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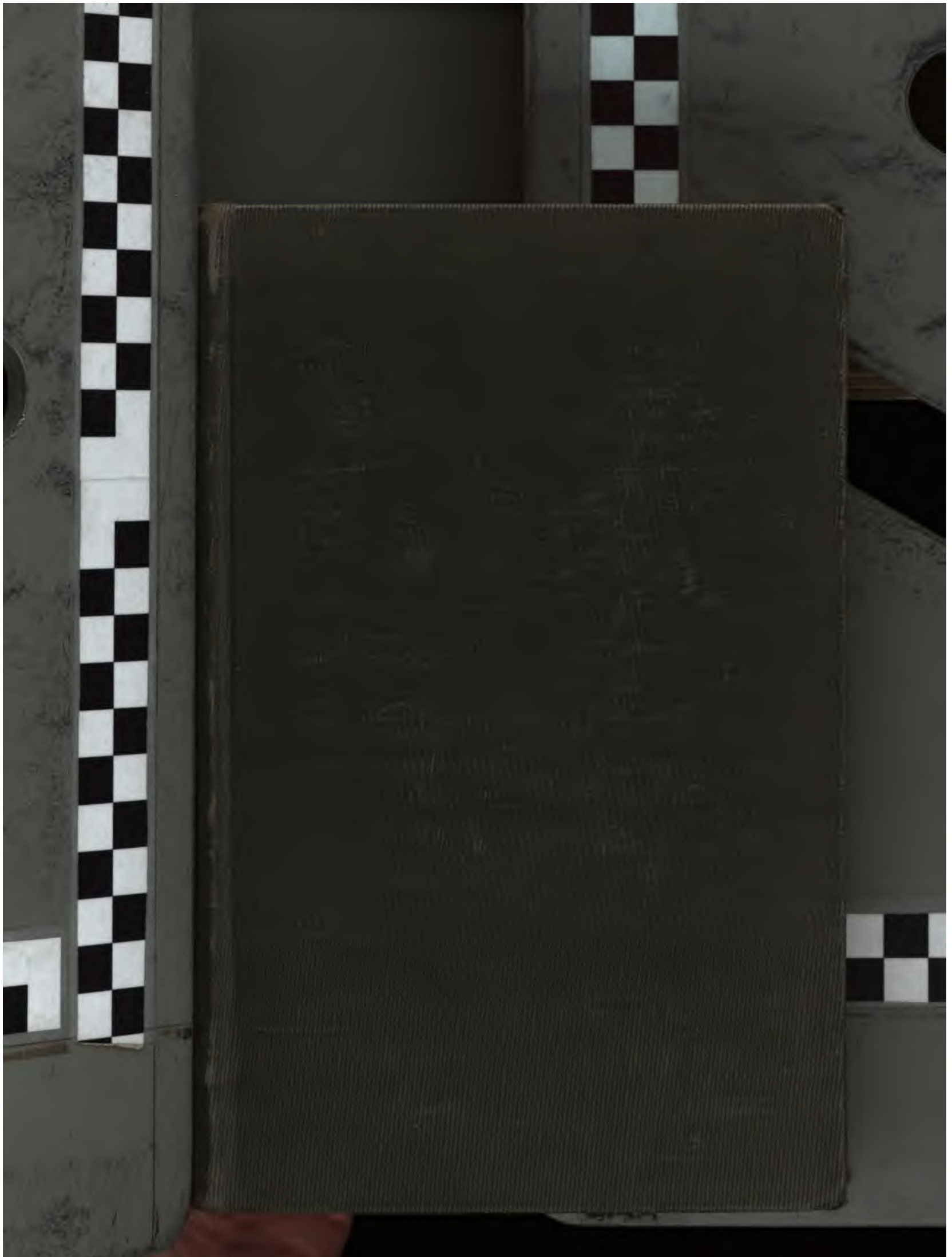
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THE

H. S. H.

WORKS

OF THE

REV. JOHN NEWTON,

LATE PASTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH AND ST. MARY WOOL-
CHURCH-HAW, LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

CONTAINING,

AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, ETC. LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA, DISCOURSES
INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT, SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS, MESSIAH,
OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,

MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

BY THE REV. JOHN CECIL, A. M.

COMPLETE IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Philadelphia :

URIAH HUNT, No. 101 MARKET STREET.

STEREOTYPED BY L. JOHNSON.

1839.

or less whoever ventures within their baneful influence; so the reformed subject of these Memoirs was happily a remarkable instance of the reverse. The change that took place in his heart, after such a course of profligacy, affords a convincing demonstration of the truth and force of Christianity. Instead of proceeding as a blight in society, he became a blessing; his future course was a striking example of the beneficial effects of the Gospel; and that, not only from the pulpit and by his pen, but also by his conversation in the large circle of his acquaintance, of which there is, yet living, a multitude of witnesses.

Impressed, therefore, with the advantages which I conceived would result from the publication of these Memoirs, I communicated my design some years ago to Mr. N. Whatever tended to promote that cause in which his heart had been long engaged, I was sure would not fail to obtain his concurrence. He accordingly promised to afford whatever materials might be necessary, beyond those which his printed Narrative contained. He promised also to read over and revise whatever was added from my own observation; and he soon after brought me an Account in writing, containing every thing memorable which he recollected before the commencement of his Narrative. I shall, therefore, detain the reader no longer than to assure him, that the whole of the following Memoirs (except what relates to Mr. N.'s character) was submitted to him in MS. while he was capable of correcting it, and received his sanction.



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MEMOIRS
OF
THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

PREFACE.

THE Memoirs of the Hon. and Rev. William Bromley Cadogan, and those of John Bacon, Esq. were written at the particular request of their relations. But in publishing these of the late Rev. JOHN NEWTON, I profess myself a volunteer; and my motives were the following:—When I perceived my venerable friend bending under a weight of years, and considered how soon, from the very course of nature, the world must lose so valuable an instructor and example; when I reflected how common it is for hasty and inaccurate accounts of extraordinary characters to be obtruded on the public by venal writers, whenever more authentic documents are wanting; above all, when I considered how striking a display such a life affords of the nature of true religion, of the power of divine grace, of the mysterious but all-wise course of divine providence, and of the encouragement afforded for our dependence upon that providence in the most trying circumstances; I say, on these accounts I felt, that the leading features of such a character should not be neglected, whilst it was easy to authenticate them correctly.

Besides which, I have observed a want of books of a certain class for young people; and have often been inquired of by Christian parents for publications that might amuse their families, and yet tend to promote their best interests. The number, however, of this kind which I have seen, and that appeared unexceptionable, is but small: For, as the characters and sentiments of some men become moral blights in society, men whose mouths seldom open but, like that of *sepulchres*, they discover the putridity they contain, and infect more

MEMOIRS,

&c. &c.

THESE Memoirs seem naturally to commence with the Account mentioned in the Preface, and which I here transcribe;—

“I was born in London, the 24th July, 1725, old style. My parents, though not wealthy, were respectable. My father was many years master of a ship in the Mediterranean trade. In the year 1748 he went Governor of York Fort, in Hudson’s Bay, where he died in the year 1750.

“My mother was a Dissenter, a pious woman, and a member of the late Dr. Jenning’s church. She was of a weak, consumptive habit, and loved retirement; and as I was her only child, she made it the chief business and pleasure of her life to instruct me, and bring me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I have been told, that from my birth she had, in her mind, devoted me to the ministry; and that, had she lived till I was of a proper age, I was to have been sent to St. Andrews, in Scotland, to be educated. But the Lord had appointed otherwise. My mother died before I was seven years of age.

“I was rather of a sedentary turn, not active and playful, as boys commonly are, but seemed as willing to learn as my mother was to teach me. I had some capacity, and a retentive memory. When I was four years old, I could read (hard names excepted) as well as I can now; and could likewise repeat the answers to the questions in the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism, with the proofs; and all Dr. Watts’s smaller Catechisms, and his Children’s Hymns.

“When my father returned from sea, after my mother’s death, he married again. My new mother was the daughter of a substantial grazier at Aveley in Essex. She seemed willing to adopt and bring me up; but, after two or three years, she had a son of her own, who engrossed the old gentleman’s notice. My father was a very sensible and a moral man, as the world rates morality, but neither he nor my step-mother were under the impressions of religion; I was, therefore, much left to myself, to mingle with idle and wicked boys, and soon learnt their ways.

“I never was at school but about two years (from my eighth to my tenth year;) it was a boarding-school at Stratford in Essex. Though my father left me much to run about the streets, yet, when under his eye, he kept me at a great distance. I am persuaded he loved me, but he seemed not willing that I should know it. I was with him in a state of fear and bondage. His sternness, together with the severity of my schoolmaster, broke and overawed my spirit, and almost made me a dolt; so that part of the two years I was at school, instead of making progress, I nearly forgot all my good mother had taught me.

“The day I was eleven years old, I went on board my father’s ship in Longreach. I made five voyages with him to the Mediterranean. In the course of the last voyage, he left me some months at Alicant in Spain, with a merchant, a particular friend of his, with whom I might have done well, if I had behaved well. But by this time my sinful propensities had gathered strength by habit: I was very wicked, and therefore very foolish; and, being my own enemy, I seemed determined that nobody should be my friend.

“My father left the sea in the year 1742. I made one voyage afterwards to

Venice before the mast; and soon after my return, was impressed on board the Harwich. Then began my awfully mad career, as recorded in the Narrative; to which, and to the Letters to a wife, I must refer you for any farther dates and incidents.—I am truly yours,

“JOHN NEWTON.

“DEC. 19, 1795.”

A few articles may be added to this account from the Narrative, where we find, that his pious mother “stored his memory with whole chapters, and smaller portions of Scripture, catechisms, hymns, and poems; and often commended him with prayers and tears to God:” also, that in his sixth year he began to learn Latin, though the intended plan of his education was soon broken; and that he lost this valuable parent, July 11, 1732.

We also find, that, after his father’s second marriage, he was sent to the school above mentioned; and in the last of the two years he spent there, a new usher came, who, observing and suiting his temper, he prosecuted Latin with great eagerness, and before he was ten years old he had reached and maintained the first post in the second class, which, in that school, was Tully and Virgil. But by being pushed forward too fast, and not properly grounded (a method too common in inferior schools,) he soon lost all he had learned.

In the next and most remarkable period of Mr. N.’s life, we must be conducted by the Narrative above mentioned. It has been observed, that at eleven years of age he was taken by his father to sea. His father was a man of remarkably good sense, and great knowledge of the world; he took much care of his son’s morals, but could not supply a mother’s part. The father had been educated at a Jesuits’ college, near Seville in Spain, and had an air of such distance and severity in his carriage as discouraged his son, who always was in fear when before him, and which deprived him of that influence he might otherwise have had.

From this time to the year 1742, Mr. N. made several voyages, but at considerable intervals: these intervals were chiefly spent in the country, excepting a few months in his fifteenth year, when he was placed, with a very advantageous prospect, at Alicant, already mentioned.

About this period of his life, with a temper and conduct exceedingly various, he was often disturbed with religious convictions; and being from a child fond of reading, he met with Bennet’s “Christian Oratory:” and though he understood little of it, the course of life it recommended, appeared very desirable. He therefore began to pray, to read the Scriptures, to keep a diary, and thought himself religious; but soon became weary of it, and gave it up. He then learned to curse and to blaspheme, and was exceedingly wicked when out of the view of his parents, though at so early a period.

Upon his being thrown from a horse near a dangerous hedge-row, newly cut, his conscience suggested to him the dreadful consequences of appearing in such a state before God. This put him, though but for a time, upon breaking off his profane practices; but the consequence of these struggles between sin and conscience was, that on every relapse he sunk into still greater depths of wickedness. He was roused again by the loss of a companion, who had agreed to go with him one Sunday on board a man-of-war. Mr. N. providentially coming too late, the boat had gone without him, and was upset, by which his companion and several others were drowned. He was exceedingly affected at the funeral of this companion, to think, that by the delay of a few minutes (which at the time occasioned much anger) his life had been preserved: but this also was soon forgotten. The perusal of the “Family Instructor” produced another temporary reformation. In short, he took up and laid aside a religious profession three or four different times before he was sixteen years of age.

“All this while,” says he, “my heart was insincere; I often saw the necessity of religion, as a means of escaping hell, but I loved sin, and was unwilling to for

sake it. I was so strangely blind and stupid, that sometimes, when I have been determined upon things which I knew were sinful, I could not go on quietly till I had first despatched my ordinary task of prayer, in which I have grudged every moment of the time; when this was finished, my conscience was in some measure pacified, and I could rush into folly with little remorse."

But his last reform was the most remarkable. "Of this period," says he, "at least of some part of it, I may say in the apostle's words, 'After the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.' I did every thing that might be expected from a person entirely ignorant of God's righteousness, and desirous to establish his own. I spent the greatest part of every day in reading the Scriptures, and in meditation and prayer. I fasted often: I even abstained from all animal food for three months. I would hardly answer a question, for fear of speaking an idle word. I seemed to bemoan my former miscarriages very earnestly, and sometimes with tears: in short, I became an ascetic, and endeavoured, as far as my situation would permit, to renounce society, that I might avoid temptation."

This reformation, it seems, continued for more than two years. "But," he adds, "it was a poor religion; it left me in many respects under the power of sin; and, so far as it prevailed, only tended to make me gloomy, stupid, unsociable, and useless."

That it was a poor religion, and quite unlike that which he afterwards possessed, will appear from what immediately follows: for had it been taken up upon more scriptural ground, and been attended with that internal evidence and satisfaction, which true religion only brings, he could not so soon have fallen a dupe to such a writer as Shaftesbury. It was at a petty shop at Middleburgh, in Holland, that he first met with a volume of the *Characteristics*. The declamation, called by his Lordship a *Rhapsody*, suited the romantic turn of his mind. Unaware of its tendency, he imagined he had found a valuable guide. This book was always in his hand, till he could nearly repeat the *Rhapsody*. Though it produced no immediate effect, it operated like a slow poison, and prepared the way for all that followed.

About the year 1742, having lately come from a voyage, his father, not intending to return to sea, was contriving for Mr. N.'s settlement in the world. But to settle a youth who had no spirit for business, who knew but little of men or things, who was of a romantic turn—a medley, as he expressed it, of religion, philosophy, and indolence, and quite averse to order—must prove a great difficulty. At length a merchant in Liverpool, an intimate friend of the father, and afterwards a singular friend to the son, offered to send him for some years to Jamaica, and undertook the charge of his future welfare. This was consented to, and preparation made for the voyage, which was to be prosecuted the following week. In the mean time, he was sent by his father, on some business, to a place a few miles beyond Maidstone in Kent. But the journey, which was designed to last but three or four days, gave such a turn to his mind as roused him from his habitual indolence, and produced a series of important and interesting occurrences.

A few days before this intended journey, he received an invitation to visit some distant relations in Kent. They were particular friends of his mother, who died at their house; but a coolness having taken place upon his father's second marriage, all intercourse between them had ceased. As his road lay within half a mile of the house, and he obtained his father's leave to call on them, he went thither, and met with the kindest reception from these friends. They had two daughters: it seems the elder had been intended, by both the mothers, for his future wife. Almost at the first sight of this girl, then under fourteen years of age, he was impressed with such an affection for her, as appears to have equalled all that the writers of romance have imagined.

"I soon lost," says he, "all sense of religion, and became deaf to the remonstrances of conscience and prudence, but my regard for her was always the same; and I may, perhaps, venture to say, that none of the scenes of misery and wickedness I afterwards experienced, ever banished her a single hour together from my waking thoughts for the seven following years.

His heart being now riveted to a particular object, every thing with which he was concerned appeared in a new light. He could not now bear the thought of living at such a distance as Jamaica, for four or five years, and therefore determined not to go thither. He dared not communicate with his father on this point, but, instead of three days, he staid three weeks in Kent, till the ship had sailed, and then he returned to London. His father, though highly displeased, became reconciled, and in a little time he sailed with a friend of his father's to Venice.

In this voyage, being a common sailor, and exposed to the company of his comrades, he began to relax from the sobriety which he had preserved, in some degree, for more than two years. Sometimes, pierced with convictions, he made a few faint efforts, as formerly, to stop; and though not yet absolutely profligate, he was making large strides towards a total apostacy from God. At length he received a remarkable check by a dream, which made a very strong, though not abiding impression upon his mind.

I shall relate this dream in his own words, referring to the Narrative those who wish to know his opinion of dreams, and his application of this one in particular to his own circumstances:—

“The scene presented to my imagination was the harbour of Venice, where we had lately been. I thought it was night, and my watch upon the deck; and that, as I was walking to and fro by myself, a person came to me (I do not remember from whence) and brought me a ring, with an express charge to keep it carefully; assuring me, that while I preserved that ring I should be happy and successful: but, if I lost or parted with it, I must expect nothing but trouble and misery. I accepted the present and the terms willingly, not in the least doubting my own care to preserve it, and highly satisfied to have my happiness in my own keeping. I was engaged in these thoughts, when a second person came to me, and, observing the ring on my finger, took occasion to ask me some questions concerning it. I readily told him its virtues; and his answer expressed a surprise at my weakness, in expecting such effects from a ring. I think he reasoned with me some time upon the impossibility of the thing; and at length urged me, in direct terms, to throw it away. At first I was shocked at the proposal; but his insinuations prevailed. I began to reason and doubt, and at last plucked it off my finger, and dropped it over the ship's side into the water, which it had no sooner touched than I saw, at the same instant, a terrible fire burst out from a range of mountains (a part of the Alps,) which appeared at some distance behind the city of Venice. I saw the hills as distinct as if awake, and that they were all in flames. I perceived, too late, my folly; and my tempter with an air of insult informed me, that all the mercy God had in reserve for me was comprised in that ring, which I had wilfully thrown away. I understood, that I must now go with him to the burning mountains, and that all the flames I saw were kindled on my account. I trembled, and was in a great agony; so that it was surprising I did not then awake: but my dream continued, and when I thought myself upon the point of a constrained departure, and stood self-condemned, without plea or hope, suddenly either a third person, or the same who brought the ring at first, (I am not certain which,) came to me, and demanded the cause of my grief. I told him the plain case, confessing that I had ruined myself wilfully, and deserved no pity. He blamed my rashness, and asked if I should be wiser, supposing I had my ring again. I could hardly answer to this, for I thought it was gone beyond recal. I believe, indeed, I had not time to answer, before I saw this unexpected friend go down under the water, just in the spot where I had dropped it, and he soon returned, bringing the ring with him: the moment he came on board, the flames in the mountains were extinguished, and my seducer left me. Then was ‘the prey taken from the hand of the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered.’ My fears were at an end, and with joy and gratitude I approached my kind deliverer to receive the ring again; but he refused to return it, and spoke to this effect: ‘If you should be intrusted with this ring again, you would very soon bring yourself into the same distress; you are not able to keep it, but I will preserve it for

you, and whenever it is needful will produce it in your behalf.' Upon this I awoke, in a state of mind not to be described: I could hardly eat, or sleep, or transact my necessary business for two or three days; but the impression soon wore off, and in a little time I totally forgot it; and I think it hardly occurred to my mind again till several years afterwards."

Nothing remarkable happened in the following part of that voyage. Mr. N. returned home in December, 1743, and, repeating his visit to Kent, protracted his stay in the same imprudent manner he had done before. This so disappointed his father's designs for his interest, as almost induced him to disown his son. Before any thing suitable offered again, this thoughtless son, unmindful of the consequence of appearing in a check shirt, was marked by a lieutenant of the Harwich man-of-war, who immediately impressed and carried him on board a tender. This was at a critical juncture, as the French fleets were hovering upon our coast: so that his father was incapable of procuring his release. A few days after, he was sent on board the Harwich at the Nore. Here a new scene of life was presented, and for about a month much hardship endured. As a war was daily expected, his father was willing he should remain in the navy, and procured him a recommendation to the captain, who sent him upon the quarter-deck as a midshipman. He might now have had ease and respect, had it not been for his unsettled mind and indifferent behaviour. The companions he met with here completed the ruin of his principles; though he affected to talk of virtue, and preserved some decency, yet his delight and habitual practice was wickedness.

His principal companion was a person of talents and observation, an expert and plausible infidel, whose zeal was equal to his address. "I have been told," says Mr. N., "that afterwards he was overtaken in a voyage from Lisbon in a violent storm; the vessel and people escaped, but a great sea broke on board, and swept him into eternity." Being fond of this man's company, Mr. N. aimed to discover what smattering of reading he had: his companion, observing that Mr. N. had not lost all the restraints of conscience, at first spoke in favour of religion; and having gained Mr. N.'s confidence, and perceiving his attachment to the Characteristics, he soon convinced his pupil that he had never understood that book. By objections and arguments Mr. N.'s depraved heart was soon gained. He plunged into infidelity with all his spirit; and, like an unwary sailor, who quits his post just before a rising storm, the hopes and comforts of the Gospel were renounced at the very time when every other comfort was about to fail.

In December 1744, the Harwich was in the Downs, bound to the East Indies. The captain gave Mr. N. leave to go on shore for a day; but, with his usual inconsideration, and following the dictates of a restless passion, he went to take a last leave of the object with which he was so infatuated. Little satisfaction attended the interview in such circumstances, and on new-year's day he returned to the ship. The captain was so highly displeased at this rash step, that it occasioned ever after the loss of his favour.

At length they sailed from Spithead, with a very large fleet. They put into Torbay, with a change of wind, but sailed the next day, on its becoming fair. Several of the fleet were lost at leaving the place, but the following night the whole fleet was greatly endangered upon the coast of Cornwall, by a storm from the southward. The ship on which Mr. N. was aboard escaped unhurt, though several times in danger of being run down by other vessels; but many suffered much: this occasioned their putting back to Plymouth.

While they lay at Plymouth, Mr. N. heard that his father, who had an interest in some of the ships lately lost, was come down to Torbay. He thought, that, if he could see his father, he might easily be introduced into a service which would be better than pursuing a long and uncertain voyage to the East Indies. It was his habit in those unhappy days, never to deliberate: as soon as the thought occurred, he resolved to leave the ship at all events: he did so, and in the worst manner possible. He was sent one day in the boat to prevent others from desertion, but betrayed his trust, and deserted himself. Not

knowing which road to take, and fearing to inquire, lest he should be suspected, yet having some general idea of the country, he found, after he had travelled some miles, that he was on the road to Dartmouth. That day, and part of the next, every thing seemed to go on smoothly. He walked fast, and thought to have seen his father in about two hours, when he was met by a small party of soldiers, whom he could not avoid or deceive: they brought him back to Plymouth, through the streets of which he proceeded guarded like a felon. Full of indignation, shame, and fear, he was confined two days in the guard-house, then sent on ship-board, and kept a while in irons; next he was publicly stript and whipt, degraded from his office, and all his former companions forbidden to show him the least favour, or even to speak to him. As midshipman he had been entitled to command, in which (being sufficiently haughty and vain) he had not been temperate; but was now in his turn brought down to a level with the lowest, and exposed to the insults of all.

The state of his mind at this time can only be properly expressed in his own words:—

“As my present situation was uncomfortable, my future prospects were still worse; the evils I suffered were likely to grow heavier every day. While my catastrophe was recent, the officers and my quondam brethren were somewhat disposed to screen me from ill usage; but during the little time I remained with them afterwards, I found them cool very fast in their endeavours to protect me. Indeed, they could not avoid such conduct, without running a great risk of sharing with me: for the captain, though in general a humane man, who behaved very well to the ship's company, was almost implacable in his resentment, and took several occasions to show it, and the voyage was expected to be (as it proved) for five years. Yet nothing I either felt or feared distressed me so much, as to see myself thus forcibly torn away from the object of my affections, under a great improbability of seeing her again, and a much greater, of returning in such a manner as would give me hope of seeing her mine.

“Thus I was as miserable on all hands, as could well be imagined. My breast was filled with the most excruciating passions, eager desire, bitter rage, and black despair. Every hour exposed me to some new insult and hardship, with no hope of relief or mitigation; no friend to take my part, nor to listen to my complaint. Whether I looked inward or outward, I could perceive nothing but darkness and misery. I think no case, except that of a conscience wounded by the wrath of God, could be more dreadful than mine. I cannot express with what wishfulness and regret I cast my last looks upon the English shore; I kept my eyes fixed upon it, till the ship's distance increasing, it insensibly disappeared; and, when I could see it no longer, I was tempted to throw myself into the sea, which (according to the wicked system I had adopted) would put a period to all my sorrows at once. But the secret hand of God restrained me.”

During his passage to Madeira, Mr. N. describes himself as a prey to the most gloomy thoughts; though he had deserved all, and more than all he had met with from the captain, yet pride suggested that he had been grossly injured; “and this so far,” says he, “wrought upon my wicked heart, that I actually formed designs against his life, and that was one reason which made me willing to prolong my own. I was sometimes divided between the two, not thinking it practicable to effect both. The Lord had now to appearance given me up to judicial hardness; I was capable of any thing. I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor (so far as I remember) the least sensibility of conscience. I was possessed with so strong a spirit of delusion, that I believed my own lie, and was firmly persuaded, that after death I should cease to be. Yet the Lord preserved me! Some intervals of sober reflection would at times take place: when I have chosen death rather than life, a ray of hope would come in (though there was little probability for such hope) that I should yet see better days, that I might return to England, and have my wishes crowned, if I did not wilfully throw myself away. In a word, my love to Mrs. N. was now the only restraint I had

left: though I neither feared God, nor regarded man, I could not bear that she should think meanly of me when I was dead.

Mr. N. had been at Madeira some time; and the business of the fleet being now completed, they were to sail the following day. On that memorable morning he happened to be late in bed, and would have continued to sleep, but that an old companion, a midshipman, came down, between jest and earnest, and bid him rise. As he did not immediately comply, the midshipman cut down the hammock in which he lay; this obliged him to dress himself; and though very angry he durst not resent it, but was little aware that this person, without design, was a special instrument of God's providence. Mr. N. said little, but went upon deck, where he saw a man putting his clothes into a boat, who informed him he was going to leave the ship. Upon inquiry, he found that two men from a Guinea ship, which lay near them, had entered on board the Harwich, and that the commodore (the late Sir George Pocock) had ordered the captain to send two others in their room. Inflamed with this information, Mr. N. requested that the boat might be detained a few minutes; he then entreated the lieutenants to intercede with the captain, that he might be dismissed upon this occasion: though he had formerly behaved ill to these officers, they were moved with pity, and were disposed to serve him. The captain, who had refused to exchange him at Plymouth, though requested by Admiral Medley, was easily prevailed with now. In little more than half an hour from his being asleep in bed, he found himself discharged, and safe on board another ship. The events depending upon this change, will show it to have been the most critical and important.

The ship he now entered was bound to Sierra Leone, and the adjacent parts of what is called the windward coast of Africa. The commander knew his father—received him kindly—and made professions of assistance; and probably would have been his friend, if, instead of profiting by his former errors, he had not pursued a course, if possible, worse. He was under some restraint on board the Harwich, but being now among strangers, he could sin without disguise. "I well remember," says he, "that while I was passing from the one ship to the other, I rejoiced in the exchange, with this reflection, that I might now be as abandoned as I pleased, without any control; and from this time I was exceedingly vile indeed, little, if any thing, short of that animated description of an almost irrecoverable state, which we have in 2 Pet. ii. 14. I not only sinned with a high hand myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion: nay, I eagerly sought occasion, sometimes to my own hazard and hurt. By this conduct he soon forfeited the favour of his captain: for, besides being careless and disobedient, upon some imagined affront, he employed his mischievous wit in making a song to ridicule the captain as to his ship, his designs, and his person; and he taught it to the whole ship's company.

He thus proceeded for about six months, at which time the ship was preparing to leave the coast; but, a few days before she sailed, the captain died. Mr. N. was not upon much better terms with his mate, who succeeded to the command, and upon some occasion had treated him ill. He felt certain, that, if he went in the ship to the West Indies, the mate would have put him on board a man-of-war, a consequence more dreadful to him than death itself: to avoid this, he determined to remain in Africa, and pleased himself with imagining it would be an opportunity of improving his fortune.

Upon that part of the coast there were a few white men settled, whose business it was to purchase slaves, &c. and sell them to the ships at an advanced price: one of these, who had first landed in circumstances similar to Mr. N.'s, had acquired considerable wealth. This man had been in England, and was returning in the same vessel with Mr. N. of which he owned a quarter part. His example impressed Mr. N. with hopes of the same success, and he obtained his discharge, upon condition of entering into the trader's service, to whose generosity he trusted without the precaution of terms. He received, however, no

compensation for his time on board the ship, but a bill upon the owners in England, who failing before his return, the bill was never paid; the day, therefore, on which the vessel sailed, he landed upon the island of Benanoes like one shipwrecked, with little more than the clothes upon his back.

"The two following years," says he, "of which I am now to give some account, will seem as an absolute blank in my life: but I have seen frequent causes since to admire the mercy of God in banishing me to those distant parts, and almost excluding me from all society, at a time when I was big with mischief, and, like one infected with a pestilence, was capable of spreading a taint wherever I went. But the Lord wisely placed me where I could do little harm. The few I had to converse with were too much like myself; and I was soon brought into such abject circumstances that I was too low to have any influence. I was rather shunned and despised than imitated, there being few, even of the Negroes themselves, during the first year of my residence, but thought themselves too good to speak to me. I was as yet an outcast ready to perish; but the Lord beheld me with mercy—he even now bid me live; and I can only ascribe it to his secret upholding power, that what I suffered, in a part of this interval, did not bereave me either of my life or senses."

The reader will have a better idea of the situation Mr. N. was now in by his brief sketch of it.—

"From Cape de Verd, the most western point of Africa, to Cape Mount, the whole coast is full of rivers: the principal are the Gambia, Rio Grande, Sierra Leone, and Sherbro. Of the former, as it is well known, and as I was never there, I need say nothing. The Rio Grande (like the Nile) divides into many branches near the sea. On the most northerly, called Cacheo, the Portuguese have a settlement. The most southern branch, known by the name of Rio Nuna, is, or was, the usual boundary of the white men's trade northward. Sierra Leone is a mountainous peninsula, uninhabited, and I believe inaccessible, upon account of the thick woods, excepting those parts which lie near the water. The river is large and navigable. From hence about twelve leagues to the south-east are three contiguous islands, called the Benanoes, twenty miles in circuit: this was about the centre of the white men's residence. Seven leagues farther, the same way, lie the Plantanes, three small islands, two miles distant from the continent, at the point which forms one side of the Sherbro. This river is more properly a sound, running within a long island, and receiving the confluence of several large rivers, 'rivers unknown to song,' but far more deeply engraven in my remembrance than the Po or Tiber. The southernmost of these has a very peculiar course, almost parallel to the coast; so that in tracing it a great many leagues upwards, it will seldom lead one above three miles, and sometimes not more than half a mile from the sea shore."

Mr. N.'s new master had resided near Cape Mount, but at this time had settled at the Plantanes, on the largest of the three islands. It is low and sandy, about two miles in circumference, and almost covered with palm-trees. They immediately began to build a house. Mr. N. had some desire to retrieve his time and character, and might have lived tolerably well with his master, if this man had not been much under the direction of a black woman, who lived with him as a wife, and influenced him against his new servant. She was a person of some consequence in her own country, and he owed his first rise to her interest. This woman, for reasons not known, was strangely prejudiced against Mr. N. from the first; he also had unhappily a severe fit of illness which attacked him before he had an opportunity to show what he could or would do in the service of his master. Mr. N. was sick when his master sailed in a shallop to Rio Nuna, and was left in the hands of this woman. He was taken some care of at first, but not soon recovering, her attention was wearied, and she entirely neglected him. Sometimes it was with difficulty he could procure a draught of cold water when burning with a fever! His bed was a mat, spread upon a board or chest, with a log for his pillow. *Upon his appetite returning, after the fever left him, he would gladly have eaten,*

but "no one gave unto him." She lived in plenty, but scarcely allowed him sufficient to sustain life, except now and then, when in the highest good humour she would send him victuals in her own plate after she had dined. And this (so greatly was he humbled) he received with thanks and eagerness, as the most needy beggar does an alms.

"Once," says he, "I well remember, I was called to receive this bounty from her own hand; but, being exceedingly weak and feeble, I dropped the plate. Those who live in plenty can hardly conceive how this loss touched me: but she had the cruelty to laugh at my disappointment, and though the table was covered with dishes (for she lived much in the European manner) she refused to give me any more. My distress has been at times so great as to compel me to go by night, and pull up roots in the plantation (though at the risk of being punished as a thief,) which I have eaten raw upon the spot for fear of discovery. The roots I speak of are very wholesome food, when boiled or roasted, but as unfit to be eaten raw in any quantity as a potato. The consequence of this diet, which after the first experiment I always expected, and seldom missed, was the same as if I had taken tartar emetic; so that I have often returned as empty as I went, yet necessity urged me to repeat the trial several times. I have sometimes been relieved by strangers; yea, even by the slaves in the chain, who have secretly brought me victuals (for they durst not be seen to do it) from their own slender pittance. Next to pressing want, nothing sits harder upon the mind than scorn and contempt, and of this likewise I had an abundant measure."

When slowly recovering, the same woman would sometimes pay Mr. N. a visit, not to pity or relieve, but to insult him. She would call him worthless and indolent, and compel him to walk; which, when he could scarcely do, she would set her attendants to mimic his motions, to clap their hands, laugh, throw limes at him, and sometimes they would even throw stones. But though her attendants were forced to join in this treatment, Mr. N. was rather pitied than scorned by the meanest of her slaves, on her departure.

When his master returned from the voyage, Mr. N. complained of ill usage, but was not credited, and as he did it in her hearing, he fared worse for it. He accompanied his master in his second voyage, and they agreed pretty well till his master was persuaded by a brother trader, that Mr. N. was dishonest. This seems to be the only vice he could not be charged with, as his honesty seemed to be the last remains of a good education which he could now boast of: and though his great distress might have been a strong temptation to fraud, it seems he never once thought of defrauding his master in the smallest matter. The charge, however, was believed, and he was condemned without evidence. From that time he was used very hardly; whenever his master left the vessel, he was locked upon deck with a pint of rice for his day's allowance, nor had he any relief till his master's return. "Indeed," says he, "I believe I should have been nearly starved, but for an opportunity of catching fish sometimes. When fowls were killed for my master's own use, I seldom was allowed any part but the entrails, to bait my hooks with: and at what we called slack-water, that is, about the changing of the tides, when the current was still, I used generally to fish (for at other times it was not practicable,) and I very often succeeded. If I saw a fish upon my hook, my joy was little less than any other person would have found in the accomplishment of the scheme he had most at heart. Such a fish hastily broiled, or rather half burnt, without sauce, salt, or bread, has afforded me a delicious meal. If I caught none, I might, if I could, sleep away my hunger till the next return of slack-water, and then try again.

"Nor did I suffer less from the inclemency of the weather, and the want of clothes. The rainy season was now advancing; my whole suit was a shirt, a pair of trowsers, a cotton handkerchief instead of a cap, and a cotton cloth about two yards long, to supply the want of upper garments: and thus accoutred, I have been exposed for twenty, thirty, perhaps near forty hours together, in incessant rains, accompanied with strong gales of wind, without the least shelter, when my master was on shore. I feel to this day some faint returns of the violent pains I then con-

tracted. The excessive cold and wet I endured in that voyage, and so soon after I had recovered from a long sickness, quite broke my constitution and my spirits; the latter were soon restored, but the effects of the former still remain with me, as a needful memento of the service and the wages of sin.

In about two months they returned, and the rest of the time Mr. N. spent with his master was chiefly at the Plantanes, and under the same regimen as has been mentioned. His heart was now bowed down, but not at all to a wholesome repentance. While his spirits sunk, the language of the prodigal was far from him: destitute of resolution, and almost all reflection, he had lost the fierceness which fired him when on board the Harwich, and rendered him capable of the most desperate attempts; but he was no farther changed than a tiger tamed by hunger.

However strange it may appear, he attests it as a truth, that though destitute both of food and clothing, and depressed beyond common wretchedness, he could sometimes collect his mind to mathematical studies. Having bought Barrow's Euclid at Plymouth, and it being the only volume he brought on shore, he used to take it to remote corners of the island, and draw his diagrams with a long stick upon the sand. "Thus," says he, "I often beguiled my sorrows, and almost forgot my feelings; and thus without any other assistance, I made myself in a good measure master of the first six books of Euclid."

"With my staff I passed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." These words of Jacob might well affect Mr. N. when remembering the days in which he was busied in planting some lime or lemon trees. The plants he put into the ground were no higher than a young gooseberry bush. His master and mistress, in passing the place, stopped a while to look at him; at length his master said, "Who knows but, by the time these trees grow up and bear, you may go home to England, obtain the command of a ship, and return to reap the fruits of your labours? We see strange things sometimes happen."

"This," says Mr. Newton, "as he intended it, was a cutting sarcasm. I believe he thought it full as probable that I should live to be king of Poland; yet it proved a prediction, and they (one of them at least,) lived to see me return from England, in the capacity he had mentioned, and pluck some of the first limes from those very trees. How can I proceed in my relation, till I raise a monument to the Divine goodness, by comparing the circumstances in which the Lord has since placed me with what I was in at that time! Had you seen me, sir, then go so pensive and solitary in the dead of night to wash my one shirt upon the rocks, and afterwards put it on wet, that it might dry upon my back, while I slept—had you seen me so poor a figure, that when a ship's boat came to the island, shame often constrained me to hide myself in the woods, from the sight of strangers; especially, had you known that my conduct, principles, and heart, were still darker than my outward condition—how little would you have imagined, that one who so fully answered to the *στυγατοὶ καὶ μισοῦντες** of the apostle, was reserved to be so peculiar an instance of the providential care and exuberant goodness of God. There was at that time but one earnest desire of my heart, which was not contrary and shocking both to religion and reason; and that one desire, though my vile licentious life rendered me peculiarly unworthy of success, and though a thousand difficulties seemed to render it impossible, the Lord was pleased to gratify."

Things continued thus nearly twelve months. In this interval Mr. N. wrote two or three times to his father, describing his condition, and desiring his assistance: at the same time signifying, that he had resolved not to return to England unless his parent were pleased to send for him. His father applied to his friend at Liverpool, who gave orders accordingly to a captain of his, who was then fitting out for Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Sometime within the year, Mr. N. obtained his master's consent to live with

* Hatelul and hating one another.

another trader, who dwelt upon the same island. This change was much to his advantage, as he was soon decently clothed, lived in plenty, was treated as a companion, and trusted with his effects to the amount of some thousand pounds. This man had several factories, and white servants in different places; particularly one in Kittam, the river already described as running so near along the sea coast. Mr. N. was soon appointed there, and had a share in the management of business, jointly with another servant; they lived as they pleased; business flourished, and their employer was satisfied.

"Here," says he, "I began to be wretch enough to think myself happy. There is a significant phrase frequently used in those parts, that such a white man is grown black. It does not intend an alteration of complexion, but disposition. I have known several, who settling in Africa after the age of thirty or forty, have at that time of life been gradually assimilated to the tempers, customs and ceremonies of the natives, so far as to prefer that country to England; they have even become dupes to all the pretended charms, necromancies, amulets, and divinations of the blinded Negroes, and put more trust in such things than the wiser sort among the natives. A part of this spirit of infatuation was growing upon me: in time, perhaps, I might have yielded to the whole. I entered into closer engagements with the inhabitants, and should have lived and died a wretch amongst them, if the Lord had not watched over me for good. Not that I had lost those ideas which chiefly engaged my heart to England; but a despair of seeing them accomplished, made me willing to remain where I was. I thought I could more easily bear the disappointment in this situation than nearer home. But, as soon as I had fixed my connexions and plans with these views, the Lord providentially interposed to break them in pieces, and save me from ruin in spite of myself."

In the meantime, the ship that had orders to bring Mr. N. home, arrived at Sierra Leone. The captain made inquiry for Mr. N. there, and at the Benanoes; but finding he was at a great distance, thought no more about him. A special providence seems to have placed him at Kittam just at this time; for the ship coming no nearer the Benanoes, and staying but a few days, if he had been at the Plantanes, he would not probably have heard of the ship till she had sailed: the same must certainly have been the event had he been sent to any other factory, of which his new master had several. But though the place he went to was a long way up a river, much more than a hundred miles distance from the Plantanes, yet, by its peculiar situation already noticed, he was still within a mile of the sea coast. The interposition was also more remarkable, as at that very juncture he was going in quest of trade, directly from the sea, and would have set out a day or two before, but that they waited for a few articles from the next ship that came, in order to complete the assortment of goods he was to take with him.

They used sometimes to walk to the beach, in hopes of seeing a vessel pass by: but this was very precarious, as at that time the place was not resorted to by ships of trade: many passed in the night; others kept at a considerable distance from the shore, nor does he remember that any one had stopped while he was there.

In February 1747, his fellow-servant, walking down to the beach in the forenoon, saw a vessel sailing by, and made a smoke in token of trade. She was already beyond the place, and the wind being fair, the captain demurred about stopping: had Mr. N.'s companion been half an hour later, the vessel would have been beyond recall. When he saw her come to an anchor, he went on board in a canoe, and this proved the very ship already spoken of, which brought an order for Mr. N.'s return. One of the first questions the captain put was concerning Mr. N.; and understanding he was so near, the captain came on shore to deliver his message.

"Had," says he, "an invitation from home reached me when I was sick and starving at the *Plantanes*, I should have received it as life from the dead: but

now, for the reasons already given, I heard it at first with indifference." The captain, however, unwilling to lose him, framed a story, and gave him a very plausible account of his having missed a large packet of letters and papers, which he should have brought with him; but said he had it from his father's own mouth, as well as from his employer, that a person lately dead had left Mr. N. four hundred pounds per annum; and added, that, if embarrassed in his circumstances, he had express orders to redeem Mr. N. though it should cost one half of his cargo. Every particular of this was false; nor could Mr. N. believe what was said about the estate, except that, as he had some expectations from an aged relation, he thought a part of it might be true.

But though his father's care and desire to see him was treated so lightly, and would have been insufficient alone to draw him from his retreat, yet the remembrance of Mrs. N., the hopes of seeing her, and the possibility that his accepting this offer might once more put him in the way of gaining her hand, prevailed over all other considerations.

The captain farther promised, (and in this he kept his word,) that Mr. N. should lodge in his cabin, dine at his table, and be his companion, without being liable to service. Thus suddenly was he freed from a captivity of about fifteen months. He had neither a thought nor a desire of this change one hour before it took place; but, embarking with the captain, he in a few hours lost sight of Kittam.

The ship in which he embarked as a passenger, was on a trading voyage for gold, ivory, dyers' wood, and bees' wax. Such a cargo requires more time to collect than one of slaves. The captain began his trade at Gambia, had been already four or five months in Africa, and, during the course of a year after Mr. N. had been with him, they ranged the whole coast as far as Cape Lopez, which lies about a degree south of the equinoxial, and more than a thousand miles further from England than the place from whence he embarked.

"I have," says he, "little to offer worthy of notice, in the course of this tedious voyage. I had no business to employ my thoughts, but sometimes amused myself with mathematics; excepting this, my whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer. Not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones; so that I was often seriously reprov'd by the captain, who was himself a very passionate man, and not at all circumspect in his expressions. From the relation I at times made him of my past adventures, and what he saw of my conduct, and especially towards the close of the voyage, when we met with many disasters, he would often tell me, that, to his great grief, he had a Jonah on board; that a curse attended me wherever I went; and that all the troubles he met with in the voyage were owing to his having taken me into his vessel."

Although Mr. N. lived long in the excess of almost every other extravagance, he was never, it seems, fond of drinking: his father was often heard to say, that while his son avoided drunkenness, some hopes might be entertained of his recovery. Sometimes, however, in a frolic, he would promote a drinking bout; not through love of liquor, but disposition to mischief. The last proposal he made of this kind, and at his own expense, was in the river Gabon, whilst the ship was trading on the coast, as follows:—

Four or five of them sat down one evening, to try who could hold out longest in drinking geneva and rum alternately; a large sea-shell supplied the place of a glass. Mr. N. was very unfit for such a challenge, as his head was always incapable of bearing much liquor: he began, however, and proposed, as a toast, some imprecation against the person who should start first: this proved to be himself. Fired in his brain, he arose and danced on the deck like a madman; and while he was thus diverting his companions, his hat went overboard. Seeing the ship's boat by moonlight, he endeavoured eagerly to throw himself over the side into the boat, that he might recover his hat. His sight, however, de-

ceived him, for the boat was not (as he supposed,) within his reach, but perhaps twenty feet from the ship's side. He was, however, half overboard, and would in the space of a moment have plunged into the water, when somebody caught hold of his clothes, and pulled him back. This was an amazing escape, as he could not swim, had he been sober; the tide ran very strong, his companions were too much intoxicated to save him, and the rest of the ship's company were asleep.

Another time, at Cape Lopez, before the ship left the coast, he went with some others into the woods, and shot a buffalo, or wild cow: they brought a part of it on board, and carefully marked the place (as he thought,) where the rest was left. In the evening they returned to fetch it, but set out too late. Mr. N. undertook to be their guide; but night coming on before they could reach the place, they lost their way. Sometimes they were in swamps, and up to their middle in water; and, when they recovered dry land, they could not tell whether they were proceeding towards the ship, or the contrary way. Every step increased their uncertainty—night grew darker—and they were entangled in thick woods, which perhaps the foot of man had never trodden, and which abound with wild beasts; besides which, they had neither light, food, nor arms, while expecting a tiger to rush from behind every tree. The stars were clouded, and they had no compass to form a judgment which way they were going. But it pleased God to secure them from the beasts; and, after some hours perplexity, the moon arose, and pointed out the eastern quarter. It appeared then, that instead of proceeding towards the sea, they had been penetrating into the country; at length, by the guidance of the moon, they recovered the ship.

These, and many other deliverances, produced at that time no salutary effect. The admonitions of conscience, which from successive repulses had grown weaker and weaker, at length entirely ceased; and for the space of many months, if not for some years, he had not a single check of that sort. At times he was visited with sickness, and believed himself to be near death, but had not the least concern about the consequences. "In a word," says he, "I seemed to have every mark of final impenitence and rejection; neither judgments nor mercies made the least impression on me."

At length, their business being finished, they left Cape Lopez, and after a few days stay at the island of Annabona, in order to lay in provisions, they sailed homeward about the beginning of January, 1784. From Annabona to England is perhaps more than seven thousand miles, if the circuits are included, which are necessary to be made on account of the trade winds. They sailed first westward, till near the coast of Brazil, then northward, to the banks of Newfoundland, without meeting any thing extraordinary. On these banks they stopped half a day to fish for cod: this was then chiefly for diversion, as they had provision enough, and little expected those fish, (as it afterwards proved,) would be all they would have to subsist on. They left the banks, March 1st, with a hard gale of wind westerly, which pushed them fast homewards. By the length of this voyage, in a hot climate, the vessel was greatly out of repair, and very unfit to endure stormy weather. The sails and cordage were likewise very much worn, and many such circumstances concurred to render what followed imminently dangerous.

Among the few books they had on board was Stanhope's *Thomas a Kempis*. Mr. N. carelessly took it up, as he had often done before, to pass away the time, but which he had read with the same indifference as if it were a romance. But in reading it this time, a thought occurred, "What if these things should be true?" He could not bear the force of the inference, and therefore shut the book, concluding that, true or false, he must abide the consequences of his own choice, and put an end to these reflections by joining in the vain conversation which came in his way.

"But now," says he, "the Lord's time was come, and the conviction I was so unwilling to receive was deeply impressed upon me by an awful dispensation."

He went to bed that night in his usual carnal security, but was awaked from a sound sleep by the force of a violent sea which broke on board: so much of it came down as filled the cabin with water in which he lay. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck, that the ship was sinking. He essayed to go upon deck, but was met upon the ladder by the captain, who desired him to bring a knife. On his returning for the knife, another person went up in his place, who was instantly washed overboard. They had no leisure to lament him, nor expected to survive him long, for the ship was filling with water very fast. The sea had torn away the upper timbers on one side, and made it a mere wreck in a few minutes; so that it seems almost miraculous that any survived to relate the story. They had immediate recourse to the pumps, but the water increased against their efforts. Some of them were set to bailing, though they had but eleven or twelve people to sustain this service: but notwithstanding all they could do, the vessel was nearly full, and with a common cargo must have sunk; but having a great quantity of bees' wax and wood on board, which was specifically lighter than water, and providentially receiving this shock in the very crisis of the gale, towards morning they were enabled to employ some means for safety, which succeeded beyond hope. In about an hour's time day began to break, and the wind abated: they expended most of their clothes and bedding to stop the leaks; over these they nailed pieces of boards, and at last perceived the water within to subside.

At the beginning of this scene Mr. N. was little affected: he pumped hard, and endeavoured to animate himself and his companions. He told one of them, that in a few days this distress would serve for a subject over a glass of wine; but the man being less hardened than himself, replied, with tears, "No: it is too late now." About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labour, Mr. N. went to speak with the captain; and, as he was returning, said, almost without meaning, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us!" thus expressing, though with little reflection, his desire of mercy for the first time within the space of many years. Struck with his own words, it directly occurred to him, "What mercy can there be for me!" He was, however, obliged to return to the pump, and there continued till noon, almost every passing wave breaking over his head, being, like the rest, secured by ropes, that they might not be washed away. He expected, indeed, that every time the vessel descended in the sea, she would rise no more; and though he dreaded death now, and his heart foreboded the worst, if the Scriptures, which he had long opposed, were true, yet he was still but half convinced, and remained for a time in a sullen frame, a mixture of despair and impatience. He thought, if the Christian religion were true, he could not be forgiven, and was therefore expecting, and almost at times wishing, to know the worst of it.

The following part of his Narrative will, I think, be best expressed in his own words:—"The 10th, that is, in the present style, the 21st of March, is a day much to be remembered by me, and I have never suffered it to pass wholly unnoticed since the year 1748. On that day the Lord sent from on high, and delivered me out of deep waters. I continued at the pump from three in the morning till near noon, and then I could do no more. I went and lay down upon my bed, uncertain, and almost indifferent, whether I should rise again. In an hour's time I was called, and, not being able to pump, I went to the helm, and steered the ship till midnight, excepting a small interval for refreshment. I had here leisure and convenient opportunity for reflection. I began to think of my former religious professions—the extraordinary turns of my life—the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with—the licentious course of my conversation—particularly by unparalleled effrontery, in making the Gospel history (which I could not be sure was false, though I was not yet assured it was true) the constant subject of profane ridicule. I thought, allowing the Scripture premises, there never was or could be such a sinner as myself; and then comparing *the advantages I had broken through*, I concluded at first, that my sins were too

great to be forgiven. The Scripture likewise seemed to say the same : for I had formerly been well acquainted with the Bible, and many passages upon this returned upon my memory ; particularly those awful passages, Prov. i. 24—31 ; Heb. vi. 4, 6 ; and 2 Pet. ii. 20 ; which seemed so exactly to suit my case and character, as to bring with them a presumptive proof of a divine original.

“ Thus, as I have said, I have waited with fear and impatience to receive my inevitable doom. Yet though I had thoughts of this kind, they were exceeding faint and disproportionate ; it was not till after (perhaps) several years, that I had gained some clear views of the infinite righteousness and grace of Christ Jesus my Lord, that I had a deep and strong apprehension of my state by nature and practice ; and perhaps, till then, I could not have borne the sight ; so wonderfully does the Lord proportion the discoveries of sin and grace ; for he knows our frame, and that if he were to put forth the greatness of his power, a poor sinner would be instantly overwhelmed, and crushed as a moth.

But to return : when I saw beyond all probability, that there was still hope of respite, and heard about six in the evening that the ship was freed from water, there arose a gleam of hope. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour. I began to pray : I could not utter the prayer of faith : I could not draw near to a reconciled God and call him Father : my prayer was like the cry of the ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus whom I had so often derided : I recollected the particulars of his life and of his death ; a death for sins not his own, but, as I remembered, for the sake of those, who, in their distress, should put their trust in him. And now I chiefly wanted evidence. The comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted, and I rather wished than believed these things were real facts. You will please to observe, that I collect the strain of the reasonings and exercises of my mind in one view ; but I do not say that all this passed at one time. The great question now was, how to obtain faith ? I speak not of an appropriating faith (of which I then knew neither the nature nor necessity,) but how I should gain an assurance that the Scriptures were of divine inspiration, and a sufficient warrant for the exercise of trust and hope in God.

“ One of the first helps I received, (in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament carefully,) was from Luke xi. 13. I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when, in reality, I did not believe his history, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God ; but here I found a Spirit spoken of, which was to be communicated to those who ask it. Upon this I reasoned thus : If this book be true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise : I have need of that very Spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask : I must therefore pray for it, and if it be of God he will make good his own word. My purposes were strengthened by John vii. 17. I concluded from thence, that though I could not say from my heart, that I believed the Gospel, yet I would, for the present, take it for granted ; and that by studying it in this light, I should be more and more confirmed in it.

