears, to recall the sense

of entire dependence, and correct that fallacious self-sufficiency which was secretly nourished within them. But in that state of perfection, where "the pure in heart shall see God," no such fluctuation can be supposed needful. Doubtless, indeed, His efficacious grace will be, in heaven as on earth, the primary cause of holiness and happiness, and of their eternal stability. Both to glorified saints, and to the "elect angels," this must be ever and alike essential. But (the efficient cause being pre-supposed,) nothing can be conceived so powerful, instrumentally, to exclude, for ever, that blind and petty pride of which even the subjects of grace are conscious on earth, as the perpetual and beatific vision of the Majesty of heaven.

Imagine a holy being, endowed with the loftiest and most blissful attainments of which a created spirit is capable, but consciously indebted for their fulness and perpetuation to the vision of God. Beholding, continually and immediately, Him who is the sole fountain of these immortal honours, will it be possible to imagine such a being liable to the folly and sin of self-exaltation? And if it cannot be conceived of an angel, still less can it be conceived of a redeemed sinner.

Were a good man of ardent feelings, to be

introduced to that one of all his fellow-men, who was known to possess at once the most sublime wisdom, and the most heroic beneficence, he would surely forget self, for the moment, in his overflowing admiration. But, if this first of mortals were also his deliverer from prison and from death, a torrent of gratitude would yet more effectually extinguish all the sparks of pride. So, when a ransomed saint shall be for ever with his Lord, and shall behold that Saviour who is the "brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," but who "humbled himself," becoming "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," that he might "obtain eternal redemption" for him—will there be space on the altar of his heart for one particle of strange and earthly fire? Will not the radiance of that divine love make it flame as a whole and pure offering?

Surely, the delight of the redeemed in the adoration of their Redeemer, flowing from the presence of its transcendent object, will be guarded, if we may speak so, by its own excess: kept pure and unalloyed by its own redundancy. There is no reason, therefore, to apprehend, that the perfection and the joy of celestial worship will need, either on a physical or moral account, intermission or abatement.

We can indeed conceive, that, even in the heavenly state, happiness may be on the whole enhanced by a variation in its degrees; that the intervention of that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," as a pause and quiescence from the "fulness of joy," may augment the whole sum of felicity. Yet there is no proof of this; and the idea takes its rise from a contracted mortal experience.

Our impressions of admiration and delight are, in the present state, weakened by continuance or repetition. He who has long and daily looked on the Alps, or the ocean, is far less affected with these sentiments than he who contemplates either for the first time. But this well-known law belongs, perhaps, to our fallen and dying nature only. It may be one of the penalties inwrought in the fabric of such a nature, that its pleasing impressions should thus work their own decay. The connexion between novelty and enjoyment may be expressly instituted for our earthly condition, in order to detach us from objects which we soon must quit, and which, themselves, "shall wax old like a garment, and, as a vesture, shall be changed." We have no ground however to conclude this connexion necessary, or permanent. We are sure it can have no place in the

omniscient and infinite blessedness of Him who is from everlasting to everlasting. Therefore, by a perpetual accession of admiring joy, arising from the contemplation of the same perfect attributes and glorious works, created minds would most approximate to that kind of felicity which is proper to the "blessed God."

Possibly, an angel, sent for the first time on a ministry of love to our earth, may view the Alps illuminated by the setting sun, with impressions (as to their rank in the scale of the divine works) like ours at first viewing a display of rich minerals and brilliant gems;—yet he has one inexhaustible ever-growing advantage over mortal observers, if by each successive view his admiration and pleasure be, not enfeebled, but enlivened. We have only to suppose this very probable and delightful inversion of present experience, in a higher mode of being, in order to anticipate enjoyment that shall not be in any way dependent on intermission or change, and to discover a new and constantly augmenting treasure in the gift of immortality.