“ If what I am writing could be perused by our modern infidels, they would say, (for I too well know their manner,) that I was very desirous to persuade myself into this opinion. I confess I was, and so would they be, if the Lord should show them, as he was pleased to show me at that time, the absolute necessity of some expedient to interpose between a righteous God and a sinful soul : upon the Gospel scheme I saw at least a peradventure of hope, but on every other side I was surrounded with black, unfathomable despair.”

The wind being now moderate, and the ship drawing nearer to its port, the ship's company began to recover from their consternation, though greatly alarmed by their circumstances. They found, that the water having floated their moveables in the hold, all the casks of provisions had been beaten to pieces by the violent motion of the ship. On the other hand, their live stock had been washed overboard, in the storm. In short, all the provisions they saved, except the fish

lately caught on the banks for amusement, and a little of the pulse kind, which used to be given to the hogs, would have supported them but a week, and that at a scanty allowance. The sails, too, were mostly blown away, so that they advanced but slowly even while the wind was fair. They imagined they were about a hundred leagues from land, but were in reality much farther. Mr. N.'s leisure was chiefly employed in reading, meditation on the Scriptures, and prayer for mercy and instruction.

Things continued thus for about four or five days, when they were awakened one morning by the joyful shouts of the watch upon deck, proclaiming the sight of land, with which they were all soon raised. The dawning was uncommonly beautiful, and the light, just sufficient to discover distant objects, presented what seemed a mountainous coast, about twenty miles off, with two or three small islands; the whole appeared to be the north-west extremity of Ireland, for which they were steering. They sincerely congratulated each other, having no doubt, that, if the wind continued, they should be in safety and plenty the next day. Their brandy, which was reduced to a little more than a pint, was, by the captain's orders, distributed among them; who added, "We shall soon have brandy enough." They likewise ate up the residue of their bread, and were in the condition of men suddenly relieved from death.

But while their hopes were thus excited, the mate sunk their spirits by saying, in a graver tone, that "he wished it might prove land at last." If one of the common sailors had first said so, the rest would probably have beaten him. The expression, however, brought on warm debates, whether it was land or not; but the case was soon decided; for one of their fancied islands began to grow red from the approach of the sun. In a word, their land was nothing but clouds; and in half an hour more the whole appearance was dissipated.

Still, however, they cherished hope from the wind continuing fair; but of this hope they were soon deprived. That very day, their fair wind subsided into a calm, and the next morning the gale sprung up from the south-east, directly against them, and continued so for more than a fortnight afterwards. At this time the ship was so wrecked, that they were obliged to keep the wind always on the broken side, except when the weather was quite moderate; and were thus driven still farther from their port in the north of Ireland, as far as the Lewis or western isles of Scotland. Their station now was such as deprived them of any hope of relief from other vessels. "It may indeed be questioned," says Mr. N., "whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean, at the same time of the year."

Provisions now began to fall short, the half of a salted cod was a day's subsistence for twelve people: they had no stronger liquor than water, no bread, hardly any clothes, and very cold weather. They had also incessant labour at the pumps, to keep the ship above water. Much labour and little food wasted them fast, and one man died under the hardship. Yet their sufferings were light when compared with their fears. Their bare allowance could continue but little longer, and a dreadful prospect appeared of their being either starved to death, or reduced to feed upon one another.

At this time Mr. N. had a farther trouble, peculiar to himself. The captain, whose temper was quite soured by distress, was hourly reproaching him as the sole cause of the calamity, and was confident, that his being thrown overboard would be the only means of preserving them. The captain, indeed, did not intend to make the experiment, but "the continued repetition of this in my ears," says Mr. N., "gave me much uneasiness; especially as my conscience seconded his words: I thought it very probable, that all that had befallen us was on my account—that I was at last found out by the powerful hand of God—and condemned in my own breast."

While, however, they were thus proceeding, at the time when they were *ready to give up all for lost*, and despair appeared in every countenance, they *began to conceive hope*, from the wind's shifting to the desired point, so as bet:

to suit that broken part of the ship, which must be kept out of the water, and so gently to blow as their few remaining sails could bear. And thus it continued, at an unsettled time of the year, till they were once more called up to see land, and which was really such. They saw the island of Tory, and the next day anchored in Lough Swilly, in Ireland, on the 8th of April, just four weeks after the damage they had sustained from the sea. When they came into this port, their very last victuals were boiling in the pot, and before they had been there two hours, the wind, which seemed to have been providentially restrained till they were in a place of safety, began to blow with great violence; so that, if they had continued at sea that night, they must, in all human estimation, have gone to the bottom! "About this time," says Mr. N., "I began to know that there is a God, who hears and answers prayer."

Mr. N.'s history is now brought down to the time of his arrival in Ireland, in the year 1748; and the progress he had hitherto made in religion will be best related in his own words. I shall, therefore, make a longer extract than usual, because it is important to trace the operation of real religion in the heart. Speaking of the ship in which he lately sailed, he says, "There were no persons on board to whom I could open myself with freedom, concerning the state of my soul; none from whom I could ask advice. As to books, I had a New Testament, Stanhope, already mentioned, and a volume of Bishop Beveridge's Sermons, one of which, upon our Lord's passion, affected me much. In perusing the New Testament, I was struck with several passages, particularly that of the fig-tree, Luke xiii. the case of St. Paul, 1 Tim. i. but particularly that of the prodigal, Luke xv. I thought that had never been so nearly exemplified as by myself. And then the goodness of the father in receiving, nay, in running to meet such a son, and this intended only to illustrate the Lord's goodness to returning sinners! Such reflections gaining upon me, I continued much in prayer; I saw that the Lord had interposed so far to save me, and I hoped he would do more. Outward circumstances helped in this place to make me still more serious and earnest in crying to him, who alone could relieve me; and sometimes I thought I could be content to die even for want of food, so I might but die a believer.

"Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland I had a satisfactory evidence, in my own mind, of the truth of the Gospel, as considered in itself, and of its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. I saw, that, by the way they were pointed out, God might declare, not his mercy only, but his justice also, in the pardon of sin, on account of the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ. My judgment, at that time, embraced the sublime doctrine of 'God manifest in the flesh, reconciling the world unto himself.' I had no idea of those systems, which allow the Saviour no higher honour than that of an upper servant, or at the most a demi-god. I stood in need of an Almighty Saviour, and such a one I found described in the New Testament. Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvellous thing; I was no longer an infidel; I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and had taken up some right notions; was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my past mispent life, and proposed an immediate reformation. I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been deeply rooted in me, as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man.

"But though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God, yet still I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my enormous sins; but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the law of God; the hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ; a continual dependence on him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort, was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolu-

tion to do better for the time to come. I had no Christian friend or faithful minister to advise me, that my strength was no more than my righteousness; and though I soon began to inquire for serious books, yet, not having spiritual discernment, I frequently made a wrong choice; and I was not brought in the way of evangelical preaching or conversation, (except the few times when I heard but understood not,) for six years after this period. Those things the Lord was pleased to discover to me gradually. I learnt them here a little, and there a little, by my own painful experience, at a distance from the common means and ordinances, and in the midst of the same course of evil company, and bad examples, I had been conversant with for some time.

"From this period I could no more make a mock of sin, or jest with holy things; I no more questioned the truth of Scripture, or lost a sense of the rebukes of conscience. Therefore I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of his return to me; but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer, (in the full sense of the word,) till a considerable time afterwards."

While the ship was refitting at Lough Swilly, Mr. N. repaired to Londonderry, where he soon recruited his health and strength. He was now a serious professor, went twice a day to the prayers at church, and determined to receive the sacrament the next opportunity. When the day came, he arose very early, was very earnest in his private devotions, and solemnly engaged himself to the Lord; not with a formal, but sincere surrender, and under a strong sense of the mercies lately received. Having, however, as yet but an imperfect knowledge of his own heart, and of the subtlety of Satan's temptations, he was afterwards seduced to forget the vows of God that were upon him. Yet he felt a peace and satisfaction in the ordinance of that day, to which he had been hitherto an utter stranger.

The next day he went abroad with the mayor of the city, and some gentlemen, shooting; climbing up a steep bank, and pulling his fowling-piece in a perpendicular direction after him, it went off so near his face as to destroy the corner of his hat. The remark he makes on this ought not to be omitted: "Thus, when we think ourselves in the greatest safety, we are no less exposed to danger, than when all the elements seem conspiring to destroy us. The divine Providence, which is sufficient to deliver us in our utmost extremity, is equally necessary to our preservation in the most peaceful situation."

During their stay in Ireland, Mr. N. wrote home. The vessel he was in had not been heard of for eighteen months, and was given up for lost. His father had no expectation of hearing that his son was alive, but received his letter a few days before he embarked from London to become governor of York Fort, in Hudson's Bay, where he died. He intended to take his son with him, had he returned to England in time. Mr. N. received two or three affectionate letters from his father; and hoped, that in three years more he should have had the opportunity of asking his forgiveness, for the uneasiness his disobedience had occasioned; but the ship that was to have brought his father home came without him. It appears he was seized with the cramp, when bathing, and was drowned before the ship arrived in the Bay. Before his father's departure from England, he had paid a visit in Kent, and gave his consent to the union that had been so long talked of.

Mr. N. arrived at Liverpool the latter end of May 1748, about the same day that his father sailed from the Nore. He found, however, another father in the gentleman whose ship had brought him home. This friend received him with great tenderness, and the strongest assurances of assistance; yet not stronger than he afterwards fulfilled; for to this instrument of God's goodness he felt he owed every thing. "Yet," as Mr. N. justly observes, "it would not have been in the power even of this friend to have served me effectually, if the Lord had not met me on my way home, as I have related. Till then, I was like the man possessed with the legion. No arguments, no persuasion, no views of interest, no remembrance of the past, nor regard to the future, could have restrained me

within the bounds of common prudence; but now I was in some measure restored to my senses."

This friend immediately offered Mr. N. the command of a ship, which, upon mature consideration, he for the present declined. He prudently considered that hitherto he had been unsettled and careless; and therefore that he had better make another voyage, and learn obedience and acquire farther experience in business, before he ventured to undertake such a charge. The mate of the vessel in which he came home was preferred to the command of a new ship, and Mr. N. engaged to go in the station of mate with him.

There was something so peculiar in Mr. N.'s case, after this extraordinary deliverance, and because others in like circumstances might be tempted to despair, that I think it proper to make another extract from his Narrative, as such accounts cannot be well conveyed but in his own words.

"We must not make the experience of others in all respects a rule to ourselves, nor our own a rule to others: yet these are common mistakes, and productive of many more. As to myself, every part of my case has been extraordinary—I have hardly met a single instance resembling it. Few, very few, have been recovered from such a dreadful state; and the few that have been thus favoured, have generally passed through the most severe convictions: and, after the Lord has given them peace, their future lives have been usually more zealous, bright, and exemplary than common. Now, as, on the one hand, my convictions were very moderate, and far below what might have been expected from the dreadful review I had to make; so, on the other, my first beginnings in a religious course were as faint as can be well imagined. I never knew that season alluded to, Jer. ii. 2; Rev. ii. 4, usually called the time of the first love. Who would not expect to hear, that, after such a wonderful and unhoped-for deliverance as I had received, and after my eyes were in some measure enlightened to see things aright, I should immediately cleave to the Lord and his ways with full purpose of heart, and consult no more with flesh and blood? But, alas! it was far otherwise with me: I had learned to pray: I set some value upon the word of God; and was no longer a libertine; but my soul still 'cleaved to the dust.' Soon after my departure from Liverpool, I began to intermit and grow slack in waiting upon the Lord: I grew vain and trifling in my conversation; and though my heart smote me often, yet my armour was gone, and I declined fast: and by the time we arrived at Guinea, I seemed to have forgotten all the Lord's mercies, and my own engagements, and was, (profaneness excepted,) almost as bad as before. The enemy prepared a train of temptations, and I became his easy prey; for about a month he lulled me asleep in a course of evil, of which, a few months before, I could not have supposed myself any longer capable. How much propriety is there in the apostle's advice, 'Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'"

In this voyage Mr. N.'s business, while upon the coast, was to sail in the long boat, from place to place, in order to purchase slaves. The ship, at this time, was at Sierra Leone, and he at the Plantanes, the scene of his former captivity, and where every thing he saw tended to remind him of his present ingratitude. He was now in easy circumstances, and courted by those who had once despised him. The lime-trees he had formerly planted, were growing tall and promised fruit, upon his expected return with a ship of his own. Unaffected, however, with these things, he needed another providential interposition to rouse him; and accordingly he was visited with a violent fever, which broke the fatal chain, and once more brought him to himself. Alarmed at the prospect before him, he thought himself now summoned away. The dangers and deliverances through which he had passed—his earnest prayers in the time of trouble—his solemn vows before the Lord at his table—and his ungrateful returns for all his goodness—were present at once to his mind. He began then to wish that he had sunk in the ocean, when he first cried for mercy. For a short time he concluded that the door of hope was quite shut. Weak, and almost delirious, he arose from his bed

crept to a retired part of the island, and here found a renewed liberty in prayer; daring to make no more resolves, he cast himself upon the Lord, to do with him as he should please. It does not appear that any thing new was presented to his mind, but that, in general, he was enabled to hope and believe in a crucified Saviour.

After this, the burthen was removed from his conscience, and not only his peace, but his health was gradually restored, when he returned to the ship. And though subject to the efforts and conflicts of sin, dwelling in him, he was ever after delivered from the power and dominion of it.

His leisure hours in this voyage were chiefly employed in acquiring Latin, which he had now almost forgotten. This desire took place from an imitation he had seen of one of Horace's Odes in a Magazine. In this attempt at one of the most difficult of the poets, he had no other help than an old English translation, with Castalio's Latin Bible. He had the edition *in usum Delphini*, and, by comparing the odes with the interpretation, and tracing such words as he understood from place to place by the index, together with what assistance he could get from the Latin Bible, he thus, by dint of hard industry, made some progress. He not only understood the sense of many odes, and some of the epistles, but "I began," says he, "to relish the beauties of the composition; acquired a spice of what Mr. Law calls, 'classical enthusiasm;' and, indeed, by this means I had Horace more *ad unguem* than some who are masters of the Latin tongue; for my helps were so few, that I generally had the passage fixed in my memory before I could fully understand its meaning."

During the eight months they were employed upon the coast, Mr. N.'s business exposed him to innumerable dangers from burning suns, chilling dews, winds, rains, and thunder storms, in an open boat; and on shore, from long journeys through the woods, and from the natives, who in many places are cruel, treacherous, and watching opportunities for mischief. Several boats, during this time, were cut off, several white men poisoned, and from his own boat he buried six or seven people, with fevers; when going on shore, or returning, he was more than once overset by the violence of the surf, and brought to land half dead, as he could not swim. Among a number of such escapes, which remained upon his memory, the following will mark the singular providence that was over him:—

On finishing their trade, and being about to sail to the West Indies, the only service Mr. N. had to perform in the boat, was to assist in bringing the wood and water from the shore. They were then at Rio Cestors. He used to go into the river, in the afternoon, with the sea-breeze, to procure his lading in the evening, in order to return on board in the morning with the land-wind. Several of these little voyages he had made; but the boat was grown old, and almost unfit for use; this service likewise was almost completed. One day, having dined on board, he was preparing to return to the river as formerly—he had taken leave of the captain—received his orders—was already in the boat—and just going to put off; in that instant the captain came up from the cabin, and called him on board again. Mr. N. went, expecting farther orders, but the captain said, "he had taken it into his head," (as he phrased it,) that Mr. N. should remain that day in the ship, and accordingly ordered another man to go in his room. Mr. N. was surprised at this, as the boat had never been sent away without him before. He asked the captain the reason of his resolution, but none was assigned, except as above, that so he would have it. The boat therefore went without Mr. N., but returned no more: it sunk that night in the river; and the person who supplied Mr. N.'s place was drowned! Mr. N. was much struck when news of the event was received the next morning. The captain himself, though quite a stranger to religion, even to the denying a particular providence, could not help being affected; but declared, that he had *no other reason* for countermanding Mr. N. at that time, but that it came *suddenly into his mind* to detain him.

A short time after he was thus surprisingly preserved, they sailed for Antigua, and from thence to Charleston, in South Carolina. In that place there were many serious people; but, at this time, Mr. N. was little capable of availing himself of their society, supposing that all who attended public worship were good Christians, and that whatever came from the pulpit must be very good. He had two or three opportunities, indeed, of hearing a minister of eminent character and gifts, whom, though struck with his manner, he did not rightly understand. Almost every day, when business would permit, he used to retire into the woods and fields, (being his favourite oratories,) and began to taste the delight of communion with God, in the exercises of prayer and praise; and yet so much inconsistency prevailed, that he frequently spent the evening in vain and worthless company. His relish, indeed, for worldly diversions was much weakened; and he was rather a spectator than a sharer in their pleasures; but he did not as yet see the necessity of absolutely relinquishing such society. It appears, that compliances of this sort, in his present circumstances, were owing rather to a want of light than to any obstinate attachment: as he was kept from what he knew to be sinful, he had, for the most part, peace of conscience; and his strongest desires were towards the things of God. He did not as yet apprehend the force of that precept, "Abstain from all appearance of evil;" but he very often ventured upon the brink of temptation. He did not break with the world at once, as might have been expected, but was gradually led to see the inconvenience and folly of first one thing and then another, and as such to give them up.

They finished their voyage, and arrived in Liverpool. When the ship's affairs were settled, Mr. N. went to London, and from thence he soon repaired to Kent. More than seven years had now elapsed since his first visit: no views of the kind seemed more chimerical than his, or could subsist under greater discouragements; yet while he seemed abandoned to his passions, he was still guided by a hand that he knew not, to the accomplishment of his wishes. Every obstacle was now removed—he had renounced his former follies—his interest was established—and friends on all sides consenting. The point was now entirely between the parties immediately concerned; and after what had passed, was easily concluded; accordingly their hands were joined, February the 1st, 1750.

"But, alas!" says he, "this mercy, which raised me to all I could ask or wish in a temporal view, and which ought to have been an animating motive to obedience and praise, had a contrary effect: I rested in the gift and forgot the giver. My poor narrow heart was satisfied. A cold and careless frame as to spiritual things, took place, and gained ground daily. Happy for me, the season was advancing; and in June I received orders to repair to Liverpool. This roused me from my dream; and I found the pains of absence and separation fully proportioned to my preceding pleasure.* Through all my following voyages, my irregular and excessive affections were as thorns in my eyes, and often made my other blessings tasteless and insipid. But he, who doth all things well, overruled this likewise for good; it became an occasion of quickening me in prayer, both for her and myself; it increased my indifference for company and amuse-

* In writing to Mrs. Newton from St. Alban's, he inserts a prayer for his own health and that of Mrs. N., upon which he remarks as follows:—

"This prayer includes all that I at that time knew how to ask for; and had not the Lord given me more than I knew how to ask or think, I should now be completely miserable. The prospect of this separation was terrible to me as death: to avoid it, I repeatedly purchased a ticket in the lottery: thinking, 'Who knows but I may obtain a considerable prize, and be thereby saved from the necessity of going to sea?' Happy for me, the lot, which I then considered as casual, was at thy disposal. The money, which I could not with prudence have spared at the time, was lost: all my tickets proved blanks, though I attempted to bribe thee, by promising, if I succeeded, to give a considerable part to the poor. But these blanks were truly prizes. Thy mercy sent me to sea against my own will. To thy blessing, and to my solitary sea-hours, I was indebted for all my temporal comforts and future hopes.

"Thou wert pleased likewise to disappoint me, by thy providence, of some money, which I expected to receive on my marriage; so that, excepting our apparel, when I sailed from Liverpool on my first voyage, the sum total of my worldly inventory was—seventy pounds in debt."

ment ; it habituated me to a kind of voluntary self-denial, which I was afterwards taught to improve to a better purpose."

Mr. N. sailed from Liverpool, in August 1750, commander of a good ship. He had now the command and care of thirty persons: he endeavoured to treat them with humanity, and to set them a good example.* He likewise established public worship, according to the Liturgy of the church of England, officiating himself twice every Lord's day. He did not proceed farther than this while he continued in that occupation.

Having now much leisure, he prosecuted the study of Latin with good success. He remembered to take a Dictionary this voyage, and added Juvenal to Horace; and, for prose authors, Livy, Cæsar, and Sallust. He was not aware of the mistake of beginning with such difficult writers; but, having heard Livy highly commended, he was resolved to understand him: he began with the first page, and made it a rule not to proceed to a second till he understood the first. Often at a stand, but seldom discouraged, here and there he found a few lines quite obstinate, and was forced to give them up, especially as his edition had no notes. Before, however, the close of that voyage, he informs us, that he could, with a few exceptions, read Livy almost as readily as an English author. Other prose authors, he says, cost him but little trouble, as in surmounting the former difficulty he had mastered all in one. In short, in the space of two or three voyages, he became acquainted with the best classics. He read Terence, Virgil, several pieces of Cicero, and the modern classics, Buchanan, Erasmus, and Casimir; and made some essays towards writing elegant Latin.

"But by this time," he observes, "the Lord was pleased to draw me nearer to himself, and to give me a fuller view of the pearl of great price, the inestimable treasure hid in the field of the Holy Scriptures; and for the sake of this I was made willing to part with all my newly-acquired riches. I began to think, that life was too short (especially my life,) to admit of leisure for such elaborate trifling. Neither poet nor historian could tell me a word of Jesus; and I therefore applied myself to those who could. The classics were at first restrained to one morning in the week, and at length laid aside."

This his first voyage after his marriage lasted the space of fourteen months, through various scenes of danger and difficulty; but nothing very remarkable occurred; and, after having seen many fall on his right hand and on his left, he was brought home in peace, Nov. 2, 1751.

In the interval, between his first and second voyage, he speaks of the use he found in keeping a sort of diary, of the unfavourable tendency of a life of ease among his friends, and of the satisfaction of his wishes proving unfavourable to the progress of grace; upon the whole, however, he seems to have gained ground, and was led into farther views of Christian doctrine and experience by Scougal's *Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Hervey's *Meditations*, and the *Life of Colonel Gardiner*. He seems to have derived no advantages from the preaching he heard, or the Christian acquaintance he made; and though he could not live without prayer, he durst not propose it, even to his wife, till she first urged him to the mutual practice of it.

In a few months, the returning season called him abroad again, and he sailed from Liverpool, in a new ship, July 1752.† "I never knew," says he, "sweeter or more frequent hours of Divine communion than in my two last voyages to Guinea, when I was either almost secluded from society on shipboard, or when

* I have heard Mr. Newton observe, that as the commander of a slave-ship, he had a number of women under his absolute command; and knowing the danger of his situation on that account, he resolved to abstain from flesh in his food, and to drink nothing stronger than water, during the voyage; that, by abstemiousness, he might subdue every improper emotion; and that, upon his setting sail, the sight of a certain point of land was the signal for his beginning a rule, which he was enabled to keep.

† Mr. N. had had an unexpected call to London; and, on his return, when within a few miles of Liverpool, he mistook a marl-pit for a pond, and, in attempting to water his horse, both the horse and the rider plunged into it overhead. He was afterwards told, that, near that time, three persons had lost their lives by a mistake of the same kind.

on shore among the natives. I have wandered through the woods, reflecting on the singular goodness of the Lord to me, in a place where, perhaps, there was not a person who knew me for some thousand miles round. Many a time, upon these occasions, I have restored the beautiful lines of Propertius to the right owner; lines full of blasphemy and madness when addressed to a creature, but full of comfort and propriety in the mouth of a believer.

Sic ego desertis possim benè vivere sylvia,
Quò nulla humano sit via trita pede;
Tu mihi curarum requies, in nocte vel artra
Lumen, et in solis tu mihi turba locia.

PARAPHRASED.

In desert woods, with thee, my God,
Where human footsteps never trod,
How happy could I be!
Thou my repose from care, my light
Amidst the darkness of the night,
In solitude my company."

In the course of this voyage, Mr. N. was wonderfully preserved through many unforeseen dangers. At one time there was a conspiracy among his own people to become pirates, and take possession of the ship. When the plot was nearly ripe, they watched only for opportunity: two of them were taken ill in one day; one of them died. This suspended the affair, and opened a way to its discovery. The slaves on board frequently plotted insurrections, and were sometimes upon the very brink of one when it was disclosed. When at a place called Mana, near Cape Mount, Mr. N. intended to go on shore the next morning to settle some business; but the surf of the sea ran so high, that he was afraid to attempt landing. He had often ventured at a worse time; but then feeling a backwardness which he could not account for, the high surf furnished a pretext for indulging it: he therefore returned to the ship without doing any business. He afterwards found, that, on the day he intended to land, a scandalous and groundless charge had been laid against him, which greatly threatened his honour and interest, both in Africa and England, and would perhaps have affected his life, had he landed. The person most concerned in this affair owed him about a hundred pounds, which he sent in a huff, and otherwise, perhaps, would not have paid it at all. Mr. N. heard no more of this accusation till the next voyage, and then it was publicly acknowledged to have been a malicious calumny, without the least shadow of a ground.

But, as these things did not occur every day, Mr. N. prosecuted his Latin, being very regular in the management of his time. He allotted about eight hours for sleep and meals, eight hours for exercise and devotion, and eight hours to his books; and thus, by diversifying his engagements, the whole day was agreeably filled up.

From the coast he went to St. Christopher's, where he met with a great disappointment: for the letters, which he expected from Mrs. N., were by mistake forwarded to Antigua. Certain of her punctuality in writing, if alive, he concluded by not hearing from her, that she was surely dead. This fear deprived him of his appetite and rest, caused an incessant pain in his stomach, and, in the space of three weeks, he was near sinking under the weight of an imaginary stroke. "I felt," says he, "some severe symptoms of that mixture of pride and madness, commonly called a broken heart; and, indeed, I wonder that this case is not more common. How often do the potsherd of the earth presume to contend with their Maker! and what a wonder of mercy is it that they are not all broken! This was a sharp lesson, but I hope it did me good; and when I had thus suffered some weeks, I thought of sending a small vessel to Antigua. I did so, and she brought me several packets, which restored my health and peace, and gave

me a strong contrast of the Lord's goodness to me, and of my unbelief and ingratitude towards him."

In August, 1753, Mr. N. returned to Liverpool: after that voyage, he continued only six weeks at home, and, in that space, nothing very memorable occurred.

We now follow Mr. N. in his third voyage to Guinea: it seems to be the shortest of any that he had made, and which is principally marked by an account of a young man, who had formerly been a midshipman, and his intimate companion on board the Harwich. This youth, at the time Mr. N. first knew him, was sober, but afterwards sadly infected with Mr. N.'s then libertine principles. They met at Liverpool, and renewed their former acquaintance: as their conversation frequently turned upon religion, Mr. N. was very desirous to recover his companion, to whom he gave a plain account of the manner and reasons of his own change, and used every argument to induce him to relinquish his infidelity. When pressed very close, his usual reply was, that Mr. N. was the first person who had given him an idea of his liberty, which naturally occasioned many mournful reflections in the mind of his present instructor. This person was going master to Guinea himself; but, meeting with a disappointment, Mr. N. offered to take him as a companion, with a view of assisting him in gaining future employment; but, principally, that his arguments, example, and prayers, might be attended with good effect. But his companion was exceedingly profane; grew worse and worse; and presented a lively, but distressing picture, continually before Mr. N.'s eyes, of what he himself had once been. Besides this, the man was not only deaf to remonstrance himself; but laboured to counteract Mr. N.'s influence upon others; his spirit and passions were likewise so exceedingly high, that it required all Mr. N.'s prudence and authority to hold him in any degree of restraint.

At length Mr. N. had an opportunity of buying a small vessel, which he supplied with a cargo from his own ship: he gave his companion the command of it; and sent him away to trade on the ship's account. When they parted, Mr. N. repeated and enforced his best advice: it seemed greatly to affect his companion at the time; but when he found himself released from the restraint of his instructor, he gave a loose to every appetite; and his violent irregularities, joined to the heat of the climate, soon threw him into a malignant fever, which carried him off in a few days. He seems to have died convinced, but not changed: his rage and despair struck those who were about him with horror: and he pronounced his own fatal doom before he expired, without any sign that he either hoped or asked for mercy.—I trust the reader will deem the features of this awful case (though a digression from the principal subject) too instructive to be omitted.

Mr. N. left the coast in about four months, and sailed for St. Christopher's. Hitherto, he had enjoyed a perfect and equal state of health in different climates for several years. But in this passage he was visited with a fever, which gave him a very near prospect of eternity: he was, however, supported in a silent composure of spirit by the faith of Jesus, and found great relief from those words, "He is able to save to the uttermost." He was for a while troubled, whether by a temptation, or by the fever disordering his faculties, that he should be lost or overlooked amidst the myriads that are continually entering the unseen world; but the recollection of that Scripture, "the Lord knoweth them that are his," put an end to his doubts. After a few days, however, he began to amend, and by the time they arrived in the West Indies, he was perfectly recovered.

In this way he was led for about the space of six years: he had learnt something of the evil of his heart—had read the Bible over and over—had perused several religious books—and had a general view of Gospel truth: but his conceptions still remained confused in many respects, not having, in all this time, met with one acquaintance qualified to assist his inquiries.

On his arrival at St. Christopher's, he found a captain of a ship from London,

a man of experience in the things of God. For near a month, they spent every evening together on board each other's ship alternately: prolonging their visits till near day-break. While Mr. N. was an eager recipient, his companion's discourse not only informed his understanding, but inflamed his heart—encouraged him in attempting social prayer—taught him the advantage of Christian converse—put him upon an attempt to make his profession more public, and to venture to speak for God. His conceptions now became more clear and evangelical; he was delivered from a fear which had long troubled him, of relapsing into his former apostacy; and taught to expect preservation, not from his own power and holiness, but from the power and promise of God. From this friend he likewise received a general view of the present state of religion, and of the prevailing errors and controversies of the times, and a direction where to inquire in London for further instruction. Mr. N.'s passage homewards gave him leisure to digest what he had received: and he arrived safely at Liverpool, August 1754.*

His stay at home, however, was intended to be but short; and by the beginning of November he was ready again for the sea. But the Lord saw fit to overrule his design. It seems, from the account he gives, that he had not the least scruple as to the lawfulness of the slave-trade: he regarded it as the appointment of Providence: he considered this employment as respectable and profitable; yet he could not help thinking himself a sort of gaoler, and was sometimes shocked with an employment so conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles. On this account he had often prayed that he might be fixed in a more humane profession, where he might enjoy more frequent communion with the people and ordinances of God; and be freed from those long domestic separations, which he found so hard to bear. His prayers were now answered, though in an unexpected way.

Mr. N. was within two days of sailing, and in apparent good health; but as he was one afternoon drinking tea with Mrs. N. he was seized with a fit, which deprived him of sense and motion. When he had recovered from this fit, which lasted about an hour, it left a pain and dizziness in his head, which continued, with such symptoms, as induced the physicians to judge it would not be safe for him to proceed on the voyage. By the advice of a friend, therefore, to whom the ship belonged, he resigned the command on the day before she sailed; and thus he was not only freed from that service, but from the future consequences of a voyage which proved extremely calamitous. The person who went in his room, died: as did most of the officers, and many of the crew.

As Mr. N. was now disengaged from business, he left Liverpool, and spent most of the following year in London, or in Kent. Here he entered upon a new trial, in a disorder that was brought upon Mrs. N. from the shock she received in his late illness; as he grew better, she became worse with a disorder which the physicians could not define, nor medicines remove. Mr. N. was therefore placed for about eleven months in what Dr. Young calls the

——Dreadful post of observation,
Darker every hour.——

* In a MS. note on a letter from sea, Mr. Newton remarks:—"I now enter my 70th year. Still thou art singularly bountiful to me; still I have reason to think myself favoured, as to externals, beyond the common lot of mortals. Thou didst bear me above the removal of her I most valued, to the admiration of all who knew me. The best part of my childhood and youth was vanity and folly; but, before I attained the age of man, I became exceedingly vile indeed; and was seated in the chair of the scorner in early life. The troubles and miseries I for a time endured were my own. I brought them upon myself, by forsaking thy good and pleasant paths; and choosing the way of transgressors, which I found very hard; they led to slavery, contempt, famine, and despair.

"But my recovery from that dreadful state was wholly of thee. Thou didst prepare the means, unthought of and undesired by me. How nice were the turns upon which my delivery from Africa depended! Had the ship passed one quarter of an hour sooner, I had died there a wretch, as I had lived. But thou didst pity, and hear my first lisping in prayer, at the time the storm fell upon me. Thou didst preserve me from sinking and starving. Thus I returned home, and thou didst provide me friends, when I was destitute and a stranger."

The reader will recollect, that Mr. N.'s friend at St. Christopher's had given him information for forming a religious acquaintance in London; in consequence of which, he became intimate with several persons eminent for that character, and profited by the spiritual advantages which a great city affords with respect to means. When he was in Kent, his advantages were of a different kind; most of his time he passed in the fields and woods. "It has been my custom," says he, "for many years, to perform my devotional exercises *sub dio* when I have opportunity, and I always find these scenes have some tendency both to refresh and compose my spirits. A beautiful, diversified prospect gladdens my heart. When I am withdrawn from the noise and petty works of men, I consider myself as in the great temple, which the Lord has built for his own honour."

During this time he had to weather two trials, the principal of which was Mrs. N.'s illness. She still grew worse, and he had daily more reason to fear that hour of separation, which appeared to be at hand. He had likewise to provide some future settlement; the African trade was overdone that year, and his friends did not care to fit out another ship till that which had been his returned. Though a provision of food and raiment had seldom been with him a cause of great solicitude, yet he was some time in suspense on this account; but, in August following, he received a letter, that he was nominated to a post, which afforded him a competency, both unsought and unexpected.

When he had gained this point, his distress respecting Mrs. N. was doubled; he was obliged to leave her in the greatest extremity of pain and illness; and when he had no hope that he should see her again alive. He was, however, enabled to resign her and himself to the divine disposal; and, soon after he was gone, she began to amend, and recovered so fast, that in about two months he had the pleasure to meet her at Stone, on her journey to Liverpool.

From October 1755, he appears to have been comfortably settled at Liverpool, and mentions his having received, since the year 1757, much profit from his acquaintance in the West Riding of Yorkshire. "I have conversed," says he, "at large, among all parties, without joining any; and in my attempts to hit the golden mean, I have been sometimes drawn too near the different extremes; yet the Lord has enabled me to profit by my mistakes." Being at length placed in a settled habitation, and finding his business would afford him much leisure, he considered in what manner he could improve it. Having determined, with the apostle, "to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified," he devoted his life to the prosecution of spiritual knowledge, and resolved to pursue nothing but in subservience to this design. But as what follows will appear most natural, and must be better expressed in his own words, I shall transcribe them from the conclusion of his narrative.

"This resolution," says Mr. N., "divorced me (as I have already hinted) from the classics and mathematics. My first attempt was to learn so much Greek as would enable me to understand the New Testament and Septuagint; and when I had made some progress this way, I entered upon the Hebrew the following year; and two years afterwards, having surmised some advantages from the Syriac version, I began with that language. You must not think that I have attained, or even aimed at a critical skill in any of these; I had no business with them, but as in reference to something else. I never read one classic author in the Greek; I thought it too late in life to take such a round in this language as I had done in the Latin. I only wanted the signification of scriptural words and phrases, and for this I thought I might avail myself of Scapula, the Synopsis, and others, who had sustained the drudgery before me. In the Hebrew, I can read the historical books and Psalms with tolerable ease; but in the prophetic and difficult parts, I am frequently obliged to have recourse to Lexicons, &c. However, I know so much as to be able, with such helps as are at hand, to judge for myself the meaning of any passage I have occasion to consult.

"Together with these studies, I have kept up a course of reading the best writers in Divinity, that have come to my hand, in the Latin and English tongues,

and some French, for I picked up the French at times while I used the sea. But within these two or three years, I have accustomed myself chiefly to writing, and have not found time to read many books besides the Scriptures.

"I am the more particular in this account, as my case has been something singular; for in all my literary attempts I have been obliged to strike out my own path by the light I could acquire from books, as I have not had a teacher or assistant since I was ten years of age.

"One word concerning my views to the ministry, and I have done. I have told you, that this was my dear mother's hope concerning me; but her death, and the scenes of life in which I afterwards engaged, seemed to cut off the probability. The first desires of this sort in my own mind, arose many years ago, from reflection on Gal. i. 23, 24. I could but wish for such a public opportunity to testify the riches of Divine grace. I thought I was, above most living, a fit person to proclaim that faithful saying, 'that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners;' and as my life had been full of remarkable turns, and I seemed selected to show what the Lord could do, I was in some hopes, that perhaps, sooner or later, he might call me into his service.

"I believe it was a distant hope of this that determined me to study the original Scriptures; but it remained an imperfect desire in my own breast, till it was recommended to me by some Christian friends. I started at the thought when first seriously proposed to me; but, afterwards, set apart some weeks to consider the case, to consult my friends, and to entreat the Lord's direction. The judgment of my friends, and many things that occurred, tended to engage me. My first thought was to join the Dissenters, from a presumption that I could not honestly make the required subscriptions; but Mr. C——, in a conversation upon these points, moderated my scruples; and, preferring the Established Church in some respects, I accepted a title from him some months afterwards, and solicited ordination from the late Archbishop of York. I need not tell you I met a refusal, nor what steps I took afterwards to succeed elsewhere. At present I desist from any applications. My desire to serve the Lord is not weakened; but I am not so hasty to push myself forward as I was formerly. It is sufficient that he knows how to dispose of me, and that he both can and will do what is best. To him I commend myself; I trust that his will and my true interest are inseparable. To his name be glory for ever; and with this I conclude my story."

A variety of remarks occurred to me while abridging the narrative, but I refrained from putting them down, lest, by interrupting its course, and breaking the thread of history, I should rather disgust than profit the reader. I have heard Mr. N. relate a few additional particulars, but they were of too little interest to be inserted here; they went, however, like natural incidents, to a farther authentication of the above account, had it needed any other confirmation than the solemn declaration of the pious relator. Romantic relations, indeed, of unprincipled travellers, which appear to have no better basis than a disposition to amuse credulity, to exhibit vanity, or to acquire gain, may naturally raise suspicion and produce but a momentary effect at most on the mind of the reader; but facts, like the present, manifest such a display of the power, providence, and grace of God; and at the same time such a deep and humbling view of human depravity, when moved and brought forth by circumstances, as inexperience can scarcely credit, but which must interest the eye of pious contemplation, and open a new world of wonders.

I must now attempt to conduct the reader without the help of Mr. N.'s Narrative, finished Feb. 2, 1763; to which, as I have already observed, he referred me for the former and most singular part of his life. When I left the above account with him for revision, he expressed full satisfaction as to all the facts related; but said, he thought I had been too minute even in the abridgment, since the Narrative itself had been long before the public. I remarked, in reply, that the Narrative contained a great variety of facts—that these Memoirs might fall into the hands of persons who had not seen the Narrative—but that without some

abridgment of it, no clear view could be formed of the peculiarity of his whole dispensation and character—and, therefore, that such an abridgment appeared to be absolutely necessary, and that he had recommended it at my first undertaking the work. With these reasons he was well satisfied. I now proceed to the remaining, though less remarkable part of his life.

Mr. Manesty, who had long been a faithful and generous friend of Mr. N. having procured him the place of tide-surveyor in the port of Liverpool, Mr. N. gives the following account of it;—"I entered upon business yesterday. I find my duty is to attend the tides one week, and visit the ships that arrive, and such as are in the river; and the other week to inspect the vessels that are in the docks; and thus alternately the year round. The latter is little more than a sinecure, but the former requires pretty constant attendance, both by day and night. I have a good office, with fire and candle, and fifty or sixty people under my direction; with a handsome six-oared boat and a coxswain to row me about in form."*

We cannot wonder that Mr. N. latterly retained a strong impression of a particular providence, superintending and conducting the steps of man; since he was so often reminded of it in his own history. The following occurrence is one of many instances. Mr. N. after his reformation, was remarkable for his punctuality: I remember his often sitting with his watch in his hand lest he should fail in keeping his next engagement. This exactness with respect to time, it seems, was his habit while occupying his post at Liverpool. One day, however, some business had so detained him, that he came to his boat much later than usual, to the surprise of those who had observed his former punctuality. He went out in the boat as heretofore, to inspect a ship, but the ship blew up just before he reached her: it appears, that if he had left the shore a few minutes sooner, he must have perished with the rest on board.

This anecdote I had from a clergyman, upon whose word I can depend, who had been long in intimate habits with Mr. N., and who had it from Mr. N. himself: the reason of its not appearing in his letters from Liverpool to Mrs. N. I can only suppose to be, his fearing to alarm her with respect to the dangers of his station. But another providential occurrence, which he mentions in those letters, I shall transcribe.

"When I think of my settlement here, and the manner of it, I see the appointment of Providence so good and gracious, and such a plain answer to my poor prayers, that I cannot but wonder and adore. I think I have not yet told you, that my immediate predecessor in office, Mr. C—, had not the least intention of resigning his place on the occasion of his father's death; though such a report was spread about the town without his knowledge, or rather in defiance of all he could say to contradict it. Yet to this false report I owe my situation. For it put Mr. M— upon an application to Mr. S—, the member for the town; and, the very day he received the promise in my favour, Mr. C— was found dead in his bed, though he had been in company, and in perfect health, the night before. If I mistake not, the same messenger who brought the promise, carried back the news of the vacancy to Mr. S—, at Chester. About an hour after, the mayor applied for a nephew of his; but, though it was only an hour or two, he was too late. Mr. S— had already written, and sent off the letter; and I was appointed accordingly. These circumstances appear to me extraordinary, though of a piece with many other parts of my singular history. And the more so, as by another mistake I missed the land waiter's place, which was my first object, and which I now see would not have suited us nearly so well. I thank God I can now look through instruments, and second causes, and see his wisdom and goodness immediately concerned in fixing my lot."

Mr. N. having expressed, near the end of his Narrative, the motives which induced him to aim at a regular appointment to the ministry in the church of England, and of the refusal he met with in his first making the attempt, the

* Letters to a Wife, vol. ii. p. 7.

Reader is further informed, that, on Dec. 16, 1758, Mr. N. received a title to a curacy from the Rev. Mr. C—, and applied to the archbishop of York, Dr. Gilbert, for ordination. The bishop of Chester having countersigned his testimonials, directed him to Dr. Newton, the archbishop's chaplain. He was referred to the secretary, and received the softest refusal imaginable. The secretary informed him, that he had "represented the matter to the archbishop; but his Grace was inflexible in supporting the rules and canons of the church," &c.

Travelling to Loughborough, Mr. N. stopped at Welwyn, and sending a note to the celebrated Dr. Young, he received for answer, that the doctor would be glad to see him. He found the doctor's conversation agreeable, and to answer his expectation respecting the author of the *Night Thoughts*. The doctor likewise seemed pleased with Mr. N. He approved Mr. N.'s design of entering the ministry, and said many encouraging things upon the subject: and when he dismissed Mr. N. desired him never to pass near Welwyn without calling upon him.

Mr. N. it seems, had made some small attempts at Liverpool, in a way of preaching or expounding. Many wished him to engage more at large in those ministerial employments, to which his own mind was inclined: and he thus expresses his motives in a letter to Mrs. N. in answer to the objections she had formed. "The late death of Mr. Jones, of St. Saviour's, has pressed this concern more closely upon my mind. I fear it must be wrong, after having so solemnly devoted myself to the Lord for his service, to wear away my time, and bury my talents in silence, (because I have been refused orders in the church,) after all the great things he has done for me."*

In a note annexed, he observes, that "the influence of his judicious and affectionate counsellor moderated the zeal which dictated this letter, written in the year 1762; that had it not been for her, he should probably have been precluded from those important scenes of service, to which he was afterwards appointed;" but he adds, "The exercises of my mind upon this point, I believe, have not been peculiar to myself. I have known several persons, sensible, pious, of competent abilities, and cordially attached to the established church, who, being wearied out with repeated refusals of ordination, and, perhaps, not having the advantage of such an adviser as I had, have at length struck into the itinerant path, or settled among the Dissenters. Some of these, yet living, are men of respectable characters, and useful in their ministry; but their influence, which would once have been serviceable to the true interests of the Church of England, now rather operates against it."

In the year 1764, Mr. N. had the curacy of Olney proposed to him, and was recommended by Lord D— to Dr. Green, bishop of Lincoln; of whose candour and tenderness he speaks with much respect. The bishop had admitted him as a candidate for orders. "The examination," says he, "lasted about an hour, chiefly upon the principal heads of Divinity. As I resolved not to be charged hereafter with dissimulation, I was constrained to differ from his lordship in some points: but he was not offended; he declared himself satisfied, and has promised to ordain me, either next Sunday, in town, or the Sunday following, at Buckden. Let us praise the Lord!"†

Mr. N. was ordained deacon at Buckden, April 29, 1764, and priest in June the following year. In the parish of Olney, he found many, who not only had evangelical views of the truth, but had also long walked in the light and experience of it. The vicarage was in the gift of the Earl of D—, the nobleman to whom Mr. N. addressed the first twenty-six letters in his *Cardiphonia*. The earl was a man of real piety, and most amiable disposition; he had formerly appointed the Rev. Moses Brown vicar. Mr. Brown was an evangelical minister, and a good man; of course he had afforded wholesome instruction to the parishioners of Olney, and had been the instrument of a sound conversion in many of

* *Letters to a Wife*, vol. ii. p. 79. † *Ibid*, vol. ii. p. 89.

them. He was the author of a poetical piece entitled *Sunday Thoughts*, a translation of Professor Zimmerman's *Excellency of the Knowledge of Jesus Christ*, &c.

But Mr. Brown had a numerous family, and met with considerable trials in it; he too much resembled Eli in his indulgence of his children. He was also under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, and had therefore accepted the chaplaincy of Morden College, Blackheath, while vicar of Olney. Mr. N. in these circumstances, undertook the curacy of Olney, in which he continued near sixteen years, previous to his removal to St. Mary Woolnoth, to which he was afterwards presented, by the late John Thornton, Esq.

As Mr. N. was under the greatest obligations to Mr. Thornton's friendship while at Olney, and had been enabled to extend his own usefulness by the bounty of that extraordinary man, it may not be foreign to our subject to give some general outline of Mr. Thornton's character in this place.

It is said of Solomon, that "the Lord gave him largeness of heart, even as the sand on the sea-shore:" such a peculiar disposition for whatever was good or benevolent was also bestowed on Mr. Thornton. He differed as much from rich men of ordinary bounty, as they do from others that are parsimonious. Nor was this bounty the result of occasional impulse, like a summer shower, violent and short; on the contrary, it proceeded like a river pouring its waters through various countries, copious and inexhaustible. Nor could those obstructions of imposture and ingratitude, which have often been advanced as the cause of damming up other streams, prevent or retard the course of this. The generosity of Mr. Thornton, indeed, frequently met with such hindrances, and led him to increasing discrimination; but the stream of his bounty never ceased to hold its course. Deep, silent, and overwhelming, it still rolled on, nor ended even with his life.

But the fountain from whence this beneficence flowed, and by which its permanency and direction were maintained, must not be concealed. Mr. Thornton was a Christian. Let no one, however, so mistake me here, as to suppose, that I mean nothing more by the term Christian, than the state of one, who, convinced of the truth of revelation, gives assent to its doctrines—regularly attends its ordinances—and maintains an external moral and religious deportment. Such a one may have a name to live while he is dead; he may have a form of godliness without the power of it; he may even be found denying and ridiculing that power—till at length he can only be convinced of his error at an infallible tribunal; where a widow, that gives but a mite, or a publican, that smites on his breast, shall be preferred before him.

Mr. Thornton was a Christian indeed; that is, he was alive to God by a spiritual regeneration. With this God he was daily and earnestly transacting that infinitely momentous affair—the salvation of his own soul; and, next to that, the salvation of the souls of others. Temperate in all things, though mean in nothing, he made provision for doing good with his opulence, and seemed to be most in his element when appropriating a considerable part of his large income to the necessities of others.

But Mr. Thornton possessed that discrimination in his attempts to serve his fellow-creatures, which distinguishes an enlightened mind; he habitually contemplated man, as one, who has not only a body, subject to want, affliction, and death, but also a spirit, which is immortal, and must be happy or miserable for ever. He therefore felt, that the noblest exertions of charity are those which are directed to the relief of the noblest part of our species. Accordingly, he left no mode of exertion untried to relieve man under his natural ignorance and depravity. To this end, he purchased advowsons and presentations, with a view to place in parishes the most enlightened, active and useful ministers. He employed the extensive commerce in which he was engaged, as a powerful instrument for conveying immense quantities of Bibles, prayer-books, and the most *useful publications*, to every place visited by our trade. He printed, at his own

sole expense, large editions of the latter for that purpose; and it may safely be affirmed, that there is scarcely a part of the known world, where such books could be introduced, which did not feel the salutary influence of this single individual.

Nor was Mr. Thornton limited in his views of promoting the interests of real religion, with what sect soever it was connected. He stood ready to assist a beneficial design in every party, but would be the creature of none. General good was his object, and wherever it made its way, his maxim seemed constantly to be, "*valeat quantum, valere potest.*"

But the nature and extent of his liberality will be greatly misconceived, if any one should suppose it confined to moral and religious objects, though the grandest and most comprehensive exertions of it. Mr. Thornton was a philanthropist on the largest scale—the friend of man under all his wants. His manner of relieving his fellow-men was princely; instances might be mentioned of it, were it proper to particularize, which would surprise those who did not know Mr. Thornton. They were so much out of ordinary course and expectation, that I know some who felt it their duty to inquire of him, whether the sum they had received was sent by his intention, or by mistake? To this may be added, that the manner of presenting his gifts was as delicate and concealed, as the measure was large.

Besides this constant course of private donations, there was scarcely a public charity, or occasion of relief to the ignorant or necessitous, which did not meet with his distinguished support. His only question was, "May the miseries of man, in any measure, be removed or alleviated?" Nor was he merely distinguished by stretching out a liberal hand: his benevolent heart was so intent on doing good, that he was ever inventing and promoting plans for its diffusion at home or abroad.

He that wisely desires any end, will as wisely regard the means; in this Mr. Thornton was perfectly consistent. In order to execute his beneficent designs, he observed frugality and exactness in his personal expenses. By such prospective methods, he was able to extend the influence of his fortune far beyond those who, in still more elevated stations, are slaves to expensive habits. Such men meanly pace in trammels of the tyrant *custom*, till it leaves them scarcely enough to preserve their conscience, or even their credit, much less to employ their talents in Mr. Thornton's nobler pursuits. He, however, could afford to be generous; and, while he was generous, did not forget his duty in being just. He made ample provision for his children; and though, while they are living, it would be indelicate to say more, I am sure of speaking truth when I say, they are so far from thinking themselves impoverished by the bounty of their father, that they contemplate with the highest satisfaction the fruit of those benefits to society which he planted, which it may be trusted will extend with time itself, and which, after his example, they still labour to extend.

But, with all the piety and liberality of his honoured character, no man had deeper views of his own unworthiness before his God. To the Redeemer's work alone he looked for acceptance of his person and services: he felt, that all he did or could do, was infinitely short of that which had been done for him, and of the obligations that were thereby laid upon him. It was this abasedness of heart towards God, combined with the most singular largeness of heart toward his fellow-creatures, which distinguished John Thornton among men.

To this common patron of every useful and pious endeavour, Mr. N. sent the Narrative, from which the former part of these Memoirs is extracted. Mr. Thornton replied in his usual manner; that is, by accompanying his letter with a valuable bank note; and, some months after, he paid Mr. N. a visit at Olney. A closer connexion being now formed between friends, who employed their distinct talents in promoting the same benevolent cause, Mr. Thornton left a sum to Mr. N. to be appropriated to the defraying his necessary expenses, "Be hospitable," said Mr. Thornton, "and keep an

open house for such as are worthy of an entertainment : help the poor and needy = I will stately allow you £200 a-year, and readily send whatever you have oc-
 casion to draw for more." Mr. N. told me, that he thought he had received
 of Mr. Thornton upwards of £3000 in this way, during the time he resided at
 Olney.

The case of most ministers is peculiar in this respect : some among them may
 be looked up to, on account of their publicity and talents ; they may have made
 great sacrifices of their personal interest, in order to enter on their ministry, and
 may be possessed of the strongest benevolence ; but, from the narrowness of their
 pecuniary circumstances, and from the largeness of their families, they often per-
 ceive, that an ordinary tradesman in their parishes, can subscribe to a charitable
 or popular institution much more liberally than themselves. This would have
 been Mr. N.'s case, but for the above-mentioned singular patronage.

A minister, however, should not be so forgetful of his dispensation, as to repine
 at his want of power in this respect. He might as justly estimate his deficiency
 by the strength of the lion, or the flight of the eagle. The power communicated
 to him is of another kind ; and power of every kind belongs to God, who gives
 gifts to every man severally as he will. The two mites of the widow were all
 the power of that kind which was communicated to her, and her bestowment of
 her two mites was better accepted than the large offerings of the rich man. The
 powers, therefore, of Mr. Thornton, and of Mr. N., though of a different order,
 were both consecrated to God ; and each might have said, "Of thine own have
 we given thee."

Providence seems to have appointed Mr. N.'s residence at Olney, among other
 reasons, for the relief of the depressed mind of the poet Cowper. There has
 gone forth an unfounded report, that the deplorable melancholy of Cowper was
 in part, derived from his residence and connexions in that place. The fact, how-
 ever, is the reverse of this ; and as it may be of importance to the interests of
 true religion to prevent such a misrepresentation from taking root, I will present
 the real state of the case, as I have found it attested by the most respectable liv-
 ing witnesses ; and more especially as confirmed by a MS., written by the poet
 himself, at the calmest period of his life ; with the perusal of which I was fa-
 voured by Mr. N.

It most evidently appears, that symptoms of Mr. Cowper's morbid state began
 to discover themselves in his earliest youth. He seems to have been at all times
 disordered, in a greater or less degree. He was sent to Westminster school at
 the age of nine years, and long endured the tyranny of an elder boy, of which
 he gives a shocking account in the paper above-mentioned ; and which "pro-
 duced," as one of his biographers observes, who had long intimacy with him,
 "an indelible effect upon his mind through life." A person so naturally bashful
 and depressed as Cowper, must needs find the profession of a barrister a farther
 occasion of anxiety : the post obtained for him by his friends in the House of Lords,
 overwhelmed him ; and the remonstrances which those friends made against his
 relinquishing so honourable and lucrative an appointment, (but which soon after
 actually took place,) greatly increased the anguish of a mind already incapacitated
 for business. To all this were added events, which of themselves have been
 found sufficient to upset the minds of the strongest ; namely, the decease of his
 particular friend and intimate, Sir William Russel ; and his meeting with a dis-
 appointment in obtaining a lady upon whom his affections were placed.

But the state of a person, torn and depressed, not by his religious connexions
 but by adverse circumstances, and these meeting a naturally morbid sensibility
 long before he knew Olney, or had formed any connexion with its inhabitants
 will best appear from some verses which he sent at this time to one of his female
 relations, and for the communication of which we are indebted to Mr. Hayley :—

"Doom'd, as I am, in solitude to waste
 The present moments, and regret the past ;

Depriv'd of every joy I valued most—
 My friend torn from me, and my mistress lost :
 Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious mien,
 The dull effect of humour or of spleen ;
 Still, still I mourn, with each returning day,
 Him—snatch'd by fate, in early youth, away ;
 And her, through tedious years of doubt and pain,
 Fix'd in her choice, and faithful—but in vain,
 See me, ere yet my destin'd course half done,
 Cast forth a wand'rer on a wild unknown !
 See me, neglected on the world's rude coast,
 Each dear companion of my voyage lost !
 Nor ask, why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,
 And ready tears wait only leave to flow :
 Why all that soothes a heart, from anguish free,
 All that delights the happy—palls with me ?

That any man, under such pressures, should at first turn his mind to those resources, which religion alone can afford, is both natural and rational. But Mr. Cowper was like a person looking from a high tower, who perceives only the danger of falling, but neither the security nor prospect it presents; and therefore it is no wonder, with so melancholy, morbid, and susceptible a mind, that his unhappiness should be increased. And yet this very mind of Cowper, when put under the care of Dr. Cotton, of St. Alban's (a physician as capable of administering to the spiritual as to the natural maladies of his patients,) received the first consolation it ever tasted, and that from evangelical truths. It was under the care of this physician, that Mr. Cowper first obtained a clear view of those sublime and animating truths, which so distinguished and exalted his future strains as a poet. Here also he received that settled tranquillity and peace, which he enjoyed for several years afterwards. So far, therefore, was his constitutional malady from being produced or increased by his evangelical connexions, either at St. Alban's or at Olney, that he seems never to have had any settled peace but from the truths he learned in these societies. It appears, that among them alone he found the only sunshine he ever enjoyed through the cloudy day of his afflicted life.

It appears also, that, while at Dr. Cotton's, Mr. Cowper's distress was, for a long time, entirely removed, by marking that passage in Rom. iii. 25: "Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past." In this scripture he saw the remedy, which God provides for the relief of a guilty conscience, with such clearness, that, for several years after, his heart was filled with love, and his life occupied with prayer, praise, and doing good to his needy fellow-creatures.

Mr. N. told me, that from Mr. Cowper's first coming to Olney, it was observed he had studied his Bible with such advantage, and was so well acquainted with its design, that not only his troubles were removed, but that to the end of his life he never had clearer views of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel than when he first became an attendant upon them; that (short intervals excepted) Mr. Cowper enjoyed a course of peace for several successive years; that, during this period, the inseparable attendants of a lively faith appeared, by Mr. Cowper's exerting himself to the utmost of his power in every benevolent service he could render to his poor neighbours; and that Mr. N. used to consider him as a sort of curate, from his constant attendance upon the sick and afflicted, in that large and necessitous parish.

But the malady, which seemed to be subdued by the strong consolations of the gospel, was still latent; and only required some occasion of irritation to break out again, and overwhelm the patient. Any object of constant attention, that shall occupy a mind previously disordered, whether fear, or love, or science, or religion, will not be so much the cause of the disease, as the accidental occasion of exciting it. Cowper's Letters will show us how much his mind was occupied at one time by the truths of the Bible, and at another time by the fictions of Homer: but melancholy was originally a constitutional disease, a physical disorder, which

deed, could be affected either by the Bible or by Homer, but was utterly distinct in its nature from the mere matter of either. And here I cannot but mark this necessary distinction, having often been witness to cases where religion has been assigned as the proper cause of insanity, when it has been only an accidental occasion, in the case of one already affected.* Thus Cowper's malady, like a strong current, breaking down the banks which had hitherto sustained the pressure and obliquity of its course, prevailed against the supports he had received, and precipitated him again into his former distress.

I inquired of Mr. N. as to the manner in which Mr. Cowper's disorder returned, after an apparent recovery of nearly nine years continuance: and was informed that the first symptoms were discovered one morning, in his discourse, soon after he had undertaken a new engagement in composition.

As a general and full account of this extraordinary genius is already before the public, such particulars would not have occupied so much room in these Memoirs, but with the view of removing the false statements that have been made.

Of great importance also was the vicinity of Mr. N.'s residence to that of the Rev. Mr. Scott, then curate of Ravenstone and Weston Underwood, and now rector of Aston Sandford; a man whose ministry and writings have since been so useful to mankind. This clergyman was nearly a Socinian: he was in the habit of ridiculing evangelical religion, and laboured to bring over Mr. N. to his own sentiments. Mr. Scott had married a lady from the family of a Mr. Wright, a gentleman in his parish, who had promised to provide for him. But Mr. Scott's objections to subscription arose so high, that he informed his patron it would be in vain to attempt providing for him in the Church of England, as he could not conscientiously accept a living on the condition of subscribing its Liturgy and Articles. "This," said Mr. N., "gave me hopes of Mr. Scott's being sincere, however wrong in his principles."

But the benefit which Mr. Scott derived from his neighbour, will best appear in his own words:—†

"I was," says he, "full of proud self-sufficiency, very positive, and very obstinate; and being situated in the neighbourhood of some of those whom the world calls Methodists I joined in the prevailing sentiment; held them in sovereign contempt; spoke of them with derision; declaimed against them from the pulpit, as persons full of bigotry, enthusiasm, and spiritual pride; laid heavy things to their charge; and endeavoured to prove the doctrine, which I supposed them to hold (for I had never read their books,) to be dishonourable to God, and destructive of morality; and though in some companies I chose to conceal part of my sentiments, and in all affected to speak as a friend to universal toleration, yet scarcely any person could be more proudly and violently prejudiced against both their persons and principles than I then was.

"In January 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of the circumstance, but, according to my general

* I have been an eye-witness of several instances of this kind of misrepresentation, but will detain the reader with mentioning only one. I was called to visit a woman whose mind was disordered, and on my observing, that it was a case which required the assistance of a physician rather than that of a clergyman, her husband replied: "Sir, we sent to you, because it is a religious case—her mind has been injured by constantly reading the Bible." "I have known many instances," said I, "of persons brought to their senses by reading the Bible; but it is possible, that too intense an application to that, as well as to any other subject, may have disordered your wife." "There is every proof of it," said he; and was proceeding to multiply his proofs, till his brother interrupted him by thus addressing me:—

"Sir, I have no longer patience to stand by and see you imposed on. The truth of the matter is this: my brother has forsaken his wife, and been long connected with a loose woman. He had the best of wives in her, and one who was strongly attached to him: but she has seen his heart and property given to another, and in her solitude and distress, went to the Bible, as the only consolation left her. Her health and spirits at length sunk under her troubles; and there she lies distracted, not from reading her Bible, but from the infidelity and cruelty of her husband." Does the reader wish to know what reply the husband made to this? He made no reply at all, but left the room with confusion of face.

† *Scott's Force of Truth*, p. 11, fifth edition.

custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it; till one evening, the woman being now dead, and the man dying, I heard that my neighbour Mr. N. had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent, in sitting at home within a few doors of dying persons, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that whatever contempt I might have for Mr. N.'s doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than my own. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit and supply my lack of care to those, who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.

"This reflection affected me so much, that without delay, and very earnestly, yea, with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect; and I resolved thenceforth to be more attentive to this duty: which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependence on my own strength, I have by divine grace been enabled hitherto to keep. I went immediately to visit the survivor; and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and another expiring in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my serious convictions.

"It was at this time that my correspondence with Mr. N. commenced. At a visitation, May 1775, we exchanged a few words on a controverted subject, in the room among the clergy, which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse; but a day or two after he sent me a short note, with a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I wanted; and I gladly embraced the opportunity, which, according to my wishes, seemed now to offer; God knoweth, with no inconsiderable expectations, that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honour of rescuing a well-meaning person from his enthusiastical delusions.

"I had, indeed, by this time conceived a very favourable opinion of him, and a sort of respect for him, being acquainted with the character he sustained, even among some persons who expressed a disapprobation of his doctrines. They were forward to commend him as a benevolent, disinterested, inoffensive person, and a laborious minister. But on the other hand I looked upon his religious sentiments as rank fanaticism; and entertained a very contemptible opinion of his abilities, natural and acquired. Once I had the curiosity to hear him preach; and, not understanding his sermon, I made a very great jest of it, where I could do it without giving offence. I had also read one of his publications; but for the same reason I thought the greater part of it whimsical, paradoxical, and unintelligible.

"Concealing, therefore, the true motives of my conduct, under the offer of friendship, and a professed desire to know the truth (which, amidst all my self-sufficiency and prejudice, I trust the Lord had even then given me,) with the greatest affectation of candour, and of a mind open to conviction, I wrote him a long letter; purposing to draw from him such an avowal and explanation of his sentiments, as might introduce a controversial discussion of our religious differences.

"The event by no means answered my expectation. He returned a very friendly and long answer to my letter, in which he carefully avoided the mention of those doctrines which he knew would offend me. He declared that he believed me to be one who feared God, and was under the teaching of his Holy Spirit; that he gladly accepted my offer of friendship, and was no ways inclined to dictate to me; but that, leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, he would be glad, as occasion served from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the gospel, and to communicate his sentiments to me on any subject with all the confidence of friendship.

"In this manner our correspondence began; and it was continued, in the interchange of nine or ten letters, till December, in the same year. Throughout I held my purpose, and he his. I made use of every endeavour to draw him into controversy, and filled my letters with definitions, inquiries, arguments, objections, and

consequences, requiring explicit answers. He, on the other hand, shunned every thing controversial as much as possible, and filled his letters with the most useful and least offensive instructions; except that now and then he dropped his hints concerning the necessity, the true nature, and the efficacy of faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought and obtained; and concerning some other matters suited, as he judged, to help me forward in my inquiry after truth. But they much offended my prejudices, afforded me matter of disputation, and at that time were of little use to me.

“When I had made this little progress in seeking the truth, my acquaintance with Mr. N. was resumed. From the conclusion of our correspondence in December 1775, till April 1777, it had been almost wholly dropped. To speak plainly, I did not care for his company: I did not mean to make any use of him as an instructor, and I was unwilling the world should think us in any way connected. But, under discouraging circumstances, I had occasion to call upon him; and his discourse so comforted and edified me, that my heart, being by his means relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection for him. From that time I was inwardly pleased to have him for my friend; though not, as now, rejoiced to call him so. I had, however, even at that time no thoughts of learning doctrinal truth from him, and was ashamed to be detected in his company; but I sometimes stole away to spend an hour with him. About the same period I once heard him preach; but still it was foolishness to me, his sermon being principally upon the believer’s experience, in some particulars with which I was unacquainted; so that, though I loved and valued him, I considered him as a person misled by enthusiastical notions; and strenuously insisted, that we should never think alike till we met in heaven.”

Mr. Scott, after going on to particularize his progress in the discovery of truth and the character of Mr. N. as its minister, afterwards adds:—

“The pride of reasoning, and the conceit of superior discernment, had all along accompanied me; and though somewhat broken, had yet considerable influence. Hitherto, therefore, I had not thought of hearing any person preach; because I did not think any one in the circle of my acquaintance capable of giving me such information as I wanted. But being at length convinced that Mr. N. had been right, and that I had been mistaken, in the several particulars in which we had differed, it occurred to me, that, having preached those doctrines so long, he must understand many things concerning them to which I was a stranger. Now, therefore, though not without much remaining prejudice, and not less in the character of a judge than of a scholar, I condescended to be his hearer, and occasionally to attend his preaching, and that of some other ministers. I soon perceived the benefit; for from time to time the secrets of my heart were discovered to me, far beyond what I had hitherto noticed; and I seldom returned from hearing a sermon without having conceived a meaner opinion of myself—without having attained to a farther acquaintance with my deficiencies, weaknesses, corruptions, and wants—or without being supplied with fresh matter for prayer, and directed to greater watchfulness. I likewise learned the use of experience in preaching; and was convinced that the readiest way to reach the hearts and consciences of others, was to speak from my own. In short, I gradually saw more and more my need of instruction, and was at length brought to consider myself as a very novice in religious matters. Thus I began experimentally to perceive our Lord’s meaning, when he says, ‘Except ye receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, ye shall in nowise enter therein.’”

If I have seemed to digress in dwelling so long on these three characters, let the reader consider the importance of the facts—their intimate connexion with Mr. N.’s history—and let me inform him, that the author has something much nearer his heart than that of precision in setting forth the history of an individual; namely, that of exhibiting the nature and importance of vital and experimental religion: he therefore gladly brings forward any fact found in his way, which may tend to illustrate it.

But to return to the more immediate subject of these Memoirs. In the year 1776, Mr. N. was afflicted with a tumour, or wen, which had formed on his thigh; and on account of its growing more large and troublesome, he resolved to undergo the experiment of extirpation. This obliged him to go to London for the operation, which was successfully performed, October 10th, by the late Mr. Warner, of Guy's Hospital. I remember hearing him speak several years afterwards of this trying occasion; but the trial did not seem to have affected him as a painful operation, so much as a critical opportunity in which he might fail in demonstrating the patience of a Christian under pain. "I felt," said he, "that being enabled to bear a very sharp operation, with tolerable calmness and confidence, was a greater favour granted to me than the deliverance from my malady.*"

While Mr. N. thus continued faithfully discharging the duties of his station, and watching for the temporal and eternal welfare of his flock, a dreadful fire broke out at Olney, October 1777. Mr. N. took an active part in comforting and relieving the sufferers: he collected upwards of £200 for them; a considerable sum of money, when the poverty and late calamity of the place are regarded. Such instances of benevolence towards the people, with the constant assistance he afforded the poor, by the help of Mr. Thornton, naturally led him to expect that he should have so much influence as to restrain gross licentiousness on particular occasions. But, to use his own expression, he had "lived to bury the old crop on which any dependence could be placed." He preached a weekly lecture, which occurred that year on the 5th of November; and, as he feared that the usual way of celebrating it at Olney might endanger his hearers in their attendance at the church, he exerted himself to preserve some degree of quiet on that evening. Instead, however, of hearkening to his entreaties, the looser sort exceeded their former extravagance, drunkenness, and rioting, and even obliged him to send out money, to preserve his house from violence. This happened but a year before he finally left Olney. When he related this occurrence to me, he added, that he believed he should never have left the place while he lived, had not so incorrigible a spirit prevailed in a parish he had long laboured to reform.

But I must remark here, that this is no solitary fact, nor at all unaccountable. The gospel, we are informed, is not merely "a savour of life unto life," but also "of death unto death." Those whom it does not soften it is often found to harden. Thus we find St. Paul "went into the synagogue and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them."

"The strong man armed," seeks to keep his "house and goods in peace," and, if a minister is disposed to let this sleep of death remain, that minister's own house and goods may be permitted to remain in peace also. Such a minister may be esteemed by his parish as a good kind of man—quiet, inoffensive, candid, &c.; and if he discover any zeal, it is directed to keep the parish in the state he found it; that is, in ignorance and unbelief, worldly-minded and hard-hearted—the very state of peace in which the strong man armed seeks to keep his palace or citadel, the human heart.

But if a minister, like the subject of these Memoirs, enters into the design of his commission—if he be alive to the interest of his own soul, and that of the souls committed to his charge; or, as the apostle expresses it, "to save himself

* His reflections upon the occasion, in his diary, are as follow:—"Thou didst support me, and make this operation very tolerable. The cure, by thy blessing, was happily expedited: so that, on Sunday the 27th, I was enabled to go to church and hear Mr. F——, and the Sunday following, to preach for him. The tenderness and attention of Dr. and Mrs. F——, with whom we were, I cannot sufficiently describe; nor, indeed, the kindness of many other friends. To them I would be thankful, my Lord, but especially to thee; for what are creatures but instruments in thy hand, fulfilling thy pleasure? At home all was preserved quiet, and I met with no incident to distress or disturb me while absent. The last fortnight I preached often, and was hurried about in seeing my friends. But though I had a little leisure or opportunity for retirement, and my heart, alas! as usual, *sadly reluctant and dull in secret*, yet in public thou wert pleased to favour me with liberty."

and those that hear him," he may depend upon meeting in his own experience the truth of that declaration, "Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," in one form of it or another. One of the most melancholy sights we behold is when any part of the church, through prejudice, joins the world in throwing the stone. There is, however, such a determined enmity to godliness itself, in the breast of a certain class of men existing in most parishes, that whatever learning and good sense are found in their teacher—whatever consistency of character, or blameless deportment he exhibits—whatever benevolence or bounty (like that which Mr. N. exercised at Olney,) may constantly appear in his character—such men remain irreconcilable. They will resist every attempt made to appease their enmity. God alone, who changed the hearts of Paul and of Newton, can heal these bitter waters.

I recollect to have heard Mr. N. say on such an occasion, "When God is about to perform any great work, he generally permits some great opposition to it. Suppose Pharaoh had acquiesced in the departure of the children of Israel, or that they had met with no difficulties in the way, they would, indeed, have passed from Egypt to Canaan with ease; but they, as well as the church in all future ages, would have been great losers. The wonder-working God would not have been seen in those extremities, which make his arm so visible. A smooth passage, here, would have made but a poor story."

But, under such disorders, Mr. N., in no one instance that I ever heard of, was tempted to depart from the line marked out by the precept and example of his Master. He continued to "bless them that persecuted him," knowing that "the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient." To the last day he spent among them, he went straight forward, "in meekness instructing those that opposed, if God peradventure might give them repentance to the acknowledging the truth."

But, before we take a final leave of Olney, the reader must be informed of another part of Mr. N.'s labours. He had published a volume of Sermons before he took orders, dated Liverpool, January 1, 1760. In 1762 he published his Omicron, to which his letters, signed Vigil, were afterwards annexed. In 1764 appeared his Narrative. In 1767, a volume of Sermons, preached at Olney. In 1769 his Review of Ecclesiastical History: and in 1779, a volume of Hymns, of which some were composed by Mr. Cowper, and distinguished by a C. To these succeeded, in 1781, his valuable work, Cardiphonia; but more will be said of these in their place.

From Olney Mr. N. was removed to the rectory of the united parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth, and St. Mary Woolchurch Haw, Lombard Street, on the presentation of his friend Mr. Thornton.

It is remarkable, that these parishes had been favoured with two very eminent pastors, before Mr. N. appeared; namely, the Rev. Josias Shute, B. D., archdeacon of Colchester, and rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, who died 1643—and the Rev. Ralph Robinson, who died in 1655. There is a well written account of Mr. Shute in the Christian Observer of January 1804; from which it appears, that his piety, ministerial talents, and moderation in those difficult times, were very much distinguished during the thirty-three years he continued rector.* Mr. Robinson died young, but has left a volume of truly evangelical discourses preached at St. Mary's.

Some difficulty arose on Mr. N.'s being presented, by Mr Thornton's right of presentation being claimed by a nobleman; the question was, therefore, at

* Granger in his Biographical History of England, says that "His learning in divinity and ecclesiastical history was extensive, indeed almost universal." And even Walker, in his account of the Clergy, says, that, "In the beginning of the troubles, he was molested and harassed to death, and denied a funeral sermon to be preached for him by Dr. Holdsworth, as he desired—that he was a person of great piety, charity, and gravity, and ~~and~~ affable temper." It farther appears, that, like his successor Mr. N., he preached the Sunday, and had a lecture in his church every Wednesday.

length brought before the House of Lords, and determined in favour of Mr. Thornton. Mr. N. preached his first sermon in these parishes, Dec. 19, 1779, from Eph. iv. 15. "Speaking the truth in love." It contained an affectionate address to his parishioners, and was directly published for their use.

Here a new and very distinct scene of action and usefulness was set before him. Placed in the centre of London—in an opulent neighbourhood—with connexions daily increasing, he had now a course of service to pursue, in several respects different from his former at Olney. Being, however, well acquainted with the word of God, and the heart of man, he proposed to himself no new weapons of warfare for pulling down the strong holds of sin and Satan around him. He perceived, indeed, most of his parishioners too intent upon their wealth and merchandise to pay much regard to their new minister; but, since they would not come to him, he was determined to go, as far as he could, to them; and, therefore, soon after his institution, he sent a printed address to his parishioners: he afterwards sent them another address, on the usual prejudices that are taken up against the gospel. What effects these attempts had then upon them does not appear; certain it is, that these, and other acts of his ministry, will be recollected by them, when the objects of their present pursuits are forgotten or lamented.

I have heard Mr. N. speak with great feeling on the circumstances of his last important station. "That one," said he, "of the most ignorant, the most miserable, and the most abandoned of slaves, should be plucked from his forlorn state of exile on the coast of Africa, and at length be appointed minister of the parish of the first magistrate of the first city in the world—that he should there not only testify of such grace, but stand up as a singular instance and monument of it—that he should be enabled to record it in his history, preaching, and writings to the world at large—is a fact I can contemplate with admiration, but never sufficiently estimate." This reflection, indeed, was so present to his mind on all occasions, and in all places, that he seldom passed a single day anywhere, but he was found referring to the strange event, in one way or other.

It may be necessary to add, that the latter part of these Memoirs leads me to speak so personally of my friend, that any farther inspection from his own eye was deemed improper.

When Mr. N. came to St. Mary's, he resided for some time in Charles' Square, Hoxton; afterwards he removed to Coleman Street Buildings, where he continued till his death. Being of the most friendly and communicative disposition, his house was open to Christians of all ranks and denominations. Here, like a father among his children, he used to entertain, encourage, and instruct his friends, especially younger ministers, or candidates for the ministry. Here also the poor, the afflicted, and the tempted, found an asylum and a sympathy, which they could scarcely find, in an equal degree, anywhere besides.

His timely hints were often given with much point, and profitable address, to the numerous acquaintance which surrounded him in this public station. Some time after Mr. N. had published his Omicron, and described the three stages of growth in religion, from the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, distinguishing them by the letters A, B, and C, a conceited young minister wrote to Mr. N., telling him, that he read his own character accurately drawn in that of C. Mr. N. wrote in reply, that in drawing the character of C, or full maturity, he had forgotten to add, till now, one prominent feature of C's character, namely, that C never knew his own face.

"It grieves me," said Mr. N., "to see so few of my wealthy parishioners come to church. I always consider the rich as under greater obligations to the preaching of the gospel than the poor. For at church, the rich must hear the whole truth as well as others. There they have no mode of escape. But let them once get home, you will be troubled to get at them; and, when you are admitted, you are so fettered with punctilio, so interrupted and damped with the frivolous conversation of their friends, that, as Archbishop Leighton says, 'it is well if your visit does not prove a blank or a blot.'"

But in his duty prompt at every call,
 He watch'd and wept, he prayed and felt, for all :
 And as a bird each fond endearment tries,
 To tempt its new-fledg'd offspring to the skies,
 He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,
 Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way."

I remember to have heard him say, when speaking of his continual interruptions, "I see in this world two heaps of human happiness and misery; now if I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add to the other, I carry a point.—If, as I go home, a child has dropped a halfpenny, and if, by giving it another, I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something. I should be glad indeed to do greater things, but I will not neglect this. When I hear a knock at my study door, I hear a message from God; it may be a lesson of instruction, perhaps a lesson of patience; but, since it is his message, it must be interesting."

But it was not merely under his own roof that his benevolent aims were thus exerted; he was found ready to take an active part in relieving the miserable, directing the anxious, or recovering the wanderer, in whatever state or place he discovered such: of which, take the following instance:—

Mr. ———, who is still living, and who holds a post of great importance abroad, was a youth of considerable talents, and who had had a respectable education. I am not informed of his original destination in point of profession; but certain it is, that he left his parents in Scotland, with a design of viewing the world at large, and that without those pecuniary resources, which could render such an undertaking convenient or even practicable. Yet having the sanguine expectations of youth, together with its inexperience, he determinately pursued his plan. I have seen an account from his own hand, of the strange, but by no means dishonourable resources to which he was reduced in the pursuit of this scheme; nor can romance exceed the detail. But the particulars of his long journey, till he arrived in London, and those which have since occurred, would not be proper, at present, for any one to record except himself; and I cannot but wish he would favour the world with them, on the principle which led Mr. N. to write his Narrative. To London, however, he came; and then he seemed to come to himself. He had heard Mr. N.'s character, and on a Sunday evening he came to St. Mary Woolnoth, and stood in one of the aisles while Mr. N. preached. In the course of that week he wrote Mr. N. some account of his adventure, and state of mind. Such circumstances could be addressed to no man more properly. Mr. N.'s favourite maxim was often in his mouth, more often in his actions, and always in his heart:—

"Haud ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco."

Mr. N. therefore gave notice from the pulpit on the following Sunday evening, that, if the person was present who had sent him such a letter, he would be glad to speak with him.

Mr. ——— gladly accepted the invitation, and came to Mr. N.'s house, where a friendship began, which continued till Mr. N.'s death. Mr. N. not only afforded this youth the instruction, which he, at this period, so deeply needed; but marking his fine abilities and corrected inclination, he introduced him to Henry Thornton Esq.; who, inheriting his father's unbounded liberality and determined adherence to the cause of real religion, readily patronized the stranger. Mr. ——— was, by the munificence of this gentleman, supported through a university education, and was afterwards ordained to the curacy of ———. It was, however, thought expedient, that his talents should be employed in an important station abroad, which he readily undertook, and in which he now maintains a very distinguished character.

It ought not to be concealed, that Mr. ———, since his advancement, has not only returned his patron the whole expense of his university education, but

was also placed in his hands an equal sum, for the education of some pious youth, who might be deemed worthy of that assistance once afforded to himself!

Mr. N. used to spend a month or two, annually, at the house of some friend in the country; he always took an affectionate leave of his congregation before he departed, and spake of his leaving town as quite uncertain of returning to it, considering the variety of incidents which might prevent that return. Nothing was more remarkable than his constant habit of regarding the hand of God in every event, however trivial it might appear to others. On every occasion—in the concerns of every hour—matters public or private, like Enoch, he “walked with God.” Take a single instance of his state of mind in this respect. In walking to his church, he would say, “‘The way of man is not in himself,’ nor can he conceive what belongs to a single step. When I go to St. Mary Woolnoth, it seems the same whether I turn down Lothbury or go through the Old Jewry; but the going through one street and not another, may produce an effect of lasting consequences. A man cut down my hammock in sport, but had he cut it down half-an-hour later, I had not been here; as the exchange of crew was then making. A man made a smoke on the sea-shore at the time a ship passed, which was thereby brought to, and afterwards brought me to England.”

Mr. N. had experienced a severe stroke soon after he came to St. Mary’s and while he resided in Charles’s Square, in the death of his niece, Miss Eliza Cunningham. He loved her with the affection of a parent, and she was, indeed, truly lovely. He had brought her up, and had observed, that, with the most amiable natural qualities, she possessed a real piety. With every possible attention from Mr. and Mrs. Newton and their friends, they saw her gradually sink into the arms of death; but fully prepared to meet him as a messenger sent from a yet kinder Father, to whom she departed, October 6th, 1785, aged fourteen years and eight months. On this occasion Mr. N. published some brief memoirs of her character and death.

In the year 1784 and 1785 Mr. N. preached a course of sermons, on an occasion, of which he gives the following account in his first discourse: “Conversation in almost every company, for some time past, has much turned upon the commemoration of Handel, and particularly on his Oratorio of the Messiah. I mean to lead your meditations to the language of the oratorio, and to consider, in their order (if the Lord, on whom our breath depends, shall be pleased to afford life, ability, and opportunity,) the several sublime and interesting passages of Scripture, which are the basis of that admired composition.” In the year 1786 he published these discourses, in two volumes octavo. There is a passage so original, at the beginning of his fourth sermon, from Mal. iii. 1—3, “The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple,” &c. that I shall transcribe it for the use of such as have not seen these discourses; at the same time, it will, in a few words, convey Mr. N.’s idea of the usual performance of this oratorio, or attending its performance, in present circumstances.

“‘Whereunto shall we liken the people of this generation, and to what are they like?’ I represent to myself a number of persons, of various characters, involved in one common charge of high treason. They are already in a state of confinement, but not yet brought to their trial. The facts, however, are so plain, and the evidence against them so strong and pointed, that there is not the least doubt of their guilt being fully proved, and that nothing but a pardon can preserve them from punishment. In this situation, it should seem their wisdom to avail themselves of every expedient in their power for obtaining mercy. But they are entirely regardless of their danger, and wholly taken up with contriving methods of amusing themselves, that they may pass away the term of their imprisonment with as much cheerfulness as possible. Among other resources, they call in the assistance of music. And amidst a great variety of subjects in this way, they are particularly pleased with one. They choose to make the solemnities of their impending trial, the character of their Judge, the methods of his procedure, and the awful sentence to which they are exposed, the groundwork

of a musical entertainment. And, as if they were quite unconcerned in the event, their attention is chiefly fixed upon the skill of the composer, in adapting the style of his music to the very solemn language and subject with which they are trifling. The king, however, out of his great clemency and compassion towards those who have no pity for themselves, prevents them with his goodness. Undesired by them, he sends them a gracious message. He assures them, that he is unwilling they should suffer: he requires, yea, he entreats them to submit. He points out a way in which their confession and submission shall be certainly accepted; and in this way, which he condescends to prescribe, he offers them a free and a full pardon. But instead of taking a single step towards a compliance with his goodness, they set his message likewise to music: and this, together with a description of their present state, and of the fearful doom awaiting them if they continue obstinate, is sung for their diversion, accompanied with the sound of cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of instruments. Surely, if such a case as I have supposed could be found in real life, though I might admire the musical taste of these people, I should commiserate their insensibility!"

But "clouds return after the rain:" a greater loss than that of Miss C. was to follow. Enough has been said in these Memoirs already, to show the more than ordinary affection Mr. N. felt for her who had been so long his idol, as he used to call her; of which I shall add but one more instance, out of many that might easily be collected.

Being with him at the house of a lady at Blackheath, we stood at a window, which had a prospect of Shooter's Hill. "Ah," said Mr. N., "I remember the many journeys I took from London to stand at the top of that hill, in order to look towards the part in which Mrs. N. then lived: not that I could see the spot itself, after travelling several miles, for she lived far beyond what I could see, when on the hill; but it gratified me even to look towards the spot: and this I did always once, and sometimes twice a week." "Why," said I, "this is more like one of the vagaries of Romance than of real life." "True," replied he, "but real life has extravagances, that would not be admitted to appear in a well-written romance—they would be said to be out of nature."

In such a continued habit of excessive attachment, it is evident how keenly Mr. N. must have felt, while he observed the progress of a threatening induration in her breast. This tumour seemed to have arisen from a blow she received before she left Liverpool. The pain it occasioned at the time soon wore off, but a small lump remained in the part affected. In October 1788, on the tumour's increasing, she applied to an eminent surgeon, who told her it was a cancer, and now too large for extraction, and that he could only recommend quiet. As the spring of 1789 advanced, her malady increased; and though she was able to bear a journey to Southampton, from which she returned, in other respects, tolerably well; she grew gradually worse with the cancer till she expired, December 15, 1790.

Mr. N. made this remark on her death, "Just before Mrs. N.'s disease became so formidable, I was preaching on the waters of Egypt being turned into blood. The Egyptians had idolized their river, and God made them loathe it. I was apprehensive it would soon be a similar case with me." During the very affecting season of Mrs. N.'s dissolution, Mr. N., like David, wept and prayed; but the desire of his eyes being taken away by the stroke, he too, like David, "arose from the earth, and came into the temple of the Lord, and worshipped," and that in a manner which surprised some of his friends.

I must own I was not one of those who saw any thing that might not be expected from such a man, surrounded with such circumstances. I did not wonder at his undertaking to preach Mrs. N.'s funeral Sermon, on the following Sunday, at St. Mary's; since I always considered him as an original, and his case quite an exception to general habits in many respects. There also could be no question as to the affection he had borne to the deceased: it had even prevailed, as he readily allowed, to an *eccentric* and blamable degree; and indeed after her re-

moval, he used to observe an annual seclusion, for a special recollection of her, whom through the year he had never forgotten, and from which proceeded a sort of little elegies or sonnets to her memory. But he clearly recognized the will of God in the removal of his idol, and reasoned as David did on the occasion: "While she was yet alive I fasted and wept: for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that she may live? But, now she is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring her back again? I shall go to her, but she shall not return to me."

Besides which, Mr. N. had a favourite sentiment, which I have heard him express in different ways long before he had so special an occasion for illustrating it in practice. "God in his providence," he used to say, "is continually bringing about occasion to demonstrate characters." He used to instance the case of Achan and Judas among bad men; and that of St. Paul, Acts xxvii. among good ones. "If any one," said he, "had asked the centurion, who Paul the prisoner was, that sailed with them on board the ship—it is probable he would have thus replied, 'He is a troublesome enthusiast, who had lately joined himself to a certain sect. These people affirm, that a Jewish malefactor, who was crucified some years ago at Jerusalem, rose the third day from the dead; and this Paul is mad enough to assert, that Jesus, the leader of their sect, is not only now alive, but that he himself has seen him, and is resolved to live and die for him—Poor crazy creature!' But God made use of this occasion to discover the real character of Paul, and taught the centurion, from the circumstances which followed, to whom it was he owed his direction in the storm, and for whose sake he received his preservation through it."

In all trying occasions, therefore, Mr. N. was particularly impressed with the idea of a Christian, and especially of a Christian minister, being called to stand forward as an example to his flock—to feel himself placed in a post of honour—a post in which he may not only glorify God, but also forcibly demonstrate the peculiar supports of the gospel. More especially, when this could be done (as in his own case) from no doubtful motive; then it may be expedient to leave the path of ordinary custom, for the greater reason of exhibiting both the doctrines of truth, and the experience of their power.

Though I professedly publish none of Mr. N.'s letters, for reasons hereafter assigned, yet I shall take the liberty to insert part of one, with which I am favoured by J. F——, Esq. of Stanmore Hill, written to him while at Rome, and dated December 5th, 1796. It shows the interest which the writer took in the safety of his friend, and his address in attempting to break the enchantments with which men of taste are surrounded, when standing in the centre of the fine arts.

"The true Christian, in strict propriety of speech, has no home here; he is, and must be, a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth: his citizenship, treasure, and real home are in a better world; and every step he takes, whether to the east, or to the west, is a step nearer to his Father's house. On the other hand, when in the path of duty, he is always at home; for the whole earth is the Lord's: and as we see the same sun in England or Italy, in Europe or Asia, so wherever he is, he equally sets the Lord always before him; and finds himself equally near the throne of grace at all times, and in all places. God is every where, and, by faith in the great Mediator, he dwells in God, and God in him; to him that line of Horace may be applied in the best sense,—

"Cælum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt."

"I trust, my dear Sir, that you will carry out and bring home with you, a determination similar to that of the patriarch Jacob; who vowed a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God!' May the Lord himself write it on you *heart!*

“ You are now at Rome, the centre of the fine arts ; a place abounding with every thing to gratify a person of your taste. Athens had the pre-eminence in the apostle Paul's time ; and I think it highly probable, from many passages in his writings, that he likewise had a taste capable of admiring and relishing the beauties of painting, sculpture, and architecture, which he could not but observe during his abode in that city ; but then he had a higher, a spiritual, a divine taste, which was greatly shocked and grieved by the ignorance, idolatry, and wickedness, which surrounded him, insomuch that he could attend to nothing else. This taste, which cannot be acquired by any effort or study of ours, but is freely bestowed on all who sincerely ask it of the Lord, divests the vanities, which the world admire, of their glare ; and enables us to judge of the most splendid and specious works of men, who know not God, according to the declaration of the prophet, ‘ They hatch cockatrice eggs, and weave the spider's web.’ Much ingenuity is displayed in the weaving of a cobweb ; but when finished it is worthless and useless : incubation requires close diligence and attention ; if the hen is too long from her nest, the egg is spoiled ; but why should she sit at all upon the egg, and watch it, and warm it night and day, if it only produce a cockatrice at last ? Thus vanity or mischief are the chief rulers of un-sanctified genius ; the artists spin webs, and the philosophers, by their learned speculations, hatch cockatrices, to poison themselves and their fellow-creatures : few of either sort have one serious thought of that awful eternity, upon the brink of which they stand for a while, and into the depth of which they successively fall.

“ A part of the sentence denounced against the city, which once stood upon seven hills, is so pointed and graphical, that I must transcribe it : ‘ And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee ; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee, and the light of a candle shall no more be seen in thee.’ Now, I am informed, that, upon certain occasions, the whole cupola of St. Peter's is covered with lamps, and affords a very magnificent spectacle : if I saw it, it would remind me of that time when there will not be the shining of a single candle in the city ; for the sentence must be executed, and the hour may be approaching :—

Sic transit gloria mundi !

“ You kindly inquire after my health : myself and family are, through the divine favour, perfectly well ; yet, healthy as I am, I labour under a growing disorder, for which there is no cure—I mean old age. I am not sorry it is a mortal disease, from which no one recovers ; for who would live always in such a world as this, who has a scriptural hope of an inheritance in the world of light ? I am now in my seventy-second year, and seem to have lived long enough for myself ; I have known something of the evil of life, and have had a large share of the good. I know what the world can do, and what it cannot do : it can neither give nor take away that peace of God, which passeth all understanding : it cannot soothe a wounded conscience, nor enable us to meet death with comfort. That you, my dear sir, may have an abiding and abounding experience that the gospel is a catholicon, adapted to all our wants and all our feelings, and a suitable help when every other help fails, is the sincere and ardent prayer of

“ Your affectionate friend,
“ JOHN NEWTON.”

But in proportion as Mr. N. felt the vanity of the pursuits he endeavoured to expose in the foregoing letter, he was as feelingly alive to whatever regarded eternal concerns. Take an instance of this, in a visit which he paid to another friend. This friend was a minister, who affected great accuracy in his discourses, and who, on that Sunday, had nearly occupied an hour in insisting on several

laboured and nice distinctions made in his subject. As he had a high estimation of Mr. N.'s judgment, he inquired of him, as they walked home, whether he thought the distinctions just now insisted on were full and judicious? Mr. N. said he thought them not full, as a very important one had been omitted. "What can that be?" said the minister; "for I had taken more than ordinary care to enumerate them fully." "I think not," replied Mr. N.; "for when many of your congregation had travelled several miles for a meal, I think you should not have forgotten the important distinction which must ever exist between meat and bones."

In the year 1790, Mr. M. had the honorary degree of D. D. conferred upon him by the University of New-Jersey in America, and the diploma sent him. He also received a work in two volumes, dedicated to him with the above title annexed to his name. Mr. N. wrote the author a grateful acknowledgment for the work, but begged to decline an honour which he never intended to accept. "I am (said he,) as one born out of due time. I have neither the pretension nor wish to honours of this kind. However, therefore, the University may overrate my attainments, and thus show their respect, I must not forget myself. It would be both vain and improper were I to concur in it."

But Mr. N. had yet another storm to weather. While we were contemplating the long and rough voyage he had passed, and thought he had only now to rest in a quiet haven, and with a fine sunsetting at the close of the evening of his life, clouds began to gather again, and seemed to threaten a wreck at the very entry of the port.*

He used to make excursions in the summer to different friends in the country, endeavouring to make these visits profitable to them and their neighbours, by his continual prayers, and the expositions he gave of the scriptures read at their morning and evening worship. I have heard of some, who were first brought to the knowledge of themselves and of God by attending his exhortations on these occasions; for, indeed, besides what he undertook in a more stated way at the church, he seldom entered a room, but something both profitable and entertaining fell from his lips. After the death of Miss Cunningham and Mrs. N., his companion in these summer excursions was his other niece, Miss Elizabeth Catlett. This young lady had also been brought up by Mr. and Mrs. N. with Miss Cunningham, and on the death of the two latter, she became the object of Mr. N.'s naturally affectionate disposition. She also became quite necessary to him by her administrations in his latter years; she watched him, walked with him, visited wherever he went: when his sight failed, she read to him, divided his food, and was unto him all that a dutiful daughter could be.

But, in the year 1801, a nervous disorder seized her, by which Mr. N. was obliged to submit to her being separated from him. During the twelvemonth it lasted, the weight of the affliction, added to his weight of years, seemed to overwhelm him. I extracted a few of his reflections on the occasion, written on some blank leaves in an edition of his Letters to a Wife, which he lent me on my undertaking these Memoirs, and subjoin them in a note.† It may give the reader

* In a MS. note on a letter, dated 15th Dec. 1797, he writes, "Though I am not so sensibly affected as I could wish, I hope I am truly affected by the frequent reviews I make of my past life. Perhaps the annals of thy church scarcely afford an instance in all respects so singular. Perhaps thy grace may have recovered some from an equal degree of apostacy, infidelity, and profligacy; but few of them have been redeemed from such a state of misery and depression as I was in, upon the coast of Africa, when thy unsought mercy wrought for my deliverance: but that such a wretch should not only be spared and pardoned, but reserved to the honour of preaching thy gospel, which he had blasphemed and renounced, and at length be placed in a very public situation, and favoured with acceptance and usefulness, both from the pulpit and the press: so that my poor name is known in most parts of the world, where there are any who know thee—this is wonderful indeed! The more thou hast exalted me, the more I ought to abase myself."

† "August 1, 1801. I now enter my 77th year. I have been exercised this year with a trying and unexpected change; but it is by thy appointment, my gracious Lord; and thou art unchangeably wise, good, and merciful. Thou gavest me my dear adopted child. Thou didst own my endeavours to bring her up for thee. I have no doubt that thou hast called her by thy grace. I thank thee for the

pleasure to be informed, that Miss Catlett returned home—gradually recovered—and afterwards married a worthy man of the name of Smith.

It was with a mixture of delight and surprise, that the friends and hearers of this eminent servant of God beheld him bringing forth such a measure of fruit in extreme age. Though then almost eighty years old, his sight nearly gone, and incapable, through deafness, of joining in conversation, yet his public ministry was regularly continued, and maintained with a considerable degree of his former animation. His memory, indeed, was observed to fail, but his judgment in divine things still remained; and though some depression of spirits was observed, which he used to account for from his advanced age, his perception, taste, and zeal for the truths he had long received and taught, were evident. Like Simeon, having seen the salvation of the Lord, he now only waited and prayed to depart in peace.

After Mr. N. was turned of eighty, some of his friends feared he might continue his public ministrations too long; they marked not only his infirmities in the pulpit, but felt much on account of the decrease of his strength, and of his occasional depressions. Conversing with him in January 1806 on the latter, he observed, that he had experienced nothing which in the least affected the principles he had felt and taught; that his depressions were the natural result of fourscore years, and that, at any age, we can only enjoy that comfort from our principles which God is pleased to send. "But (replied I,) in the article of public preaching, might it not be best to consider your work as done, and stop before you evidently discover you can speak no longer?" "I cannot stop," said he, raising his voice; What! shalt the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?"

In every future visit I perceived old age making rapid strides. At length his friends found some difficulty in making themselves known to him: his sight, his hearing, and his recollection exceedingly failed; but, being mercifully kept from pain, he generally appeared easy and cheerful. Whatever he uttered was perfectly consistent with the principles he had so long and so honourably maintained. Calling to see him a few days before he died, with one of his most intimate friends, we could not make him recollect either of us; but seeing him afterwards, when sitting up in his chair, I found so much intellect remaining as produced a short and affectionate reply, though he was utterly incapable of conversation.

Mr. N. declined in this very gradual way, till at length it was painful to ask him a question, or attempt to rouse faculties almost gone; still his friends were anxious to get a word from him, and those friends who survive him will be as anxious to learn the state of his mind in his latest hours. It is quite natural thus to inquire, though it is not important, how such a decided character left this world. I have heard Mr. N. say, when he has heard particular inquiry made about the last expressions of an eminent believer, "Tell me not how the man died, but how he lived."

Still I say it is natural to inquire, and I will meet the desire, not by trying to expand uninteresting particulars, but as far as I can collect encouraging facts,

many years comfort (ten) I have had in her, and for the attention and affection she has always shown me, exceeding that of most daughters to their own parents. Thou hast now tried me, as thou didst Abraham, in my old age; when my eyes are failing, and my strength declines. Thou hast called for my Isaac, who had so long been my chief stay and staff; but it was thy blessing that made her so. A nervous disorder has seized her, and I desire to leave her under thy care; and chiefly pray for myself, that I may be enabled to await thy time and will, without betraying any signs of impatience or dependency unbecoming my profession and character. Hitherto thou hast helped me; and to thee I look for help in future. Let all issue in thy glory, that my friends and hearers may be encouraged by seeing how I am supported: let thy strength be manifested in my weakness, and thy grace be sufficient for me, and let all finally work together for our good. Amen. I aim to say from my heart, not my will, but thine be done. But though thou hast in a measure made my spirit willing, thou knowest, and I feel, that the flesh is weak. Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief. Lord, I submit, subdue every rebellious thought that dares arise against thy will. Spare my eyes, if it please thee; but, above all, strengthen my faith and love."

and I learn from a paper, kindly sent me by his family, all that is interesting and authentic.

About a month before Mr. N.'s death, Mr. Smith's niece was sitting by him, to whom he said, "It is a great thing to die; and when flesh and heart fail, to have God for the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever: I know whom I have believed, and he is able to keep that which I have committed, against that great day. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."

When Mrs. Smith came into the room, he said, "I have been meditating on a subject, 'Come, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.'"

At another time he said, "More light, more love, more liberty—Hereafter I hope, when I shut my eyes on the things of time, I shall open them in a better world. What a thing it is to live under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty! I am going the way of all flesh." And when one replied, "The Lord is gracious," he answered, "If it were not so, how could I dare to stand before him?"

The Wednesday before he died, Mrs. G—— asked him if his mind was comfortable; he replied, "I am satisfied with the Lord's will."

Mr. N. seemed sensible to his last hour, but expressed nothing remarkable after these words. He departed on the 21st, and was buried in the vault of his church the 31st of December 1807, having left the following injunction, in a letter for the direction of his executors.

"I propose writing an epitaph for myself, if it may be put up, on a plain marble tablet, near the vestry door, to the following purport:—

JOHN NEWTON, CLERK,
Once an infidel and libertine,
A servant of slaves in Africa,
Was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour
JESUS CHRIST,
Preserved, restored, pardoned,
And appointed to preach the faith he
Had long laboured to destroy,
Near 16 years at Olney in Bucks;
And — years in this church.
On Feb. 1, 1750, he married .
MARY,
Daughter of the late George Catlett,
Of Chatham, Kent.
He resigned her to the Lord who gave her,
On the 15th of December, 1790.

"And I earnestly desire, that no other monument, and no inscription but to this purport, may be attempted for me."

The following is a copy of the exordium of Mr. Newton's will, dated June 13, 1803:—

"In the name of God, amen. I, JOHN NEWTON, of Coleman street Buildings, in the parish of St. Stephen, Coleman Street, in the city of London, Clerk, being through mercy in good health and of sound and disposing mind, memory, and understanding, although in the seventy-eighth year of my age, do, for the settling of my temporal concerns, and for the disposal of all the worldly estate which it hath pleased the Lord in his good providence to give me, make this my last Will and Testament as follows. I commit my soul to my gracious God and Saviour, who mercifully spared and preserved me, when I was an apostate, a blasphemers

an infidel, and delivered me from that state of misery on the coast of Africa which my obstinate wickedness had plunged me; and who has been pleased to admit me (though most unworthy,) to preach his glorious gospel. I with humble confidence upon the atonement and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, God and Man, which I have often proposed to others as the only foundation whereon a sinner can build his hope; trusting that he will guard and guide through the uncertain remainder of my life, and that he will then admit me to his presence in his heavenly kingdom. I would have my body deposited in a vault under the parish church of St. Mary Woolnoth, close to the coffins of my late dear wife and my dear niece Elizabeth Cunningham; and it is my desire, that my funeral may be performed with as little expense as possible, consistent with decency." —

REVIEW

OF

MR. NEWTON'S CHARACTER.

THERE seems to be little need of giving a general character of Mr. N. after the particulars which appear in the foregoing Memoirs. He unquestionably was the child of a peculiar providence, in every step of his progress; and his deep sense of the extraordinary dispensation through which he had passed, was the prominent topic in his conversation. Those who personally knew the man, could have no doubt of the probity with which his Narrative (singular as it may appear) was written. They, however, who could not view the subject of these Memoirs so nearly as his particular friends did, may wish to learn something farther of his character with respect to his LITERARY ATAINMENTS—his MINISTRY—his FAMILY HABITS—his WRITINGS—and his FAMILIAR CONVERSATION.

Of his LITERATURE, we learn from his Narrative what he attained in the learned languages, and that by almost incredible efforts. Few men have undertaken such difficulties, under such disadvantages. It, therefore, seems more extraordinary that he should have attained so much, than that he should not have acquired more. Nor did he quit his pursuits of this kind, but in order to gain that knowledge which he deemed much more important. Whatever he conceived had a tendency to qualify him as "a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of God, bringing out of his treasury things new and old"—I say, in pursuit of this point, he might have adopted the apostle's expression, "One thing I do." By a principle so simply and firmly directed, he furnished his mind with much information: he had consulted the best old divines; had read the moderns of reputation with avidity; and was continually watching whatever might serve for analogies or illustrations, in the service of religion. "A minister," he used to say, "wherever he is, should be always in his study. He should look at every man, and at every thing, as capable of affording him some instruction." His mind, therefore, was ever intent on his calling—ever extracting something, even from the basest materials, which he could turn into gold.

In consequence of this incessant attention to his object, while many, whose early advantages greatly exceeded his, were found excelling Mr. N. in the knowledge and investigation of some curious abstract, but very unimportant points; he was found vastly excelling them in points of infinitely higher importance to man. In the knowledge of God, of his word, and of the human heart, in its wants and resources, Newton would have stood among mere scholars as his name-sake the philosopher stood in science among ordinary men. I might say the same of some others who have set out late in the profession, but who, with a portion of Mr. N.'s piety and ardour, have greatly outstripped those who have had every early advantage and encouragement. Men with specious titles and high connexions have received the rewards; while men, like Newton, without them, have done the work.

With respect to his MINISTRY, he appeared, perhaps, to least advantage in the pulpit; as he did not generally aim at accuracy in the composition of his sermons, nor at any address in the delivery of them. His utterance was far from clear, and his attitudes ungraceful. He possessed, however, so much affection for

his people, and zeal for their best interests, that the defect of his manner was of little consideration with his constant hearers: at the same time, his capacity, and habit of entering into their trials and experience, gave the highest interest to his ministry among them. Besides which, he frequently interspersed the most brilliant allusions, and brought forward such happy illustration of his subject, and those with so much unction on his own heart, as melted and enlarged theirs. The parent-like tenderness and affection which accompanied his instruction, made them prefer him to preachers, who, on other accounts, were much more generally popular. It ought also to be noted, that amidst the extravagant notions and unscriptural positions, which have sometimes disgraced the religious world, Mr. N. never departed, in any instance, from soundly and seriously promulgating the "faith once delivered to the saints," of which his writings will remain the best evidence. His doctrine was strictly that of the Church of England, urged on the consciences of men in the most practical and experimental manner. "I hope," said he one day to me, smiling, "I hope I am upon the whole a scriptural preacher: for I find I am considered as an Arminian among the high Calvinists, and as a Calvinist among the strenuous Arminians."