And besides these considerations, there is every reason to expect that, in a future state of happiness, the blissful exercise of adoration will be concurrent with those active services, and those subordinate enjoyments, which may oc-

copy, in boundless diversity and succession, "the whole family in heaven."

A divine of great note,* and far removed from that class whose statements are most commonly regarded as extravagant, has represented a sort of perpetual adoration as possible even in the present life. "Let no man think it is too much to require at the hands of men, at one and the self-same instant, both to attend their vocation and their prayer. For the mind of man is a very agile and nimble substance; and it is a wonderful thing to see how many things it will, at one moment, apply itself unto without any confusion or let. Look but upon the musician, while he is in his practice, he tunes his voice, fingers his instrument, reads his ditty, makes the note, observes the time; all these things *simul et semel*, (at one and the same instant,) without any distraction or impediment; thus should men do in case of devotion, and in the common acts of our vocation let prayer bear a part."

And the celebrated Barrow has said nearly the same:—"As bodily respiration, without intermission or impediment, doth concur with all our actions, so may that breathing of soul,

* Hales, of Eton.

which preserveth our spiritual life, and ventilateth that holy flame within us, well conspire with all other occupations.”

The remarks of both these authors forcibly and instructively show, how practicable and important it is to habituate ourselves to interpose mental devotion, in the frequent intervals and brief vacuities of other engagements. Yet it is plain they were not meant to be understood strictly, either in a philosophical or practical sense; because many occupations claim, while we are pursuing them, the whole and fixed attention of the mind. And from this fact, that the occupations in which the intellect is most steadfastly and unremittingly engaged, can least admit such interposed prayer, we may draw an inference, humbling to the philosopher and encouraging to the peasant; namely, that the simple ordinary labours of mankind, in which the body, and not the mind, is chiefly concerned, are peculiarly favourable to that kind of devotion which is least artificial, least intermitted, and therefore most heavenly. The comparisons which those writers have used are most correctly adapted to illustrate that capacity of uninterrupted worship, which we expect will characterise a future state of perfection.

Devotion in heaven may neither impede, nor be impeded by, any mode of mental activity; but may consist with all, be excited by all, be essential to all. The highest employments of the mind may offer no more "distraction or impediment" to a blissful adoration, than the involuntary functions of the body now present to the exercise of thought. And this idea disarms the sarcasm of infidels on the perpetual worship of heaven, founded on their own false pretence, that it involves a cessation of vigorous action and of intellectual progress. Is the play of the fountain obstructed by the iris that blends with and encircles it? Must the living fountains of mind spring up with a less majestic strength, or in forms and combinations of less variety and grandeur, because each drop shall give forth a ray, brighter and more ethereal than itself, to the eternal arch of praise?

Such are some of the thoughts of futurity which revelation invites the true worshipper to indulge; or, rather, it intimates prospects far above his powers of present conception; since even a distinguished apostle could say—"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The first impression awakened by such prospects, in a mind deeply sensible to its frailty and demerit,

is—Can such an exaltation be designed for me? And the only substantial answer which I have discovered, is found in the memorable question of St. Paul;—“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?” That truth, believed and realised, must silence all feelings which would limit the free and unmeasured munificence of our Father who is in heaven.

What, then, is the great practical impression to be sought from prospects like these, especially as it regards our present exercises of devotion? They should surely abound in grateful, ardent hope, joyfully anticipating “the glory that shall be revealed.” But if, through temptations, or infirmities, our worship be still, in these happiest qualities, defective, at least, let its sincerity be unquestionable, as the great pre-requisite to its becoming blissful and perfect hereafter. Let it be solemnly remembered, that though we cannot now emulate the adoration of the heavenly world, yet “the hour now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth;” that is, with the unreserved, undissembled homage of the soul. Except there be in the heart a germ of real piety

—except it be, though weak and imperfect, yet genuine and incorrupt, rooted and growing, it were vain to hope that even the climate of heaven could expand that which is lifeless, or invest that which has no principle of growth, with beauty and fragrance.

THE END.



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