I never observed any thing like bigotry in his ministerial character, though he seemed at all times to appreciate the beauty of order, and its good effects in the ministry. He had formerly been intimately connected with some highly respectable ministers among the dissenters, and retained a cordial regard for many to the last. He considered the strong prejudices which attach to both Churchmen and Dissenters, as arising more from education than from principle. But being himself both a clergyman and an incumbent in the Church of England, he wished to be consistent. In public, therefore, he felt he could not act with some ministers, whom he thought truly good men, and to whom he cordially wished success in their endeavours; and he patiently met the consequence. They called him a bigot, and he in return prayed for them that they might not be really such.

He had formerly taken much pains in composing his sermons, as I could perceive in one MS. which I looked through; and even latterly, I have known him, whenever he felt it necessary, produce admirable plans for the pulpit. I own I thought his judgment deficient in not deeming such preparation necessary at all times. I have sat in pain when he has spoken unguardedly in this way before young ministers: men, who, with but comparatively slight degrees of his information and experience, would draw encouragement to ascend the pulpit with but little previous study of their subject. A minister is not to be blamed, who cannot rise to qualifications which some of his brethren have attained; but he is certainly bound to improve his own talent to the utmost of his power: he is not to cover his sloth, his love of company, or his disposition to attend a wealthy patron, with the pretence of depending entirely on divine influence. Timothy had at least as good ground for expecting such influence as any of his successors in the ministry; and yet the apostle admonishes him to "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine—not to neglect the gift that was in him—to meditate upon these things—to give himself wholly to them, that his profiting might appear to all."

Mr. N. regularly preached on the Sunday morning and evening at St. Mary Woolnoth, and also on the Wednesday morning. After he was turned of seventy, he often undertook to assist other clergymen; sometimes even to the preaching six sermons in the space of a week. What was more extraordinary, he continued his usual course of preaching at his own church after he was fourscore years old, and that when he could no longer see to read his text! His memory and voice sometimes failed him; but it was remarked, that, at this great age, he was nowhere more collected or lively than in the pulpit. He was punctual as to time with his congregation; and preached every first Sunday evening in the month on relative duties. Mr. Alderman Lea regularly sent his carriage to convey him to the church, and Mr. Bates sent his servant to attend him in the pulpit; which friendly assistance was continued till Mr. N. could appear no longer in public.

His ministerial visits were exemplary. I do not recollect one, though favoured with many, in which his general information and lively genius did not communicate instruction, and his affectionate and condescending sympathy did not leave comfort.

Truth demands it should be said, that he did not always administer consolation nor give an account of characters, with sufficient discrimination. His talent did not lie in "discerning of spirits." I never saw him so much moved as when any friend endeavoured to correct his errors in this respect. His credulity seemed to arise from the consciousness he had of his own integrity, and from that sort of parental fondness which he bore to all his friends, real or pretended. I knew one, since dead, whom he thus described, while living—"He is certainly an odd man, and has his failings; but he has great integrity, and I hope is going to heaven." Whereas almost all who knew him thought the man should go first into the pillory!

In his FAMILY Mr. N. might be admired more safely than imitated. His excessive attachment to Mrs. N. is so fully displayed in his Narrative, and confirmed in the two volumes he thought proper to publish, entitled, "Letters to a Wife," that the reader will need no information on this subject. Some of his friends wished this violent attachment had been cast more into the shade, as tending to furnish a spur, where human nature generally needs a curb. He used, indeed, to speak of such attachments, in the abstract, as idolatry; though his own was providentially ordered to be the main hinge on which his preservation and deliverance turned, while in his worst state. Good men, however, cannot be too cautious how they give sanction, by their expressions or example, to a passion, which, when not under sober regulation, has overwhelmed not only families, but states, with disgrace and ruin.

With his unusual degree of benevolence and affection, it was not extraordinary that the spiritual interests of his servants were brought forward, and examined severally every Sunday afternoon; and that, being treated like children, they should grow old in his service. In short, Mr. N. could live no longer than he could love; it is no wonder, therefore, if his nieces had more of his heart than is generally afforded to their own children by the fondest parents. It has already been mentioned, that his house was an asylum for the perplexed and afflicted. Young ministers were peculiarly the objects of his attention: he instructed them, he encouraged them, he warned them; and might truly be said to be a father in Christ, "spending and being spent" for the interest of his church. In order thus to execute the various avocations of the day, he used to rise early; he seldom was found abroad in the evening, and was exact in his appointments.

Of his WRITINGS, I think little need be said here; they are in wide circulation, and best speak for themselves. What I shall observe upon them, therefore, will be general and cursory.

The Sermons Mr. N. published at Liverpool, after being refused on his first application for Orders, were intended to show what he would have preached, had he been admitted; they are highly creditable to his understanding and to his heart. The facility with which he attained so much of the learned languages seems partly accounted for, from his being able to acquire, so early, a neat and natural style in his own language, and that under such evident disadvantages. His Review of Ecclesiastical History, so far as it proceeded, has been much esteemed; and, if it had done no more than excite the Rev. J. Milner (as that most valuable and instructive author informs us it did) to pursue Mr. N.'s idea more largely, it was sufficient success. Before this, the world seems to have lost sight of a history of real Christianity, and to have been content with what, for the most part, was but an account of the ambition and politics of secular men, assuming the Christian name.

It must be evident to any one, who observes the spirit of all his sermons, hymns, tracts, &c. that nothing is aimed at which should be met by critical investigation. In the preface to his hymns, he remarks, "Though I would not

offend readers of taste by a wilful coarseness and negligence, I do not write professedly for them. I have simply declared my own views and feelings, as I might have done if I had composed hymns in some of the newly discovered islands in the South sea, where no person had any knowledge of the name of Jesus but myself."

To dwell, therefore, with a critical eye on this part of his public character, would be absurd and impertinent, and to erect a tribunal to which he seems not amenable. He appears to have paid no regard to a nice ear, or an accurate reviewer; but, preferring a style at once neat and perspicuous, to have laid out himself entirely for the service of the church of God, and more especially for the tried and experienced part of its members.

His chief excellence seemed to lie in the easy and natural style of his epistolary correspondence. His letters will be read while real religion exists; and they are the best draught of his own mind.

He had so largely communicated to his friends in this way, that I have heard him say, "he thought, if his letters were collected, they would make several folios." He selected many of these for publication, and expressed a hope, that no other person would take that liberty with the rest, which were so widely spread abroad. In this, however, he was disappointed and grieved, as he once remarked to me; and for which reason I do not annex any letters that I received from him. He esteemed that collection published under the title of *Cardiphonia* as the most useful of his writings, and mentioned various instances of the benefits which he heard they had conveyed to many.

His *Apologia*, or defence of conformity, was written on occasion of some reflections (perhaps only jocular) cast on him at that time. His *Letters to a Wife*, written during his three voyages to Africa, and published 1793, have been received with less satisfaction than most of his other writings. While, however, his advanced age and inordinate fondness may be pleaded for this publication, care should be taken lest men fall into a contrary extreme; and suppose that temper to be their wisdom, which leads them to avoid another, which they consider as his weakness. But his *Messiah*, before mentioned, his *Letters of the Rev. Mr. Vanlier*, chaplain at the Cape, his *Memoirs of the Rev. John Cowper* (brother to the poet,) and those of the Rev. Mr. Grimshaw of Yorkshire, together with his single sermons and tracts, have been well received, and will remain a public benefit.

I recollect reading a MS. which Mr. N. lent me, containing a correspondence that had passed between himself and the Rev. Dr. Dixon, principal of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford; and another MS. of a correspondence between him and the late Rev. Martin Madan. They would have been very interesting to the public, particularly the latter, and were striking evidences of Mr. N.'s humility, piety, and faithfulness; but reasons of delicacy led him to commit the whole to the flames.

To speak of his writings in the mass, they certainly possess what many have aimed at, but very few attained, namely originality. They are the language of the heart; they show a deep experience of its religious feelings, a continual anxiety to sympathize with man in his wants, and to direct him to his only resources.

His CONVERSATION, and familiar habits with his friends, were more peculiar, amusing, and instructive, than any I ever witnessed. It is difficult to convey a clear idea of them by description. I venture, therefore, to add a few pages of what I may call his *table-talk*, which I took down at different times, both in company and in private, from his lips. Such a collection of printed remarks will not have so much point as when spoken in connexion with the occasion that produced them: they must appear to considerable disadvantage thus detached, and candid allowance should be made by the reader on this account. They, however, who had the privilege of Mr. N.'s conversation when living, cannot but recognize the speaker in most of them, and derive both profit and pleasure from these remains of their late valuable friend; and such as had not, will (if I do not mistake) think them the most valuable part of this book.

WHILE the mariner uses the loadstone, the philosopher may attempt to investigate the cause; but after all, in steering through the ocean, he can make no other use of it than the mariner.

If an angel were sent to find the most perfect man, he would probably not find him composing a body of divinity, but perhaps a cripple in a poor-house, whom the parish wish dead, and humbled before God with far lower thoughts of himself than others think of him.

When a Christian goes into the world, because he sees it is his call, yet, while he feels it also his cross, it will not hurt him.

Satan will seldom come to a Christian with a gross temptation: a green log and a candle may be safely left together; but bring a few shavings, then some small sticks, and then larger, and you may soon bring the green log to ashes.

If two angels came down from heaven to execute a divine command, and one was appointed to conduct an empire, and the other to sweep a street in it, they would feel no inclination to change employments.

The post of honour in an army is not with the baggage, nor with the women.

What some call providential openings are often powerful temptations; the heart, in wandering, cries, Here is a way opened before me; but, perhaps, not to be trodden, but rejected.

Young people marry as others study navigation, by the fire-side. If they marry unsuitably, they can scarcely bring things to rule; but, like sailors, they must sail as near the wind as they can. I feel myself like a traveller with his wife in his chaise and one; if the ground is smooth, and she keep the right pace, and is willing to deliver the reins when I ask for them, I am always willing to let her drive.

I should have thought mowers very idle people; but they work while they whet their scythes. Now devotedness to God, whether it mows or whets the scythe, still goes on with the work.

A Christian should never plead spirituality for being a sloven; if he be but a shoe-cleaner, he should be the best in the parish.

In choosing my text, I feel myself like a servant to whom a key has been given, which opens a particular drawer, but who has not the bunch of keys, which open all the drawers. I therefore expect to be helped to only one text at a time.

My course of study, like that of a surgeon, has principally consisted in walking the hospital.

In divinity, as well as in other professions, there are the little artists. A man may be able to execute the buttons of a statue very neatly, but I could not call him an able artist. There is an air, there is a taste, to which his narrow capacity cannot reach. Now in the church, there are your dexterous button-makers.

My principal method for defeating heresy, is by establishing truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares; now if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defy his attempts.

When some people talk of religion, they mean they have heard so many ser-

mons, and performed so many devotions, and thus mistake the means for the end. But true religion is an habitual recollection of God and intention to serve him, and thus turns every thing into gold. We are apt to suppose that we need something splendid to evince our devotion, but true devotion equals things—washing plates, and cleaning shoes, is a high office, if performed in a right spirit. If three angels were sent to earth, they would feel perfect indifference who should perform the part of prime-minister, parish-minister, or watchman.

When a ship goes to sea, among the vast variety of its articles and circumstances, there is but one object regarded, namely, doing the business of the voyage: every bucket is employed with respect to that.

Many have puzzled themselves about the origin of evil; I observe there is evil, and that there is a way to escape it, and with this I begin and end.

Consecrated things under the law were first sprinkled with blood, and then anointed with oil, and thenceforward were no more common. Thus under the gospel, every Christian has been a common vessel for profane purposes; but, when sprinkled and anointed, he becomes separated and consecrated to God.

I would not give a straw for that assurance, which sin will not damp. If David had come from his adultery, and had talked of his assurance at that time, I should have despised his speech.

A spirit of adoption is the spirit of a child; he may disoblige his father, yet he is not afraid of being turned out of doors. The union is not dissolved, though the communion is. He is not well with his father, therefore must be unhappy, as their interests are inseparable.

We often seek to apply cordials when the patient is not prepared for them, and it is the patient's advantage, that he cannot take a medicine when prematurely offered. When a man comes to me, and says, "I am quite happy," I am not sorry to find him come again with some fears. I never saw a work stand well without a check. "I only want," says one, "to be sure of being safe, and then I will go on." No; perhaps then you will go off.

For an old Christian to say to a young one, "Stand in my evidences," is like a man, who has with difficulty climbed by a ladder or scaffolding to the top of the house, and cries to one at the bottom, "This is the place for a prospect—come up at a step."

A Christian, like a miser, will ask the price of his pleasures: the miser has no objection to go to Brighton, but always asks what it will cost? The miser, indeed, has this advantage, that he is always in the same frame.

A Christian in the world, is like a man who has had a long intimacy with one whom at length he finds out was the murderer of a kind father; the intimacy, after this, will surely be broken.

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." A man may live in a deep mine in Hungary, never having seen the light of the sun; he may have received accounts of prospects, and by the help of a candle, may have examined a few engravings of them; but let him be brought out of the mine, and set on the mountain, what a difference appears!

In our fallen state, we are a sort of solecism in the universe: other animals are faithful to their instincts; lambs do not wish to swim, nor fish to feed in a meadow. If the sun were a rational creature he would delight to shine, otherwise he ought to be extinguished.

Candour will always allow much for inexperience. I have been thirty years forming my own views, and in the course of this time some of my hills have been sinking, and some of my valleys have risen; but how unreasonable would it be to expect all this should take place in another person, and that in the course of a year or two.

Candour forbids us to estimate a character from its accidental blots. Yet it is thus that David, and others have been treated.

Apollo met with two candid people in the church: they neither ran away because he was legal, nor were carried away because he was eloquent.

There is the analogy of faith ; it is a master-key, which not only opens particular doors, but carries you through the whole house ; but an attachment to a rigid system is dangerous. Luther once turned out the epistle of St. James, because it disturbed his system. Dr. Owen will be ashamed of his wisdom and clearness, five minutes after he has been in heaven. I shall preach, perhaps, very usefully upon two opposite texts, while kept apart ; but if I attempt nicely to reconcile them, it is ten to one if I don't begin to bungle.

I can conceive a living man without an arm or a leg, but not without a head or a heart : so there are some truths essential to vital religion, and which all awakened souls are taught.

Apostacy, in all its branches, takes its rise from atheism. " I have set the Lord always before me," &c. The doctrine of omnipresence is universally allowed.

We are surprised at the fall of a famous professor ; but, in the sight of God, the man was gone before ; it is only we that have now first discovered it. " He that despiseth small things, shall fall by little and little."

There are critical times of danger. After great services, honours, and consolations, we should stand upon our guard. Noah, Lot, David, and Solomon, fell in these circumstances. Satan is a footpad : a footpad will not attack a man in going to the bank, but in returning with his pocket full of money.

A Christian is like a young nobleman, who, on going to receive his estate, is at first enchanted by its prospects ; this in a course of time may wear off, but a sense of the value of the estate grows daily.

When we first enter into the divine life, we propose to grow rich ; God's plan is to make us feel poor.

Good men have need to take heed of building upon groundless impressions. Mr. Whitfield had a son, which he imagined was born to be a very extraordinary man : but the son soon died, and the father was cured of his mistake.

I remember, in going to undertake the care of a congregation, I was reading, as I walked in a green lane, " Fear not, Paul, I have much people in this city ;" but I soon afterwards was disappointed in finding that Paul was not John, and Corinth was not Warwick.

Christ has taken our nature into heaven to represent us ; and has left us on earth, with his nature, to represent him.

Worldly men will be true to their principles ; and if we were as true to ours, the visits between the two parties would be short and seldom.

A Christian in the world is like a man transacting his affairs in the rain. He will not suddenly leave his client, because it rains ; but the moment the business is done, he is off : as it is said in the Acts, " Being let go, they went to their own company."

When a man is joined to Christ, Christ says to him, as it was once said to the Levite, " Let all thy wants lie upon me, only abide not in the street."

God's word is certainly a restraint ; but it is such a restraint as the irons which prevent children from getting into the fire.

The scriptures are so full, that every case may be found in them. A rake went into a church, and tried to decoy a girl by saying, " Why do you attend to such stuff as these scriptures ?" " Because," said she, " they tell me, that in the last days there shall come such scoffers as you."

God deals with us as we do with our children : he first speaks, then gives a gentle stroke, at last a blow.

The religion of a sinner stands on two pillars : namely, what Christ did for us in his flesh, and what he performs in us by his Spirit. Most errors arise from an attempt to separate these two.

We blame an Arminian for his want of submission to divine sovereignty ; yet let a shower of rain fall on a suit of new clothes, and we cannot submit ourselves.

Man is not taught any thing to purpose till God becomes his teacher, and then the glare of the world is put out, and the value of the soul rises in full view.

A man's present sentiments may not be accurate, but we make too much of sentiments. We pass a field with a few blades, we call it a field of wheat; but here is no wheat; no, not in perfection, but wheat is sown, and full ears may be expected.

The word temperance, in the New Testament, signifies self-possession; it is a disposition suitable to one who has a race to run, and therefore will not load his pockets with lead.

One reason why we must not attempt to pull up the tares which grow among the wheat is, that we have not skill for the work; like a weeder, whom Mrs. N. employed in my garden at Olney, who for weeds pulled up some of her favourite flowers.

Contrivers of systems on earth are like contrivers of systems in the heavens; where the sun and moon keep the same course, in spite of the philosophers.

I endeavour to walk through the world as a physician goes through Bedlam: the patients make a noise, pester him with impertinence, and hinder him in his business; but he does the best he can, and so gets through.

A man always in society, is one always on the spend: on the other hand, a mere solitary is at his best but a candle in an empty room.

If we were upon the watch for improvement, the common news of the day would furnish it: the falling of the tower of Siloam, and the slaughter of the Galileans, were the news of the day, which our Lord improved.

The generality make out their righteousness by comparing themselves with some others whom they think worse: thus a woman of the town, who was rotting in the Lock Hospital, was offended at a minister speaking to her as a sinner, because she had never picked a pocket.

Take away a toy from a child, and give him another, and he is satisfied; but if he be hungry, no toy will do. Thus as new born babes, true believers desire the sincere milk of the word; and the desire of grace, in this way, is grace.

One said, that the great saints in the calendar were many of them poor sinners; Mr. N. replied they were poor saints indeed, if they did not feel that they were great sinners.

A wise man looks upon men as he does upon horses, and considers their caparisons of title, wealth, and place, but as harness.

The force of what we deliver from the pulpit is often lost by a starched, and what is often called a correct style, and especially by adding meretricious ornaments. I called upon a lady who had been robbed, and she gave me a striking account of the fact; but had she put it in heroics, I should neither so well have understood her, nor been so well convinced that she was robbed.

When a man says he received a blessing under a sermon, I begin to inquire who this man is, that speaks of the help he has received. The Roman people proved the effect they received under a sermon of Antony when they flew to avenge the death of Cæsar.

The Lord has reasons, far beyond our ken, for opening a wide door, while he stops the mouth of a useful preacher. John Bunyan would not have done half the good he did, if he had remained preaching in Bedford, instead of being shut up in Bedford prison.

If I could go to France, and give every man in it a right and peaceable mind by my labour, I should have a statue; but to produce such an effect in the conversion of one soul would be a far greater achievement.

Ministers would over-rate their labours, if they did not think it worth while to be born and spend ten thousand years in labour and contempt, to recover one soul.

Don't tell me of your feelings. A traveller would be glad of fine weather; but, if he be a man of business, he will go on. Bunyan says, You must not judge of a man's haste by his horse; for when the horse can hardly move, you may see by the rider's urging him, what a hurry he is in.

A man and a beast may stand upon the same mountain, and even touch one

another; yet they are in two different worlds: the beast perceives nothing but the grass; but the man contemplates the prospect, and thinks of a thousand remote things. Thus a Christian may be solitary at a full exchange; he can converse with the people there upon trade, politics, and the stocks; but they cannot talk with him upon the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.

Love and fear are like the sun and moon, seldom seen together.

Two men go into a wood with their guns, and one fires as often as the other: but one kills a great quantity of game, because he fires with shot. Some, like Zaccheus, think they sit very snug in a corner, and are brought down much before they expect it.

I dreamt one night that I saw Matthew Henry lay open at this text, "Let your women keep silence in the churches," and thought I read the following note at bottom: "Note—We see the reason why women are forbid to preach the gospel, for they would persuade without argument, and reprove without giving offence."

It is a mere fallacy to talk of the sins of a short life. The sinner is always a sinner. Put a pump into the river, you may throw out some water, but the river remains.

Professors, who own the doctrines of free grace, often act inconsistently with their own principles, when they are angry at the defects of others. A company of travellers fall into a pit, one of them gets a passenger to draw him out: now he should not be angry with the rest for falling in, nor because they are not yet out, as he is. He did not pull himself out; instead, therefore, of reproaching them, he should show them pity; he should avoid at any rate going down upon their ground again, and show how much better and happier he is upon his own. We should take care that we do not make our profession of religion a receipt in full for all other obligations. A man, truly illuminated, will no more despise others, than Bartimeus, after his own eyes were opened, would take a stick, and beat every blind man he met.

We are much mistaken in supposing, that the removal of a particular obstruction would satisfy the objector. Suppose I am in bed, and want to know whether it be light, it is not enough if I draw the curtain; for if there be light, I must have eyes to see it.

Too deep a consideration of eternal realities might unfit a man for his present circumstances. Walking through St. Bartholomew's Hospital or Bedlam must deeply affect a feeling mind, but in reality this world is a far worse scene; it has but two wards: in the one, men are miserable; in the other mad.

Some preachers near Olney dwelt on the doctrine of predestination; an old woman said—"Ah! I have long settled that point; for if God had not chosen me before I was born, I am sure he would have seen nothing in me to have chosen me for afterwards."

Law has swept away Warburton's cobweb, with a single brush. Abel pleased God, but Cain killed him; therefore, it was a dangerous thing to please God, if there were no future state.

I see the unprofitableness of controversy in the case of Job and his friends; for if God had not interposed, and they had lived to this day, they would have continued the dispute.

It is pure mercy that negatives a particular request. A miser would pray very earnestly for gold, if he believed prayer would gain it; whereas, if Christ had any favour to him, he would take his gold away. A child walks in the garden in spring and sees cherries; he knows they are good fruit, and therefore asks for them. "No, my dear," says the father, "they are not ripe: stay till the season."

If I cannot take pleasure in infirmities, I can sometimes feel the profit of them. I can conceive a king to pardon a rebel, and take him into his family, and then say, "I appoint you for a season to wear a fetter. At a certain season I will send a messenger to knock it off. In the mean time this fetter will serve to remind you of your state; it may humble you, and restrain you from rambling."

Some Christians, at a glance, seem of a superior order, and are not; they want

a certain quality. At a florist's feast the other day, a certain flower was determined to bear the bell; but it was found to be an artificial flower; there is a quality called growth, which it had not.

Doctor Taylor of Norwich said to me, "Sir, I have collated every word in the Hebrew Scriptures seventeen times; and it is very strange, if the doctrine of atonement you hold should not have been found by me." I am not surprised at this: I once went to light my candle with the extinguisher on it. Now, prejudices from education, learning, &c. often form an extinguisher. It is not enough that you bring the candle, you must remove the extinguisher.

I measure ministers by square measure. I have no idea of the size of a table, if you only tell me how long it is; but if you also say how broad, I can tell its dimensions. So when you tell what a man is in the pulpit, you must also tell me what he is out of it, or I shall not know his size.

If Nebuchadnezzar's image was of solid gold, and every worshipper was to have a bit of it, I fear our nation, as well as his, would be ready to fall down before it.

There were two sorts of Calvinists at Olney, and they always reminded me of the two baskets of Jeremiah's figs.

A man should be born to high things not to lose himself in them. Slaters will walk on the ridge of a house with ease, which would turn our heads.

Much depends on the way we come into trouble. Paul and Jonah were both in a storm, but in very different circumstances.

I have read of many wicked Popes; but the worst Pope I ever met with, is Pope SELF.

The men of this world are children. Offer a child an apple and a bank-note, he will doubtless choose the apple.

A pious gentlewoman told me of her pottery being burnt. "I congratulate you, madam," said I, "in possessing something you cannot lose."

The heir of a great estate, while a child, thinks more of a few shillings in his pocket, than of his inheritance. So a Christian is often more elated by some frame of heart, than by his title to glory.

A dutiful child is ever looking forward to the holidays, when he shall return to his father; but he does not think of running from school before.

The gospel is a proclamation of free mercy to guilty creatures—an act of grace to rebels. Now, though a rebel should throw away his pistols, and determine to go into the woods, and make his mind better before he goes to court and pleads the act; he may, indeed, not be found in arms, yet, being taken in his reforming scheme, he will be hanged.

The devil told a lie when he said, "All these things are mine, and to whomsoever I will, I give them:" for if he had the disposal of preferments, since he knows the effect of them, you and I, brother C—, should soon be dignitaries.

Man is made capable of three births—by nature he enters the present world—by grace into spiritual light and life—by death into glory.

In my imagination, I sometimes fancy I could make a perfect minister. I take the eloquence of —, the knowledge of —, the zeal of —, and the pastoral meekness, tenderness, and piety of —; then putting them all together into one man, I say to myself, this would be a perfect minister. Now, there is one who, if he chose it, could actually do this; but he never did: he has seen fit to do otherwise, and to divide these gifts to every man severally as he will.

I feel like a man who has no money in his pocket, but is allowed to draw for all he wants upon one infinitely rich: I am, therefore, at once both a beggar and a rich man.

I went one day to Mrs. G—'s just after she had lost all her fortune: I could not be surprised to find her in tears; but she said, "I suppose you think I am crying for my loss: but that is not the case—I am now weeping to think I should feel so much uneasiness on the account." After that I never heard her *speak again upon the subject as long as she lived.*—Why, now

this is just as it should be.—Suppose a man was going to York to take possession of a large estate, and his chaise should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him if we saw him wringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, “ My chaise is broken ! my chaise is broken ! ”

I have many books that I cannot sit down to read ; they are, indeed, good and sound ; but, like halfpence, there goes a great quantity to a little amount. There are silver books, and a very few golden books ; but I have one book worth more than all, called the Bible, and that is a book of bank-notes.

I conclude these remarks, not because my memorandum-book is exhausted, but lest the reader should think I forget the old maxim, *ne quid nimis*. No undue liberty, however, has been taken in publishing Mr. N.'s private conversation ; since all the above remarks were submitted to him, as intended for this publication, and were approved.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

THE difference of mental improvement, among men, seems very much to depend on their capacity and habit of gathering instruction from the objects which are continually presented to their observation. Two men behold the same fact: one of them is in the habit of drawing such remarks and inferences as the fact affords, and learns something from every thing he sees; while the other sees the same fact, and perhaps with a momentary admiration, but lets it pass without making so much as one profitable reflection on the occasion. The excursions of the bee and the butterfly present an exact emblem of these two characters.

I have present to my mind an acquaintance, who has seen more of the outside of the world than most men: he has lived in most countries of the civilized world; yet I scarcely know a man of a less improved mind. With every external advantage, he has learned nothing to any useful purpose. He seems to have passed from flower to flower without extracting a drop of honey; and now he tires all his friends with the frivolous garrulity of a capricious, vacant, and petulant old age.

I wish the reader of these Memoirs may avoid such an error in passing over the history here laid before him. An extraordinary train of facts is presented to his observation; and if "the proper study of mankind is man," the history before us will surely furnish important matter of the kind, to the eye of every wise moral traveller.

I would here call the attention of three classes of men to a single point of prime importance; namely, to the efficacy and excellency of real Christianity, as exhibited in the principles and practice of the subject of these Memoirs.

I. Suppose the reader to be so unhappy (though his misfortune may be least perceived by himself,) as to be led astray by bad society, in conjunction with "an evil heart of unbelief." I will suppose him to be now in the state in which Mr. N. describes himself formerly to have been, and in which also the writer of these Memoirs once was. I will suppose him to be given up to "believe his own lie;" and that he may be in the habit of thinking, that God, when he made man, left him to find his way, without any express revelation of the mind and will of his Maker and Governor; or, at most, that he is left to the only rule in morals, which nature may be supposed to present. What that way is, which such a thinker will take, is sufficiently evident from the general course and habits of unbelievers.—But there is a conscience in man. Conscience, in sober moments, often alarms the most stout-hearted. When such an unbeliever meets an overwhelming providence, or lies on a death-bed, he will probably awake to a strong sense of his real condition. He will feel, if not very hardened indeed, in what a forlorn, unprovided, and dangerous state he exists. Life is the moment in which only this sceptical presumption can continue; and, when it is terminating, where is he to set the sole of his foot? He wildly contemplates the book of nature, in which he may have been persuaded, that man may read all he needs to know; but the forlorn outcast sees nothing there to meet his case as a sinner. Infinite power, wisdom, contrivance, general provision alone appear; but nothing of that further and distinct information, which a dying offender needs. He wants footing, and finds none. He needs the hand of a friend to grasp, but none is seen. Possibilities shock his apprehension. He may, perhaps, discern, that the present system has a moral government, which frowns

upon guilt; and, for aught he knows to the contrary, the next scene may present a Judge upon his throne of justice—this world, his present idol, vanished like smoke—and quick and dead called to give their account. Where then is he?—an atom of guilt and wretchedness! All this, I say, may be, for aught he knows to the contrary. But the express and well-authenticated revelation, which that Judge hath sent to man, tells us plainly that all this shall be, and that every eye shall behold it!

“Be it so,” such a reader may reply, “still I am what I am. My habits of thinking are fixed; and I perceive my habits of life can only be decently borne out by my profession of unbelief. Both are now inveterate. Nor do I see, all things considered, what can be done in my case. How can I adopt the Christian revelation? and what could it do for me if I could?” I answer by calling your attention to the fact before us. What was the case of John Newton?

Could any one be more deeply sunk in depravity, in profligacy, in infidelity, than he? Can you even conceive a rational creature more degraded, or more hardened in his evil habits? Would you attempt to recover such a mind by arguments, drawn from the advantage which virtue has over vice? or by rousing his attention to the duties of natural religion? or the possible consequences of a future retribution? He would have gone on thinking he had made the most of his circumstances, in his practice of catching fish, and eating them almost raw—He would sullenly have proceeded to sleep through the drying of his one shirt, which he had just washed on the rock, and put on wet—He would, with a savage ferocity, have watched an opportunity for murdering his master—He would have drowned all reflection in a drunken revel, and overwhelmed all remonstrance by belching out newly-invented blasphemies; and then sought to rush headlong, in a drunken paroxysm, into the ocean.

Here is certainly presented the utmost pitch of a depraved and a degraded nature; nor does it seem possible for Satan to carry his point farther with a man—except in one single instance, namely, by the final disbelief of a remedy.

Now, by God’s help, this divine remedy was applied, and its efficacy demonstrated, of which there are thousands of living witnesses. A plain matter of fact is before us. It pleased God, by a train of dispensations, that this prodigal should “come to himself.” He is made to feel his wants and misery. He follows the “light shining in a dark place.” He calls for help. He is made willing to follow his guide. He proceeds with implicit confidence. And now let us examine to what, at length, he is brought; and also by what means.

I speak of a matter of fact—whither is he brought? He is brought from the basest, meanest, under-trodden state of slavery—from a state of mind still more degraded, being “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating”—wanting nothing of a complete devil but his powers. This man is brought, I say, to be a faithful and zealous servant of his God; an able and laborious minister of Christ; a useful and benevolent friend to his neighbour; wise to secure the salvation of his own soul, and wise to win the souls of others.

Consider also the means by which he was brought. It was not by the arguments of philosophers, or the rational considerations of what is called natural religion. Mr. N.’s own account informs us, that the peculiar discoveries of revealed truth gradually broke in upon his mind; till, at length, he was made sensible that there was a remedy provided in the gospel, and which was fully sufficient to meet even his case, and he found that, and that only, to be “the power of God unto salvation.”

The result, therefore, which should be drawn from these premises is the following:—There exists a desperate disorder in the world, called sin. Heathens as well as Christians have marked its malignant influence; they have tried various expedients, which have been prescribed for its cure, or at least its mitigation; *but no means, except God’s own appointed means, have been discovered, that*

Have been able to relieve so much as a single individual. Yet, strange to say, this *medicina mentis* of God's own appointment, to which only he has promised a peculiar blessing, and by which he is daily recovering men in the most desperate circumstances, who actually employ it: strange to say, this remedy still remains a stumbling block—is counted foolishness—inso-much, that many will rather dash this cup of salvation from the lips of a profligate, like Newton, when disposed to receive it, than he should obtain relief that way. Their conduct seems to say, "Rather let such a wretch go on in his profligacy, than the gospel be acknowledged to be the wisdom and the power of God."

Not that the case of Mr. N., here presented to the consideration of an unbeliever, is brought forward as if the gospel needed any farther evidence, or has occasion for facts of our own time to give it additional authenticity; but we are directed to regard the "cloud of witnesses," among which our departed brother was distinguished: "and though now dead, yet speaketh." May the reader have ears to hear the important report!

Does the question return, therefore, as to what the unbeliever should do? Let him, after seriously considering what is here advanced, consider also what conduct is becoming a responsible, or at least a rational creature? Surely it becomes such a one to avoid all means of stifling the voice of conscience whenever it begins to speak; to regard the voice of God yet speaking to him in the revelation of his grace, and that much more humbly and seriously than such persons are wont to do. It becomes him, if he have any regard to the interest of his own soul, or the souls of his fellow-creatures, to give no countenance, by his declarations or example, to the senseless cavils, and indecent scoffs, by which the profligate aim to cloak the disorders of their hearts; by which vanity aims at distinction, and half-thinkers affect depth. The person I am now speaking to cannot but observe how much the judgment becomes the dupe of the passions. "If the veil be upon the heart, it will be upon every thing." We need not only an object presented, but an organ to discern it. Now the gospel, only, affords both these. Mr. N. becomes an instructive example in this respect to the unbeliever. "One of the first helps," says he, "I received (in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament more carefully) was from Luke vi. 13, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when, in reality, I did not believe his history, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God; but here I found a Spirit spoken of, which was to be communicated to those who ask it. Upon this I reasoned thus: if this book be true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise. I have need of that very Spirit by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here, to give that Spirit to those who ask; and if it be of God, he will make good his own word."

A man, therefore, who is found in this unhappy state, but not judicially hardened in it, should mark this stage of Mr. N.'s recovery, and attend to the facts and evidences of the power and excellency of real religion, such as this before him. He should appreciate that gospel, which it has pleased God to employ as his instrument for displaying the wonders of his might in the moral world. He should pray that he may experience the power of it in his own heart, and thus not lose the additional benefit of the cases presented to him in Memoirs like these; a case probably far exceeding his own in the malignity of its symptoms. Let him also consider, that, while such convictions can produce no real loss to him, they may secure advantages beyond calculation. He may not be able at present to comprehend how "godliness is profitable for all things, in having not only the promise of the life that now is, but that which is to come;" but he may see, as a rational creature, that, at the very lowest estimation, he has taken a safe side, by embracing the only hope set before him: and on this ground it is clearly *demonstrable*, that not only the grossest folly must attach to the

rejector of a revelation attended with such accumulated evidences, but also actual guilt, and the highest ingratitude and presumption.

II. But there is another class of men, to whom I would recommend a serious consideration of Mr. N.'s religious character and principles. The persons whom I am now addressing are convinced of the truth of revelation, and some of them ably contend for it against unbelievers. They are also conscientious—they are often useful in society—and are sometimes found amiable and benevolent: they are even religious, according to their views of religion; and some of them are exact in their devotions. Yet from certain morbid symptoms, they appear not to receive the grace of God in truth, nor to be cordially disposed to the spirit of the gospel. So much apparent right intention and exemplary conduct seems, indeed, to demand respect: and a respect which some, who possess more zeal than judgment, do not duly pay them.

ARDELIO despises his neighbour EUSEBIUS's religious views and habits; and not only deems him a blind Pharisee, but has sometimes expressed the sentiment in the rudest terms. This reminds me of the old story of Diogenes' walking on the costly carpet of his brother philosopher, saying, "I trample on the pride of Plato." "Yes," said Plato, "but with greater pride, Diogenes."

If it be asked, Why should any one judge unfavourably of such a character as Eusebius? I answer, we may charitably seek to convince one whom we have reason to think under fatal mistakes, without any disposition to judge or condemn him. I meet a traveller who is confidently pursuing a path, which I have reason to believe is both wide of his mark, and dangerous to his person: I may charitably attempt to direct his steps, without thinking ill of his intention. It is recorded of our Lord, that he even loved a young man, who went away sorrowful on having his grand idol exposed. But why, it is asked, should you suspect any thing essentially wrong in such characters as you describe? I reply, for the following reasons:—

I have observed with much concern, when God hath wrought such a mighty operation of grace in the heart of a man like Newton, that this man has not, upon such a saving change being wrought, suited the religious taste of the persons just mentioned. They will, indeed, commend his external change of conduct; but by no means relish his broken and contrite spirit, or his ascribing the change to free and unmerited favour, and his "counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus," as that Lord who has thus called him "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." They will not relish the zeal and evangelical strain of his preaching, his endeavouring to alarm a stupid sleeping conscience, to probe a deceitful heart, to expose the wretchedness of the world, and to rend the veil from formality and hypocrisy; nay, they will rather prefer some dry moralist, or mere formalist, who, instead of having experienced any such change of heart, will rather revile it.

Again, I have observed a lamentable disposition of mind in such persons to form false and unfavourable associations. They will pay too much attention to injurious representations, true or false, of a religious class of mankind, whom the world has branded with some general term of reproach. Two or three ignorant or extravagant fanatics shall be admitted to represent the religious world at large, not considering how much such offensive characters are actually grieving those whose cause I am pleading. No one, indeed, can have lived long in society, but he must needs have met the counterfeit of every excellence. In the article of property, for instance, who is not on the watch lest he should be imposed on? And, while the love of property is so general, who is not studious to discover the difference between the true and the false? It will be so in religion, wherever there is the attention which its worth so imperiously demands. Love has a piercing eye, which will discover its object in a crowd. But if there be this disposition to confound in the lump the precious with the vile, it is symptomatic of something *morbid in the heart*. We have reason to fear a latent aversion from vital and *spiritual religion*, notwithstanding all the allowance that can be made for the

prevailing prejudices of their education and circumstances, in the persons offended. And here, also, we cannot but lament the effect of such a disposition in those perverse conclusions these persons are often observed to draw from a sermon. Of the two handles which attach to every thing, what must we think of that mind which is ever choosing the wrong? Jesus Christ, for instance, shows how much the farm, the oxen, and the wife became impediments in the way of those who refused his invitation. But a perverse conclusion would infer that he was, therefore, an enemy to lawful engagements. Candour, however, sees at a glance, that this was not his design in speaking the parable. His drift was evidently to mark the state and spirit of the recusants, and not to discountenance their lawful occupations. He meant to show, that even lawful pursuits may be unlawfully pursued, when they become sole objects, and are thus preferred to his inestimable proposal. It is thus the well-disposed hearer will mark the design of his minister, and draw wholesome nourishment from that discourse, which another will turn to poison, by stopping to cavil at the letter.

Another objection arises from the affinity which characters of this class have with a "world which lieth in wickedness." In this instance of their worldly attachments, their charity will readily "cover a multitude of sins," and form excuses for serious breaches of both tables of the law, in their worldly friends. They appear in their element while in the society of these friends, especially if wealthy and accomplished. If any person's ear is wounded with a profane expression from one of their rich or fashionable acquaintance, they are ready to whisper, that, "notwithstanding his unguarded language, he has yet upon the whole one of the best of hearts."

Yet an infallible monitor has said, "Know ye not, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" If the old maxim does not always hold good, that "A man is known by the company he keeps," it will infallibly stand good if we add one word to it, namely, "that a man is known by the company he chooses to keep." The physician may be detained in an infectious chamber, and the lawyer be found conversing with his client in a shower of rain; but nobody will infer from thence, that the one chooses to breathe foul air, or that the other chooses to be wet to the skin. While the true Christian, therefore, will avoid inurbanity, fanaticism, or becoming the dupe of any religious party, he will also join the Psalmist in declaring, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts."

Again, these moral and religious characters, whom I am labouring to convince of their errors, have been observed to be more disposed to nurse, than to examine their prejudices against a minister of Mr. N.'s principles. "His teaching," say they, "tends to divide a parish, or a family." But why do they not examine the reason? Why do they not consider, that introducing good has ever been the occasion of disturbing evil? I recollect a great family, whose servants were in a ferment, because one truly conscientious man was found among them. "He will spoil the place," was their term, because he would not connive at their iniquity. But let me ask, what was to be blamed in this affair? His integrity or their corruption? The master understood the case, and valued his servant in proportion as he marked the division. And thus it is in religion, while moving in a blind and corrupt world. Christ, though the Prince of Peace, expressly declared, that his doctrine would be the occasion of much division in the world; that he "came not to send peace, but a sword;" that he should be the occasion of family variance, &c. Matt. x. 34, 35; and warns his disciples of what they must expect while they endeavour faithfully to conduct his interests. Plain matter of fact declares, that to maintain truth has been the occasion of the suffering state of the true church in all ages, and that often unto the death of its innumerable martyrs. But, should a man who reads his Bible, or has any regard for the interests of truth, need to have this explained?

Another mistake might be exposed in the stale objection, that such principles as Mr. N.'s tend to injure the interests of morality, from his strictly adhering to

the doctrine of our eleventh article, on justification by faith. I would hope that this objection, in many, arises from a very slight acquaintance with the subject. It requires, indeed, but little attention to mark how expressly the Scriptures maintain our justification on the sole merit of our Redeemer, while they as fully maintain the necessity of our sanctification, or holiness, by his Spirit. It has been proved over and over, by sound and incontestable arguments, that these two grand fundamentals of our religion are so far from opposing each other, either in Scripture or experience, that, when real, they are found inseparable. But, because this is not the place to either state or defend this doctrine at large, it may help such as have hitherto stumbled respecting it, to observe an illustration and proof of this position, in the matter of fact just now presented to our view.

To one willing to learn, I would say, what proof would you require of the practical tendency of principles like Mr. N.'s? We bring you, in his history, a most deplorable instance of human depravity and deep moral disorder. What experiment shall be tried to recover this wretched creature to God and to himself? Regard, I say, the fact in this man's history. You will find, that his recovery was not brought about by such considerations as are urged in what are termed moral or rational discourses; but, on the contrary, by such truths as he laboured throughout his ministry to establish, not only from the Scriptures, but from his own experience of their efficacy. He dwelt on truths, which are essential and peculiar to Christianity; such as the guilt and utter depravity of our fallen nature, whereby man is become an alien and apostate from his God; his inability to recover himself without the grace of the Holy Spirit; the necessity of regeneration by the same Spirit, and of faith in the Redeemer, not only as the only ground of his justification before God, but as the root and motive of all acceptable obedience and good works. "If I wanted a man to fly," said Mr. N., "I must contrive to find him wings; and thus, if I would successfully enforce moral duties, I must advance evangelical motives." He preached truths like these constantly and fervently, and he lived a consistent example of them.

Thus in all things approving himself a true disciple and minister of Christ, those who knew him, know, without making any odious comparison, it might be literally affirmed of Mr. N., that "by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left," his mouth was opened and his heart enlarged towards men.

I trust it is from a pure motive that I am endeavouring to convince persons of the class I am addressing of their mistake. And I am the more induced to bring a case in point before them, because I think it cannot be paralleled as an instance, of the power of religion among those who labour to keep up prejudices against ministers of Mr. N.'s character; or who, by unfair or partial statements, strive to subvert the doctrines he preached, and the great end to which all his labours were directed, namely, the life of God in the soul of man.

If, indeed, any one "is willing to be deceived, let him be deceived." At least such an one will not be addressed here. But if a man has any serious sense of the value of his soul—of its lost condition by sin, and of recovering the friendship of his God—if he feel the express declaration in the Scriptures of an eternity of happiness or misery to be of infinite importance, and to which the weightiest concern in this perishing world is but as the "dust on the balance"—let such an one consider these things. Let him inquire, whether those who object to the character and views of such a minister as Mr. N. labour first to probe the state of their own hearts deeply, as he did? When he was no longer an infidel, had renounced his grosser habits, and was to all appearance a new man; "Yet," says he, "though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God, still I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my enormous sins, but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the law of God. The hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in

communion with God by Jesus Christ, and a continual dependence upon him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort, was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come."

Let the honest inquirer also consider, whether the objectors just spoken of are observed to be as anxious in their pursuits to serve God and propagate his will to glorify his Son, and to save the souls of men? Whether they have experienced the force of truth in the conversion of their own hearts and lives? "Conformed to the world," as he once was, have they been since "transformed by the renewing of their minds," as he at length became? A few such questions as these, well considered, would lead to important discoveries. Such an inquiry would show, that, however some persons may be able to treat the outworks of revelation, as they may of any other science they have studied; yet for such to dogmatize on religion, as it consists in a vital, spiritual, and experimental principle, would be as absurd as for a man originally deprived of one of the five senses, to deny the perceptions of those who possess them all. In short, it is as ridiculous as it is profane, for men rashly to assert on religious points, who evidently appear to have nothing so little at heart as the real influence and actual interests of religion.

Lastly, let nominal Christians seriously consider whether our immortal interests are not much too important to be stated upon a mere prejudice of education—an old unrevised habit of thinking—a taking it for granted that they are right, when the event may awfully prove the reverse; and that too, when such errors can never be rectified? The persons with whom I have been pleading would pity the Jew or the Pagan in such an error: I earnestly pray that they may be enabled to see as clearly their own mistake, and not resent the admonition of a real friend now seeking to prevent it.

III. But there yet remains a class of persons, found in the religious world, who entertain a high regard for Mr. N.'s character, and who should gather that instruction from it of which they appear to stand in great need. "They should all take care," as he expresses it, "that they do not make their profession of religion a receipt in full for all other obligations." I do not regard this class as hypocrites, so much as self-deceivers. They have a zeal for the gospel; but without a comprehensive view of its nature. They do not consider, that, in avoiding error on the one hand, they are plunging into a contrary mistake. Like a child crossing a bridge, they tremblingly avoid the deep water which they perceive is roaring on one side; and recede from it till they are ready to perish, from not perceiving the danger of that which lies on the other side.

The class of which I am here speaking are defective in the grand article of a humble and contrite spirit. I remember Mr. N. used to remark, that "if any one criterion could be given of a real work of grace begun in the heart of a sinner, it would be found in his contrite spirit." Nothing is more insisted on in Scripture, as essential to real religion. I never knew any truly serious Christian but would readily join in acknowledging, that "the religion of a sinner," as Mr. N. expresses it, "stands on two pillars; namely, what Christ did for us in his flesh, and what he performs in us by his Spirit. Most errors," says he, "arise from an attempt to separate these two." But as it was in the beginning, so it is now; the enemy comes and sows tares among the wheat; and a sort of loose profession has obtained, which has brought much reproach on religion, and become a cause of stumbling to many, who perceive a class of Christians contending for only a part of Christianity.

You can prevail little with a professor of this description, in exhorting him by "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," to self-denying, patient, or forbearing habits. If you state the genius of Christ's religion as it relates to the returning good for evil; in blessing them that curse, and praying for such as revile and persecute; in showing, out of a good conversation, their works with meekness

of wisdom ; or in having a fervent charity towards all men, &c. he is ready to kindle, and to cover his conduct by a crude system of mere doctrinal points, ill understood. It is well if your charitable remonstrance does not lead him to ask, Whether you mean to bring him back to the Whole Duty of Man, or to Nelson's Festivals and Fasts? He laments that you yourself are not clear in the gospel, because you maintain the whole of it ; and that you are not faithful, if you maintain the whole of it in a patient, forbearing spirit.

The views of such persons, and the evil tempers to which they give place in their spiritual warfare, have often reminded me of the shrewd answer which our Richard I. sent the Pope ; who was angry because a certain warlike bishop had fallen by Richard in battle, and whom, being an ecclesiastic, the Pope called his son. Richard sent the bishop's armour to the Pope, with the words of Joseph's brethren, " Know now, whether this be thy son's coat or not."

Nothing, however, could be more opposed to the spirit and character of our departed friend than the temper that has just been described. His zeal in propagating the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, was not more conspicuous than the tenderness of his spirit as to the manner of his maintaining and delivering it. He was found constantly " speaking the truth in love, and in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure would give them repentance to the acknowledging the truth." There was a gentleness, a candour, and a forbearance in him, that I do not recollect to have seen in an equal degree among his brethren ; and which had so conciliating an effect, that even the enemies of truth often spoke loudly in praise of his character. On the other hand, it generated such an affection in his friends, that, had he attempted to preach longer than he did, a great part of his congregation would have gathered, were it only for the pleasure they had in seeing his person.

That this account is not panegyric, is clear to all who personally knew Mr. N. But as many who may read these Memoirs had not that pleasure, I will add the testimony of one, whose nice discernment of character will admit of no question :—

" A people will love a minister, if a minister seems to love his people ; the old maxim *simile agit in simile*, is in no case more exactly verified ; therefore you were beloved at Olney ; and, if you preached to the Chickasaws and Choc-taws, would be equally beloved by them."*

As this spirit of Christian benevolence and charity seems not to have been sufficiently cultivated among us, while a furious and often abusive zeal for certain points, as Cowper remarks, has been substituted for the whole truth, I am led to dwell longer than I intended in enforcing this amiable feature of Mr. N.'s character ; especially on account of those Christians, who have imbibed a false taste in their religion, from such teachers, or books, as have fallen in their way. I therefore earnestly request those persons to weigh well the inquiries which follow :—

Have you ever sufficiently considered the evil of divisions and heart-burnings in a church ; and what interest that enemy, who comes to sow tares among the wheat, takes in promoting them? Do you reflect, that another Christian may be doing God's work, though his mode of doing it may not meet your taste, any more than your taste meets his? Do you consider how much greater evil a wrong spirit and temper produce than the things you object against? Do you weigh the consequences of your haste in weakening the hands and grieving the heart of any godly minister, whom you constantly or occasionally attend ; and in actually laying a stumbling-block in the way of the ungodly, while you depreciate him and his services? Nothing affected that eminent character, Mr. Cadogan, like what he met from some religious persons of this kind, as I have related from his own lips, in his Memoirs.†

Let me farther exhort such as are in danger from this unchastised spirit to con-

* *Haley's life of Cowper*, Letter xxvii.

† See Memoirs of Cadogan, p. 39.

sider, how much corrupt nature is at the bottom of this error. Corrupt nature frets and rages at any supposed contradiction or restraint: it would substitute the work of the tongue for that of the heart: in the mean time, real religion is scorned by the world, which cannot distinguish between a thing so deformed, and the thing as it ought to appear.

Consider, also, whether there needs any grace at all in order to maintain such a sort of profession. We require only to christen the evil passions of corrupt nature, and then may call names, hate, boast, and give ourselves the preference, as much as any ungodly man whatever! A zealot at an election can fight and strive for his favourite candidate; with inflamed zeal he can cause divisions, exhibit pride, self-will, and impatience of subordination: but, let me ask, will the same evil tempers change their nature because they are employed about spiritual objects?

Much blame attaches, too, respecting certain disputable points for which such persons strive. It seems as if some, who are otherwise good men, did not relish the Bible till they had garbled and selected it; and that, if the whole were not of acknowledged authority, they would condemn it as it now stands. They speak as if it were not accurate in its terms, or sufficiently express or decisive in confirming their fond opinions. This leads them to be shy of some parts of revelation, and to distort others, in order to fit them for their system; and while contending for that system, they appear to forget the stress which the apostle lays upon the holy, humble, self-denying, affectionate spirit of Christianity, in 1 Cor. xiii.; how gentle it is, how easy to be entreated, how it hopeth and endureth all things, &c. While, on the contrary, they who can speak with the tongues of men and of angels, who have all knowledge, who can work miracles, and even die martyrs, would, without this distinguishing characteristic of Christianity, be considered of God as nothing. The Old Testament dispensation, it is granted, had a severe aspect, and special occasions may be pleaded for special expressions of holy indignation under any dispensation; but when the prophet describes the brighter day, he foretells, that then "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb," &c., as emblematical of the prevalence of that grace described by the apostle, in the chapter just quoted. Hold, therefore, the faith once delivered to the saints as firmly as possible, but hold it in love. "Buy the truth and sell it not;" rather die for it, than part with it; but "speak it in love;" and walk in it "as Christ also walked," ever remembering, that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

I feel conscious that it is simply with a view to convince many well meaning Christians of their error (and I have found more or less of this class in almost every place where I have been,) that I thus speak. If a gross superstition, arising in the Church, perverted the Christianity of former ages; I wish I may mistake in supposing, that a loose and unscriptural profession is widely spreading as the bane of our age. Against such a departure from the true genius of Christianity, I certainly, as a minister of Christ, ought to bear my feeble testimony. Consider, therefore, that what is said, is with a single view to your best interests; and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

As I referred the Christians who were last addressed, to the character of Mr. N. as an example, so I never knew a more perfect one to my purpose. When any person depreciated the ministry of a good man, who, by advancing important truths, was opposing the reigning errors of the times; but who, from timidity or prejudice, was shy of Mr. N., he would imitate his Divine Master by saying, "Let him alone; he that is not against us is on our side. Make no man an offender for a word. He is doing good, according to his views. Let us pray for him, and by no means weaken his hands. Who knows but God may one day put him far above our heads both in knowledge and usefulness?"

His grand point, in a few words, as he used to express it, was, "TO BREAK A HARD HEART, AND TO HEAL A BROKEN HEART." To implant the life of God in

the soul of man, he would sacrifice every subordinate consideration. He felt every other consideration comparatively insignificant. He saw the spirit of ancient Pharisaism working among those who cry out the most against it; who exact to a scruple, in the tythe of mint, anise, and cummin of their own peculiarities, while they pass over the weightier matters of unity and love; straining at the gnat of a private opinion, and swallowing the camel of a deadly discord. On the contrary, as far as order and circumstances would admit, Mr. N. clave to every good man, and endeavoured to strengthen his hands, in whatever denomination of Christians he was found. His character well illustrated the Scripture, that though "scarcely for a righteous (or just) man would one die; yet for a good man (i. e. one eminent for his candour and benevolence) some would even dare to die." However they admired some ministers, they all loved him; and saw exemplified in him that "wisdom which is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits without partiality and without hypocrisy."

I conclude these Memoirs with a word to such as are endeavouring to follow the steps of their late faithful friend, as he followed Christ. We cannot but lament the errors just described. We cannot, if we have any zeal for the gospel, but protest against them. But let us recollect, that they are not the only errors which are found in the church; and therefore let us watch, lest any other "root of bitterness spring up to trouble us, and defile many." While you lament with me the removal of ministers like Mr. N., let us recollect that Eternal Friend, who will never leave his church without witnesses to the truth; and who, among other reasons for removing earthly helps, teaches us thereby to rest only upon that help which cannot be removed. Let us take comfort too in recollecting, that, spotted as the church may appear from the inconsistencies of many of its members, yet all the real good that is to be found in this corrupt world, is to be found in that church. God saw seven thousand true believers in Israel while his prophet could see but one. Where some Jehu is sounding a trumpet before him, many are quietly passing to heaven without any such clamour. . . As a great writer remarks, "Because half a dozen grasshoppers, under a fern, make the field ring with their importunate chink, while thousands of great cattle chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those, who make the noise, are ; the only inhabitants of the field.' "

But I must remark, that nothing has been more profitable to myself in considering Mr. N.'s life, than the exhibition it makes of a particular providence. If the church be not conducted by such visible signs now, as formerly, it is found to be as actually conducted. We read of a Divine hand concerned in the fall of sparrows, in numbering the hairs of our head, and in raising our dust to life; but with what little interest we read this, appears by our distrust in the first trial we meet. If we do not dare to join the sentiments of some, who regard such expressions as purely figurative and hyperbolic, yet our imagination is so overwhelmed with the difficulty of the performance, that we are apt to turn from the subject with some general hope, but with a very indistinct and vague idea of "a God at hand," faithful to his promise, and almighty to deliver. Yet how many cases occur in the history of every one of us, where nothing short of an Almighty arm could prove "a present help in the time of trouble."

Now, this short history before us is admirably calculated to encourage our faith and hope, when we are called to pass through those deep waters, that seem to bid defiance to human strength and contrivance. What, for instance, but a Divine interference caused Mr. N. to be roused from sleep on board the Harwich at the moment of exchanging men, and thereby effected his removal? What placed him in a situation so remarkably suited to his recovering the ship, which had already passed the place of his station in Africa, and brought him back to his country? what kept him from returning in the boat, that was lost at Rio Cestors? or from *the ship that was blown up near Liverpool?* not to mention many other of his *special deliverances*

"I am a wonder unto many," says he, in the motto of his Narrative; and if we as distinctly considered the strange methods of mercy which have occurred in our own cases, we should at least be a wonder to ourselves. But my aim is to point out the use we should make of these Memoirs in this respect. We should, as Christians, mark the error of despair. We should see, that the case of a praying man cannot be desperate; that if a man be out of the pit of hell, he is on the ground of mercy. We should recollect, that God sees a way of escape when we see none; that nothing is too hard for him; that he warrants our dependence, and invites us to call on him in the day of trouble, and gives a promise of deliverance. We should, therefore, in every trial, adopt the language of Mr. N.'s favourite Herbert:

"Away, despair; my gracious Lord doth hear;
Though winds and waves assault my keel,
He doth preserve it; he doth steer,
Ev'n when the boat seems most to reel.
Storms are the triumph of his art:
Well may he close his eyes, but not his heart."

From these facts we should see, that Christ is able, not only "to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" but also that he is able to bring the most hardened blasphemer and abject slave from his chains of sin and misery, to stand in the most honourable and useful station, and proclaim to the wretched and to the ruined the exceeding riches of his grace. I have observed, from my own experience as well as from that of others, how strong a hold Satan builds by despair. The pressing fascinations of the world, the secret invitations of sensuality, and the distant prospect of eternal things, form a powerful current against vital religion. The heart of a Christian is ready to sink whenever these proud waters rise. Let him, therefore, recollect, that his hope, his only hope, is in pressing right onward through a world of lies and vanity; that his present dispensation is the walk of faith and not of sight; and that "by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, he has given strong consolation to such as flee for refuge to the hope set before them."

One could, indeed, scarcely conjecture, that cases like Mr. N.'s should be so perverted by any of our children, as that they should take confidence in their sins from his former course of life; but, because such facts, as I am credibly informed, do exist, let us be upon the watch to counteract this deep device of the great enemy.

My dear young friends, who may have read these Memoirs, perhaps merely for your amusement, consider with what a contrary design St. Paul states his former unrenewed condition: "I was," says he, "before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; but for this cause I obtained mercy." For what cause? Was it that men should continue in sin, because a miracle of special grace had been wrought? To "do evil that good may come" is the black mark of a reprobate mind. But "for this cause," saith the apostle, "I obtained mercy; that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting." The same caution is necessary whenever you may be tempted to hope for such a recovery as Mr. N.'s, after erring like him. To proceed upon such a hope, is a gross presumption. Thousands perish in wrong courses, for one who escapes from their natural consequences. Pray, therefore, that you may be enabled to resist the temptation of perverting such extraordinary cases. God affords them to be "a savour of life unto life," while Satan would employ them to be "a savour of death unto death." One almighty to save, affords you here, indeed, an instance of special mercy, which gives you the strongest encouragement in setting your face towards his kingdom; and this is the proper use to be made of such a case.

Your parents, your most disinterested friends, are anxiously watching for your

good : and they, perhaps, have put this book into your hand with a view of promoting it. The author has cause to thank God, who put it into the heart of his pious parent to make a similar attempt, and bless it with success; and he could tell of more such instances. May it please God that you may be added to the number! Worldly prosperity would rather hurt than help you before your minds become rightly directed. Mr. N. shows us,* that his firmest friend could not have served him effectually had not God first prepared his mind for the advancement. An enemy would occupy your minds with perishing objects; but God calls you to cultivate nobler views. He proposes glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life by the gospel. "Seek," therefore, "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things shall be added to you."

* Memoirs, page 26.

AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &c.

LETTER I.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I MAKE NO doubt but you have at times had pleasing reflections upon that promise made to the Israelites, Deut. viii. 2. They were then in the wilderness, surrounded with difficulties, which were greatly aggravated by their own distrust and perverseness: they had experienced a variety of dispensations, the design of which they could not as yet understand; they frequently lost sight of God's gracious purposes in their favour, and were much discouraged by reason of the way. To compose and animate their minds, Moses here suggests to them, that there was a future happy time drawing near, when their journey and warfare should be finished; that they should soon be put in possession of the promised land, and have rest from all their fears and troubles; and then it would give them pleasure to look back upon what they now found so uneasy to bear:—"Thou shalt remember all the way, by which the Lord thy God led thee through this wilderness."

But the importance and comfort of these words is still greater, if we consider them in a spiritual sense, as addressed to all who are passing through the wilderness of this world to a heavenly Canaan; who by faith in the promises and power of God are seeking eternal rest in that kingdom which cannot be shaken. The hope of that glorious inheritance inspires us with some degree of courage and zeal to press forward, to where Jesus has already entered as our forerunner; and when our eye is fixed upon him, we are more than conquerors over all that would withstand our progress. But we have not yet attained it; we still feel the infirmities of a fallen nature: through the remains of ignorance and unbelief, we often mistake the Lord's dealings with us, and are ready to complain, when, if we knew all, we should rather rejoice. But to us likewise there is a time coming, when our warfare shall be accomplished, our views enlarged, and our sight increased: then, with what transports of adoration and love shall we look back upon the way, by which the Lord led us!

We shall then see and acknowledge, that mercy and goodness directed every step; we shall see, that what our ignorance once called adversities and evils, were in reality blessings which we could not have done well without; that nothing befel us without a cause: that no trouble came upon us sooner, or pressed us more heavily, or continued longer, than our case required: in a word, that our many afflictions were each in their place among the means employed by divine grace and wisdom, to bring us to the possession of that exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which the Lord has prepared for his people. And even in this imperfect state, though we are seldom able to judge aright of our present circumstances, yet, if we look upon the years of our past life, and compare the dispensations we have been brought through, with the frame of our minds under each successive period; if we consider, how wonderfully one thing has been connected with another; so that what we now number amongst our greatest advantages, perhaps took their first rise from incidents which we thought hardly worth our notice; and that we have sometimes escaped the greatest dangers that threatened us, not by any wisdom or foresight of our own, but by the intervention of circumstances, which we neither desired nor thought of;—I say, when we compare and consider these things by the light afforded us in the holy scriptures, we may collect indisputable proof, from the narrow circle of our own concerns, that the wise and good providence of God watches over his people from the earliest moment of their life, overrules and guards them through all their wanderings in a state of ignorance, leads them in a way they know not, till at length his providence and grace concur in those events and impressions, which bring them to the knowledge of him and themselves.

I am persuaded that every believer will, upon due reflection, see enough in his own case to confirm this remark; but not all in the same degree. The outward circumstances of many have been uniform; they

have known but little variety in life; and with respect to their inward change, it has been effected in a secret way, unnoticed by others, and almost unperceived by themselves. The Lord has spoken to them, not in thunder and tempest, but with a still small voice he has drawn them gradually to himself; so that, though they have a happy assurance of the thing, that they know and love him, and are passed from death unto life; yet of the precise time and manner, they can give little account. Others he seems to select, in order to show the exceeding riches of his grace, and the greatness of his mighty power: he suffers the natural rebellion and wickedness of their hearts to have full scope; while sinners of less note are cut off with little warning, these are spared, though sinning with a high hand, and, as it were, studying their own destruction. At length, when all that knew them are perhaps expecting to hear, that they are made signal instances of divine vengeance, the Lord (whose thoughts are high above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth) is pleased to pluck them as brands out of the fire, and to make them monuments of his mercy, for the encouragement of others; they are, beyond expectation, convinced, pardoned, and changed. A case of this sort indicates a divine power no less than the creation of a world: and it is evidently the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in the eyes of all those, who are not blinded by prejudice and unbelief.

Such was the persecuting Saul: his heart was full of enmity against Jesus of Nazareth, and therefore he persecuted and made havoc of his disciples. He had been a terror to the church of Jerusalem, and was going to Damascus with the same views. He was yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against all that loved the Lord Jesus. He thought little of the mischief he had hitherto done. He was engaged for the suppression of the whole sect; and hurrying from house to house, from place to place, he carried menaces in his look, and repeated threatenings with every breath. Such was his spirit and temper, when the Lord Jesus, whom he hated and opposed, checked him in the height of his rage, called this bitter persecutor to the honour of an apostle, and inspired him with great zeal and earnestness, to preach that faith which he had so lately attempted to destroy.

Nor are we without remarkable displays of the same sovereign, efficacious grace in our own times;—I may particularly mention the instance of the late colonel Gardiner. If any real satisfaction could be found in a sinful course, he would have met with it; for he pursued the experiment with all possible advantages. He was habituated to evil; and *many uncommon, almost miraculous deliverances, made no impression upon him. Yet*

he was likewise made willing in the day of God's power: and the bright example of his life, illustrated and diffused by the account of him, published since his death, has afforded an occasion of much praise to God and much comfort to his people.

After the mention of such names, can you permit me, Sir, to add my own? If I do, it must be with a very humbling distinction. These once eminent sinners, proved sincere Christians: much had been forgiven them, therefore they loved much. St. Paul could say, "The grace bestowed upon me was not in vain; for I laboured more abundantly than they all." Colonel Gardiner likewise was as a city set upon a hill, a burning and a shining light: the manner of his conversion was hardly more singular, than the whole course of his conversation from that time to his death. Here, alas! the parallel greatly fails. It has not been thus with me;—I must take deserved shame to myself, that I have made very unsuitable returns for what I have received. But, if the question is only concerning the patience and long-suffering of God, the wonderful interposition of his providence in favour of an unworthy sinner, the power of his grace in softening the hardest heart, and the riches of his mercy in pardoning the most enormous and aggravated transgressions; in these respects, I know no case more extraordinary than my own. And indeed many persons, to whom I have related my story, have thought it worthy of being preserved.

I never gave any succinct account in writing, of the Lord's dealing with me, till very lately; for I was deterred, on the one hand, by the great difficulty of writing properly where self is concerned; on the other, by the ill use which persons of corrupt and perverse minds are often known to make of such instances. The Psalmist reminds us that a reserve in these things is proper, when he says, "Come unto me, all you that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul;" and our Lord cautions us not to "cast our pearls before swine." The pearls of a Christian are, perhaps, his choice experiences of the Lord's power and love in the concerns of his soul; and these should not be at all adventures made public, lest we give occasion to earthly and grovelling souls, to profane what they cannot understand. These were the chief reasons of my backwardness: but, a few weeks since, I yielded to the judgment and request of a much respected friend, and sent him a relation at large, in a series of eight letters. The event has been what I little expected; I wrote to one person, but my letters have fallen into many hands: amongst others, I find they have reached your notice; and instead of blaming me for being too tedious and circumstantial, which was the fault I feared I had committed, you

re pleased to desire a still more distinct detail. As you and others of my friends apprehend my compliance with this request may be attended with some good effect, may promote the pleasing work of praise to our adorable Redeemer, to confirm the faith of some other of his people, I am willing to obey; give up my own reasonings upon the in expediency of so inconsiderable a person as myself adventuring in so public a point of view. God may be glorified on my behalf, and his children in any measure comforted or instructed by what I have to declare of his goodness, I shall be satisfied; and am content to leave all other possible consequences of this undertaking in his hands, who does all things well.

I must again have recourse to my memory, as I retained no copies of the letters you saw. So far as I can recollect what I then wrote, will relate, but shall not affect a needless variety of phrase and manner, merely because those have been already perused by many. I may perhaps, in some places, when repeating the same facts, express myself in nearly the same words; yet I propose, according to your desire, to make this relation more explicit and particular than the former, especially towards the close, which I wound up hastily, lest my friend should be wearied. I hope you will likewise excuse me, if I do not strictly confine myself to narration, but now and then intersperse such reflections as may offer, while I am writing: and though you have signified your intentions of communicating what I send you to others, I must yet, on this account, affect a conciseness and correctness which is not my natural talent, lest the whole should appear dry and constrained. I shall therefore (if possible) think only of you, and write with that confidence and freedom which your friendship and candour deserve. This sheet may stand as a preface, and I purpose, as far as I can, to interrupt many other engagements, until I have completed the task you have assigned me.

In the mean time, I entreat the assistance of your prayers, that in this, and all my poor attempts, I may have a single eye to his glory, who was pleased to call me out of the *oblivion* of a *dark* darkness, into the marvellous light of his gospel.—I am, with sincere respect, dear Sir, your obliged and affectionate servant.

January 12, 1763.

LETTER II.

REVEREND SIR,—I can sometimes feel a pleasure in repeating the grateful acknowledgment of David, "O Lord, I am thy servant, the son of thine handmaid; thou hast loosed my hands." The tender mercies of God towards me were manifest in the first

moment of my life;—I was born as it were in his house, and dedicated to him in my infancy. My mother (as I have heard from many) was a pious experienced Christian; she was a dissenter, in communion with the late Doctor Jennings. I was her only child; and as she was of a weak constitution and a retired temper, almost her whole employment was the care of my education. I have some faint remembrance of her care and instructions. At a time when I could not be more than three years of age, she herself taught me English, and with so much success (as I had something of a forward turn,) that when I was four years old I could read with propriety, in any common book that offered. She stored my memory, which was then very retentive, with many valuable pieces, chapters, and portions of scripture, catechisms, hymns and poems. My temper, at that time seemed quite suitable to her wishes: I had little inclination to the noisy sports of children, but was best pleased when in her company, and always as willing to learn as she was to teach me. How far the best education may fall short of reaching the heart, will strongly appear in the sequel of my history: yet, I think, for the encouragement of pious parents to go on in the good way of doing their part faithfully to form their children's minds, I may properly propose myself as an instance. Though in process of time, I sinned away all the advantages of these early impressions, yet they were for a great while a restraint upon me; they returned again and again, and it was very long before I could wholly shake them off; and when the Lord at length opened my eyes, I found a great benefit from the recollection of them. Further, my dear mother, besides the pains she took with me, often commended me with many prayers and tears to God; and I doubt not but I reap the fruits of these prayers to this hour.

My mother observed my early progress with peculiar pleasure, and intended from the first to bring me up with a view to the ministry, if the Lord should so incline my heart. In my sixth year I began to learn Latin; but, before I had time to know much about it, the intended plan of my education was broke short.—The Lord's designs were far beyond the views of an earthly parent; he was pleased to reserve me for an unusual proof of his patience, providence, and grace, and therefore overruled the purpose of my friends, by depriving me of this excellent parent, when I was something under seven years old. I was born the 24th of July, 1725, and she died the 11th of that month, 1732.

My father was then at sea (he was a commander in the Mediterranean trade at that time;) he came home the following year, and soon after married again. Thus I passed into different hands. I was well treated

in all other respects; but the loss of my mother's instructions was not repaired. I was now permitted to mingle with careless and profane children, and soon began to learn their ways. Soon after my father's marriage I was sent to a boarding school in Essex, where the imprudent severity of the master almost broke my spirit and relish for books. With him I forgot the first principles and rules of arithmetic, which my mother had taught me years before. I staid there two years; in the last of the two a new usher coming, who observed and studied my temper, I took to the Latin with great eagerness; so that before I was ten years old, I reached and maintained the first post in the second class, which in that school read Tully and Virgil. I believe I was pushed forward too fast, and therefore not being grounded, I soon lost all I had learned (for I left school in my tenth year,) and when I long afterwards undertook the Latin language from books, I think I had little, if any advantage, from what I had learned before.

My father's second marriage was from a family in Essex; and when I was eleven years old, he took me with him to sea. He was a man of remarkable good sense, and great knowledge of the world; he took great care of my morals, but could not supply my mother's part. Having been educated himself in Spain, he always observed an air of distance and severity in his carriage, which overawed and discouraged my spirit. I was always in fear when before him, and therefore he had the less influence. From that time to the year 1742, I made several voyages, but with considerable intervals between, which were chiefly spent in the country, excepting a few months in my fifteenth year, when I was placed upon a very advantageous prospect at Alicant in Spain; but my unsettled behaviour and impatience of restraint rendered that design abortive.

In this period my temper and conduct were exceedingly various. At school, or soon after, I had little concern about religion, and easily received very ill impressions. But I was often disturbed with convictions; I was fond of reading from a child; among other books, Bennet's Christian Oratory often came in my way; and though I understood but little of it, the course of life therein recommended appeared very desirable, and I was inclined to attempt it. I began to pray, to read the scriptures, and to keep a sort of diary; I was presently religious in my own eyes; but alas! this seeming goodness had no solid foundation, but passed away like a morning cloud, or early dew. I was soon weary, gradually gave it up, and became worse than before: instead of prayer, I learned to curse and blaspheme, and was exceedingly wicked, when from under my parents' view. All this was before I was

twelve years old. About that time I had a dangerous fall from a horse; I was thrown, I believe, within a few inches of a hedge-row newly cut down; I got no hurt; but could not avoid taking notice of a gracious providence in my deliverance; for had I fallen upon the stakes, I had inevitably been killed; my conscience suggested to me the dreadful consequences, if in such a state I had been summoned to appear before God. I presently broke off from my profane practices, and appeared quite altered; but was not long before I declined again. These struggles between sin and conscience were often repeated; but the consequence was, that every relapse sunk me into still greater depths of wickedness. I was once roused by the loss of an intimate companion. We had agreed to go on board a man-of-war (I think it was on Sunday,) but I providentially came too late; the boat was overset, and he and several others were drowned. I was invited to the funeral of my play-fellow, and was exceedingly affected, to think that by a delay of a few minutes (which had much displeased and angered me till I saw the event,) my life had been preserved. However, this likewise was soon forgot. At another time the perusal of the Family Instructor put me upon a partial and transient reformation. In brief, though I cannot distinctly relate particulars, I think I took up and laid aside a religious profession three or four different times before I was sixteen years of age; but all this while my heart was insincere. I often saw a necessity of religion as a means of escaping hell; but I loved sin, and was unwilling to forsake it. Instances of this, I can remember, were frequent in the midst of all my forms; I was so strangely blind and stupid, that sometimes when I have been determined upon things which I knew were sinful and contrary to my duty, I could not go on quietly, till I had first despatched my ordinary task of prayer, in which I have grudged every moment of my time; and when this was finished, my conscience was in some measure pacified, and I could rush into folly with little remorse.

My last reform was the most remarkable both for degree and continuance. Of this period, at least of some part of it, I may say, in the apostle's words, "After the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a pharisee." I did every thing that might be expected from a person entirely ignorant of God's righteousness, and desirous to establish his own. I spent the greatest part of every day in reading the scriptures, meditation and prayer; I fasted often; I even abstained from all animal food for three months; I would hardly answer a question for fear of speaking an idle word. I seemed to bemoan my former miscarriages very earnestly, sometimes with tears. In short I became an ascetic, and endeavoured,

so far as my situation would permit, to renounce society, that I might avoid temptation. I continued in this serious mood (I cannot give it a higher title) for more than two years, without any considerable breaking off. But it was a poor religion; it left me in many respects under the power of sin, and so far as it prevailed, only tended to make me gloomy, stupid, unsociable, and useless.

Such was the frame of my mind, when I became acquainted with Lord Shaftesbury. I saw the second volume of his *Characteristics* in a petty shop at Middleburgh in Holland. The title allured me to buy it, and the style and manner gave me great pleasure in reading, especially the second piece, which his lordship, with great propriety, has entitled a *Rhapsody*. Nothing could be more suited to the romantic turn of my mind, than the address of this pompous declamation; of the design and tendency I was not aware; I thought the author a most religious person, and that I had only to follow him, and be happy. Thus with fine words and fair speeches my simple heart was beguiled. This book was always in my hand; I read it till I could very nearly repeat the *Rhapsody* verbatim from beginning to end. No immediate effect followed, but it operated like a slow poison, and prepared the way for all that followed.

This letter brings my history down to December, 1743. I was then lately returned from a voyage, and my father not intending me for the sea again, was thinking how to settle me in the world; but I had little life or spirit for business: I knew but little of men or things. I was fond of a visionary scheme of contemplative life; a medley of religion, philosophy, and indolence; and was quite averse to the thoughts of an industrious application to business. At length a merchant in Liverpool, an intimate friend of my father (to whom, as the instrument of God's goodness, I have since been chiefly indebted for all my earthly comforts,) proposed to send me for some years to Jamaica, and to charge himself with the care of my future fortune. I consented to this, and every thing was prepared for my voyage. I was upon the point of setting out the following week. In the meantime, my father sent me on some business to a place a few miles beyond Maidstone in Kent; and this little journey, which was to have been only for three or four days, occasioned a sudden and remarkable turn, which roused me from the habitual indolence I had contracted, and gave rise to the series of uncommon dispensations, of which you desire a more particular account. So true it is, "that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."—I am affectionately your's in the best bonds.

January 13, 1763.

LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,—A few days before my intended journey into Kent, I received an invitation to visit a family in that county. They were distant relations, but very intimate friends of my dear mother: she died in their house; but a coolness took place upon my father's second marriage, and I had heard nothing of them for many years. As my road lay within half a mile of their house, I obtained my father's leave to call on them. I was, however, very indifferent about it, and sometimes thought of passing on: however I went. I was known at first sight, before I could tell my name, and met with the kindest reception, as the child of a dear deceased friend. My friends had two daughters. The eldest (as I understood some years afterwards) had been often considered, by her mother and mine, as a future wife for me from the time of her birth. I know indeed, that intimate friends frequently amuse themselves with such distant prospects for their children, and that they miscarry much oftener than succeed. I do not say that my mother predicted what was to happen, yet there was something remarkable in the manner of its taking place. All intercourse between the families had been long broken off; I was going into a foreign country, and only called to pay a hasty visit; and this I should not have thought of, but for a message received just at that crisis (for I had not been invited at any time before.) Thus the circumstances were precarious in the highest degree, and the event was as extraordinary. Almost at the first sight of this girl (for she was then under fourteen,) I was impressed with an affection for her, which never abated or lost its influence a single moment in my heart from that hour. In degree, it actually equalled all that the writers of romance have imaged; in duration, it was unalterable. I soon lost all sense of religion, and became deaf to the remonstrances of conscience and prudence; but my regard for her was always the same; and I may perhaps venture to say, that none of the scenes of misery and wickedness I afterwards experienced, ever banished her a single hour together from my waking thoughts, for the seven following years.

Give me leave, Sir, to reflect a little upon this unexpected incident, and to consider its influence upon my future life, and how far it was subservient to the views of divine providence concerning me, which seem to have been twofold; that by being given up, for awhile, to the consequences of own wilfulness, and afterwards reclaimed by a high hand, my case, so far as it should be known, might be both a warning and an encouragement to others.

In the first place, hardly any thing less

than this violent and commanding passion would have been sufficient to awaken me from the dull melancholy habit I had contracted. I was almost a misanthrope, notwithstanding I so much admired the pictures of virtue and benevolence as drawn by lord Shaftesbury: but now my reluctance to active life was overpowered at once, and I was willing to be or to do any thing, which might subserve the accomplishment of my wishes at some future time.

Farther, when I afterwards made shipwreck of faith, hope, and conscience, my love to this person was the only remaining principle, which in any degree supplied their place; and the bare possibility of seeing her again was the only present and obvious means of restraining me from the most horrid designs against myself and others.

But then the ill effects it brought upon me counterbalanced these advantages. The interval, usually styled the time of courtship, is indeed a pleasing part of life, where there is a mutual affection, the consent of friends, a reasonable prospect as to settlement, and the whole is conducted in a prudential manner, and in subordination to the will and fear of God. When things are thus situated, it is a blessing to be susceptible of the tender passions; but when these concomitants are wanting, what we call love is the most tormenting passion in itself, and the most destructive in its consequences, that can be named: and they were all wanting, in my case. I durst not mention it to her friends, or to my own, nor indeed for a considerable time to herself, as I could make no proposals: it remained as a dark fire, locked up in my own breast, which gave me a constant uneasiness. By introducing an idolatrous regard to a creature, it greatly weakened my sense of religion, and made farther way for the entrance of infidel principles: and though it seemed to promise great things, as an incentive to diligence and activity in life, in reality it performed nothing. I often formed mighty projects in my mind, of what I would willingly do or suffer for the sake of her I loved; yet, while I could have her company, I was incapable of forcing myself away to improve opportunities that offered; still less could it do in regulating my manners. It did not prevent me from engaging in a long train of excess and riot, utterly unworthy the honourable pretensions I had formed. And though through the wonderful interposition of divine goodness, the maze of my follies was at length unravelled, and my wishes crowned in such a manner as overpaid my sufferings; yet, I am sure, I would not go through the same series of trouble again to possess all the treasures of both the Indies. I have enlarged more than I intended on this point, as perhaps these papers may be useful to caution others against indulging

an ungovernable passion by my painful experience. How often may such headstrong votaries be said "to sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind."

My heart being now fixed and riveted to a particular object, I considered every thing I was concerned with in a new light. I concluded it would be absolutely impossible to live at such a distance as Jamaica, for a term of four or five years, and therefore determined at all events that I would not go. I could not bear either to acquaint my father with the true reason, or to invent a false one; therefore, without giving any notice to him why I did so, I staid three weeks instead of three days in Kent, till I thought (as it proved) the opportunity would be lost, and the ship sailed. I then returned to London. I had highly displeased my father by this disobedience; but he was more easily reconciled than I could have expected. In a little time I sailed with a friend of his to Venice. In this voyage, I was exposed to the company and ill example of the common sailors among whom I ranked. Importunity and opportunity presenting every day, I once more began to relax from the sobriety and order which I had observed, in some degree, for more than two years. I was sometimes pierced with sharp convictions; but though I made a few faint efforts to stop, as I had done from several before; I did not, indeed, as yet turn out profligate; but I was making large strides towards a total apostacy from God. The most remarkable check and alarm I received (and for what I know, the last,) was by a dream, which made a very strong, though not any abiding impression upon my mind.

The consideration of whom I writing to renders it needless for me either to enter upon a discussion of the nature of dreams in general, or to make an apology for recording my own. Those who acknowledge scripture will allow that there have been monitory and supernatural dreams, evident communications from heaven, either directing or foretelling future events: and those who are acquainted with the history and experience of the people of God are well assured, that such intimations have not been totally withheld in any period down to the present times. Reason, far from contradicting this supposition, strongly pleads for it, where the process of reasoning is rightly understood, and carefully pursued. So that a late eminent writer,* who, I presume, is not generally charged with enthusiasm, undertakes to prove, that the phenomenon of dreaming is inexplicable at least, if not absolutely impossible, without taking in the agency and intervention of spiritual beings, to us invisible. I would refer the incredulous to him. For my own part, I can say, without scruple, "The dream

* Baxter on the Via Inertia.

is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." I am sure I dreamed of the following effect, and I cannot doubt, from what I have seen since, that it had a direct and easy application to my own circumstances, to the dangers into which I was about to plunge myself, and to the unmerited deliverance and mercy which God would be pleased to offer me in the time of my distress.

Though I have wrote out a relation of this dream more than once for others, it has happened that I never reserved a copy; but the principal incidents are so deeply engraven in my memory, that I believe I am not liable to any considerable variations in repeating the account. The scene presented to my imagination was the harbour of Venice, where we had lately been. I thought it was night, and my watch upon the deck; and that, as I was walking to and fro by myself, a person came to me, (I do not remember from whence,) and brought me a ring, with an express charge to keep it carefully; assuring me that while I preserved that ring, I should be happy and successful: but, if I lost or parted with it, I must expect nothing but trouble and misery. I accepted the present and the terms willingly, not in the least doubting my own care to preserve it, and highly satisfied to have my happiness in my own keeping. I was engaged in these thoughts, when a second person came to me, and observing the ring on my finger, took occasion to ask me some questions concerning it. I readily told him its virtues, and his answer expressed a surprise at my weakness, in expecting such effects from a ring. I think he reasoned with me some time upon the impossibility of the thing, and at length urged me in direct terms to throw it away. At first, I was shocked at the proposal; but his insinuations prevailed. I began to reason and doubt myself, and at last plucked it off my finger, and dropt it over the ship's side into the water, which it had no sooner touched, than I saw, the same instant, a terrible fire burst out from a range of mountains, (a part of the Alps,) which appeared at some distance behind the city of Venice. I saw the hills as distinct as if awake, and they were all in flames. I perceived too late my folly; and my tempter, with an air of insult, informed me, that all the mercy God had in reserve for me, was comprised in that ring, which I had wilfully thrown away. I understood that I must now go with him to the burning mountains, and that all the flames I saw were kindled upon my account. I trembled, and was in a great agony; so that it was surprising I did not then awake; but my dream continued, and when I thought myself upon the point of a constrained departure, and stood self-condemned, without plea or hope; suddenly, either a third person, or the same who

brought the ring at first, (I am not certain which,) came to me, and demanded the cause of my grief. I told him the plain case, confessing that I had ruined myself wilfully, and deserved no pity. He blamed my rashness, and asked if I should be wiser, supposing I had my ring again. I could hardly answer to this; for I thought it was gone beyond recal. I believe, indeed, I had not time to answer, before I saw this unexpected friend go down under the water, just in the spot where I dropped it; and he soon returned, bringing the ring with him. The moment he came on board, the flames in the mountains were extinguished, and my seducer left me. Then was "the prey taken from the hand of the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered." My fears were at an end, and with joy and gratitude I approached my kind deliverer to receive the ring again; but he refused to return it, and spoke to this effect: "If you should be entrusted with this ring again, you would very soon bring yourself into the same distress; you are not able to keep it; but I will preserve it for you, and whenever it is needful, will produce it in your behalf."—Upon this I awoke, in a state of mind not to be described: I could hardly eat, or sleep, or transact my necessary business for two or three days; but the impression soon wore off, and in a little time I totally forgot it; and I think it hardly occurred to my mind again, till several years afterwards. It will appear, in the course of these papers, that a time came, when I found myself in circumstances very nearly resembling those suggested by this extraordinary dream, when I stood helpless and hopeless upon the brink of an awful eternity; and I doubt not, but had the eyes of my mind been then opened, I should have seen my grand enemy, who had seduced me, wilfully to renounce and cast away my religious profession, and to involve myself in the most complicated crimes; I say, I should probably have seen him pleased with my agonies, and waiting for a permission to seize and bear away my soul to this place of torment. I should perhaps have seen likewise that Jesus, whom I had persecuted and defied, rebuking the adversary, challenging me for his own, as a brand plucked out of the fire, and saying, "Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom." However, though I saw not these things, I found the benefit; I obtained mercy. The Lord answered for me in the day of my distress; and, blessed be his name, he who restored the ring, (or what was signified by it,) vouchsafes to keep it. O what an unspeakable comfort is this, that I am not in mine own keeping. "The Lord is my shepherd:" I have been able to trust my all in his hands, and I know in whom I have believed. Satan still desires to have me, that he might sift

as wheat; but my Saviour has prayed for me, that my faith may not fail. Here is my security and power; a bulwark, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. But for this, many a time and often, if possible, I should have ruined myself, since my first deliverance; nay, I should fall, and stumble, and perish still, after all that the Lord has done for me, if his faithfulness was not engaged in my behalf, to be my sun and shield even unto death.—“Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

Nothing very remarkable occurred in the following part of that voyage. I returned home in December, 1743, and soon after repeated my visit to Kent, where I protracted my stay in the same imprudent manner I had done before, which again disappointed my father's designs in my favour, and almost provoked him to disown me. Before any thing suitable offered again I was impressed (owing entirely to my own thoughtless conduct which was all of a piece,) and put on board a tender: it was a critical juncture, when the French fleets were hovering upon our coast, so that my father was incapable to procure my release. In a few days I was sent on board the *Harwich* man-of-war, at the *Nore*. I entered here upon quite a new scene of life, and endured much hardship for about a month. My father was then willing that I should remain in the navy, as a war was daily expected, and procured me a recommendation to the captain, who took me upon the quarter deck as a midshipman. I had now an easy life, as to externals, and might have gained respect; but my mind was unsettled, and my behaviour very indifferent. I here met with companions who completed the ruin of my principles; and though I affected to talk of virtue, and was not utterly abandoned as afterwards, yet my delight and habitual practice was wickedness: my chief intimate was a person of exceeding good natural talents, and much observation; he was the greatest master of what is called the free-thinking scheme I remember to have met with, and knew how to insinuate his sentiments in the most plausible way. And his zeal was equal to his address; he could hardly have laboured more in the cause, if he had expected to gain heaven by it. Allow me to add, while I think of it, that this man, whom I honoured as my master, and whose practice I adopted so eagerly, perished in the same way as I expected to have done. I have been told, that he was overtaken in a voyage from Lisbon with a violent storm; the vessel and people escaped, but a great sea broke on board and swept him into eternity. Thus the Lord spares or punishes according to his sovereign pleasure! But to return:—I was fond of his company, and having myself a smattering of books, was eager enough to show my reading. He soon perceived my case that I had not wholly

broke through the restraints of conscience, and therefore did not shock me at first with too broad intimations of his design; he rather, as I thought, spoke favourably of religion; but when he had gained my confidence, he began to speak plainer; and perceiving my ignorant attachment to the characteristics, he joined issue with me upon that book, and convinced me that I had never understood it. In a word, he so plied me with objections and arguments, that my depraved heart was soon gained, and I entered into his plan with all my spirit. Thus, like an unwary sailor, who quits his port just before the rising storm, I renounced the hopes and comforts of the gospel at the very time when every other comfort was about to fail me.

In December, 1744, the *Harwich* was in the Downs, bound to the East Indies. The captain gave me liberty to go on shore for a day; but without consulting prudence, or regarding consequences, I took horse, and followed the dictates of my restless passion; I went to take a last leave of her I loved. I had little satisfaction in the interview, as I was sensible that I was taking pains to multiply my own troubles. The short time I could stay passed like a dream, and on new-year's day, 1745, I took my leave to return to the ship. The captain was prevailed on to excuse my absence; but this rash step (especially as it was not the first step of the kind I had taken,) highly displeased him, and lost me his favour, which I never recovered.

At length we sailed from Spithead with a very large fleet. We put into Torbay with a change of wind; but it returning fair again, we sailed the next day. Several of our fleet were lost in attempting to leave that place: and the following night the whole fleet was greatly endangered upon the coast of Cornwall, by a storm from the southward. The darkness of the night, and the number of the vessels, occasioned much confusion and damage. Our ship, though several times in imminent danger of being run down by other vessels, escaped unhurt; but many suffered much, particularly the admiral. This occasioned our putting back to Plymouth.

While we lay at Plymouth, I heard that my father, who had interest in some of the ships lately lost, was come down to Torbay. He had a connexion at that time with the African company. I thought if I could get to him, he might easily introduce me into that service, which would be better than pursuing a long uncertain voyage to the East Indies. It was a maxim with me in those unhappy days, never to deliberate; the thought hardly occurred to me before I was resolved to leave the ship at all events: I did so, and in the wrongest manner possible. I was sent one day in the boat, to take care

that none of the people deserted; but I betrayed my trust, and went off myself. I knew not what road to take, and durst not ask for fear of being suspected; yet having some general idea of the country, I guessed right; and when I had travelled some miles, I found upon inquiry, that I was on the road to Dartmouth. All went smoothly that day, and part of the next: I walked apace, and expected to have been with my father in about two hours, when I was met by a small party of soldiers; I could not avoid or deceive them. They brought me back to Plymouth. I walked through the streets guarded like a felon. My heart was full of indignation, shame, and fear. I was confined two days in the guard house, then sent on board my ship, and kept awhile in irons, then publicly stripped and whipped; after which I was degraded from my office, and all my former companions forbidden to show me the least favour, or even to speak to me. As midshipman, I had been entitled to some command, which (being sufficiently haughty and vain,) I had not been backward to exert. I was now in my turn brought down to a level with the lowest, and exposed to the insults of all.

And as my present situation was uncomfortable, my future prospects were still worse: the evils I suffered were likely to grow heavier every day. While my catastrophe was recent, the officers and my quondam brethren were something disposed to screen me from ill usage; but, during the little time I remained with them afterwards, I found them cool very fast in their endeavours to protect me. Indeed they could not avoid it without running a great risk of sharing with me; for the captain, though in general a humane man, who behaved very well to the ship's company, was almost implacable in his resentment, when he had been greatly offended, and took several occasions to show himself so to me; and the voyage was expected to be, as it proved, for five years. Yet I think nothing I either felt or feared distressed me so much, as to see myself thus forcibly torn away from the object of my affections, under a great improbability of seeing her again, and a much greater of returning in such a manner as would give me hopes of seeing her mine. Thus I was as miserable on all hands as could well be imagined. My breast was filled with the most excruciating passions, eager desire, bitter rage, and black despair. Every hour exposed me to some new insult and hardship, with no hope of relief or mitigation, no friend to take my part, or to listen to my complaint. Whether I looked inward or outward, I could perceive nothing but darkness and misery. I think no case except that of a conscience wounded by the wrath of God, could be more dreadful than mine. I cannot express with what wishfulness and regret I

cast my last looks upon the English shore; I kept my eyes fixed upon it till, the ship's distance increasing, it sensibly disappeared; and when I could see it no longer, I was tempted to throw myself into the sea, which (according to the wicked system I had adopted) would put a period to all my sorrows at once. But the secret hand of God restrained me.—Help me to praise him, dear Sir, for his wonderful goodness to the most unworthy of all creatures.—I am your most obliged servant.

January 15, 1763.

LETTER IV.

DEAR SIR,—Though I desired your instructions as to the manner and extent of these memoirs, I began to write before I received them, and had almost finished the preceding sheet when your favour of the 11th came to hand. I shall find another occasion to acknowledge my sense of your kind expressions of friendship, which, I pray the Lord, I may never give you cause to repent or withdraw; at present I shall confine myself to what more particularly relates to the task assigned me. I shall obey you, Sir, in taking notice of the little incidents you recal to my memory, and of others of the like nature, which, without your direction, I should have thought too trivial, and too much my own to deserve mentioning. When I began the eighth letter, I intended to say no more of myself than might be necessary to illustrate the wonders of divine providence and grace in the leading turns of my life; but I account your judgment a sufficient warrant for enlarging my plan.

Amongst other things, you desired a more explicit account of the state and progress of my courtship, as it is usually phrased. This was the point in which I thought it especially became me to be very brief; but I submit to you; and this seems a proper place to resume it, by telling you how it stood at the time of my leaving England.—When my inclinations first discovered themselves, both parties were so young, that no one but myself considered it in a serious view. It served for tea-table talk amongst our friends, and nothing further was expected from it. But afterwards, when my passion seemed to have abiding effects, so that in an interval of two years it was not at all abated, and especially as it occasioned me to act without any regard to prudence or interest, or my father's designs, and as there was a coolness between him and the family, her parents began to consider it as a matter of consequence; and when I took my last leave of them, her mother (at the same time she expressed the most tender affection for me, as if I had been her own child) told me, that though she had no objections to make,

upon a supposition that, at a maturer age, there should be a probability of our engaging upon a prudent prospect, yet, as things then stood, she thought herself obliged to interfere; and therefore desired I would no more think of returning to her house, unless her daughter was from home, till such time as I could either prevail with myself entirely to give up my pretensions, or could assure her that I had my father's express consent to go on. Much depended upon Mrs. N*****'s part in this affair; it was something difficult; but though she was young, gay, and quite unpractised in such matters, she was directed to a happy medium. A positive encouragement, or an absolute refusal, would have been attended with equal, though different disadvantages. But without much studying about it, I found her always upon her guard: she had penetration to see her absolute power over me, and prudence to make a proper use of it; she would neither understand my hints, nor give me room to come to a direct explanation. She has said since, that from the first discovery of my regard, and long before the thought was agreeable to her, she had often an unaccountable impression upon her mind, that sooner or later she should be mine. Upon these terms we parted.

I now return to my voyage. During our passage to Maderia, I was a prey to the most gloomy thoughts. Though I had well deserved all I met with, and the captain might have been justified if he had carried his resentment still farther; yet my pride at that time suggested that I had been grossly injured, and this so far wrought upon my wicked heart, that I actually formed designs against his life; and this was one reason that made me willing to prolong my own. I was sometimes divided between the two, not thinking it practicable to effect both. The Lord had now to appearance given me up to judicial blindness; I was capable of any thing. I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor (so far as I remember) the least sensibility of conscience. I was possessed of so strong a spirit of delusion, that I believed my own lie, and was firmly persuaded that after death I should cease to be: yet the Lord preserved me! Some intervals of sober reflection would at times take place: when I have chosen death rather than life, a ray of hope would come in (though there was little probability for such a hope) that I should yet see better days, that I might again return to England, and have my wishes crowned, if I did not wilfully throw myself away. In a word, my love to Mrs. N***** was now the only restraint I had left; though I neither feared God, nor regarded men, I could not bear that she should think meanly of me when I was dead. As in the outward concerns of life, *the weakest means* are often employed by *divine providence* to produce great effects,

beyond their common influence (as when a disease, for instance, has been removed by a fright,) so I found it then: this single thought, which had not restrained me from a thousand smaller evils, proved my only and effectual barrier against the greatest and most fatal temptations. How long I could have supported this conflict, or what, humanly speaking, would have been the consequence of my continuing in that situation, I cannot say; but the Lord whom I little thought of, knew my danger, and was providing for my deliverance.

Two things I had determined when at Plymouth, that I would not go to India, and that I would go to Guinea; and such, indeed, was the Lord's will concerning me; but they were to be accomplished in his way, not in my own. We had been now at Maderia some time; the business of the fleet was completed, and we were to sail the following day. On that memorable morning I was late in bed, and had slept longer, but that one of the midshipmen (an old companion) came down, and between jest and earnest bade me rise; and as I did not immediately comply, he cut down the hammock or bed in which I lay, which forced me to dress myself. I was very angry, but durst not resent it. I was little aware how much his caprice affected me, and that this person, who had no design in what he did, was the messenger of God's providence. I said little, but went upon deck, where I that moment saw a man putting his clothes into a boat, who told me he was going to leave us. Upon inquiring, I was informed that two men from a Guinea ship, which lay near us, had entered on board the Harwich, and that the commodore (the present Sir George Pocock) had ordered the captain to send two others in their room. My heart instantly burned like fire. I begged the boat might be detained a few minutes; I ran to the lieutenants, and intreated them to intercede with the captain that I might be dismissed. Upon this occasion, though I had been formerly on ill terms with these officers, and had disobliged them all in their turns, yet they had pitied my case, and were ready to serve me now. The captain, who, when we were at Plymouth, had refused to exchange me, though at the request of admiral Medley, was now easily prevailed on. I believe, in little more than half an hour from my being asleep in my bed, I saw myself discharged, and safe on board another ship. This was one of the many critical turns of my life, in which the Lord was pleased to display his providence and care, by causing many unexpected circumstances to concur in almost an instant of time. These sudden opportunities were several times repeated: each of them brought me into an entire new scene of action; and they were usually delayed to almost the last moment, in which they could have taken place.

The ship I went on board of was bound to Sierra Leone, and the adjacent parts of what is called the Windward Coast of Africa. The commander, I found, was acquainted with my father: he received me very kindly, and made fair professions of assistance, and I believe he would have been my friend; but without making the least advantage of former mistakes and troubles, I pursued the same course; nay, if possible, I acted much worse. On board the Harwich, though my principles were totally corrupted, yet, as upon my first going there I was in some degree staid and serious, the remembrance of this made me ashamed of breaking out in that notorious manner I could otherwise have indulged. But now, entering amongst strangers, I could appear without disguise; and I well remember, that while I was passing from the one ship to the other, this was one reason why I rejoiced in the exchange, and one reflection I made upon the occasion, viz. that I now might be as abandoned as I pleased, without any control: and, from this time, I was exceedingly vile indeed, little if any thing short of that animated description of an almost irrecoverable state, which we have in 2 Peter ii. 14. I not only sinned with a high hand myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion: nay, I eagerly sought occasion sometimes to my own hazard and hurt. One natural consequence of this carriage was, a loss of the favour of my new captain; not that he was at all religious, or disliked my wickedness, any further than it affected his interest; but I became careless and disobedient; I did not please him, because I did not intend it; and, as he was a man of an odd temper likewise, we the more easily disagreed. Besides, I had a little of that unlucky wit, which can do little more than multiply troubles and enemies to its possessor; and upon some imagined affront, I made a song, in which I ridiculed his ship, his designs, and his person, and soon taught it to the whole ship's company. Such was the ungrateful return I made for his offers of friendship and protection. I had mentioned no names, but the allusion was plain, and he was no stranger either to the intention or the author.—I shall say no more of this part of my story; let it be buried in eternal silence. But let me not be silent from the praise of that grace which could pardon, that blood which could expiate such sins as mine; yea, "the Ethiopian may change his skin, and the leopard his spots," since I, who was the willing slave of every evil, possessed with a legion of unclean spirits, have been spared, and saved, and changed, to stand a monument of his Almighty power for ever.

Thus I went on for about six months, by which time the ship was preparing to leave

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the coast. A few days before she sailed the captain died. I was not upon much better terms with his mate, who now succeeded to the command, and had upon some occasion treated me ill: I made no doubt, but, if I went with him to the West Indies, he would put me on board a man-of-war; and this, from what I had known already, was more dreadful to me than death. To avoid it, I determined to remain in Africa, and amused myself with many golden dreams, that here I should find an opportunity of improving my fortune.

There are still upon that part of the coast a few white men settled, (and there were many more at the time I was first there,) whose business it was to purchase slaves, &c. in the rivers and country adjacent, and sell them to the ships at an advanced price. One of these, who at first landed in my indigent circumstances, had acquired considerable wealth: he had lately been in England, and was returning in the vessel I was in, of which he owned a quarter part. His example impressed me with hopes of the same success; and upon condition of entering into his service, I obtained my discharge. I had not the precaution to make any terms, but trusted to his generosity. I received no compensation for my time on board the ship, but a bill upon the owners in England, which was never paid; for they failed before my return. The day before the vessel sailed I landed upon the island of Benancoes, with little more than the clothes upon my back, as if I had escaped shipwreck.—I am, dear Sir, your's, &c.

January 17, 1763.

LETTER V.

DEAR SIR,—There seems an important instruction, and of frequent use, in these words of our dear Lord, "Mine hour is not yet come." The two following years, of which I am now to give some account, will seem as an absolute blank in a very short life: but as the Lord's hour of grace was not yet come, and I was to have still deeper experience of the dreadful state of the heart of man, when left to itself; I have seen frequent cause since, to admire the mercy of the Lord in banishing me to those distant parts, and almost excluding me from human society, at a time when I was big with mischief, and, like one infected with a pestilence, was capable of spreading a taint wherever I went. Had my affairs taken a different turn; had I succeeded in my designs, and remained in England, my sad story would probably have been worse. Worse in myself, indeed, I could have hardly been; but my wickedness would have had greater scope; I might have beca

very hurtful to others, and multiplied irreparable evils; but the Lord wisely placed me where I could do little harm. The few I had to converse with were too much like myself, and I was soon brought into such abject circumstances, that I was too low to have any influence. I was rather shunned and despised than imitated; there being few even of the negroes themselves, during the first year of my residence amongst them, but thought themselves too good to speak to me. I was as yet an "outcast lying in my blood," (Ezek. xvi.) and to all appearance exposed to perish. But the Lord beheld me with mercy,—he did not strike me to hell, as I justly deserved; "he passed by me when I was in my blood, and said unto me live." But the appointed time for the manifestation of his love, to cover all my iniquities with the robe of his righteousness, and to admit me to the privileges of his children, was not till long afterwards; yet even now he bade me live; and I can only ascribe it to his secret upholding power, that what I suffered in a part of this interval, did not bereave me either of my life or senses; yet as by these sufferings the force of my evil example and inclinations was lessened, I have reason to account them amongst my mercies.

It may not, perhaps, be amiss to digress for a few lines, and give you a very brief sketch of the geography of the circuit I was now confined to, especially as I may have frequent occasion to refer to places I shall now mention; for my trade afterwards when the Lord gave me to see better days, was chiefly to the same places, and with the same persons, where and by whom I had been considered as upon a level with their meanest slaves. From Cape De Verd, the most western point of Africa, to Cape Mount, the whole coast is full of rivers: the principal are Gambia, Rio Grande, Sierra Leone, and Sherbro. Of the former, as it is well known, and I was never there, I need say nothing. The Rio Grande, like the Nile, divides into many branches near the sea. On the most northerly, called Cacheo, the Portuguese have a settlement. The most southern branch, known by the name of Rio Nuna, is, or then was, the usual boundary of the white men's trade northward. Sierra Leone is a mountainous peninsula, uninhabited, and I believe inaccessible, upon account of the thick woods, excepting those parts which lie near the water. The river is large and navigable. From hence, about twelve leagues to the south-east, are three contiguous islands, called the Benanoes, about twenty miles in circuit: this was about the centre of the white men's residence. Seven leagues farther the same way, lie the Plantanes, three small islands, two miles distant from the continent at the point which forms one side of the *Sherbro*. This river is more properly a

sound, running within a long island, and receiving the confluence of several large rivers, "rivers unknown to song," but far more deeply engraven in my remembrance than the Po or Tyber. The southernmost of these has a very peculiar course, almost parallel to the coast; so that in tracing it a great many leagues upwards, it will seldom lead one above three miles, and sometimes not more than half a mile from the sea-shore. Indeed I know not, but that all these rivers may have communications with each other, and with the sea in many places, which I have not remarked. If you cast your eyes upon a large map of Africa, while you are reading this, you will have a general idea of the country I was in; for though the maps are very incorrect, most of the places I have mentioned are inserted, and in the same order as I have named them.

My new master had formerly resided near Cape Mount, but he now settled at the *Plantanes*, upon the largest of the three islands. It is a low sandy island, about two miles in circumference, and almost covered with palm-trees. We immediately began to build a house, and to enter upon trade. I had now some desire to retrieve my lost time, and to exert diligence in what was before me; and he was a man with whom I might have lived tolerably well, if he had not been soon influenced against me: but he was much under the direction of a black woman, who lived with him as a wife. She was a person of some consequence in her own country, and he owed his first rise to her interest. This woman, (I know not for what reason,) was strangely prejudiced against me from the first; and what made it still worse for me, was a severe fit of illness, which attacked me very soon, before I had opportunity to show what I could or would do in his service. I was sick when he sailed in a shallop to Rio Nuna, and he left me in her hands. At first I was taken some care of; but, as I did not recover very soon, she grew weary, and entirely neglected me. I had sometimes not a little difficulty to procure a draught of cold water, when burning with a fever. My bed was a mat, spread upon a board or chest, and a log of wood my pillow. When my fever left me, and my appetite returned, I would gladly have eaten, but there was no one gave unto me. She lived in plenty herself, but hardly allowed me sufficient to sustain life, except now and then, when in the highest good humour, she would send me victuals in her own plate, after she had dined; and this, (so greatly was my pride humbled,) I received with thanks and eagerness, as the most needy beggar does an alms. Once, I well remember, I was called to receive this bounty from her own hand; but, being exceedingly weak and feeble, I dropped the plate. Those who live in plenty can

hardly conceive how this loss touched me; but she had the cruelty to laugh at my disappointment; and though the table was covered with dishes, (for she lived much in the European manner,) she refused to give me any more. My distress has been at times so great, as to compel me to go, by night, and pull up roots in the plantation, (though at the risk of being punished as a thief,) which I have eaten raw upon the spot, for fear of discovery. The roots I speak of are very wholesome food, when boiled or roasted, but as unfit to be eaten raw in any quantity, as a potatoe. The consequence of this diet, which, after the first experiment, I always expected, and seldom missed, was the same as if I had taken tartar emetic; so that I often returned as empty as I went: yet necessity urged me to repeat the trial several times. I have sometimes been relieved by strangers; nay, even by the slaves in the chain, who secretly brought me victuals (for they durst not be seen to do it,) from their own slender pittance. Next to pressing want, nothing sits harder upon the mind than scorn and contempt: and of this likewise I had an abundant measure. When I was very slowly recovering, this woman would sometimes pay me a visit, not to pity or relieve, but to insult me. She would call me worthless and indolent, and compel me to walk, which when I could hardly do, she would set her attendants to mimic my motions, to clap their hands, laugh, throw limes at me; or, if they chose to throw stones, (as I think was the case once or twice,) they were not rebuked; but, in general, though all who depended on her favour must join in her treatment, yet, when she was out of sight, I was rather pitied than scorned, by the meanest of her slaves. At length my master returned from his voyage; I complained of ill usage, but he could not believe me; and, as I did it in her hearing, I fared no better for it. But in his second voyage he took me with him. We did pretty well for a while, till a brother trader he met in the river, persuaded him that I was unfaithful, and stole his goods in the night, or when he was on shore. This was almost the only vice I could not be justly charged with: the only remains of a good education I could boast of, was what is commonly called honesty: and, as far as he had entrusted me, I had always been true; and though my great distress might, in some measure, have excused it, I never once thought of defrauding him in the smallest matter. However, the charge was believed, and I condemned without evidence. From that time he likewise used me very hardly; whenever he left the vessel I was locked upon deck, with a pint of rice for my day's allowance; and if he staid longer, I had no relief till his return. Indeed, I believe I should have been nearly starved, but for

an opportunity of catching fish sometimes. When fowls were killed for his own use, I seldom was allowed any part but the entrails, to bait my hooks with: and, at what we call *slack water*, that is, about the changing of the tides, when the current was still, I used generally to fish, (for at other times it was not practicable,) and I very often succeeded. If I saw a fish upon my hook, my joy was little less than any other person may have found, in the accomplishment of the scheme he had most at heart. Such a fish, hastily broiled, or rather half burned, without sauce, salt, or bread, has afforded me a delicious meal. If I caught none, I might, if I could, sleep away my hunger till the next return of slack water, and then try again. Nor did I suffer less from the inclemency of the weather and the want of clothes. The rainy season was now advancing; my whole suit was a shirt, a pair of trowsers, a cotton handkerchief instead of a cap, and a cotton cloth about two yards long, to supply the want of upper garments: and thus accoutred, I have been exposed for twenty, thirty, perhaps near forty hours together, in incessant rains, accompanied with strong gales of wind, without the least shelter, when my master was on shore. I feel to this day some faint returns of the violent pains I then contracted. The excessive cold and wet I endured in that voyage, and soon after I had recovered from a long sickness, quite broke my constitution and my spirits; the latter were soon restored, but the effects of the former still remain with me, as a needful memento of the service and the wages of sin.

In about two months we returned, and then the rest of the time I remained with him was chiefly spent at the Plantanes under the same regimen as I have already mentioned. My haughty heart was now brought down, not to a wholesome repentance, not to the language of the prodigal; this was far from me; but my spirits were sunk; I lost all resolution, and almost all reflection. I had lost the fierceness which fired me when on board the *Harwich*, and which made me capable of the most desperate attempts; but I was no further changed than a tyger tamed by hunger—remove the occasion, and he will be as wild as ever.

One thing, though strange, is most true. Though destitute of food and clothing, depressed to a degree beyond common wretchedness, I could sometimes collect my mind to mathematical studies. I had bought *Barrow's Euclid* at *Portsmouth*; it was the only volume I brought on shore; it was always with me, and I used to take it to remote corners of the island by the sea side, and draw my diagrams with a long stick upon the sand. Thus I often beguiled my sorrows, and almost forgot my feeling: and thus, without any other assistance, I made

myself, in good measure, master of the first six books of Euclid.—I am, your's as before.
January 17, 1763.

LETTER VI.

DEAR SIR,—There is much piety and spirit in the grateful acknowledgment of Jacob, "With my staff I passed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." They are words which ought to affect me with a peculiar emotion. I remember that in some of those mournful days, to which my last letter refers, I was busied in planting some lime or lemon trees. The plants I put into the ground were no longer than a young gooseberry bush; my master and his mistress passing by the place, stopped a while to look at me; at last, "Who knows," says he, "who knows but by the time these trees grow up and bear, you may go home to England, obtain the command of a ship, and return to reap the fruits of your labours; we see strange things sometimes happen." This, as he intended it, was a cutting sarcasm. I believe he thought it full as probable, that I should live to be king of Poland; yet it proved a prediction, and they (one of them at least) lived to see me return from England in the capacity he had mentioned, and pluck some of the first limes from those very trees. How can I proceed in my relation, till I raise a monument to the divine goodness, by comparing the circumstances in which the Lord has since placed me, with what I was at that time! Had you seen me, Sir, then go so pensive and solitary in the dead of night to wash my one shirt upon the rocks, and afterwards put it on wet, that it might dry upon my back, while I slept; had you seen me so poor a figure, that when a ship's boat came to the island, shame often constrained me to hide myself in the woods, from the sight of strangers; especially, had you known that my conduct, principles, and heart, were still darker than my outward condition, how little would you have imagined that one, who so fully answered to the *στυγνός και μισούσις** of the apostle, was reserved to be so peculiar an instance of the providential care and exuberant goodness of God. There was, at that time, but one earnest desire in my heart, which was not contrary and shocking both to religion and reason; that one desire, though my vile licentious life rendered me peculiarly unworthy of success, and though a thousand difficulties seemed to render it impossible, the Lord was pleased to gratify. But this favour, though great, and greatly prized, was a small thing compared to the blessings of his grace: he spared me, to give

* *Hateful and hating one another.*

me the knowledge of himself, in the person of Jesus Christ; in love to my soul he delivered me from the pit of corruption, and cast all my aggravated sins behind his back. He brought my feet into the paths of peace. This is indeed the chief article, but it is not the whole. When he made me acceptable to himself in the beloved, he gave me favour in the sight of others. He raised me new friends, protected and guided me through a long series of dangers, and crowned every day with repeated mercies. To him I owe it that I am still alive, and that I am not still living in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and the want of all things: into that state I brought myself, but it was he who delivered me. He has given me an easy situation in life, some experimental knowledge of his gospel, a large acquaintance amongst his people, a friendship and correspondence with several of his most honoured servants. But it is as difficult to enumerate my present advantages, as it is fully to describe the evils and miseries of the preceding contrast.

I know not exactly how long things continued with me thus, but I believe near a twelvemonth. In this interval I wrote two or three times to my father; I gave him an account of my condition, and desired his assistance, intimating at the same time, that I had resolved not to return to England, unless he was pleased to send for me; I have likewise letters by me wrote to Mrs. N**** in that dismal period; so that at the lowest ebb, it seems I still retained a hope of seeing her again. My father applied to his friend in Liverpool, of whom I have spoken before, who gave orders accordingly to a captain of his, who was then fitting out for Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Some time within the year, as I have said, I obtained my master's consent to live with another trader, who dwelt upon the same island. Without his consent I could not be taken, and he was unwilling to do it sooner, but it was then brought about. This was an alteration much to my advantage; I was soon decently clothed, lived in plenty, was considered as a companion, and trusted with the care of all his domestic effects, which were to the amount of some thousand pounds. This man had several factories and white servants in different places, particularly one in Kittam, the river I spoke of which runs so near along the sea coast. I was soon appointed to go there, where I had a share in the management of business, jointly with another of his servants: we lived as we pleased, business flourished, and our employer was satisfied. Here I began to be wretch enough to think myself happy. There is a significant phrase frequently used in those parts, that such a white man is grown black. It does not intend an alteration of com-

plexion, but disposition. I have known several, who, settling in Africa after the age of thirty or forty, have at that time of life been gradually assimilated to the tempers, customs, and ceremonies of the natives, so far as to prefer that country to England; they have even become dupes to all the pretended charms, necromances, amulets, and divinations of the blinded negroes, and put more trust in such things than the wiser sort among the natives. A part of this spirit of infatuation was growing upon me; in time, perhaps, I might have yielded to the whole: I entered into closer engagements with the inhabitants, and should have lived and died a wretch amongst them, if the Lord had not watched over me for good. Not that I had lost those ideas which chiefly engaged my heart to England, but despair of seeing them accomplished made me willing to remain where I was. I thought I could more easily bear the disappointment in this situation, than nearer home. But, so soon as I had fixed my connexions and plans with these views, the Lord providentially interposed to break them in pieces, and save me from ruin in spite of myself.

In the mean time, the ship that had orders to bring me home arrived at Sierra Leone: the captain made inquiry for me there and at the Benanoes; but understanding that I was at a great distance in the country, he thought no more about me. Without doubt the hand of God directed my being placed at Kittam just at this time; for, as the ship came no nearer than the Benanoes, and staid but a few days, if I had been at the Plantanes, I could not perhaps have heard of her till she had been sailed. The same must have certainly been the event, had I been sent to any other factory, of which my new master had several upon different rivers. But though the place I was at, was a long way up a river, much more than a hundred miles distant from the Plantanes, yet, by the peculiar situation which I have already noticed, I was still within a mile of the sea coast. To make the interposition more remarkable, I was at that very juncture going in quest of trade to a place at some distance directly from the sea, and should have set out a day or two before, but that we waited for a few articles from the next ship that offered, to complete the assortment of goods I was to take with me. We used sometimes to walk to the beach, in expectation of seeing a vessel pass by, but this was very precarious, as at that time the place was not at all resorted to by ships for trade. Many passed in the night, others kept at a considerable distance from the shore. In a word, I do not know that any one had stopped while I was there, though some had before, upon observing a signal made from the shore. In February, 1747 (I know not the exact day,) my

fellow servant walking down to the beach in the forenoon, saw a vessel sailing past, and made a smoke in token of trade. She was already a little beyond the place, and, as the wind was fair, the captain was in some demur whether to stop or not: however, had my companion been half an hour later, she would have gone beyond recal; but he soon saw her come to anchor, and went on board in a canoe: and this proved the very ship I have spoken of. One of the first questions he was asked, was concerning me; and when the captain understood I was so near, he came on shore to deliver his message. Had an invitation from home reached me, when I was sick and starving at the Plantanes, I should have received it as life from the dead; but now, for the reasons already given, I heard it at first with indifference. The captain, unwilling to lose me, told a story altogether of his own framing: he gave me a very plausible account, how he had missed a large packet of letters and papers, which he should have brought with him; but this, he said, he was sure of, having had it from my father's own mouth, as well as from his employer, that a person lately dead had left me £400 per annum; adding further, that if I was any way embarrassed in my circumstances, he had express orders to redeem me, though it should cost one half of his cargo. Every particular of this was false; nor could I myself believe what he said about the estate; but, as I had some expectations from an aged relation, I thought a part of it might be true. But I was not long in suspense: for though my father's care and desire to see me had too little weight with me, and would have been insufficient to make me quit my retreat, yet the remembrance of Mrs. N*****, the hopes of seeing her, and the possibility, that accepting this offer might once more put me in a way of gaining her hand, prevailed over all other considerations. The captain further promised (and in this he kept his word,) that I should lodge in his cabin, dine at his table, and be his constant companion, without expecting any service from me. And thus I was suddenly freed from a captivity of about fifteen months. I had neither a thought nor a desire of this change one hour before it took place. I embarked with him, and in a few hours lost sight of Kittam.

How much is their blindness to be pitied, who can see nothing but chance in events of this sort! So blind and stupid was I at that time, I made no reflection. I sought no direction in what had happened; like a wave of the sea driven with the wind, and tossed, I was governed by present appearances, and looked no further. But he, who is eyes to the blind, was leading me in a way that I knew not.

Now I am in some measure enlightened, I

can easily perceive that it is in the adjustment and concurrence of these seemingly fortuitous circumstances, that the ruling power and wisdom of God is most evidently displayed in human affairs. How many such casual events may we remark in the history of Joseph, which had each a necessary influence in his ensuing promotion! If he had not dreamed, or if he had not told his dream; if the Midianites had passed by a day sooner or later; if they had sold him to any person but Potiphar; if his mistress had been a better woman; if Pharaoh's officers had not displeas'd their lord; or if any or all these things had fallen out in any other manner or time than they did, all that followed had been prevented: the promises and purposes of God concerning Israel, their bondage, deliverances, polity, and settlement, must have failed; and, as all these things tended to, and centered in Christ, the promised Saviour, the desire of all nations would not have appeared; mankind had been still in their sins, without hope, and the counsels of God's eternal love in favour of sinners defeated. Thus we may see a connexion between Joseph's first dream, and the death of our Lord Christ, with all its glorious consequences. So strong, though secret, is the concatenation between the greatest and the smallest events! What a comfortable thought is this to a believer to know, that amidst all the various interfering designs of men, the Lord has one constant design which he cannot, will not miss, namely, his own glory in the complete salvation of his people; and that he is wise, and strong, and faithful, to make even those things, which seem contrary to this design, subservient to promote it. You have allowed me to comment upon my own text, yet the length of this observation may need some apology. Believe me to be, with great respect, dear sir, your affectionate and obliged servant.

January 18, 1763.

LETTER VII.

DEAR SIR,—The ship I was now on board as a passenger, was on a trading voyage for gold, ivory, dyers' wood, and bees' wax. It requires much longer time to collect a cargo of this sort than of slaves. The captain began his trade at Gambia, had been already four or five months in Africa, and continued there a year, or thereabouts, after I was with him; in which time we ranged the whole coast, as far as Cape Lopez, which lies about a degree south of the Equinoctial, and more than a thousand miles farther from England than the place where I embarked. I have little to offer worthy your notice, in the course of this tedious voyage. I had no

business to employ my thoughts, but sometimes amused myself with mathematics: excepting this, my whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer: not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones; so that I was often seriously reprov'd by the captain, who was himself a very passionate man, and not at all circumspect in his expressions. From the relation I at times made him of my past adventures, and what he saw of my conduct, and especially towards the close of the voyage, when we met with many disasters, he would often tell me that, to his great grief he had a Jonah on board; that a curse attended me wherever I went; and that all the troubles he met with in the voyage, were owing to his having taken me into the vessel. I shall omit any further particulars, and after mentioning an instance or two of the Lord's mercy to me, while I was thus defying his power and patience, I shall proceed to something more worthy your perusal.

Although I lived long in the excess of almost every other extravagance, I never was fond of drinking; and my father has often been heard to say, that while I avoided drunkenness, he should still entertain hopes of my recovery. But sometimes I would promote a drinking-bout for a frolic's sake, as I termed it: for though I did not love the liquor, I was sold to do iniquity, and delighted in mischief. The last abominable frolic of this sort I engaged in, was in the river Gabon; the proposal and expense were my own. Four or five of us one evening sat down upon deck, to see who could hold out longest in drinking geneva and rum alternately; a large sea-shell supplied the place of a glass. I was very unfit for a challenge of this sort, for my head was always incapable of bearing much strong drink. However I began and proposed the first toast, which, well remember, was some imprecation against the person who should start first. This prov'd to be myself. My brain was soon fired. I arose and danced about the deck like madman; and while I was thus diverting my companions, my hat went overboard. By the light of the moon, I saw the ship's boat, and eagerly threw myself over the side to get into her, that I might recover my hat. My sight in that circumstance deceived me for the boat was not within my reach, as I had thought, but perhaps twenty feet from the ship's side. I was, however, half overboard, and should in one moment more have plunged myself into the water, when somebody caught hold of my clothes behind, and pulled me back. This was an amazing escape, for I could not swim if I had been sober; the tide ran very strong; my companions were too much intoxicated to save

me; and the rest of the ship's company were asleep. So near I was, to appearance, of perishing in that dreadful condition, and sinking into eternity under the weight of my own curse!

Another time, at cape Lopez, some of us had been in the woods, and shot a buffalo or wild cow. We brought a part of it on board, and carefully marked the place (as I thought) where we left the remainder. In the evening, we returned to fetch it; but we set out too late. I undertook to be their guide; but night coming on before we could reach the place, we lost our way. Sometimes we were in swamps up to the middle in water, and when we recovered dry land, we could not tell whether we were walking towards the ship, or wandering farther from her. Every step increased our uncertainty. The night grew darker, and we were entangled in inextricable woods, where perhaps the foot of man had never trod before. That part of the country is entirely abandoned to wild beasts, with which it prodigiously abounds. We were indeed in a terrible case, having neither light, food, nor arms, and expecting a tiger to rush from behind every tree. The stars were clouded, and we had no compass to form a judgment which way we were going. Had things continued thus, we had probably perished; but it pleased God, no beast came near us; and after some hours perplexity, the moon arose and pointed out the eastern quarter. It appeared then, as we had expected, that instead of drawing near to the sea side, we had been penetrating into the country; but by the guidance of the moon, we at length came to the water side, a considerable distance from the ship. We got safe on board, without any other inconvenience than what we suffered from fear and fatigue.

Those and many other deliverances were all, at that time, entirely lost upon me. The admonitions of conscience, which, from successive repulses, had grown weaker and weaker, at length entirely ceased; and for a space of many months, if not for some years, I cannot recollect that I had a single check of that sort. At times I have been visited with sickness, and have believed myself near to death, but I had not the least concern about the consequences. In a word, I seemed to have every mark of final impenitence and rejection; neither judgments nor mercies made the least impression on me.

At length, our business finished, we left Cape Lopez, and after a few days stay at the island of Annabona, to lay in provisions, we sailed homeward about the beginning of January 1748. From Annabona to England, without touching at any intermediate port, is a very long navigation, perhaps more than seven thousand miles, if we include the circuits necessary to be made on account of the

trade-winds. We sailed first westward, till near the coast of Brazil, then northward, to the banks of Newfoundland, with the usual variations of wind and weather, and without meeting any thing extraordinary. On these banks we stopped half a day to fish for cod; this was then chiefly for diversion; we had provisions enough, and little expected those fish (as it afterwards proved) would be all we should have to subsist on. We left the banks on the first of March, with a hard gale of wind, westerly, which pushed us fast homewards. I should here observe, that, with the length of this voyage, in a hot climate, the vessel was greatly out of repair, and very unfit to support stormy weather; the sails and cordage were likewise very much worn out, and many such circumstances concurred to render what followed more dangerous. I think it was on the ninth of March, the day before our catastrophe, that I felt a thought pass through my mind, which I had long been a stranger to. Among the few books we had on board, one was Stanhope's *Thomas a Kempis*; I carelessly took it up, as I had often done before, to pass away the time; but I had still read it with the same indifference as if it was entirely a romance. However, while I was reading this time, an involuntary suggestion arose in my mind: What if these things should be true! I could not bear the force of the inference, as it related to myself; and therefore shut the book presently. My conscience witnessed against me once more, and I concluded that, true or false, I must abide the consequences of my own choice. I put an abrupt end to these reflections, by joining in with some vain conversation or other that came in my way.

But now the Lord's time was come, and the conviction I was so unwilling to receive, was deeply impressed upon me by an awful dispensation. I went to bed that night in my usual security and indifference, but was awakened from a sound sleep by the force of a violent sea, which broke on board us; so much of it came down below as filled the cabin I lay in with water. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck, that the ship was going down or sinking. As soon as I could recover myself, I essayed to go upon deck: but was met upon the ladder by the captain, who desired me to bring a knife with me. While I returned for the knife, another person went up in my room, who was instantly washed overboard. We had no leisure to lament him, nor did we expect to survive him long; for we soon found the ship was filling with water very fast. The sea had torn away the upper timbers on one side, and made a mere wreck in a few minutes. I shall not affect to describe this disaster in marine dialect, which would be understood by few; and therefore I can give

you but a very inadequate idea of it. Taking in all circumstances, it was astonishing, and almost miraculous, that any of us survived to relate the story. We had immediate recourse to the pumps; but the water increased against our efforts. Some of us were set to baling in another part of the vessel; that is, to lade it out with buckets and pails. We had but eleven or twelve people to sustain this service; and, notwithstanding all we could do, she was full, or very near it: and then, with a common cargo, she must have sunk of course; but we had a great quantity of bees' wax and wood on board, which were specifically lighter than the water; and as it pleased God that we received this shock in the very crisis of the gale, towards morning we were enabled to employ some means for our safety, which succeeded beyond hope. In about an hour's time, the day began to break, and the wind abated. We expended most of our clothes and bedding to stop the leaks (though the weather was exceedingly cold, especially to us, who had so lately left a hot climate;) over these we nailed pieces of boards, and at last perceived the water abate. At the beginning of this hurry, I was little affected. I pumped hard, and endeavoured to animate myself and companions: I told one of them, that in a few days, this distress would serve us to talk of over a glass of wine; but he being a less hardened sinner than myself, replied, with tears, "No; it is too late now." About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labour, I went to speak with the captain, who was busied elsewhere, and just as I was returning from him, I said almost without any meaning, "If this will not do the Lord have mercy upon us." This (though spoken with little reflection) was the first desire I had breathed for mercy for the space of many years. I was instantly struck with my own words; and, as Jehu said once, "what hast thou to do with peace?" so it directly occurred, "What mercy can there be for me!" I was obliged to return to the pump, and there I continued till noon, almost every passing wave breaking over my head; but we made ourselves fast with ropes, that we might not be washed away. Indeed, I expected that every time the vessel descended in the sea, she would rise no more; and though I dreaded death now, and my heart foreboded the worst, if the scriptures, which I had long since opposed, were indeed true; yet still I was but half convinced, and remained for a space of time in a sullen frame, a mixture of despair and impatience. I thought, if the Christian religion was true, I could not be forgiven; and was, therefore, expecting, and almost, at times, wishing, to know the worst of it.—I am your's, &c.

January 19, 1763.

LETTER VIII.

DEAR SIR,—The tenth (that is in the present style, the twenty-first) of March, is a day much to be remembered by me, and I have never suffered it to pass wholly unnoticed since the year 1748. On that day the Lord sent from on high, and delivered me out of the deep waters. I continued at the pump from three in the morning till near noon, and then I could do no more. I went and lay down upon my bed, uncertain and almost indifferent, whether I should rise again. In an hour's time I was called, and not being able to pump, I went to the helm, and steered the ship till midnight, excepting a small interval for refreshment. I had here leisure and convenient opportunity for reflection. I began to think of my former religious professions; the extraordinary turns in my life; the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with; the licentious course of my conversation, particularly my unparalleled effrontery in making the gospel history (which I could not now be sure was false, though I was not yet assured it was true) the constant subject of profane ridicule. I thought, allowing the scripture premises, there never was nor could be such a sinner as myself; and then, comparing the advantages I had broken through, I concluded, at first, that my sins were too great to be forgiven. The scripture likewise seemed to say the same; for I had formerly been well acquainted with the Bible, and many passages, upon this occasion, returned upon my memory, particularly those awful passages, Prov. i. 24—31. Heb. vi. 4, 6, and 2 Pet. ii. 20, which seemed so exactly to suit my case and character, as to bring with them a presumptive proof of a divine original. Thus, as I have said, I waited with fear and impatience to receive my inevitable doom. Yet, though I had thoughts of this kind, they were exceeding faint and disproportionate. It was not till long after (perhaps several years,) till I had gained some clear views of the infinite righteousness and grace of Christ Jesus, my Lord, that I had a deep and strong apprehension of my state by nature and practice; and, perhaps, till then, I could not have borne the sight. So wonderfully does the Lord proportion the discoveries of sin and grace; for he knows our frame, and that if he was to put forth the greatness of his power, a poor sinner would be instantly overwhelmed, and crushed as a moth. But to return: when I saw, beyond all probability, there was still hope of respite, and heard, about six in the evening, that the ship was freed from water, there arose a gleam of hope. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour; I began to pray; I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a recon-

ciled God, and call him father: my prayer was like the cry of the ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus whom I had so often derided: I recollected the particulars of his life and of his death; a death for sins not his own, but, as I remembered, for the sake of those who, in their distress, should put their trust in him. And now I chiefly wanted evidence. The comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted, and I rather wished than believed these things were real facts. You will please to observe, Sir, that I collect the strain of the reasonings and exercises of my mind in one view; but I do not say that all this passed at one time. The great question now was, how to obtain faith.

I speak not of an appropriating faith, (of which I then knew neither the nature nor necessity,) but how I should gain an assurance that the scriptures were of divine inspiration, and a sufficient warrant for the exercise of trust and hope in God. One of the first helps received, (in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament more carefully,) was from Luke xi. 13. I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when in reality I did not believe his story, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God; but here I found a Spirit spoken of, which was to be communicated to those who ask it. Upon this I reasoned thus: If this book is true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise; I have need of that very Spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask. I must therefore pray for it, and, if it is of God, he will make good his own word. My purposes were strengthened by John vii. 17. I concluded from thence, that though I could not say from my heart, that I believed the gospel, yet I would, for the present, take it for granted; and that, by studying it in this light, I should be more and more confirmed in it. If what I am writing could be perused by our modern infidels, they would say, (for I too well know their manner,) that I was very desirous to persuade myself into this opinion. I confess I was, and so would they be, if the Lord should show them, as he was pleased to show me at that time, the absolute necessity of some expedient to interpose between a righteous God and a sinful soul. Upon the gospel scheme I saw, at least, a peradventure of hope, but on every other side I was surrounded with black unfathomable despair.

The wind was now moderate, but continued fair, and we were still drawing nearer to our port. We began to recover from our consternation, though we were greatly alarmed by our circumstances. We found that the water having floated all our moveables in the hold, all the casks of provision

had been beaten to pieces by the violent motion of the ship: on the other hand, our live stock, such as pigs, sheep, and poultry, had been washed overboard in the storm. In effect, all the provisions we saved, except the fish I have mentioned, and some food of the pulse kind, which used to be given to the hogs (and there was but little of this left,) all our other provisions would have subsisted us but a week, at scanty allowance. The sails, too, were mostly blown away, so that we advanced but slowly, even while the wind was fair. We imagined ourselves about a hundred leagues from the land, but were in reality much further. Thus we proceeded with an alternate prevalence of hope and fear. My leisure time was chiefly employed in reading and meditating on the scriptures, and praying to the Lord for mercy and instruction.

Things continued thus for four or five days, or perhaps longer, till we were awakened one morning, by the joyful shout of the watch upon deck, proclaiming the sight of land. We were all soon raised at the sound. The dawning was uncommonly beautiful, and the light, (just strong enough to discover distant objects) presented us with a gladdening prospect: it seemed a mountainous coast, about twenty miles from us, terminating in a cape or point, and a little farther, two or three small islands, or hummucks, as if just rising out of the water: the appearance and position seemed exactly answerable to our hopes, resembling the north-west extremity of Ireland, which we were steering for. We sincerely congratulated each other, making no doubt, but that if the wind continued, we should be in safety and plenty the next day. The small remainder of our brandy (which was reduced to little more than a pint) was, by the captain's orders, distributed amongst us; he adding at the same time, "We shall soon have brandy enough." We likewise eat up the residue of our bread for joy of this welcome sight, and were in the condition of men suddenly reprieved from death. While we were thus alert, the mate with a graver tone than the rest, sunk our spirits by saying that, "he wished it might prove land at last." If one of the common sailors had first said so, I know not but the rest would have beat him for raising such an unreasonable doubt. It brought on, however, warm debates and disputes whether it was land or no; but the case was soon unanswerably decided; for the day was advancing fast, and in a little time, one of our fancied islands began to grow red, from the approach of the sun, which soon arose just under it. In a word, we had been prodigal of our bread and brandy too hastily; our land was literally *in nubibus*, nothing but clouds, and in half an hour more the whole appearance was dissipated. Seamen have often known deceptions of this

sort, but in our extremity we were loath to be undeceived. However, we comforted ourselves, that though we could not see the land, yet we should soon, the wind hitherto continuing fair; but, alas! we were deprived of this hope likewise. That very day, our fair wind subsided into a calm, and the next morning the gales sprung up from the south-east, directly against us, and continued so for more than a fortnight afterwards. The ship was so wrecked, that we were obliged to keep the wind always on the broken side, unless the weather was quite moderate: thus we were driven, by the wind fixing in that quarter, still further from our port, to the northward of all Ireland, as far as the Lewis or western islands of Scotland, but a long way to the westward. In a word, our station was such as deprived us of any hope of being relieved by other vessels: it may, indeed, be questioned, whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean, at the same season of the year.

Provisions now began to grow very short; the half of a salted cod was a day's subsistence for twelve people; we had plenty of fresh water, but not a drop of stronger liquor; no bread, hardly any clothes, and very cold weather. We had incessant labour with the pumps, to keep the ship above water. Much labour and little food, wasted us fast, and one man died under the hardship. Yet our sufferings were light in comparison of our just fears; we could not afford this bare allowance much longer, but had a terrible prospect of being either starved to death, or reduced to feed upon one another. Our expectations grew darker every day, and I had a further trouble peculiar to myself. The captain, whose temper was quite soured by distress, was hourly reproaching me (as I formerly observed) as the sole cause of the calamity, and was confident that if I was thrown overboard, and not otherwise, they should be preserved from death. He did not intend to make the experiment, but continual repetition of this in my ears gave me much uneasiness, especially as my conscience seconded his words. I thought it very probable, that all that had befallen us was on my account. I was, at last, found out by the powerful hand of God, and condemned in my own breast. However, proceeding in the method I have described, we began to conceive hopes greater than all our fears, especially, when at the time we were ready to give up all for lost, and despair was taking place in every countenance, we saw the wind come about to the very point we wished it, so as best to suit that broken part of the ship which must be kept out of the water, and to blow so gently as our few remaining sails could bear; and thus it continued without any observable alteration or increase, though at an unsettled time of the year, till we once more were call-

ed up to see the land, and were convinced that it was land indeed. We saw the island Tory, and the next day anchored in Lough Swilly, in Ireland; this was the eighth of April, just four weeks after the damage was sustained from the sea. When we came into this port our very last victuals were boiling in the pot; and before we had been there two hours, the wind, which seemed to have been providentially restrained till we were in a place of safety, began to blow with great violence, so that if we had continued at sea that night in our shattered, enfeebled condition, we must, in all human appearance, have gone to the bottom. About this time I began to know that there is a God that hears and answers prayer. How many times has he appeared for me since this great deliverance!—yet, alas! how distrustful and ungrateful is my heart unto this hour!—I am, dear sir, your obliged humble servant.

January 19, 1763.

LETTER IX.

DEAR SIR,—I have brought my history down to the time of my arrival in Ireland 1748; but before I proceed, I would look back a little, to give you some farther account of the state of my mind, and how far I was helped against inward difficulties, which beset me, at the time I had many outward hardships to struggle with. The straits of hunger, cold, weariness, and the fears of sinking and starving, I shared in common with others; but besides these, I felt a heart-bitterness, which was properly my own; no one on board, but myself, being impressed with any sense of the hand of God in our danger and deliverance, at least not awakened to any concern for their souls. No temporal dispensations can reach the heart, unless the Lord himself applies them. My companions in danger were either quite unaffected, or soon forgot it all; but it was not so with me: not that I was any wiser or better than they, but because the Lord willed to vouchsafe me peculiar mercies; otherwise I was the most unlikely person the ship to receive an impression, having been often before quite stupid and hardened in the very face of great dangers, and ways to this time had hardened my heart still more and more after every reproof. I can see no reason why the Lord singled me out for mercy, but this, "that so it seemed good to him;" unless it was to show, by an astonishing instance, that with him "nothing is impossible."

There were no persons on board to whom I could open myself with freedom, concerning the state of my soul, none from whom I could

ask advice. As to books, I had a New Testament, Stanhope, already mentioned, and a volume of bishop Beveridge's sermons, one of which, upon our Lord's passion, affected me much. In perusing the New Testament, I was struck with several passages, particularly that of the fig-tree, Luke xiii. The case of St. Paul, 1 Tim. i. but particularly the prodigal, Luke xv. a case, I thought, that had never been so nearly exemplified, as by myself; and then the goodness of the father in receiving, nay, in running to meet such a son, and this intended only to illustrate the Lord's goodness to returning sinners,—this gained upon me. I continued much in prayer; I saw that the Lord had interposed so far to save me, and I hoped he would do more. The outward circumstances helped in this place to make me still more serious and earnest in crying to him, who alone could relieve me; and sometimes I thought I could be content to die, even for want of food, so I might but die a believer. Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland, I had a satisfactory evidence in my own mind of the truth of the gospel, as considered in itself, and its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. I saw that, by the way they are pointed out, God might declare not his mercy only, but his justice also, in the pardon of sin on the account of the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ. My judgment, at that time, embraced the sublime doctrine of "God manifest in the flesh, reconciling the world to himself." I had no idea of those systems which allow the Saviour no higher honour than that of an upper servant, or, at the most, a demi-god. I stood in need of an Almighty Saviour, and such a one I found described in the New Testament. Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvellous thing: I was no longer an infidel; I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and I had taken up some right notions, was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my misspent life, and purposed an immediate reformation: I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been deeply rooted in me, as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man.

But though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God, yet still I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my more enormous sins, but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the law of God; the hidden life of a christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ, and a continual dependence on him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength,

and comfort, was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come. I had no christian friend or faithful minister to advise me, that my strength was no more than my righteousness; and though I soon began to inquire for serious books, yet, not having spiritual discernment, I frequently made a wrong choice, and I was not brought in the way of evangelical preaching or conversation (except a few times when I heard but understood not) for six years after this period. Those things the Lord was pleased to discover to me gradually. I learnt them here a little and there a little, by my own painful experience, at a distance from the common means and ordinances, and in the midst of the same course of evil company and bad examples I had been conversant with for some time. From this period I could no more make a mock at sin, or jest with holy things; I no more questioned the truth of scripture, or lost a sense of the rebukes of conscience. Therefore I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of his return to me; but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards.

I have told you that, in the time of our distress, we had fresh water in abundance; this was a considerable relief to us, especially as our spare diet was mostly salt fish, without bread. We drank plentifully, and were not afraid of wanting water; yet our stock of this likewise was much nearer to an end than we expected; we supposed that we had six large butts of water on board, and it was well that we were safe arrived in Ireland, before we discovered that five of them were empty, having been removed out of their places and stove by the violent agitation, when the ship was full of water. If we had found this out while we were at sea, it would have greatly heightened our distress, as we must have drunk more sparingly.

While the ship was refitting at Lough Swilly, I repaired to Londonderry. I lodged at an exceeding good house, where I was treated with much kindness, and soon recruited my health and strength. I was now a serious professor, went twice a day to the prayers at church, and determined to receive the sacrament the next opportunity. A few days before, I signified my intention to the minister, as the rubric directs; but I found this practice was grown obsolete. At length the day came; I arose very early, was very particular and earnest in my private devotion; and, with the greatest solemnity, engaged myself to be the Lord's for ever, and only his. This was not a formal, but a sincere surrender, under a warm sense of mercies recently received; and yet, for want of a better

knowledge of myself and the subtilty of Satan's temptations, I was seduced to forget the vows of God that were upon me. Upon the whole, though my views of the gospel salvation were very indistinct, I experienced a peace and satisfaction in the ordinance that day, to which I had been hitherto a perfect stranger.

The next day I was abroad with the mayor of the city and some other gentlemen a-shooting; I climbed up a steep bank, and pulling my fowling-piece after me, as I held it in a perpendicular direction, it went off so near my face, as to burn away the corner of my hat. Thus, when we think ourselves in the greatest safety, we are no less exposed to danger than when all the elements seem conspiring to destroy us. The divine providence, which is sufficient to deliver us in our utmost extremity, is equally necessary to our preservation in the most peaceful situation.

During our stay in Ireland I wrote home. The vessel I was in had not been heard of for eighteen months, and was given up for lost long before. My father had no more expectation of hearing that I was alive, but he received my letter a few days before he left London. He was just going out governor of York Fort, in Hudson's bay, from whence he never returned. He sailed before I arrived in England, or he had purposed to take me with him; but God designing otherwise, one hindrance or other delayed us in Ireland till it was too late. I received two or three affectionate letters from him, but I never had the pleasure of seeing him more. I had hopes, that in three years more I should have had an opportunity of asking his forgiveness for the uneasiness my disobedience had given him; but the ship that was to have brought him home, came without him. According to the best accounts we received, he was seized with the cramp when bathing, and drowned a little before her arrival in the bay.—Excuse this digression.

My father, willing to contribute all in his power to my satisfaction, paid a visit before his departure to my friends in Kent, and gave his consent to the union which had been so long talked of. Thus, when I returned to ———, I found I had only the consent of one person to obtain: with her I as yet stood at as great an uncertainty as on the first day I saw her.

I arrived at——in the latter end of May, 1748, about the same day that my father sailed from the Nore, but found the Lord had provided me another father, in the gentleman whose ship had brought me home. He received me with great tenderness, and the strongest expressions of friendship and assistance: yet not more than he has since made good; for to him, as the instrument of God's goodness, I owe my all. Yet it would not have been in the power, even of this friend, to

have served me effectually, if the Lord had not met with me on my way home, as I have related. Till then I was like the man possessed with the legion. No arguments, no persuasion, no views of interest, no remembrance of the past, or regard to the future, could have constrained me within the bounds of common prudence. But now I was in some measure restored to my senses. My friend immediately offered me the command of a ship; but, upon mature consideration, I declined it for the present. I had been hitherto always unsettled and careless, and therefore thought I had better make another voyage first, and learn to obey, and acquire a farther insight and experience in business, before I ventured to undertake such a charge. The mate of the vessel I came home in, was preferred to the command of a new ship, and I engaged to go in the station of mate with him. I made a short visit to London, &c. which did not fully answer my views. I had but one opportunity of seeing Mrs. N****, of which I availed myself very little, for I was always exceeding awkward in pleading my own cause, *viva voce*. But after my return to L——, I put the question in such a manner, by letter, that she could not avoid (unless I had greatly mistaken her) coming to some sort of an explanation. Her answer, though penned with abundance of caution, satisfied me; as I collected from it, that she was free from any other engagement, and not unwilling to wait the event of the voyage I had undertaken. I should be ashamed to trouble you with these little details, if you had not yourself desired me.—I am, your's, &c.

January 20, 1763.

LETTER X.

DEAR SIR,—My connexions with sea affairs have often led me to think, that the varieties observable in christian experience may be properly illustrated from the circumstances of a voyage. Imagine to yourself a number of vessels, at different times, and from different places, bound to the same port; there are some things in which all these would agree,—the compass steered by, the port in view, the general rules of navigation, both as to the management of the vessel and determining their astronomical observations, would be the same in all. In other respects they would differ; perhaps no two of them would meet with the same distribution of winds and weather. Some we see set out with a prosperous gale; and, when they almost think their passage secured, they are checked by adverse blasts; and after enduring much hardship and danger, and frequent expectations of shipwreck, they just escape and reach the desired haven. Others meet

the greatest difficulties at first; they put forth in a storm, and are often beaten back; at length their voyage proves favourable, and they enter the port with a *πληροπλοια*, a rich and abundant entrance. Some are hard beset with cruisers and enemies, and obliged to fight their way through; others meet with little remarkable in their passage. Is it not thus in the spiritual life! All true believers walk by the same rule, and mind the same things. The word of God is their compass; Jesus is both their polar star and their sun of righteousness; their hearts and faces are all set Sion-ward. Thus far they are as one body, animated by one spirit; yet their experience, formed upon these common principles, is far from being uniform. The Lord, in his first call, and his following dispensations, has a regard to the situation, temper, and talents of each, and to the particular services or trials he has appointed them for. Though all are exercised at times, yet some pass through the voyage of life much more smoothly than others. But he "who walketh upon the wings of the wind, and measures the waters in the hollow of his hand," will not suffer any of whom he has taken charge, to perish in the storms, though, for a season, perhaps, many of them are ready to give up all hopes.

We must not, therefore, make the experience of others, in all respects, a rule to ourselves, nor our own, a rule to others; yet, these are common mistakes, and productive of many more. As to myself, every part of my case has been extraordinary. I have hardly met a single instance resembling it. Few, very few, have been recovered from such a dreadful state; and the few that have been thus favoured, have generally passed through the most severe convictions; and after the Lord has given them peace, their future lives have been usually more zealous, bright, and exemplary, than common. Now, as on the one hand, my convictions were very moderate, and far below what might have been expected from the dreadful review I had to make; so, on the other, my first beginnings in a religious course were as faint as can be well imagined. I never knew that season alluded to, Jer. ii. 2. Rev. ii. 4. usually called the time of the first love. Who would not expect to hear, that, after such a wonderful unhoped-for deliverance, as I had received, and, after my eyes were in some measure enlightened to see things aright, I should immediately cleave to the Lord and his ways, with full purpose of heart, and consult no more with flesh and blood? But, alas! it was far otherwise with me: I had learned to pray; I set some value upon the word of God, and was no longer a libertine; but my soul still cleaved to the dust. Soon after my departure from L—, I began to intermit, and grow slack in waiting

upon the Lord; I grew vain and trifling in my conversation; and though my heart smote me often, yet my armour was gone, and I declined fast; and by the time I arrived at Guinea, I seemed to have forgotten all the Lord's mercies, and my own engagements, and was (profaneness excepted) almost as bad as before. The enemy prepared a train of temptations, and I became his easy prey; and, for about a month, he lulled me asleep in a course of evil, of which, a few months before, I could not have supposed myself any longer capable. How much propriety is there in the apostle's advice, "Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." O, who can be sufficiently upon their guard! Sin first deceives, and then it hardens. I was now fast bound in chains; I had little desire, and no power at all to recover myself. I could not but at times reflect how it was with me: but, if I attempted to struggle with it, it was in vain. I was just like Samson, when he said, "I will go forth and shake myself as at other times;" but the Lord was departed, and he found himself helpless in the hands of his enemies. By the remembrance of this interval, the Lord has often instructed me since, what a poor creature I am in myself, incapable of standing a single hour without continual fresh supplies of strength and grace from the fountain head.

At length the Lord, whose mercies are infinite, interposed in my behalf. My business in this voyage, while upon the coast, was to sail from place to place in the long-boat to purchase slaves. The ship was at Sierra Leone, and I then at the Plantanes, the scene of my former captivity, where every thing I saw might seem to remind me of my ingratitude. I was in easy circumstances, courted by those who formerly despised me. The lime trees I had planted were grown tall, and promised fruit the following year; against which time I had expectations of returning with a ship of my own. But none of these things affected me, till, as I have said, the Lord again interposed to save me. He visited me with a violent fever, which broke the fatal chain, and once more brought me to myself. But, O what a prospect! I thought myself now summoned away. My past dangers and deliverances, my earnest prayers in the time of trouble, my solemn vows before the Lord at his table, and my ungrateful returns for all his goodness were all present to my mind at once. Then I began to wish that the Lord had suffered me to sink into the ocean, when I first besought his mercy. For a little while I concluded the door of hope to be quite shut; but this continued not long. Weak, and almost delirious, I arose from my bed, and crept to a retired part of the island; and here I found a renewed liberty to pray. I durst make no more

resolves, but cast myself before the Lord, to do with me as he should please. I do not remember that any particular text, or remarkable discovery, was presented to my mind; but in general I was enabled to hope and believe in a crucified Saviour. The burden was removed from my conscience, and not only my peace, but my health was restored; I cannot say instantaneously, but I recovered from that hour; and so fast, that when I returned to the ship, two days afterwards, I was perfectly well before I got on board. And from that time, I trust, I have been delivered from the power and dominion of sin; though, as to the effects and conflicts of sin dwelling in me, I still "groan, being burdened." I now began again to wait upon the Lord; and though I have often grieved his Spirit, and foolishly wandered from him since, (when, alas! shall I be more wise?) yet his powerful grace has hitherto preserved me from such black declensions as this I have last recorded; and I humbly trust in his mercy and promises, that he will be my guide and guard to the end.

My leisure hours in this voyage were chiefly employed in learning the Latin language, which I had now entirely forgot. This desire took place from an imitation I had seen of one of Horace's odes in a magazine. I began the attempt under the greatest disadvantages possible; for I pitched upon a poet, perhaps the most difficult of the poets, even Horace himself, for my first book. I had picked up an old English translation of him, which, with Castalio's Latin Bible, were all my helps. I forgot a Dictionary; but I would not therefore give up my purpose. I had the edition in *usum Delphini*, and by comparing the Odes with the interpretation, and tracing the words, I could understand from one place to another, by the index, with the assistance I could get from the Latin Bible; in this way, by dint of hard industry, often waking when I might have slept, I made some progress before I returned, and not only understood the sense and meaning of many Odes, and some of the Epistles, but began to relish the beauties of the composition, and acquire a spice of what Mr. Law calls classical enthusiasm. And, indeed, by this means, I had Horace more *ad unguem* than some who are masters of the Latin tongue; for my helps were so few, that I generally had the passage fixed in my memory, before I could fully understand its meaning.

My business in the long-boat, during the eight months we were upon the coast, exposed me to innumerable dangers and perils, from burning suns, and chilling dews, winds, rains, and thunder-storms, in the open boat; and on shore, from long journeys through the woods, and the temper of the natives, who are, in many places, cruel, treacherous, and watching opportunities for mischief. Several

boats in the same time were cut off; several white men poisoned, and, in my own boat, I buried six or seven people with fevers. When going on shore, or returning from it, in their little canoes, I have been more than once or twice overset by the violence of the surf, or break of the sea, and brought to land half dead (for I could not swim.) An account of such escapes as I still remember, would swell to several sheets, and many more I have perhaps forgot; I shall only select one instance, as a specimen of that wonderful providence which watched over me for good, and which, I doubt not, you will think worthy of notice.

When our trade was finished, and we were near sailing to the West Indies, the only remaining service I had to perform in the boat, was to assist in bringing the wood and water from the shore. We were then at Rio Cestors. I used to go into the river in the afternoon, with the sea breeze, procure my loading in the evening, and return on board in the morning, with the land wind. Several of these little voyages I had made; but the boat was grown old, and almost unfit for use. This service likewise was almost completed. One day having dined on board, I was preparing to return to the river, as formerly; I had taken leave of the captain, received his orders, was ready in the boat, and just going to put off, as we term it; that is, to let go our ropes and sail from the ship. In that instant, the captain came up from the cabin, and called me on board again. I went, expecting further orders; but he said he had "taken it in his head" (as he phrased it,) that I should remain that day in the ship, and accordingly ordered another man to go in my room. I was surprised at this, as the boat had never been sent away without me before; and asked him the reason. He could give me no reason, but as above, that so he would have it. Accordingly, the boat went without me, but returned no more. She sunk that night in the river, and the person who had supplied my place was drowned. I was much struck when we received news of the event the next morning. The captain himself, though quite a stranger to religion, so far as to deny a particular providence, could not help being affected; but he declared, that he had no other reason for countermanding me at that time, but that it came suddenly into his mind to detain me. I wonder I omitted it in my eight letters, as I have always thought it one of the most extraordinary circumstances of my life. I am, dear sir, your humble servant.

January 21, 1763.

LETTER XI.

DEAR SIR,—A few days after I was thus wonderfully saved from an unforeseen danger,

we sailed for Antigua, and from thence proceeded to Charleston, in South Carolina. In this place there are many serious people; but I knew not how to find them out. Indeed, I was not aware of a difference; but supposed that all who attended public worship were good christians. I was as much in the dark about preaching, not doubting but whatever came from the pulpit must be very good. I had two or three opportunities of hearing a dissenting minister, named Smith, who, by what I have known since, I believe to have been an excellent and powerful preacher of the gospel; and there was something in his manner that struck me; but I did not rightly understand him. The best words that men can speak are ineffectual, till explained and applied by the Spirit of God, who alone can open the heart. It pleased the Lord for some time, that I should learn no more than what he enabled me to collect from my own experience and reflection. My conduct was now very inconsistent. Almost every day, when business would permit, I used to retire into the woods and fields (for these, when at hand, have always been my favourite oratories;) and I trust I began to taste the sweets of communion with God, in the exercises of prayer and praise, and yet I frequently spent the evening in vain and worthless company. Indeed, my relish for worldly diversions was much weakened, and I was rather a spectator than a sharer in their pleasures; but I did not as yet see the necessity of an absolute forbearance. Yet, as my compliance with custom and company was chiefly owing to want of light, rather than to an obstinate attachment, and the Lord was pleased to preserve me from what I knew was sinful, I had, for the most part, peace of conscience, and my strongest desires were towards the things of God. As yet I knew not the force of that precept, "Abstain from all appearance of evil," but very often ventured upon the brink of temptation; but the Lord was gracious to my weakness, and would not suffer the enemy to prevail against me. I did not break with the world at once (as might, in my case, have been expected,) but I was gradually led to see the inconvenience and folly of one thing after another, and, when I saw it, the Lord strengthened me to give it up. But it was some years before I was set quite at liberty from occasional compliance in many things in which, at this time, I dare by no means allow myself.

We finished our voyage, and arrived in L——. When the ship's affairs were settled, I went to London, and from thence (as you may suppose) I soon repaired to Kent. More than seven years were now elapsed since my first visit. No views of the kind could seem more chimerical, or could subsist under great discouragements, than mine had

done; yet, through the over-ruling goodness of God, while I seemed abandoned to myself, and blindly following my own passions, I was guided, by a hand that I knew not, to the accomplishment of my wishes. Every obstacle was now removed. I had renounced my former follies, my interest was established, and friends on all sides consenting, the point was now entirely between ourselves, and after what had passed, was easily concluded. Accordingly, our hands were joined on the first of February 1750.

The satisfaction I have found in this union, you will suppose, has been greatly heightened by reflections on the former disagreeable contrasts I had passed through, and the views I have had of the singular mercy and providence of the Lord in bringing it to pass. If you please to look back to the beginning of my sixth letter, I doubt not but you will allow that few persons have known more, either of the misery or happiness, of which human life (as considered in itself) is capable. How easily, at a time of life when I was so little capable of judging (but a few months more than seventeen,) might my affections have been fixed where they could have met with no return, or where success would have been the heaviest disappointment. The long delay I met with was likewise a mercy; for, had I succeeded a year or two sooner, before the Lord was pleased to change my heart, we must have been mutually unhappy, even as to the present life. Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all my days.

But alas! I soon began to feel that my heart was still hard and ungrateful to the God of my life. This crowning mercy, which raised me to all I could ask or wish in a temporal view, and which ought to have been an animating motive to obedience and praise, had a contrary effect. I rested in the gift, and forgot the giver. My poor narrow heart was satisfied. A cold and careless frame, as to spiritual things, took place, and gained ground daily. Happy for me, the season was advancing, and in June I received orders to repair to L——. This roused me from my dream. I need not tell you, that I found the pains of absence and separation fully proportioned to my preceding pleasure. It was hard, very hard, to part, especially as conscience interfered, and suggested to me how little I deserved that we should be spared to meet again. But the Lord supported me. I was a poor faint idolatrous creature; but I had now some acquaintance with the way of access to a throne of grace, by the blood of Jesus, and peace was soon restored to my conscience. Yet, through all the following voyage, my irregular and excessive affections were as thorns in my eyes, and often made my other blessings tasteless and insipid. But He, who doth all things

well, over-ruled this likewise for good. It became an occasion of quickening me in prayer, both for her and myself; it increased my indifference for company and amusement; it habituated me to a kind of voluntary self-denial, which I was afterwards taught to improve to a better purpose.

While I remained in England, we corresponded every post; and all the while I used the sea afterwards, I constantly kept up the practice of writing two or three times a week (if weather and business permitted,) though no conveyance homeward offered for six or eight months together. My packets were usually heavy; and as not one of them at any time miscarried, I have to the amount of nearly two hundred sheets of paper now lying in my bureau of that correspondence. I mention this little relief I had contrived to soften the intervals of absence, because it had a good effect beyond my first intention. It habituated me to think and write upon a great variety of subjects; and I acquired, insensibly, a greater readiness of expressing myself, than I should have otherwise attained. As I gained more ground in religious knowledge, my letters became more serious, and, at times, I still find an advantage in looking them over, especially as they remind me of many providential incidents, and the state of my mind at different periods in these voyages, which would otherwise have escaped my memory.

I sailed from I.—— in August 1750, commander of a good ship. I have no very extraordinary events to recount from this period, and shall, therefore, contract my memoirs, lest I become tedious; yet I am willing to give you a brief sketch of my history down to 1755, the year of my settlement in my present situation. I had now the command and care of thirty persons; I endeavoured to treat them with humanity, and to set them a good example. I likewise established public worship, according to the liturgy, twice every Lord's day, officiating myself. Farther than this I did not proceed, while I continued in that employment.

Having now much leisure, I prosecuted the study of the Latin with good success. I remembered a dictionary this voyage, and procured two or three other books; but still it was my hap to choose the hardest. I added Juvenal to Horace; and, for prose authors, I pitched upon Livy, Cæsar, and Sallust. You will easily conceive, Sir, that I had hard work to begin (where I should have left off) with Horace and Livy. I was not aware of the difference of style; I had heard Livy highly commended, and was resolved to understand him. I began with the first page, and laid down a rule, which I seldom departed from, not to proceed to a *second period* till I understood the first, and *so on*. I was often at a stand, but seldom dis-

couraged; here and there I found a few lines quite obstinate, and was forced to break in upon my rule, and gave them up, especially as my edition had only the text, without any notes to assist me. But there were not many such; for, before the close of that voyage, I could (with a few exceptions) read Livy from end to end, almost as readily as an English author. And I found, in surmounting this difficulty, I had surmounted all in one. Other prose authors, when they came in my way, cost me little trouble. In short, in the space of two or three voyages, I became tolerably acquainted with the best classics (I put all I have to say upon this subject together;) I read Terence, Virgil, and several pieces of Cicero, and the modern classics, Buchanan, Erasinus, and Cassimir. At length I conceived a design of becoming Ciceronian myself, and thought it would be a fine thing indeed to write pure and elegant Latin. I made some essays towards it, but by this time, the Lord was pleased to draw me nearer to himself, and to give me a fuller view of the "pearl of great price," the inestimable treasure hid in the field of the holy scriptures; and, for the sake of this, I was made willing to part with all my newly acquired riches. I began to think that life was too short (especially my life) to admit of leisure for such elaborate trifling. Neither poet nor historian could tell me a word of Jesus, and I therefore applied myself to those who could. The classics were at first restrained to one morning in the week, and at length quite laid aside. I have not looked into Livy these five years, and I suppose I could not well understand him. Some passages in Horace and Virgil I still admire, but they seldom come in my way. I prefer Buchanan's Psalms to a whole shelf of Elzevirs. But thus much I have gained, and more than this I am not solicitous about, so much of the Latin as enables me to read any useful or curious book that is published in that language. About the same time, and for the same reason that I quarrelled with Livy, I laid aside the mathematics. I found they not only cost me much time, but engrossed my thoughts too far: my head was literally full of *schemes*. I was weary of cold contemplative truths, which can neither warm nor amend the heart, but rather tend to aggrandize self. I found no traces of this wisdom in the life of Jesus, or the writings of Paul. I do not regret that I have had some opportunities of knowing the first principles of these things; but I see much cause to praise the Lord, that he inclined me to stop in time; and that whilst I was "spending my labour for that which is not bread," he was pleased to set before me "wine and milk, without money and without price."

My first voyage was fourteen months, through various scenes of danger and diffi-

culty, but nothing very remarkable; and as I intend to be more particular with regard to the second, I shall only say that I was preserved from every harm; and having seen many fall on my right hand and on my left, I was brought home in peace, and restored to where my thoughts had been often directed, November 2, 1751.—I am, your's, &c.

January 22, 1763.

LETTER XII.

DEAR SIR,—I almost wish I could recall my last sheet, and retract my promise. I fear I have engaged too far, and shall prove a mere egotist. What have I more that can deserve your notice? However, it is some satisfaction that I am now writing to yourself only; and I believe, you will have candour to excuse, what nothing but a sense of your kindness could extort from me.

Soon after the period where my last closes, that is, in the interval between my first and second voyage after my marriage, I began to keep a sort of diary, a practice which I have found of great use. I had, in this interval, repeated proofs of the ingratitude and evil of my heart. A life of ease, in the midst of my friends, and a full satisfaction of my wishes, was not favourable to the progress of grace, and afforded cause of daily humiliation. Yet, upon the whole, I gained ground. I became acquainted with books, which gave me a further view of christian doctrine and experience, particularly Scougal's Life of God in the Soul of Man, Hervey's Meditations, and the Life of Colonel Gardiner. As to preaching, I heard none but of the common sort, and had hardly an idea of any better; neither had I the advantage of christian acquaintance; I was likewise greatly hindered by a cowardly reserved spirit; I was afraid of being thought precise; and, though I could not live without prayer, I durst not propose it, even to my wife, till she herself first put me upon it; so far was I from those expressions of zeal and love, which seemed so suitable to the case of one who has had much forgiven. In a few months the returning season called me abroad again, and I sailed from L—— in a new ship, July 1752.

A sea-faring life is necessarily excluded from the benefit of public ordinances and christian communion; but, as I have observed, my loss upon these heads was at this time but small. In other respects, I know not any calling that seems more favourable, or affords greater advantages to an awakened mind, for promoting the life of God in the soul, especially to a person who has the command of a ship, and thereby has in his power to restrain gross irregularities in others, and to dispose of his own time; and

still more so in African voyages, as these ships carry a double proportion of men and officers to most others, which made my departure very easy; and, excepting the hurry of trade, &c. upon the coast, which is rather occasional than constant, afforded me abundance of leisure. To be at sea in these circumstances, withdrawn out of the reach of innumerable temptations, with opportunity and a turn of mind disposed to observe the wonders of God in the great deep, with the two noblest objects of sight, the expanded heavens, and the expanded ocean, continually in view; and where evident interpositions of Divine Providence, in answer to prayer, occur almost every day; these are helps to quicken and confirm the life of faith, which, in a good measure, supply to a religious sailor the want of those advantages which can be only enjoyed upon the shore. And, indeed, though my knowledge of spiritual things (as knowledge is usually estimated) was, at this time, very small, yet I sometimes look back with regret upon those scenes. I never knew sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion than in my two last voyages to Guinea, when I was either almost secluded from society on ship-board, or when on shore among the natives. I have wandered through the woods, reflecting on the singular goodness of the Lord to me, in a place where, perhaps, there was not a person who knew him for some thousand miles round me. Many a time, upon these occasions, I have restored the beautiful lines of Propertius to the right owner; lines full of blasphemy and madness, when addressed to a creature, but full of comfort and propriety in the mouth of a believer.

*Sic ego desertis possim bene vivere sylvis
Quo nulla humano sit via trita pede;
Tu mihi curarum requies, in nocte velatra
Lumen, et in solis tu mihi turba locis.*

PARAPHRASED.

In desert woods with thee, my God,
Where human footsteps never trod,
How happy could I be!
Thou my repose from care, my light
Amidst the darkness of the night,
In solitude my company.

In the course of this voyage, I was wonderfully preserved in the midst of many obvious unforeseen dangers. At one time there was a conspiracy amongst my own people to turn pirates, and take the ship from me. When the plot was nearly ripe, and they only waited a convenient opportunity, two of those concerned in it were taken ill one day; one of them died, and he was the only person I buried while on board. This suspended the affair, and opened the way to its discovery, or the consequence might have been fatal. The slaves on board were likewise frequently plotting insurrections, and were sometimes

upon the very brink of mischief; but it was always disclosed in due time. When I have thought myself most secure, I have been suddenly alarmed with danger; and when I have almost despaired of life, as sudden a deliverance has been vouchsafed me. My stay upon the coast was long, and the trade very precarious; and, in the pursuit of my business, both on board and on shore, I was in deaths often. Let the following instance serve as a specimen.

I was at a place called Mana, near Cape Mount, where I had transacted very large concerns, and had, at the time I am speaking of, some debts and accounts to settle, which required my attendance on shore, and I intended to go the next morning. When I arose, I left the ship according to my purpose; but when I came near the shore, the surf, or break of the sea, ran so high, that I was almost afraid to attempt landing. Indeed I had often ventured at a worse time, but I felt an inward hinderance and backwardness, which I could not account for: the surf furnished a pretext for indulging it; and after waiting and hesitating for about half an hour, I returned to the ship, without doing any business; which I think I never did but that morning, in all the time I used that trade. But I soon perceived the reason of all this. It seems the day before I intended to land, a scandalous and groundless charge had been laid against me (by whose instigation I could never learn,) which greatly threatened my honour and interest, both in Africa and England, and would perhaps, humanly speaking, have affected my life, if I had landed according to my intention. I shall, perhaps, inclose a letter, which will give a full account of this strange adventure; and therefore shall say no more of it here, any further than to tell you, that an attempt aimed to destroy either my life or my character, and which might very probably, in its consequences have ruined my voyage, passed off without the least inconvenience. The person most concerned owed me about a hundred pounds, which he sent me in a huff; and otherwise, perhaps, would not have paid me at all. I was very uneasy for a few hours, but was soon afterwards comforted. I heard no more of my accusation till the next voyage, and then it was publicly acknowledged to have been a malicious calumny, without the least shadow of a ground.

Such were the vicissitudes and difficulties through which the Lord preserved me. Now and then both faith and patience were sharply exercised, but suitable strength was given; and as those things did not occur every day, the study of the Latin, of which I gave a general account in my last, was renewed, and carried on from time to time, when business would permit. I was mostly very regular in the management of my time.

I allotted about eight hours for sleep and meals, eight hours for exercise and devotion, and eight hours to my books; and thus, by diversifying my engagements, the whole day was agreeably filled up, and I seldom found a day too long, or an hour to spare. My studies kept me employed, and so far it was well; otherwise they were hardly worth the time they cost, as they led me to an admiration of false models and false maxims; a almost unavoidable consequence, I suppose of an admiration of classic authors. Abating what I have attained of the language, I think I might have read Cassandra or Cleopatra to as good purpose as I read Livy, whom I now account an equal romancer, though in a different way.

From the coast, I went to St. Christopher's and here my idolatrous heart was its own punishment. The letters I expected from Mrs N**** were, by mistake, forwarded to Antigua, which had been at first proposed as a port. As I was certain of her punctuality in writing, if alive, I concluded, by not hearing from her, that she was surely dead. This fear affected me more and more; I lost my appetite and rest; I felt an incessant pain in my stomach, and in about three weeks time I was near sinking under the weight of an imaginary stroke. I felt some severe symptoms of that mixture of pride and madness which is commonly called a broken heart, and, indeed, I wonder that this case is no more common than it appears to be. How often do the potsherds of the earth presume to contend with their maker! and what wonder of mercy is it, that they are not broken! However, my complaint was not so grievous; conscience had a share. I thought my unfaithfulness to God had deprived me of her, especially my backwardness in speaking of spiritual things, which I could hardly tempt even to her. It was this thought, that I had lost invaluable, irrecoverable opportunities, which both duty and affection should have engaged me to improve, that chiefly stung me; and I thought I could have given the world to know that she was living, that I might at least discharge my engagements by writing, though I were never to see her again. This was a sharp lesson, but I hope it did me good; and when I had thus suffered some weeks, I thought of sending a small vessel to Antigua. I did so, and she brought me several packets, which restored my health and peace, and gave me a strong contrast of the Lord's goodness to me, and my unbelief and ingratitude towards him.

In August, 1753, I returned to London. My stay was very short at home that voyage only six weeks; in that space nothing very remarkable occurred; I shall therefore begin my next with an account of my third and last voyage. And thus I give both you and myself hopes of a speedy period to these

memoirs, which begin to be tedious and minute, even to myself; only I am animated by the thought that I write at your request, and have therefore an opportunity of showing myself, your obliged servant.

January 31, 1763.

LETTER XIII.

DEAR SIR,—My third voyage was shorter and less perplexed than either of the former. Before I sailed, I met with a young man, who had formerly been a midshipman and my intimate companion, on board the Harwich. He was, at the time I first knew him, a sober youth, but I found too much success in my unhappy attempts to infect him with libertine principles. When we met at L—, our acquaintance renewed upon the ground of our former intimacy. He had good sense, and had read many books. Our conversation frequently turned upon religion, and I was desirous to repair the mischief I had done him. I gave him a plain account of the manner and reason of my change, and used every argument to persuade him to relinquish his infidel schemes; and when I sometimes pressed him so close that he had no other reply to make, he would remind me that I was the very first person who had given him an idea of his liberty. This occasioned me many mournful reflections. He was then going master to Guinea himself, but before his ship was ready, his merchant became a bankrupt, which disconcerted his voyage. As he had no further expectations for that year, I offered to take him with me as a companion, that he might gain a knowledge of the coast; and the gentleman who employed me promised to provide for him upon his return. My view in this was not so much to serve him in his business, as to have opportunity of debating the point with him at leisure; and I hoped, in the course of my voyage, my arguments, example, and prayers, might have some good effect on him. My intention in this step was better than my judgment, and I had frequent reason to repent it. He was exceedingly profane, and grew worse and worse: I saw in him a most lively picture of what I had once been, but it was very inconvenient to have it always before my eyes. Besides, he was not only deaf to my remonstrances himself, but laboured all that he could to counteract my influence upon others. His spirit and passions were likewise exceeding high, so that it required all my prudence and authority to hold him in any degree of restraint. He was as a sharp thorn in my side for some time; but at length I had an opportunity upon the coast of buying a small vessel which I supplied with a cargo from my own, and gave him the command, and sent him

away to trade on the ship's account. When we parted, I repeated and enforced my best advice. I believe his friendship and regard were as great as could be expected, where principles were so diametrically opposite. He seemed greatly affected when I left him, but my words had no weight with him. When he found himself at liberty from under my eye, he gave a hasty loose to every appetite; and his violent irregularities, joined to the heat of the climate, soon threw him into a malignant fever, which carried him off in a few days. He died convinced, but not changed. The account I had from those who were with him was dreadful; his rage and despair struck them all with horror, and he pronounced his own fatal doom before he expired, without any appearance that he either hoped or asked for mercy. I thought this awful contrast might not be improper to give you, as a stronger view of the distinguishing goodness of God to me the chief of sinners.

I left the coast in about four months, and sailed for St. Christopher's. Hitherto I had enjoyed a perfect state of health, equally in every climate, for several years; but, upon this passage, I was visited with a fever, which gave me a very near prospect of eternity. I have obtained liberty to enclose you three or four letters, which will more clearly illustrate the state and measure of my experience, at different times, than any thing I can say at present. One of them you will find was written at this period, when I could hardly hold a pen, and had some reason to believe I should write no more. I had not that *πληροτερια**, which is so desirable at a time when flesh and heart fail; but my hopes were greater than my fears, and I felt a silent composure of spirit, which enabled me to wait the event without much anxiety. My trust, though weak in degree, was alone fixed upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus; and those words, "he is able to save to the uttermost," gave me great relief. I was for a while troubled with a very singular thought. Whether it was a temptation, or that the fever disordered my faculties, I cannot say, but I seemed not so much afraid of wrath and punishment, as of being lost and overlooked amidst the myriads that are continually entering the unseen world. What is my soul, thought I, among such an innumerable multitude of beings? And this troubled me greatly. Perhaps the Lord will take no notice of me. I was perplexed thus for some time, but at last a text of scripture, very apposite to the case, occurred to my mind, and put an end to the doubt; "The Lord knoweth them that are his." In about ten days, beyond the hopes of those about me, I began to amend, and by the time of

* Full assurance.

our arrival in the West Indies, I was perfectly recovered.—I hope this visitation was made useful to me.

Thus far, that is, for about the space of six years, the Lord was pleased to lead me in a secret way. I had learned something of the evil of my heart; I had read the Bible over and over, with several good books, and had a general view of gospel truths. But my conceptions were, in many respects, confused; not having, in all this time, met with one acquaintance who could assist my inquiries. But upon my arrival at St. Christopher's, this voyage, I found a captain of a ship from London, whose conversation was greatly helpful to me. He was, and is a member of Mr. B——r's church, a man of experience in the things of God, and of a lively, communicative turn. We discovered each other by some casual expressions in mixed company, and soon became (so far as business would permit) inseparable. For near a month, we spent every evening together, on board each other's ship alternately, and often prolonged our visits till towards day-break. I was all ears; and what was better, he not only informed my understanding, but his discourse inflamed my heart. He encouraged me to open my mouth in social prayer; he taught me the advantage of christian converse; he put me upon an attempt to make my profession more public, and to venture to speak for God. From him, or rather from the Lord, by his means, I received an increase of knowledge; my conceptions became clearer and more evangelical, and I was delivered from a fear which had long troubled me, the fear of relapsing into my former apostacy. But now I began to understand the security of the covenant of grace, and to expect to be preserved, not by my own power and holiness, but by the mighty power and promise of God, through faith in an unchangeable Saviour. He likewise gave me a general view of the state of religion, with the errors and controversies of the times (things to which I had been entirely a stranger,) and finally directed me where to apply in London for further instruction. With these newly acquired advantages, I left him, and my passage homewards gave me leisure to digest what I had received. I had much comfort and freedom during those seven weeks, and my sun was seldom clouded. I arrived safe in L——, August, 1754.

My stay at home was intended to be but short, and by the beginning of November, I was again ready for the sea: but the Lord saw fit to over-rule my design. During the time I was engaged in the slave trade, I never had the least scruple as to its lawfulness. I was, upon the whole, satisfied with it, as the appointment Providence had marked out for me; yet it was, in many respects, far from eligible. It is, indeed, accounted a

genteel employment, and is usually very profitable, though to me it did not prove so, the Lord seeing that a large increase of wealth could not be good for me. However, I considered myself as a sort of gaoler or turnkey; and I was sometimes shocked with an employment that was perpetually conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles. In this view I had often petitioned, in my prayers, that the Lord, in his own time, would be pleased to fix me in a more humane calling, and, if it might be, place me where I might have more frequent converse with his people and ordinances, and be freed from those long separations from home, which very often were hard to bear. My prayers were now answered, though in a way I little expected. I now experienced another sudden, unforeseen change of life. I was within two days of sailing, and, to all appearance, in good health as usual; but in the afternoon as I was sitting with Mrs. N****, by ourselves, drinking tea, and talking over past events, I was in a moment seized with a fit which deprived me of sense and motion, and left me no other sign of life than that of breathing. I suppose it was of the apoplectic kind. It lasted about an hour, and when I recovered, it left a pain and dizziness in my head, which continued with such symptoms as induced the physicians to judge I would not be safe or prudent for me to proceed on the voyage. Accordingly, by the advice of my friend, to whom the ship belonged, I resigned the command the day before she sailed; and thus I was unexpectedly called from that service, and freed from share of the future consequences of the voyage, which proved extremely calamitous. The person who went in my room, most of the officers, and many of the crew, died, and the vessel was brought home with great difficulty.

As I was now disengaged from business, I left L——, and spent most of the following year at London, and in Kent. But I entered upon a new trial. You will easily conceive that Mrs. N**** was not an unconcerned spectator, when I lay extended, and, as she thought, expiring upon the ground. In effect the blow that struck me reached her in the same instant: she did not, indeed, immediately feel it, till her apprehensions on my account began to subside; but as I grew better, she became worse: her surprise threw her into a disorder, which no physicians could define, or medicines remove. Without any of the ordinary symptoms of a consumption she decayed almost visibly, till she became so weak that she could hardly bear any one to walk across the room she was in. I was placed for about eleven months in what Dr. Young calls the

“—dreadful post of observation,
Darker every hour.”

It was not till after my settlement in my present station, that the Lord was pleased to restore her by his own hand, when all hopes from ordinary means were at an end. But before this took place, I have some other particulars to mention, which must be the subject of the following sheet, which I hope will be the last on this subject, from—Your affectionate servant.

February 1, 1764.

LETTER XIV.

DEAR SIR,—By the directions I had received from my friend at St. Kitt's, I soon found out a religious acquaintance in London. I first applied to Mr. B—, and chiefly attended upon his ministry, when in town. From him I received many helps both in public and private; for he was pleased to favour me with his friendship, from the first. His kindness and the intimacy between us have continued and increased to this day; and of all my many friends, I am most deeply indebted to him. The late Mr. H—d was my second acquaintance; a man of a choice spirit, and an abundant zeal for the Lord's service. I enjoyed his correspondence till near the time of his death. Soon after, upon Mr. W—d's return from America, my two good friends introduced me to him; and though I had little personal acquaintance with him till afterwards, his ministry was exceeding useful to me. I had likewise access to some religious societies, and became known to many excellent christians in private life. Thus, when at London, I lived at the fountain head, as it were, for spiritual advantages. When I was in Kent, it was very different, yet I found some serious persons there; but the fine variegated woodland country afforded me advantages of another kind. Most of my time, at least some hours every day, I passed in retirement, when the weather was fair; sometimes in the thickest woods, sometimes on the highest hills, where almost every step varied the prospect. It has been my custom for many years, to perform my devotional exercises *sub dio*, when I have opportunity, and I always find these rural scenes have some tendency both to refresh and compose my spirits. A beautiful diversified prospect gladdens my heart. When I am withdrawn from the noise and petty works of men, I consider myself as in the great temple, which the Lord hath built for his own honour.

The country between Rochester and Maidstone, bordering upon the Medway, was well suited to the turn of my mind; and was I to go over it now, I could point to many a place where I remember either to have earnestly sought, or happily found, the Lord's comfortable presence with my soul. And thus I lived,

sometimes at London, and sometimes in the country, till the autumn of the following year. All this while I had two trials, more or less, upon my mind; the first and principal was Mrs. N****'s illness; she still grew worse, and I had daily more reason to fear that the hour of separation was at hand. When faith was in exercise, I was in some measure resigned to the Lord's will; but too often my heart rebelled, and I found it hard either to trust or to submit. I had likewise some care about my future settlement; the African trade was overdone that year, and my friends did not care to fit out another ship till mine returned. I was sometime in suspense; but, indeed, a provision of food and raiment has seldom been a cause of great solicitude to me. I found it easier to trust the Lord in this point than in the former, and accordingly this was first answered. In August I received an account that I was nominated to the office of —. These places are usually obtained, or at least sought, by dint of much interest and application; but this came to me unsought and unexpected. I knew, indeed, my good friend in L— had endeavoured to procure another post for me, but found it pre-engaged. I found afterwards, that the place I had missed would have been very unsuitable for me, and that this, which I had no thought of, was the very thing I could have wished for, as it afforded me much leisure, and the liberty of living in my own way. Several circumstances, unnoticed by others concurred, to show me that the good hand of the Lord was as remarkably concerned in this event as in any other leading turn of my life.

But when I gained this point, my distress in the other was doubled; I was obliged to leave Mrs. N****, in the greatest extremity of pain and illness, when the physicians could do no more, and I had no ground of hope that I should see her again alive, but this, that nothing is impossible with the Lord. I had a severe conflict; but faith prevailed. I found the promise remarkably fulfilled, of strength proportioned to my need. The day before I set out, and not till then, the burden was entirely taken from my mind. I was strengthened to resign both her and myself to the Lord's disposal, and departed from her in a cheerful frame. Soon after I was gone, she began to amend, and recovered so fast, that in about two months I had the pleasure to meet her at Stone, on her journey to L—.

And now, I think, I have answered, if not exceeded, your desire. Since October 1755, we have been comfortably settled here, and all my circumstances have been as remarkably smooth and uniform as they were various in former years. My trials have been light and few, not but that I still find, in the experience of every day, the necessity of a

life of faith. My principal trial is, the body of sin and death, which makes me often to sigh out the apostle's complaint, "O wretched man, &c." But with him likewise I can say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord." I live in a barren land, where the knowledge and power of the gospel is very low; yet here are a few of the Lord's people; and this wilderness has been a useful school to me, where I have studied more leisurely the truths which I gathered up in London. I brought down with me a considerable stock of notional truths; but I have since found, that there is no effectual teacher but God; that we can receive no further than he is pleased to communicate; and that no knowledge is truly useful to me, but what is made my own by experience. Many things, I thought I had learned, would not stand in an hour of temptation, till I had in this way learned them over again. Since the year 1757, I have had an increasing acquaintance in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where the gospel flourishes greatly. This has been a good school to me. I have conversed at large among all parties, without joining any; and in my attempts to hit the golden mean, I have sometimes been drawn too near the different extremes; yet the Lord has enabled me to profit by my mistakes. In brief, I am still a learner, and the Lord still condescends to teach me. I begin at length to see that I have attained but very little; but I trust in him to carry on his own work in my soul, and, by all the dispensations of his grace and providence, to increase my knowledge of him and of myself.

When I was fixed in a house, and found my business would afford me much leisure time, I considered in what manner I should improve it. And now, having reason to close with the apostle's determination, "to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified," I devoted my life to the prosecution of spiritual knowledge, and resolved to pursue nothing but in subservience to this main design. This resolution divorced me, as I have already hinted, from the classics and mathematics. My first attempt was to learn so much Greek as would enable me to understand the New Testament and Septuagint; and when I had made some progress this way, I entered upon the Hebrew the following year; and two years afterwards, having surmised some advantages from the Syriac version, I began with that language. You must not think that I have attained, or ever aimed at, a critical skill in any of these. I had no business with them but as in reference to something else. I never read one classic author in the Greek. I thought it too late in life to take such a round in this language as I had done in the Latin. I only wanted the signification of scriptural words and phrases; and for this I thought I might avail myself of

Scapula, the Synopsis, and others, who had sustained the drudgery before me. In the Hebrew, I can read the historical books and psalms with tolerable ease; but in the prophetic and difficult parts, I am frequently obliged to have recourse to lexicons, &c. However, I know so much as to be able, with such helps as are at hand, to judge for myself the meaning of any passage I have occasion to consult. Beyond this I do not think of proceeding, if I can find better employment; for I would rather be some way useful to others, than die with the reputation of an eminent linguist.

Together with these studies, I have kept up a course of reading of the best writers in divinity that have come to my hand, in the Latin and English tongues, and some French. For I picked up the French at times while I used the sea. But within these two or three years I have accustomed myself chiefly to writing, and have not found time to read many books besides the scriptures.

I am the more particular in this account, as my case has been somewhat singular; for in all my literary attempts, I have been obliged to strike out my own path, by the light I could acquire from books, as I have not had a teacher or assistant since I was 24 years of age.

One word concerning my views to the ministry, and I have done. I have told you that this was my dear mother's hope concerning me; but her death, and the scenes of life in which I afterwards engaged, seemed to cut off the probability. The first desires of this sort in my own mind, arose many years ago, from a reflection on Gal. i. 23, 24. I could not but wish for such a public opportunity to testify the riches of divine grace. I thought I was, above most living, a fit person to proclaim that faithful saying, "That Jesus Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners;" and as my life had been full of remarkable turns, and I seemed selected to show what the Lord could do, I was in some hopes that, perhaps, sooner or later, he might call me into his service.

I believe it was a distant hope of this that determined me to study the original scriptures; but it remained an imperfect desire in my own breast, till it was recommended to me by some christian friends. I started at the thought, when first seriously proposed to me; but afterwards set apart some weeks to consider the case, to consult my friends, and to intreat the Lord's direction. The judgment of my friends, and many things that occurred, tended to engage me. My first thought was to join the dissenters, from a presumption that I could not honestly make the required subscriptions; but Mr. C—— in a conversation upon these points, moderated my scruples; and preferring the established church in some other respects, I am

cepted a title from him, some months afterwards, and solicited ordination from the late archbishop of York. I need not tell you I met a refusal, nor what steps I took afterwards to succeed elsewhere. At present I desist from any applications. My desire to serve the Lord is not weakened; but I am not so hasty to push myself forward as I was formerly. It is sufficient that he knows how to dispose of me, and that he both can and will do what is best. To him I commend myself: I trust that his will and my true interest are inseparable. To his name be glory for ever. And thus I conclude my story, and presume you will acknowledge I have been particular enough. I have room for no more, but to repeat that I am, sir, your's, &c.

February 2, 1764.

FORTY-ONE LETTERS
ON
RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS.

ORIGINALLY

PUBLISHED UNDER THE SIGNATURES

OF

OMICRON AND VIGIL.

LETTER I.

*On Trust in the Providence of God, and
Benevolence to his Poor.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The more I think of the point you proposed to me, the more I am confirmed to renew the advice I then gave. There is doubtless such a thing as christian prudence; but, my friend, beware of counterfeits. Self-love, and the evil heart of unbelief, will endeavour to obtrude upon us a prudence so called, which is as opposite to the former as darkness to light. I do not say that, now you have a wife, and the present of a family, you are strictly bound to communicate with the poor in the same proportion as formerly. I say, you are not bound; for every thing of this sort should proceed from a willing mind. But if you should tell me, the Lord has given you such a zeal for his glory, such a concern for the honour of the gospel, such a love to his members, such a grateful sense of his mercies (especially by granting you, in this late instance of your marriage, the desire of your heart,) and such an affiance in his providence and promises, that you find yourself very unwilling to be one sixpence in the year less useful than you was before, I could not blame you, or dissuade you from it. But I do not absolutely advise it; because I know not the state of your mind, or what measure of faith the Lord has given you. Only this I believe, that when the Lord gives such a confidence, he will not disappoint it.

When I look among the professors, yea, among the ministers of the gospel, there are few things I see a more general want of,

than such a trust in God as to temporals, and such a sense of the honour of being permitted to relieve the necessities of his people, as might dispose them to a more liberal distribution of what they have at present in their power, and to a reliance on him for a sufficient supply in future. Some exceptions there are. Some persons I have the happiness to know, whose chief pleasure it seems to be, to devise liberal things. For the most part, we take care, first, to be well supplied, if possible, with all the necessities, conveniences, and not a few of the elegancies of life; then to have a snug fund laid up against a rainy day, as the phrase is (if this is in an increasing way, so much the better,) that when we look at children and near relatives, we may say to our hearts, "Now they are well provided for." And when we have gotten all this, and more, we are, perhaps, content, for the love of Christ, to bestow a pittance of our superfluities, a tenth or a twentieth part of what we spend or hoard up for ourselves, upon the poor. But, alas! what do we herein more than others! Multitudes, who know nothing of the love of Christ, will do thus much, yea, perhaps, greatly exceed us, from the mere feelings of humanity.

But it may be asked, Would you show no regard to the possibility of leaving your wife or children unprovided for? Quite the reverse. I would have you attend to it very much, and behold the scriptures show you the more excellent way. If you had a little money to spare, would you not lend it to me, if I assured you it should be repaid when wanted! I can point out to you better interest

and better security than I could possibly give you: Prov. xix. 17, "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, will he pay him again." What think you of this text! Is it the word of God or not? Is he worthy of belief, or is he not? I dare stake all my interest in your friendship (which I should be very loath to forfeit,) that if you act upon this maxim, in a spirit of prayer and faith, and with a single eye to his glory, you shall not be disappointed. Read over Matt. vi. 23-34. Shall we confine that reasoning and those promises to the primitive times? Say not, "if the Lord would make windows in heaven, this thing might be." He has more ways to bless and prosper those who trust in him, than we are able to point out to him. But I tell you, my friend, he will sooner make windows in heaven, turn stones into bread, yea, stop the sun in his course, than he will suffer those who conscientiously serve him, and depend upon him, to be destitute.

Some instances we have had of ministers, who have seemed to transgress the bounds of strict prudence in their attention to the poor. But if they have been men of faith, prayer, and zeal; if they did it, not from a chance of honour, or a spirit of indolence, but from such motives as the scripture suggests and recommends, I believe their families have seldom suffered for it. I wish you to consult, upon this head, what Mrs. Alleine says, in the affecting account she has given of that honoured and faithful servant of God, her husband, Joseph Alleine. Besides, you know not what you may actually save in a course of years by this method. The apostle, speaking of some abuses that obtained in the church of Corinth, says, "For this cause many are sick among you." If prudence would shut up the bowels of your compassion (which I trust it never will,) the Lord might quarter an apothecary upon your family, which would, perhaps, cost you twice the money that would have sufficed to refresh his people, and to commend your ministry and character.

But if, after all, prudence will be heard, I counsel you to do these two things. First, Be very certain that you allow yourselves in nothing superfluous. You cannot, I trust, in conscience think of laying out one penny more than is barely decent, unless you have another penny to help the poor. Then, secondly, Let your friends, who are in good circumstances, be plainly told, that, though you love them, prudence and the necessary charge of a family, will not permit you to entertain them; no, not for a night. What say you! shut my door against my friends! Yes, by all means, rather than against Christ. If the Lord Jesus was again upon earth in a

state of humiliation, and he, and the best friend you have, standing at your door, and your provision so strait that you could not receive both, which would you entertain! Now, he says of the poor, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me." Your friends have houses of their own, and money to pay at an inn, if you do not take them in; but the poor need relief. One would almost think that passage, Luke xiv. 12, 13, 14, was not considered as a part of God's word; at least I believe there is no one passage so generally neglected by his own people. I do not think it unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us, that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.

I was enabled to set out upon the plan I recommend to you, at a time when my certain income was much too scanty for my own provision, and before I had the expectation or promise of assistance from any person upon earth. Only I knew that the Lord could provide me with whatever he saw needful; and I trusted, that if he kept me dependant upon himself, and desirous to live for his service only, he assuredly would do so. I have as yet seen no cause to repent it. I live upon his promise; for as to any present ways or means, every thing here below is so uncertain, that I consider myself in the same situation with the birds of the air, who have neither store-house nor barn. To-day I have enough for myself, and something to impart to them that need; as to futurity, the Lord must provide; and for the most part I can believe he will. I can tell you, however, that now and then my heart is pinched; unbelief creeps in, and self would much rather choose a strong box, or what the world calls a certainty, than a life of absolute dependence upon the providence of God. However, in my composed hours I am well satisfied. Hitherto he has graciously taken care of me; therefore may my heart trust in him, and not be afraid.

Consider, my friend, the Lord has done well for you likewise. He has settled you peaceably in a good and honourable interest; he has now answered your prayers, in giving you a partner, with whom you may take sweet counsel, one that will help and strengthen you in your best desires. Beware, therefore, of that reasoning which might lead you to distrust the Lord your God, or to act as if you did. You complain that there is too much of an expensive taste among some persons in your congregation. If you set yourself to discountenance this, and should at the same time too closely shut up your hand, they will be ready to charge you with being governed by the same worldly spirit, though in another form. If you have been hitherto tender and bountiful to the

poor, and should make too great and too sudden an alteration in this respect, if the blame should not fall upon you, it probably would upon your wife, who, I believe, would be far from deserving it. If the house which had been open to the poor in former times, should be shut against them, now you live in it, would it not lead the people's thoughts back? Would it not open the mouths of those who do not love your ministry, to say, That, notwithstanding all your zeal about doctrines, you know how to take care of your own interest, as well as those whom you have thought indifferent and lukewarm in the cause of the gospel? Would it not? But I forbear. I know you need no such arguments. Yet consider how many eyes are upon you, watching for your halting. Now, at your first setting out, is the proper time seriously to seek the Lord's direction, that you may, from the beginning, adopt such a plan as may be most for your own comfort, the honour of your character as a minister, the glory of him who has called you, and the edification of your people. It is easier to begin well, than to make alterations afterwards. I trust the Lord will guide and bless you in your deliberations. And, for my own part, I am not in the least afraid, that you will ever have cause to blame me for the advice I have given, if you should be disposed to follow it.

I have given you my opinion freely, and, perhaps, with an appearance of more strictness than is necessary. But I would apply our Lord's words in another case to this: "All men cannot receive this saying; he that is able to receive it, let him receive it." If the Lord has given you this confidence in his word, you are happy. It is better than the possession of thousands by the year.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

Extract of a Letter to a Student in Divinity.

DEAR SIR,—The subject of your last is important. I can sympathise with your anxiety, having known much of it myself, and therefore willingly devote my first leisure to your service. But shall I indeed condole with you? or shall I rather congratulate you on the perplexity you complain of? I know it is not pleasing; but I hope it will be sanctified and profitable to you.

Though I am no enemy to the acquisition of useful knowledge, I have seen many instances of young men who have been much hurt by what they expected to reap advantage from. They have gone to the academy humble, peaceable, spiritual, and lively; but have come out self-wise, dogmatical, censorious, and full of a prudence founded upon

the false maxims of the world. I have been ready to address them with that line of Iton:

"If thou art he—But ah! how fall'st thou?"

I do not mention this as the necessary fault of the institution, but as the frequent effect of notions too hastily picked up, which are not sanctified by grace, nor balanced by proportionable depth of spiritual experience. I am therefore glad to hear, that notwithstanding the advantages you have had in the pursuit of your studies, you feel an inward conviction, that you still need something which you cannot receive from men, books, in order to complete your fitness for the ministry; that you may be "a workman that needs not to be ashamed," and enabled rightly to divide (to distinguish and distribute) the word of truth.

It seems to me a point of more curiosity than use, to inquire too nicely into the mode of the Holy Spirit's assistance in the composition and delivery of sermons. If we cannot exactly state the boundaries between what we may deem the result of our own thoughts, and the needful influence of the Holy Spirit, it seems a safe way to give him the honour of the whole, and to attribute nothing to our selves but our infirmities. I we have a capacity, means for improvement, diligence to make use of those means, and if that diligence is attended with any degree of success, may we not acknowledge, that the former links of this chain are the effect of his goodness and favour, no less than the latter?

To the question, How far is it lawful to expect this assistance? I answer, It is lawful very far, even to lay the whole stress upon it, so as to be firmly persuaded that we can neither meditate nor speak to purpose without it; that if we have not this assistance, whatever else we have, or may think we have, we shall but "darken counsel by words without knowledge." For this, I think, I have warrant in John xv. 5. If any person supposes he has so far mastered a system of divinity, that though he can indeed do better with the Spirit's assistance, yet he can make a tolerable shift without it, I envy him not this attainment.

But if the question intends, How far a dependence upon the Holy Spirit may lawfully supersede the use of means? I answer, Not in the least. The blessing and the means are so closely united, that they cannot be separated. The blessing may be surely expected, if diligently sought in the use of proper means; and we have no just reason to expect it without them. But to clear up the whole, let it be considered, What may deserve the name of diligence in this matter, and what are the proper means?

By diligence, I understand spiritual dili-

ice; such an active, improving, industrious habit, as is peculiar to a heart impressed with some real abiding sense of the love of God, the worth of souls, the shortness of time, and the importance of eternity. Without this turn of mind, though a man would spend sixteen hours every day in his study, he may be a mere trifler. The greatest part of his application will be spent on what is least necessary, and his knowledge will chiefly prove of that sort which puffeth up, without communicating any real benefit. Gen. xli. 21. Psal. cxxvii. 2.

The chief means for attaining wisdom, and suitable gifts for the ministry, are, the holy scriptures and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water, the other the bucket with which we are to draw. And I believe you will find, by observation, that the man who is most frequent and fervent in prayer, and most devoted to the word of God, will shine and flourish above his fellows. Next to these, and derived from them, is meditation. By this I do not mean a stated exercise upon some one particular subject, so much as a disposition of mind to observe carefully what passes within us and around us; what we see, hear, and feel; and to apply all for the illustration and confirmation of the written word to us. In the use of these means, and an humble dependence upon the Lord in all the changing dispensations we pass through, our spiritual experience will enlarge; and this experience is the proper fund of our ministerial capacity, so far as it may be considered inherent in us. Prov. xvi. 23. Mat. xiii. 52. 1 John i. 3.

These means are of universal importance. The wisest can do nothing without them; the weakest shall not use them in vain. There are likewise subordinate means, which may be helpful, and should in general be attended to. Yet they ought not, I apprehend, to be considered as a *sine qua non* in a minister's call and fitness. The first preachers had them not, and some in the present day are enabled to do well without them. Under this head, I principally intend all that comes under the usual denomination of literature. A competent acquaintance with the learned languages, history, natural philosophy, &c. is very desirable. If these things are held in a proper subserviency, if they do not engross too much of our time, nor add fuel to the fire of that self importance which is our great snare, they may contribute to increase and enlarge our ideas, and facilitate our expressing ourselves with propriety. But these attainments, like riches, are attended with their peculiar temptations; and unless they are under the regulation of a sound judgment, and spiritual frame of mind, will prove, like Saul's armour to David, rather burdensome than useful in preaching. The reasons of preachers thus qualified are often

more ingenious than edifying, and rather set off the man, than commend the gospel of Christ.

As you desire my advice with respect to your future studies, I shall comply, without hesitation or ceremony.

The original scriptures well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them. There is, doubtless, a beauty, fulness, and spirit, in the originals, which the best translations do not always express. When a word or phrase admits of various senses, the translators can only preserve one; and it is not to be supposed, unless they were perfectly under the influence of the same infallible Spirit, that they should always prefer the best. Only be upon your guard, lest you should be tempted to think, that because you are master of the grammatical construction, and can tell the several acceptations of the words in the best authors, you are therefore and thereby master of the spiritual sense likewise. This you must derive from your experimental knowledge, and the influence and teaching of the Spirit of God.

Another thing which will much assist you in composing, and speaking properly and acceptably, is logic. This will teach you what properly belongs to your subject, and what may be best suppressed; and likewise to explain, divide, enumerate, and range your ideas to advantage. A lax, immethodical, disproportionate manner is to be avoided; yet beware of the contrary extreme. An affected starchiness and over-accuracy will fetter you, will make your discourse lean and dry, preclude an useful variety, and savour more of the school-lamp, than of that heavenly fire, which alone can make our meditations efficacious, and profitable either to ourselves or our hearers. The proper medium can hardly be taught by rule; experience, observation, and prayer, are the best guides.

As your inquiry seems chiefly to be, How to fill up your outlines! I would advise you to study the living, as well as the dead, or rather more. Converse much with experienced christians, and exercised souls. You will find advantage in this respect, not only from the wise, but from the weak of the flock. In the course of your acquaintance, you will meet with some in a backsliding state, some under temptations, some walking in darkness, others rejoicing in the light, &c. Observe how their spirits work, what they say, and how they reason in their several cases; what methods and arguments you find most successful in comforting the feeble-minded, raising up those who are cast down, and the like; and what answers they return. Compare these with the word of God, and your own heart. What you observe of ten persons in these different situations, may be applied to ten thousand. For though some

circumstances vary, the heart of man, the aids of grace, and the artifices of Satan, in general, are universally the same. And whenever you are to preach, remember that some of all these sorts will probably be before you, and each should have something said to their own peculiar case.

The tempted and distressed will be most probably relieved, by opening the various states and exercises of the heart, and by showing, from scriptural and other examples, that no new thing has befallen them. The careless and backsliders, who have made a profession, should be reminded of that blessedness they once spoke of, and warned of their danger. Those who are now upon the mount, should be cautioned to expect a change, and to guard against security and spiritual pride. To the dead in trespasses and sins (some such will be always present,) it is needful to preach the spirituality and sanction of the law, that they may be stirred up to seek Jesus. Of him all awakened souls love to hear much. Let him, therefore, be your capital subject. If you discuss some less essential topic, or bend all your strength to clear up some dark text, though you should display much learning and ingenuity, you will probably fall short of your main design, which I dare say, will be to promote the glory of God, and the good of souls.

You will likewise find advantage, by attending as much as you can on those preachers, whom God has blessed with much power, life, and success in their ministry; and in this you will do well not to confine yourself to any denomination or party; for the Spirit of the Lord is not confined. Different men have different gifts and talents. I would not wish you to be a slavish admirer of any man. Christ alone is our Master and Teacher. But study the excellencies of each; and if you observe a fault in any (for no human models are perfect,) you will see what you are yourself to avoid.

Your inquiries respecting my own experience on this subject, must be answered very briefly. I have long since learned, that if I was ever to be a minister, faith and prayer must make me one. I desire to seek the Lord's direction, both in the choice and management of subjects; but I do not expect it in a way of extraordinary impulse, but in endeavouring to avail myself, to the best of my judgment, of present circumstances. The converse I have with my people usually suggests what I am to preach to them. At first, my chief solicitude used to be, what I should find to say; I hope it is now, rather that I may not speak in vain. For the Lord has sent me here, not to acquire the character of a ready speaker, but to win souls to Christ, and to edify his people. As to preparation, I make little use of books, excepting the Bible and Concordance. Though I

preach without notes, I must first write more or less upon the subject. When I begin, I am at a loss how I shall proceed; but one thing insensibly offers itself to another; and in general, I believe, the most useful parts of my sermon come *novò*, while I am preaching. This is the sense of Luther's maxim, "*Bene prædicari bene studuisse.*" When I can find myself in frame and liberty for prayer, even else is comparatively easy.

I should be very glad if any thing offered, may afford you satisfaction. The sum of my advice is this: Examine your heart and views. Can you appeal to the work of the ministry, not for the sake of the world, but with an humble desire to promote the Redeemer's kingdom? If his providence has thus far concurred with you, trust him for your sufficiency of kind, and he will not disappoint you, but be near to strengthen you according to his promise. Depend not upon any cisterns hewn out for yourself, but rejoice that you have liberty to come to the fountain that is full, and always flowing. You must not have a mechanical sufficiency, such as art acquires by habit and exercise in their art. When you have preached well many times, this will be no security for the future. Yea, when you have been up to twenty years, should the Lord with his hand, you would be as much at a loss as the first.

If you lean upon books or men, you will be in fear and in danger of falling away from your own faculties and attainments. But if you stay yourself upon the Lord, he will not only make good your own views, but in time will give you a boldness and confidence in his goodness, and freedom from your present anxiety.

One thing more I must mention as relating to the subject: That a comfortableness for public service depends much upon the spirituality of our walk before God. Wisdom will not dwell with a man who is an assuming, a censorious, or a worldly man. But if it is our business, and our pleasure to contemplate Jesus, and to walk in his love, he will bless us; we shall be like a tree planted by a constant stream, and will prosper the work of our hands.—I am

LETTER III.

A letter to a friend, on the Question, whether the sins of believers shall be declared at the great day? or, how to understand the apostle's assertion, that all must appear before the judgment.

of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad?"
2 Cor. v. 10, compared with Rom. xiv. 12.

MY DEAR SIR,—My heart congratulates you. What changes and events many, in younger life, may be reserved to see, who can tell! But your pilgrimage is nearly finished; you stand upon the river's brink, with the city full in view, waiting and wishing for the appointed hour. You need not be anxious concerning your passage; for every circumstance attending it is already adjusted by infinite wisdom and love, and the King himself will be ready to receive you. While you continue here, I am glad to hear from you, and should be glad to contribute in any way or degree to your satisfaction, or even to show my willingness, if I can do no more. I can propose little more than the latter, by offering my thoughts on the subject you propose from 2 Cor. v. 10, and the apparent difficulty of understanding that passage, in full harmony with the many texts which seem expressly to assert, that the sins of believers are so forgiven as to be remembered no more.

There is doubtless, as you observe, a perfect consistence in every part of the word of God; the difficulties we meet with are wholly owing to the narrowness of our faculties, and the ignorance which, in some degree, is inseparable from our present state of imperfection. And we may, in general, rest satisfied with the thought, that there is a bright moment approaching, when the veil shall be wholly taken away. It is the part of faith to rest upon the plain declarations of Scripture, without indulging a blameable curiosity of knowing more than is clearly revealed; yet, while we humbly depend upon divine teaching, it is right to aim at as enlarged a sense of what is revealed as we can attain to. Every acquisition of this kind is more valuable than gold, especially respecting those points which have an immediate tendency to comfort and support us under the view of an approaching dissolution. The question you have proposed is undoubtedly of this nature.

May the Lord direct my thoughts and pen, that I may not "darken counsel by words without knowledge!" I have been looking over the passage you refer to in Dr. Ridgely, and think I might be well excused from saying any thing further on the subject, as he hath briefly and fully stated all the arguments that have occurred to me on either side of the question, and closes with a proper caution not to be peremptory in determining, but by attempting to be wise above what is written, I should betray my own folly. Yet, as you desire to have my thoughts, I must say something. I wish I may not give you

reason to think that this caution has been lost upon me.

I think all the great truths in which we are concerned, are clearly, and expressly laid down, not only in one, but in many places of scripture; but it sometimes happens, that here and there we meet with a text, which, in the first and obvious sound of the words, seems to speak differently from what is asserted more largely elsewhere; which texts, singly taken, afford some men their only ground for the hypothesis they maintain. Thus the Arians lay a great stress on John xiv. 28, and the Arminians on James ii. 24, &c. But their true interpretation is to be sought according to the analogy of faith. They are capable of a sense agreeable to the others, though the others are not intelligible in the sense they would fix upon these. In like manner, I would say, whatever may be the precise meaning of 2 Cor. v. 10, we are sure it cannot be designed to weaken what we are taught in almost every page, of the free, absolute and unalterable nature of a believer's justification; the benefit of which, as to the forgiveness of sin, is signified by the phrases of "blotting out,"—"not remembering,"—"casting behind the back,"—and "into the depths of the sea." The sins of a believer are so effectually removed, that even when, or if they are sought for, they cannot be found; for Jesus has borne them away: believers are complete in him, and clothed in his righteousness. They shall stand before God without spot or wrinkle. Who shall lay any thing to their charge!

But it is probable that those stray expressions chiefly, if not entirely, respect the guilt, imputation, and deserved consequences of sin.—None can suppose that the Lord will, or can forget the sins of his people, or that they can ever be hid from his all-comprehending view. Neither can I think they themselves will forget them. Their song is founded upon a recollection of their sins and their circumstances in this life, Rev. v. 9; and their love, and consequently, their happiness, seems inseparably connected with the consciousness of what they were, and what they had done, Luke vii. 47. And I think those are the sweetest moments in this life, when we have the clearest sense of our own sins, provided the sense of our acceptance in the Beloved is proportionably clear, and we feel the consolations of his love, notwithstanding all our transgressions. When we arrive in glory, unbelief and fear will cease for ever; our nearness to God, and communion with him, will be unspeakable beyond what we can now conceive. Therefore, the remembrance of our sins will be no abatement of our bliss, but rather the contrary. When Pharaoh and his host were alive, and pursuing them, the Israelites were terrified; but afterwards, when they saw their enemies

dead upon the shore, their joy and triumph were not abated, but heightened, by the consideration of their number.

With respect to our sins being made known to others, I acknowledge with you, that I could not now bear to have any of my fellow creatures made acquainted with what passes in my heart for a single day; but, I apprehend it is a part, and a proof of my present depravity, that I feel myself disposed to pay so great a regard to the judgment of men, while I am so little affected with what I am in the sight of a pure and holy God. But I believe that hereafter, when self shall be entirely rooted out, and my will perfectly united to the divine will, I should feel no reluctance, supposing it for the manifestation of his glorious grace, that men, angels, and devils, should know the very worst of me. Whether it will be so or no, I dare not determine. Perhaps the difficulty chiefly lies in the necessity of our being at present taught heavenly things by earthly. In the descriptions we have of the great day, allusion is made to what is most solemn in human transactions. The ideas of the judgment-seat, the great trumpet, of the book being opened, and the pleadings, Matt. xxv. 37—44, seem to be borrowed from the customs that obtain amongst men, to help our weak conceptions, rather than justly and fully to describe what will be the real process. Now, when we attempt to look into the unseen world, we carry our ideas of time and place, and sensible objects, along with us; and we cannot divest ourselves of them, or provide ourselves with better: yet, perhaps, they have as little relation to the objects we aim at, as the ideas which a man born blind acquires from what he hears and feels, have to the true nature of light and colours. Mr. Locke mentions one, who, after much thought and conversation, supposed he had got a tolerable notion of scarlet, and that it was something nearly resembling the sound of a trumpet. Perhaps, this is no improper emblem of the utmost we can attain to, when we are endeavouring to realize the solemnities of the judgment-day. What we mean by memory and reasoning, may possibly have no place in the world of spirits. We guess at something more suitable, perhaps, when we use the term intuition. But I apprehend we must die before we can fully understand what it signifies: perhaps, thoughts may be as intelligible there as words are here.

In a word, my dear Sir, if I have not given you satisfaction (I am sure I have not satisfied myself,) accept my apology in the words of a much wiser, and an inspired man: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it." Ere long we shall know: in the mean while our cause *is in sure hands*: we have a shepherd who *will guide us* below, an Advocate who will

receive and present us before the throne above. I trust we meet daily before the throne of grace; hereafter we shall meet in glory. The paper will allow no more. Believe me yours in the Lord, &c.

LETTER IV.

To Theron, on Family Worship.

SIR,—A neglect of family-prayer is, I am afraid, too common amongst professors in this day. I am glad that you consider it both as a duty and a privilege, and are by grace determined, that when you shall commence master of a family, you will worship God with all your house. It was Abraham's commendation, that he not only served the Lord himself, but was solicitous that his children and household might serve him likewise. I trust that he who inclines your heart to walk in the footsteps of faithful Abraham will bless you in the attempt, and give you peace in your dwelling; a mercy which is seldom enjoyed, which, indeed, can hardly be expected by those families which call not upon the Lord.

Though I readily comply with your request, and should be glad if I can offer any thing that may assist or animate you in your good purpose; I am afraid I shall not answer your expectations with regard to the particulars of your inquiry, concerning the most proper method of conducting family worship. The circumstances of families are so various, that no determinate rules can be laid down, nor has the word of God prescribed any; because, being of universal obligation, it is wisely and graciously accommodated to suit the different situations of his people. You must, therefore, as to circumstantialia, judge for yourself. You will do well to pursue such a method as you shall find most convenient to yourself and family, without scrupulously binding yourself, when the scripture has left you free.

We have no positive precept enjoining us any set time for prayer, nor even how often we should pray, either in public or private; though the expressions of, "continuing instant in prayer," "praying without ceasing," and the like, plainly intimate that prayer should be frequent. Daniel prayed three times a day; which the Psalmist speaks of as his practice likewise; and in one place declares his purpose of praising God seven times a day. This last expression is, perhaps, indefinite; not precisely seven times, but very often. Indeed, a person who lives in the exercise of faith and love, and who finds, by experience, that it is good for him to draw nigh to God, will not want to be told how often he must pray, any more than how often

he must converse with an earthly friend. Those whom we love, we love to be much with. Love is the best casuist, and either resolves or prevents a thousand scruples and questions, which may perplex those who only serve God from principles of constraint and fear. And a believer will account those his happiest days, when he has most leisure, and most liberty of spirit, for the exercise of prayer. However, I think family prayer cannot be said to be stated, unless it be performed at least daily, and when unavoidable hinderances do not prevent, twice a day. Though all times and seasons are alike to the Lord, and his ear is always open, whenever we have a heart to call upon him; yet to us there is a peculiar suitableness in beginning and closing the day with prayer: in the morning, to acknowledge his goodness in our preservation through the night, and entreat his presence and blessing on our persons and callings in the course of the day; and at night, to praise him for the mercies of the day past, to humble ourselves before him for what has been amiss, to wait on him for a renewed manifestation of his pardoning love, and to commit ourselves and our concerns to his care and protection while we sleep. You will of course choose those hours when you are least liable to be incommoded by the calls of business, and when the family can assemble with the most convenience; only I would observe, that it greatly preserves regularity and good order in a house, to keep constantly to the same hours when it is practicable; and likewise, that it is best not to defer evening-prayer till late, if it can be well avoided, lest some who join in the exercise, and perhaps the person himself who leads in it, should be too weary or sleepy to give a due attention. On this account, I should advise to have family-prayer before supper, where people have the choice and disposal of their own hours.

I think, with you, that it is very expedient and proper that reading a portion of the word of God should be ordinarily a part of our family-worship; so likewise, to sing a hymn or psalm, or part of one, at discretion, provided there are some persons in the family who have enough of the musical ear and voice to conduct the singing in a tolerable manner; otherwise, perhaps, it may be better omitted. If you read and sing, as well as pray, care should be taken that the combined services do not run into an inconvenient length.

The chief thing to be attended to is, that it may be a spiritual service; and the great evil to be dreaded and guarded against in the exercise of every duty that returns frequently upon us, is formality. If a stated course of family-prayer is kept up as constantly in its season as the striking of the clock, it may come in time to be almost as

mechanically performed, unless we are continually looking to the Lord to keep our hearts alive. It most frequently happens, that one or more members of a family are unconverted persons. When there are such present, a great regard should be had to them, and every thing conducted with a view to their edification, that they may not be disgusted, or wearied, or tempted to think that it is little more than the fashion or custom of the house; which will probably be the case, unless the master of the family is lively and earnest in the performance of the duty, and likewise circumspect and consistent in every part of his behaviour at other times. By leading in the worship of God before children, servants, strangers, a man gives bond, as it were, for his behaviour, and adds strength to every other motive which should engage him to abstain from all appearance of evil. It should be a constant check upon our language and tempers in the presence of our families, to consider that we began the day, and propose to end it, with them in prayer. The Apostle Peter uses this argument to influence the conduct of husbands and wives towards each other; and it is equally applicable to all the members of a family; "That your prayers be not hindered:" that is, either prevented and cut off, or despoiled of all life and efficacy, by the ferment of sinful passions. On the other hand, the proper exercise of family-prayer, when recommended by a suitable deportment, is a happy means of instructing children and servants in the great truths of religion, of softening their prejudices, and inspiring them with a temper of respect and affection, which will dispose them to cheerful obedience, and make them unwilling to grieve or offend. In this instance, as in every other, we may observe, that the Lord's commands to his people are not arbitrary appointments, but that, so far as they are conscientiously complied with, they have an evident tendency and suitableness to promote our own advantage. He requires us to acknowledge him in our families, for our own sakes; not because he has need of our poor services, but because we have need of his blessing, and without the influence of his grace (which is promised to all who seek it) are sure to be unhappy in ourselves and in all our connexions.

When husband and wife are happily partakers of the same faith, it seems expedient, and for their mutual good, that, besides their private devotions, and joining in family prayer, they should pray together. They have many wants, mercies, and concerns, in common with each other, and distinct from the rest of the family. The manner in which they should improve a little time in this joint exercise cannot well be prescribed by a third person; yet I will venture to suggest one thing: and the rather as I do not

of their graves, if we had the command and promise of God to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect his power would accompany our word. The vision of Ezekiel, chap. xxxvii. may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a gospel minister. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord's question to the prophet, "Can these dry bones live!" Our resource, like that of the prophet, is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord: "O Lord, thou knowest, impossible as it is to us, it is easy for thee to raise them unto life; therefore we renounce our own reasonings; and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at thy bidding, as if they were alive, and say, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! The means is our part, the work is thine, and to thee be all the praise." The dry bones could not hear the prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived, but the word was spoken to them considered as dry and dead.

It is true the Lord can, and I hope he often does make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly to them, only the truths of the gospel are declared in their hearing; but he who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of the topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave themselves condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which he often effects the purposes of his grace; though none of the means of grace by which he ordinarily works, can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of his Spirit. Should we admit, that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would, perhaps, extend too far, even to prove the impropriety of all exhortation universally: for when we invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Jesus, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, "to repent and to do their first works;" yea, when we exhort believers "to walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory;" in each of these cases we press them to acts for which they have no inherent power of their own; and unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the words to their hearts, we do but speak to the air; and our endeavours can have no more effect in these instances, than if we were to say to a dead body, "Arise, and walk." For an exertion of divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than the breaking of a hard heart;

and only he who has begun the good work of grace, is able either to revive or to maintain it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways: they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences, that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for want of power, but for want of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning till night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes. They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord only can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the gospel-promises, to seek to him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do that for them, which they cannot do for themselves, and who has said, "Him, that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Perhaps it will not be easily proved, that intreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner's salvation, from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should, undoubtedly, endeavour to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of the scripture constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of consistency may fetter our sentiments, and greatly preclude our usefulness. We need not wish to be more consistent than the inspired writers, nor be afraid of speaking, as they have spoken before us. We may easily perplex ourselves, and our hearers by nice reasonings on the nature of human liberty, and the divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisitions are better avoided. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects, till we arrive in the world of light. In the mean time, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favours you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with his constraining love, many little curious distinctions,

and gracious Master; who, though he will make us feel our weakness and vileness, will not suffer us to sink under it. His grace is sufficient for us; and if he favours us with an humble and dependant spirit, a single eye and a simple heart, he will make every difficulty give way, and mountains will sink into plains before his power.

You have known something of Satan's devices while you were in private life: how he has envied your privileges, assaulted your peace, and laid snares for your feet: though the Lord would not suffer him to hurt you, he has permitted him to sift and tempt, and shoot his fiery arrows at you. Without some of this discipline, you would have been very unfit for that part of your office which consists in speaking a word in season to weary and heavy-laden souls. But you may now expect to hear from him, and to be beset by his power and subtilty in a different manner. You are now to be placed in the forefront of the battle, and to stand as it were, for his mark: so far as he can prevail against you now, not yourself only, but many others, will be affected; many eyes will be upon you; and if you take a wrong step, or are ensnared into a wrong spirit, you will open the mouths of the adversaries wider, and grieve the hearts of believers more sensibly than if the same things had happened to you while you was a layman. The word of the ministry is truly honourable; but, like the post of honour in a battle, it is attended with peculiar dangers; therefore the apostle cautions Timothy, "Take heed to thyself, and to thy doctrine." To thyself in the first place, and then to thy doctrine; the latter without the former would be impracticable and vain.

You have need to be upon your guard in whatever way your first attempts to preach the gospel may seem to operate. If you should (as may probably be the case where the truth has been little known) meet with much opposition, you will perhaps find it a heavier trial than you are aware of; but I speak of it only as it might draw forth your corruptions, and give Satan advantage against you, and this may be two ways; first, by emitting your spirit against opposers, so as to speak in anger, to set them at defiance, or retaliate upon them in their own way; which, besides bringing guilt upon your conscience, would of course increase your difficulties, and impede your usefulness. A violent opposition against ministers and professors of the gospel is sometimes expressed by the devil's roaring, and some people think no good can be done without it. It is allowed, that men who love darkness will show their helike of the light; but, I believe, if the wisdom and meekness of the friends of the gospel had been always equal to their good intentions and zeal, the devil would not have had opportunity of roaring so loud as he has

sometimes done. The subject-matter of the gospel is offence enough to the carnal heart; we must therefore expect opposition; but we should not provoke or despise it, or do any thing to aggravate it. A patient continuance in well-doing, a consistency in character, and an attention to return kind offices for hard treatment, will, in course of time, greatly soften the spirit of opposition; and instances are to be found of ministers, who are treated with some respect, even by those persons in their parishes who are most averse to their doctrine. When the apostle directs us, "If it be possible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men," he seems to intimate, that though it be difficult, it is not wholly impracticable. We cannot change the rooted prejudices of their hearts against the gospel; but it is possible, by the Lord's blessing, to stop their mouths, and make them ashamed of discovering it, when they behold our good conversation in Christ. And it is well worth our while to cultivate this outward peace, provided we do not purchase it at the expense of truth and faithfulness; for ordinarily we cannot hope to be useful to our people, unless we give them reason to believe that we love them, and have their interest at heart. Again, opposition will hurt you, if it should give you an idea of your own importance, and lead you to dwell with a secret self-approbation upon your own faithfulness and courage in such circumstances. If you are able to stand your ground uninfluenced either by the favour or the fear of men, you have reason to give glory to God; but remember, that you cannot thus stand an hour, unless he upholds you. It shows a strong turn of mind, when we are very ready to speak of our trials and difficulties of this kind, and of our address and resolution in encountering them. A natural stiffness of spirit, with a desire to have self taken notice of, may make a man willing to endure those kind of hardships, though he has but little grace in exercise; but true christian fortitude, from a consciousness that we speak the truths of God, and are supported by his power is a very different thing.

If you should meet with but little opposition, or if the Lord should be pleased to make your enemies your friends, you will probably be in danger from the opposite quarter. If opposition has hurt many, popularity has wounded more. To say the truth, I am in some pain for you. Your natural abilities are considerable; you have been diligent in your studies; your zeal is warm, and your spirit is lively. With these advantages, I expect to see you a popular preacher. The more you are so, the greater will your field of usefulness be: but, alas! you cannot yet know to what it will expose you. It is like walking upon ice. When you shall see an attentive congregation hanging upon your words;

when you shall hear the well-meant, but often injudicious, commendations of those to whom the Lord shall make you useful; when you shall find, upon an intimation of your preaching in a strange place, people thronging from all parts to hear you, how will your heart feel? It is easy for me to advise you to be humble, and for you to acknowledge the propriety of the advice; but while human nature remains in its present state, there will be almost the same connection between popularity and pride, as between fire and gunpowder; they cannot meet without an explosion, at least, not unless the gunpowder is kept very damp. So unless the Lord is constantly moistening our hearts (if I may so speak) by the influences of his Spirit, popularity will soon set us in a blaze. You will hardly find a person, who has been exposed to this fiery trial, without suffering loss. Those whom the Lord loves, he is able to keep, and he will keep them upon the whole; yet by such means, and in a course of such narrow escapes, that they shall have reason to look upon their deliverance as no less than miraculous. Sometimes, if his ministers are not watchful against the first impressions of pride, he permits it to gather strength; and then it is but a small thing, that a few of their admirers may think them more than men in the pulpit, if they are left to commit such mistakes when out of it, as the weakest of the flock can discover and pity. And this will certainly be the case, while pride and self-sufficiency have the ascendant. Beware, my friend, of mistaking the ready exercise of gifts for the exercise of grace. The minister may be assisted in public for the sake of his hearers; and there is something in the nature of our public work, when surrounded by a concourse of people, that is suited to draw forth the exertion of our abilities, and to engage our attention in the outward services, when the frame of the heart may be far from being right in the sight of the Lord. When Moses smote the rock, the water followed; yet he spoke unadvisedly with his lips, and greatly displeased the Lord. However, the congregation was not disappointed for his fault, nor was he put to shame before them; but he was humbled for it afterwards. They are happy whom the Lord preserves in some degree humble, without leaving them to expose themselves to the observation of men, and to receive such wounds as are seldom healed without leaving a deep scar. But even these have much to suffer. Many distressing exercises you will probably meet with, upon the best supposition, to preserve in you a due sense of your own unworthiness, and to convince you, that your ability, your acceptance, and your usefulness, depend upon a power beyond your own. Sometimes, perhaps, you will feel such an amazing difference between the frame of your

spirit in public and in private, when the eyes of men are not upon you, as will make you, almost ready to conclude, that you are no better than a hypocrite, a mere stage-player, who derives all his pathos and exertion from the sight of the audience. At other times, you will find such a total emptiness and indisposition of mind, that former seasons of liberty in preaching will appear to you like the remembrance of a dream, and you will hardly be able to persuade yourself you shall ever be capable of preaching again; the scriptures will appear to you like a sealed book, and no text or subject afford any light or opening to determine your choice; and this perplexity may not only seize you in the study, but accompany you to the pulpit. If you are enabled at some times to speak to the people with power, and to resemble Samson, when, in the greatness of his strength, he bore away the gates of the city, you will, perhaps, at others, appear before them like Samson when his locks were shorn, and he stood in fetters. So that you need not tell the people you have no sufficiency in yourself; for they will readily perceive it without your information. These things are hard to bear; yet successful popularity is not to be preserved upon easier terms; and if they are but sanctified to hide pride from you, you will have reason to number them amongst your choicest mercies.

I have but just made an entrance upon the subject of the difficulties and dangers attending the ministry. But my paper is full. If you are willing I should proceed, let me know, and I believe I can easily find enough to fill another sheet. May the Lord make you wise and watchful! That he may be the light of your eye, the strength of your arm, and the joy of your heart, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER VI.

On the Practical Influence of Faith.

SIR,—The use and importance of faith, as it respects a sinner's justification before God, has been largely insisted on; but it is likewise of great use and importance in the daily concerns of life. It gives evidence and subsistence to things not seen, and realizes the great truths of the gospel, so as that they become abiding and living principles of support and direction, while we are passing through this wilderness. Thus, it is as the eye and the hand, without which we cannot take one step with certainty, or attempt any service with success. It is to be wished, that this practical exercise of faith were duly attended to by all professors. We should not then meet with so many cases that put

us to a stand, and leave us at a great difficulty to reconcile, what we see in some, of whom we would willingly hope well, with what we read in scripture, of the inseparable concomitants of a true and lively faith. For how can we but be staggered, when we hear persons speaking the language of assurance, that they know their acceptance with God through Christ, and have not the least doubt of their interest in all the promises; while, at the same time, we see them under the influence of unsanctified tempers, of a proud, passionate, positive, worldly, selfish, or churlish carriage!

It is not only plain from the general tenor of scripture, that a covetous, a proud, or a censorious spirit, are no more consistent with the spirit of the gospel, than drunkenness or whoredom; but there are many express texts directly pointed against the evils which too often are found amongst professors. Thus the apostle James assures us, "That if any man seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, his religion is vain;" and the apostle John, "That if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" and he seems to apply this character to any man, whatever his profession or pretences may be, "who having this world's goods, and seeing his brother have need, shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him." Surely these texts more than intimate, that the faith which justifies the soul, does likewise receive from Jesus grace for grace, whereby the heart is purified, and the conversation regulated as becomes the gospel of Christ.

There are too many who would have the ministry of the gospel restrained to the privileges of believers; and when the fruits of faith, and the tempers of the mind, which should be manifest in those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," are inculcated, think they sufficiently evade all that is said, by calling it legal preaching. I would be no advocate for legal preaching; but we must not be deterred by the fear of a hard word, from declaring the whole counsel of God; and we have the authority and example of St. Paul, who was a champion of the doctrines of free grace, to animate us in exhorting professors to "walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory." And indeed the expression of a believer's privilege is often misunderstood. It is a believer's privilege to walk with God in the exercise of faith, and, by the power of his Spirit, to mortify the whole body of sin; to gain a growing victory over the world and self, and to make daily advances in conformity to the mind that was in Christ. And nothing that we profess to know, believe, or hope for, deserves the name of a privilege, farther than we are influenced by it to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness. Whosoever is possessed of true faith, will not confine

his inquiries to the single point of his acceptance with God, or be satisfied with the distant hope of heaven hereafter. He will likewise be solicitous how he may glorify God in the world, and enjoy such foretastes of heaven as are attainable while he is yet upon earth.

Faith, then, in its practical exercise, has for its object the whole word of God, and forms its estimate of all things with which the soul is at present concerned, according to the standard of scripture. Like Moses, it "endures, as seeing him who is invisible." When our Lord was upon earth, and conversed with his disciples, their eyes and hearts were fixed upon him. In danger he was their defender; their guide when in perplexity; and to him they looked for the solution of all their doubts, and the supply of all their wants. He is now withdrawn from our eyes; but faith sets him still before us for the same purposes, and, according to its degree, with the same effects, as if we actually saw him. His spiritual presence, apprehended by faith, is a restraint from evil, an encouragement to every service, and affords a present refuge and help in every time of trouble. To this is owing the delight a believer takes in ordinances, because there he meets his Lord; and to this likewise it is owing, that his religion is not confined to public occasions; but he is the same person in secret as he appears to be in the public assembly; for he worships him who sees in secret, and dares appeal to his all-seeing eye for the sincerity of his desires and intentions. By faith he is enabled to use prosperity with moderation; and knows and feels, that what the world calls good is of small value, unless it is accompanied with the presence and blessing of Him whom his soul loveth. And his faith upholds him under all trials, by assuring him that every dispensation is under the direction of his Lord; that chastisements are a token of his love; that the season, measure, and continuance of his sufferings, are appointed by infinite wisdom, and designed to work for his everlasting good; and that grace and strength shall be afforded him, according to his day. Thus, his heart being fixed, trusting in the Lord, to whom he has committed all his concerns, and knowing that his best interests are safe, he is not greatly afraid of evil tidings, but enjoys a stable peace in the midst of a changing world. For though he cannot tell what a day may bring forth, he believes that He, who has invited and enabled him to cast all his cares upon him, will suffer nothing to befall him but what shall be made subservient to his chief desires, the glory of God in the sanctification and final salvation of his soul. And if, through the weakness of his flesh, he is liable to be startled by the first impression of a sharp and sudden trial, he quickly flees to his strong refuge, remembers it is the Lord's doing, resigns himself

to his will, and patiently expects a happy issue.

By the same principle of faith, a believer's conduct is regulated towards his fellow-creatures; and in the discharge of the several duties and relations of life, his great aim is to please God, and to let his light shine in the world. He believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness, and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord. This gives him an habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit. Humbled under the sense of much forgiveness to himself, he finds it easy to forgive others, if he has aught against any. A due sense of what he is in the sight of the Lord, preserves him from giving way to anger, positiveness, and resentment. He is not easily provoked, but is "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;" and if offended, easy to be entreated, and disposed, not only to yield to a reconciliation, but to seek it. As Jesus is his life, and righteousness, and strength, so he is his pattern. By faith he contemplates and studies this great exemplar of philanthropy. With a holy ambition, he treads in the footsteps of his Lord and Master, and learns of him to be meek and lowly, to requite injuries with kindness, and to overcome evil with good. From the same views, by faith he derives a benevolent spirit, and, according to his sphere and ability, he endeavours to promote the welfare of all around him. The law of love being thus written in his heart, and his soul set at liberty from the low and narrow dictates of a selfish spirit, his language will be truth, and his dealings equity. His promise may be depended on, without the interposition of an oath, bond, or witness; and the feelings of his own heart, under the directions of an enlightened conscience, and the precepts of scripture, prompt him to do unto others as he would desire they, in the like circumstances, should do unto him. If he is a master, he is gentle and compassionate; if a servant, he is faithful and obedient; for in either relation he acts by faith, under the eye of his Master in heaven. If he is a trader, he neither dares nor wishes to take advantage, either of the ignorance or the necessities of those with whom he deals. And the same principle of love influences his whole conversation. A sense of his own infirmities makes him candid to those of others. He will not readily believe reports to their prejudice, without sufficient proof; and even then, he will not repeat them, unless he is lawfully called to it. He believes that the precept, "Speak evil of no man," is founded upon the same authority with those which forbid committing adultery or murder, and therefore he "keeps his tongue as with a bridle."

Lastly, faith is of daily use as a preservative from a compliance with the corrupt customs and maxims of the world. The believer though in the world, is not of it. By

faith he triumphs over its smiles and enticements; he sees that all that is in the world, suited to gratify the desires of the flesh or the eye, is not only to be avoided as sinful, but as incompatible with his best pleasures. He will mix with the world so far as is necessary, in the discharge of the duties of that station of life in which the providence of God has placed him, but no farther. His leisure and inclinations are engaged in a different pursuit. They who fear the Lord are his chosen companions; and the blessings he derives from the word, and throne, and ordinances of grace, make him look upon the poor pleasures and amusements of those who live without God in the world with a mixture of disdain and pity; and by faith he is proof against its frowns. He will obey God rather than man. He will "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will rather reprove them." And if, upon this account, he should be despised and injuriously treated, whatever loss he suffers in such a cause, he accounts his gain, and esteems such disgrace his glory.

I am not aiming to draw a perfect character, but to show the proper effects of that faith which justifies, which purifies the heart, which worketh by love, and overcomes the world. An habitual endeavour to possess such a frame of spirit, and thus to adorn the gospel of Christ, and that with growing success, is what I am persuaded you are not a stranger to; and I am afraid that they who can content themselves with aiming at any thing short of this in their profession, are too much strangers to themselves, and to the nature of that liberty wherewith Jesus has promised to make his people free. That you may go on from strength to strength, increasing in the light and image of our Lord and Saviour, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER VI,

On the Propriety of a Ministerial Address to the Unconverted.

SIR,—In a late conversation, you desired my thoughts concerning a scriptural and consistent manner of addressing the consciences of unawakened sinners in the course of your ministry. It is a point on which many eminent ministers have been, and are not a little divided; and it therefore becomes me to propose my sentiments with modesty and caution, so far as I am constrained to differ from any, from whom, in general, I would be glad to learn.

Some think that it is sufficient to preach the great truths of the word of God in their hearing; to set forth the utterly ruined and helpless state of fallen man by nature, and

the appointed method of salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and then to leave the application entirely to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the dark understandings of sinners, and enable them to receive, in a due manner, the doctrines of either the law or the gospel. And they apprehend, that all exhortations, arguments, and motives, addressed to those who are supposed to be still under the influence of a carnal mind, are inconsistent with the principles of free grace, and the acknowledged inability of such persons to perform any spiritual acts; and that, therefore, the preachers who, avowing the doctrines of free grace, do, notwithstanding, plead and expostulate with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract in their application what they had laboured to establish in the course of their sermons.

There are others, who, though they would be extremely unwilling to derogate from the free grace and sovereign power of God in the great work of conversion, or in the least degree to encourage the mistaken notion which every unconverted person has of his own power; yet think it their duty to deal with sinners as rational and moral agents; and as such, besides declaring the counsel of God in a doctrinal way, to warn them by the terrors of the Lord, and to beseech them, by his tender mercies, that they receive not the grace of God in a preached gospel in vain. Nor can it be denied, but that some of them, when deeply affected with the worth of souls, and the awful importance of eternal things, have sometimes, in the warmth of their hearts, dropped unguarded expressions, and such as have been justly liable to exception.

If we were to decide to which of these different methods of preaching the preference is due, by the discernible effects of each, it will, perhaps, appear in fact, without making any invidious comparisons, that those ministers whom the Lord has honoured with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have generally been led to adopt the more popular way of exhortation or address; while they who have been studiously careful to avoid any direct application to sinners, as unnecessary and improper, if they have not been altogether without seals to their ministry, yet their labours have been more owned in building up those who have already received the knowledge of the truth, than in adding to their number. Now, as "he that winneth souls is wise," and as every faithful labourer has a warm desire of being instrumental in raising the dead in sin to a life of righteousness, this seems at least a presumptive argument in favour of those who, besides stating the doctrines of the gospel, endeavour, by earnest persuasions and expostulations, to impress them upon the

hearts of their hearers, and intreat and warn them to consider "how they shall escape, if they neglect so great salvation." For it is not easy to conceive, that the Lord should most signally bear testimony in favour of that mode of preaching which is least consistent with the truth, and with itself.

But not to insist on this, nor to rest the cause on the authority or examples of men, the best of whom are imperfect and fallible, let us consult the scriptures, which, as they furnish us with the whole subject-matter of our ministry, so they afford us perfect precepts and patterns for its due and orderly dispensation. With respect to the subject of our inquiry, the examples of our Lord Christ, and of his authorised ministers, the apostles, are both our rule and our warrant. The Lord Jesus was the great preacher of free grace, "who spake as never man spake;" and his ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy-laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared, that none could come unto him, unless drawn and taught of God; John vi. 44—46. And yet he often speaks to sinners in terms, which, if they were not known to be his, might perhaps, be censured as inconsistent and legal; John vi. 27; Luke xiii. 24—27; John xii. 35.—It appears, both from the context and the tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken not to his disciples, but to the multitude. The apostles copied from their Lord: they taught, that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought, and that "it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God who showeth mercy;" yet they plainly call upon sinners (and that before they had given evident signs that they were pricked to the heart, as Acts iii. 31.) "to repent, and to turn from their vanities to the living God;" Acts iii. 19, and xiv. 15, and xvii. 30.—Peter's advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point: for though he perceived him to be "in the very gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," he exhorted him "to repent, and to pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven." It may be presumed, that we cannot have stronger evidence, that any of our hearers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus; and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the apostle's example.

You have been told, that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which, a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary: and that therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave. To this it may be answered, that we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to call the dead out

of their graves, if we had the command and promise of God to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect his power would accompany our word. The vision of Ezekiel, chap. xxxvii. may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a gospel minister. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord's question to the prophet, "Can these dry bones live!" Our resource, like that of the prophet, is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord: "O Lord, thou knowest, impossible as it is to us, it is easy for thee to raise them unto life; therefore we renounce our own reasonings; and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at thy bidding, as if they were alive, and say, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! The means is our part, the work is thine, and to thee be all the praise." The dry bones could not hear the prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived, but the word was spoken to them considered as dry and dead.

It is true the Lord can, and I hope he often does make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly to them, only the truths of the gospel are declared in their hearing; but he who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of the topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave themselves condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which he often effects the purposes of his grace; though none of the means of grace by which he ordinarily works, can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of his Spirit. Should we admit, that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would, perhaps, extend too far, even to prove the impropriety of all exhortation universally: for when we invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Jesus, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, "to repent and to do their first works;" yea, when we exhort believers "to walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory;" in each of these cases we press them to acts for which they have no inherent power of their own; and unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the words to their hearts, we do but speak to the air; and our endeavours can have no more effect in these instances, than if we were to say to a dead body, "Arise, and walk." *For an exertion of divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than the breaking of a hard heart;*

and only he who has begun the good work of grace, is able either to revive or to maintain it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways: they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences, that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for want of power, but for want of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning till night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes. They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord only can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the gospel-promises, to seek to him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do that for them, which they cannot do for themselves, and who has said, "Him, that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Perhaps it will not be easily proved, that intreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner's salvation, from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should, undoubtedly, endeavour to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of the scripture constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of consistency may fetter our sentiments, and greatly preclude our usefulness. We need not wish to be more consistent than the inspired writers, nor be afraid of speaking, as they have spoken before us. We may easily perplex ourselves, and our hearers by nice reasonings on the nature of human liberty, and the divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisitions are better avoided. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects, till we arrive in the world of light. In the mean time, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favours you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with his con-
straining love, many little curious distinctions

which amused you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words; and while your bowels yearn over poor sinners, you will not hesitate a moment, whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, Dr. Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners, the running title to which is, "Exhortations unto believing." It is in his Exposition of the 130th Psalm, from p. 242, to 247, London edition, 1609, which I recommend to your attentive consideration. I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

On the Inward Witness to the Ground and Reality of Faith.

SIR.—I readily offer you my thoughts on 1 John v. 10, "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself;" though, perhaps, you will think I am writing a sermon rather than a letter. If we believe in the Son of God, whatever trials we may meet with in the present life, our best concerns are safe, and our happiness is sure. If we do not, whatever else we have, or seem to have, we are in a state of condemnation; and living and dying so, must perish. Thousands, it is to be feared, persuade themselves that they are believers, though they cannot stand the test of scripture. And there are many real believers, who, through the prevalence of remaining unbelief and the temptations of Satan, form hard conclusions against themselves though the scripture speaks peace to them. But how does this correspond with the passage before us which asserts universally, "He that believeth, hath the witness in himself!" for can a man have a witness in himself and yet not know it? It may be answered, The evidence, in its own nature, is sufficient and infallible; but we are very apt, when we would form a judgment of ourselves, to superadd rules and marks of trial which are not given us, for that purpose, in the Bible. That the word and Spirit of God do witness for his children, is a point in which many are agreed, who are far from being agreed as to the nature and manner of that witness. It is, therefore, very desirable rightly to understand the evidence by which we are to judge whether we are believers or not.

The importance and truth of the gospel-salvation is witnessed to in heaven, by "the Father, the Word, and the Spirit." It is witnessed to on earth, by "the Spirit, the water, and the blood," verses 7 and 8. The Spirit, in verse 8, I apprehend, denotes a divine light in the understanding, communicated by the Spirit of God, enabling the soul

to perceive and approve the truth. The water seems to intend the powerful influence of this knowledge and light, in the work of sanctification. And the blood, the application of the blood of Jesus to the conscience, relieving it from guilt and fear, and imparting a "peace which passes all understanding." And he that believeth hath this united testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, not by hearsay only, but in himself. According to the measure of his faith (for faith has various degrees) he has a living proof that the witness is true, by the effects wrought in his own heart.

These things, which God has joined together are too often attempted to be separated. Attempts of this kind have been a principal source and cause of most of the dangerous errors and mistakes which are to be found among professors of religion. Some say much concerning the Spirit, and lay claim to an inward light, whereby they think they know the things of God. Others lay great stress upon the water; maintaining a regular conversation, abstaining from the defilements of the world, and aiming at a mastery over their natural desires and tempers; but neither the one nor the other appear to be duly sensible of the value of the blood of atonement, as the sole ground of their acceptance, and the spring of their life and strength. Others, again, are all for the blood; can speak much of Jesus, and his blood and righteousness; though it does not appear that they are truly spiritually enlightened to perceive the beauty and harmony of gospel-truths, or that they pay a due regard to that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. But Jesus came, not by water only, or by blood only, but by water and blood; and the Spirit bears witness to both, because the Spirit is truth. The water alone affords but a cold starched form of godliness, destitute of that enlivening power which is derived from a knowledge of the preciousness of Jesus, as the Lamb that was slain. And if any talk of the blood without the water, they do but turn the grace of God into licentiousness; so, likewise, to pretend to the Spirit, and at the same time to have low thoughts of Jesus, is a delusion and vanity; for the true Spirit testifies and takes of his glory, and presents it to the soul. But the real believer receives the united testimony, and has the witness in himself that he does so.

To have the witness in ourselves, is to have the truths that are declared in the scripture revealed in our hearts. This brings an experimental conviction, which may be safely depended on, that "we have received the grace of God in truth." A man born blind may believe that the sun is bright upon the testimony of another; but if he should obtain his sight, he would have the witness in himself. Believing springs from a sense

and perception of the truths of the gospel; and whoever hath this spiritual perception is a believer. He has a witness in himself. He has received the Spirit; his understanding is enlightened, whereby he sees things to be as they are described in the word of God, respecting his own state by sin, and the utter impossibility of his obtaining relief by any other means than those proposed in the gospel. These things are hidden from us by nature. He has likewise received the blood. The knowledge of sin, and its demerits, if alone, would drive us to despair; but by the same light of the Spirit, Jesus is apprehended as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour. All that is declared concerning his person, offices, love, sufferings, and obedience, is understood and approved. Here the wounded and weary soul finds healing and rest. Then the apostle's language is adopted, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He has likewise received the water, considered as the emblem of sanctification. To a believer, all that the scripture teaches concerning the nature, beauty, and necessity of holiness, as a living principle in the heart, carries conviction and evidence. A deliverance from the power, as well as from the guilt of sin, appears to be an important, and essential part of salvation. He sees his original and his proper happiness, that nothing less than communion with God and conformity to him, is worth his pursuit. And therefore he can say, "My soul thirsteth for thee; I delight in the law of God after the inward man." In a word, his judgment and his choice are formed upon a new spiritual taste, derived from the written word, and correspondent with it, as the musical ear is adapted to relish harmony: so that what God has forbidden, appears hateful; what he has commanded, necessary; what he has promised, desirable; and what he has revealed, glorious. Whoever has these perceptions, has the witness in himself, that he has been taught of God, and believes in his Son.

If you think this explanation is agreeable to the scripture, you will be satisfied that the witness spoken of in this passage, is very different from what some persons understand it to be. It is not an impulse, or strong persuasion impressed upon us in a way of which we can give no account, that "we are the children of God," and that our sins are freely forgiven; nor is the powerful application of a particular text of scripture necessary to produce it; neither is it always connected with a very lively, and sensible comfort. These things, in some persons, and instances, may accompany the witness or testimony we are speaking of, but do not properly belong to it; and they may be, and often have been, counterfeited. But what I have described is *inimitable and infallible*; it is undubitably, as

the magicians confessed of the miracles of Moses, the finger of God, as certainly the effect of his divine power as the creation of the world. It is true, many who have this witness walk in darkness, and are harassed with many doubts and perplexities concerning their state; but this is not because the witness is not sufficient to give them satisfaction, but because they do not account it so; being misled by the influence of self-will and a legal spirit, they overlook this evidence as too simple, and expect something extraordinary; at least, they think they cannot be right, unless they are led in the same way in which the Lord has been pleased to lead others, with whom they may have conversed. But the Lord the Spirit is sovereign and free in his operations; and though he gives to all who are the subjects of his grace, the same views of sin, of themselves, and of the Saviour; yet with respect to the circumstances of his work, there is, as in the features of our faces, such an amazing variety, that perhaps no two persons can be found whose experiences have been exactly alike: but, as the apostle says, that "he that believeth," that is, whosoever believeth, without exception, "has the witness in himself;" it must, consequently, arise from what is common to them all, and not from what is peculiar to a few.

Before I conclude, I would make two or three observations. In the first place, I think it is plain, that the supposition of a real believer's living in sin, or taking encouragement from the gospel so to do, is destitute of the least foundation in truth, and can only proceed from an ignorance of the subject. Sin is the burden under which he groans; and he would account nothing short of a deliverance from it worthy the name of salvation. A principal part of his evidence, that he is a believer, arises from that abhorrence of sin which he habitually feels. It is true, sin still dwelleth in him; but he loathes and resists it: upon this account he is in a state of continual warfare; if he was not so, he could not have the witness in himself, that he is born of God.

Again, from hence arises a solid evidence, that the scripture is indeed the word of God, because it so exactly describes what is exemplified in the experience of all who are subjects of a work of grace. While we are in a natural state, it is to us as a sealed book; though we can read it, and perhaps assent to the facts, we can no more understand our own concerns in what we read, than if it was written in an unknown tongue. But when the mind is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the scripture addresses us as it were by name, explains every difficulty under which we laboured, and proposes an adequate and effectual remedy for the relief of all our wants and fears.

Lastly, it follows, that the hope of a believer, is built upon a foundation that cannot be shaken, though it may, and will be, assaulted. It does not depend upon occasional and changeable frames, upon any that is precarious and questionable, but upon a correspondence and agreement with the written word. Nor does this agreement depend upon a train of laboured arguments and deductions, but is self-evident, as light is to the eye, to every person who has a real participation of the grace of God. It is equally suited to all capacities; by this the unlearned are enabled to know their election of God, and to "rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory." And the wisest, if destitute of this perception, though they may be masters of all the external evidences of Christianity, and able to combat the cavils of infidels, can see no real beauty in the truths of the gospel, nor derive any solid comfort from them.

I have only sent you a few hasty hints: it would be easy to enlarge; but I sat down, not to write a book, but a letter. May this inward witness preside with power in our hearts, to animate our hopes, and to mortify our corruptions!—I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

On the Doctrines of Election and final Perseverance.

DEAR SIR,—Your letter breathes the spirit of a Christian, though you say you are not a Calvinist. I should have still confined myself, in my letters, to the great truths in which we are agreed, if you had not invited me to touch upon the points wherein we differ. If you were positive and peremptory in your present sentiments, I should not think it my duty to debate with you; in that case, we might contend as much for victory as for truth. But as you profess yourself an inquirer, and are desirous of forming your judgment agreeable to the word of God, without being influenced by the authority of names and parties, I willingly embrace the occasion you offer me. You say, that though you are not prejudiced against the doctrines of election, and perseverance of the saints, they appear to you attended with such difficulties, that you cannot yet heartily and fully assent to them. May the Lord the Spirit, whose office it is to guide his people into all truth, dictate to my pen, and accompany what I shall write with his blessing.

It is not my intention to prove and illustrate these doctrines at large, or to encounter the various objections that have been raised against them. So much has been done in this way already, that I could only repeat what has been said to greater advantage by

others. Nor need I refer you to the books which have been professedly written upon this argument.—In a letter to a friend, I shall not aim at the exactness of a disputant, but only offer a few unpremeditated hints, in the same manner as if I had the pleasure of personally conversing with you.

Permit me to remind you, in the first place, of that important aphorism, John iii. 27, (which, by the by, seems to speak strongly in favour of the doctrines in question :) "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." If you should accede to my opinions upon my persuasion only, you would be little benefitted by the exchange. The Lord alone can give us the true, vital, comfortable, and useful knowledge of his own truths. We may become wise in notions, and so far masters of a system or scheme of doctrines, as to be able to argue, object, and fight, in favour of our own hypothesis, by dint of application, and natural abilities; but we rightly understand what we say, and whereof we affirm, no farther than we have a spiritual perception of it wrought in our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not, therefore, by noisy disputation, but by humble waiting upon God in prayer, and a careful perusal of his holy word, that we are to expect a satisfactory, experimental, and efficacious knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. I am persuaded, that you are seeking in this way; if so, I am confident, you shall not seek in vain. The Lord teaches effectually, though for the most part gradually. The path of the just is compared to the light, which is very faint at the early dawn, but shineth more and more to the perfect day.

If you sincerely seek the Lord's direction by prayer, you will of course make use of his appointed means of information, and search the scriptures. Give me leave to offer you the following advices, while you are reading and comparing spiritual things with spiritual. First, not to lay too great stress upon a few detached texts, but seek for that sense which is most agreeable to the general strain of the scripture. The infallible word of God must doubtless be consistent with itself. If it does not appear so to us, the obscurity and seeming inconsistency must be charged to the remaining darkness and ignorance of our minds. As many locks, whose wards differ, are opened with equal ease by one master-key; so there is a certain comprehensive view of scriptural truth, which opens hard places, solves objections, and happily reconciles, illustrates, and harmonizes many texts, which, to those who have not this master-key, frequently styled the analogy of faith, appear little less than contradictory to each other. When you obtain this key, you will be sure that you have the right sense.

Again, you will do well to consult expe-

rience as you go along. For though this is not to be depended upon in the first instance, but must itself be subjected to the rule of the written word, yet it is a good subordinate help. Consider which sense is most agreeable to what passes within you and around you, and which best answers to the dealings of God with yourself, and to what you can observe of his dealings with others.

Farther, when you are led (as I think you will be, if you are not already) to view the Calvinist doctrines in a favourable light, be not afraid of embracing them, because there may be, perhaps, some objections, which, for want of a full possession of the key I mentioned, you are not able to clear up; but consider if there are not as strong or stronger objections against the other side. We are poor weak creatures: and the clearing up of every difficulty is not what we are immediately called to, but rather to seek that light which may strengthen and feed our souls.

Lastly, compare the tendency of different opinions. This is an excellent rule, if we can fairly apply it. Whatever is from God has a sure tendency to ascribe glory to him, to exclude boasting from the creature, to promote the love and practice of holiness, and increase our dependence upon his grace and faithfulness. The Calvinists have no reason to be afraid of resting the merits of their cause upon this issue; notwithstanding the unjust misrepresentations which have been often made of their principles, and the ungenerous treatment of those who would charge the miscarriages of a few individuals, as the necessary consequence of embracing those principles.

But I must check myself, or I shall finish my letter before I properly begin my subject. You have objections to the doctrine of election. You will, however, agree with me, that the scripture does speak of it, and that in very strong and express terms, particularly St. Paul. I have met with some sincere people, as I believe, who have told me that they could not bear to read his eighth chapter to the Romans, but always passed it over; so that their prejudices against election, prejudiced them against a part of the scripture likewise. But why so, unless because the dreaded doctrine is maintained too plainly to be evaded? But you will say, that some writers and preachers attempt to put an easier sense upon the apostle's words. Let us judge then, as I lately proposed, from experience. Admitting, what I am sure you will admit, the total depravity of human nature, how can we account for the conversion of a soul to God, unless we likewise admit an election of grace? The work must begin somewhere. Either the sinner first seeks the Lord, or the Lord first seeks the sinner. The former is impossible, if by nature we are dead in trespasses and sins; if

the God of this world have blinded our eyes, and maintains the possession of our hearts; and if our carnal minds, so far from being disposed to seek God, are enmity against him. Let me appeal to yourself. I think you know yourself too well to say, that you either sought or loved the Lord first; perhaps you are conscious, that for a season, and so far as in you lay, you even resisted his call; and must have perished, if he had not made you willing in the day of his power, and saved you in defiance of yourself. In your own case, you acknowledge that he began with you; and it must be the case universally with all that are called, if the whole race of mankind are by nature enemies to God. Then farther, there must be an election, unless all are called. But we are assured that the broad road which is thronged with the greatest multitudes, leads to destruction. Were not you and I in this road? Were we better than those who continue in it still? What has made us differ from our former selves? Grace. What has made us differ from those who are now as we once were? Grace. Then this grace, by the very terms, must be differencing, or distinguishing grace; that is, in other words, electing grace. And to suppose, that God should make this election or choice only at the time of our calling, is not only unscriptural, but contrary to the dictates of right reason, and the ideas we have of the divine perfections, particularly those of omniscience and immutability. They who believe there is any power in man by nature, whereby he can turn to God, may contend for a conditional election upon the foresight of faith and obedience; but while others dispute, let you and me admire; for we know that the Lord foresaw us (as we were) in a state utterly incapable either of believing or obeying, unless he was pleased to work in us to will and to do according to his own good pleasure.

As to final perseverance, whatever judgment we form of it in a doctrinal view, unless we ourselves do so persevere, our profession of religion will be utterly vain; for only "they that endure to the end shall be saved." It should seem, that whoever believes this, and is duly apprized of his own weakness, the number and strength of his spiritual enemies, and the difficulties and dangers arising from his situation in this evil world, will at least be desirous to have, if possible, some security that his labour and expectation shall not be in vain. To be at an uncertainty in a point of so great importance, to have nothing to trust to for our continuance in well doing, but our own feeble efforts, our partial diligence, and short-sighted care, must surely be distressing, if we rightly consider how unable we are in ourselves to withstand the forces of the devil, the world, and the flesh, which are combin-

ce. In this view I should
 opposers of this doctrine, if
 ble of their state and situa-
 position that they should be
 unscriptural and false, would
 victory, and be sorry that a
 arently suited to encourage
 hope, should not be founded
 not to be wondered at, that
 ouch gives to the Lord the
 name, and provides so effec-
 tual comfort of his people, should
 traduced by men of corrupt
 ay well seem strange, that
 eir need of it, and cannot be
 out it, should be afraid or
 eive it. Yet many a child
 g in darkness upon this ac-
 ey are staggered by the sen-
 whom they think wiser than
 umbled by the falls of pro-
 ce once advocates for this
 lexed be ause they cannot
 d those passages of scripture
 peak a different language.
 knowledge increase, these
 ened. The Lord claims the
 ngages for the accomplish-
 te salvation, that no power
 eople out of his hand, or se-
 his love. Their perseve-
 besides being asserted in
 omises, may be proved with
 ce from the unchangeable
 intercession of Christ, the
 sists between him and his
 the principle of spiritual
 oted in their hearts, which,
 e, is connected with ever-
 grace is the seed of glory. I
 enlarge on these particu-
 ou to the following texts,
 us strong and invincible are
 drawn for their confirma-
 8—30, compared with Phil.
 1, with Rom. viii. 34—39;
 h xv. 1, 2, and iv. 14. Up-
 a, my friend, why may not
 d for refuge to the hope set
 mitted your soul to Jesus,
 lvation; and say, "While
 idation, root, and head, and
 ople, while the word of God
 i, while the counsels of God
 i, while we have a Mediator
 before the throne, while the
 lling and able to bear wit-
 of the gospel, while God is
 and stronger than Satan, so
 in Jesus is and shall be safe.
 h may pass away, but the
 i, and the blood, on which
 ford me a security which

of election and perse-

verance are comfortable, so they cut off all
 pretence of boasting and self-dependence,
 when they are truly received in the heart,
 and therefore tend to exalt the Saviour. Of
 course they stain the pride of all human glory,
 and leave us nothing to glory in but the Lord.
 The more we are convinced of our utter de-
 pravity and inability from first to last, the
 more excellent will Jesus appear. The
 whole may give the physician a good word,
 but the sick alone know how to prize him.
 And here I cannot but remark a difference
 between those who have nothing to trust to
 but free grace, and those who ascribe a little
 at least to some good disposition and ability
 in man. We assent to whatever they en-
 force from the word of God on the subject of
 sanctification. We acknowledge its import-
 ance, its excellency, its beauty; but we could
 wish they would join more with us in exalt-
 ing the Redeemer's name. Their experience
 seems to lead them to talk of themselves, of
 the change that is wrought in them, and the
 much that depends upon their own watchful-
 ness and striving. We likewise would be
 thankful if we could perceive a change
 wrought in us by the power of grace. We
 desire to be found watching likewise. But
 when our hopes are most alive, it is less from
 a view of the imperfect beginnings of grace
 in our hearts, than from an apprehension of
 him who is our all in all. His person, his
 love, his sufferings, his intercession, compas-
 sion, fulness, and faithfulness,—these are our
 delightful themes, which leave us little lei-
 sure, when in our best frames, to speak of
 ourselves. How do our hearts soften, and
 our eyes melt, when we feel some liberty in
 thinking and speaking of him! For we had
 no help in time past, nor can have any in
 time to come, but from him alone. If any
 persons have contributed a mite to their own
 salvation, it was more than we could do. If
 any were obedient and faithful to the first
 calls and impressions of his Spirit, it was not
 our case. If any were prepared to receive
 him beforehand, we know that we were in a
 state of alienation from him. We needed
 sovereign irresistible grace to save us, or we
 had been lost for ever. If there are any who
 have a power of their own, we must confess
 ourselves poorer than they are. We cannot
 watch, unless he watches with us; we can-
 not strive, unless he strives with us; we can-
 not stand one moment, unless he holds us up;
 and we believe we must perish after all, un-
 less his faithfulness is engaged to keep us.
 But this, we trust, he will do, not for our
 righteousness, but for his own name's sake,
 and because, having loved us with an ever-
 lasting love, he has been pleased, in loving-
 kindness, to draw us to himself, and to be
 found of us when we sought him not.

Can you think, dear Sir, that a person who
 lives under the influence of these sentiments

will desire to continue in sin, because grace abounds? No; you are too candid an observer of men and manners, to believe the calumnies which are propagated against us. It is true, there are too many false and empty professors amongst us; but are there none amongst those who hold the opposite sentiments? And I would observe, that the objection drawn from the miscarriages of reputed Calvinists is quite beside the purpose. We maintain that no doctrines or means can change the heart, or produce a gracious conversation, without the efficacious power of almighty grace: therefore, if it is found to be so in fact, it should not be charged against our doctrine, but rather admitted as a proof and confirmation of it. We confess, that we fall sadly short in every thing, and have reason to be ashamed and amazed that we are so faintly influenced by such animating principles; yet, upon the whole, our consciences bear us witness, and we hope we may declare it both to the church and to the world, without just fear of contradiction, that the doctrines of grace are doctrines according to godliness.—I am, &c.

LETTER X.

A; or, *Grace in the Blade*.—Mark iv. 28.

DEAR SIR,—According to your desire, I sit down to give you my general views of a progressive work of grace, in the several stages of a believer's experience, which I shall mark by the different characters, A, B, C, answerable to the distinctions our Lord teaches us to observe from the growth of the corn, Mark iv. 28, "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The Lord leads all his people effectually and savingly to the knowledge of the same essential truths, but in such a variety of methods, that it will be needful, in this disquisition, to set aside, as much as possible, such things as may be only personal and occasional in the experience of each, and to collect those only which, in a greater or less degree, are common to them all. I shall not, therefore, give you a copy of my own experience, or of that of any individual; but shall endeavour, as clearly as I can, to state what the scripture teaches us concerning the nature and essentials of a work of grace, so far as it will bear a general application to all those who are the subjects of gracious operations.

By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins, not only strangers to God, but in a state of enmity and opposition to his government and grace. In this respect, whatever difference there may be in the characters of men as members of society, they are all, whether wise or ignorant, whether sober or

profane, equally incapable of receiving or approving divine truths, 1 Cor. ii. 14. On this ground our Lord declares, "No man can come unto me, except the Father who has sent me draws him." Though the term Father most frequently expresses a known and important distinction in the adorable Trinity, I apprehend our Lord sometimes uses it, to denote God, or the Divine Nature, in contradistinction from his humanity, as in John xiv. 9. And this I take to be the sense here: "No man can come unto me, unless he is taught of God," and wrought upon by a divine power. The immediate exertion of this power, according to the economy of salvation, is rather ascribed to the Holy Spirit than to the Father, John xvi. 8—11. But it is the power of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore severally attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit, John v. 21, and ch. vi. 44, 63; 2 Cor. iii. 18; 2 Thea. iii. 5.

By A, I would understand a person who is under the drawings of God, which will infallibly lead him to the Lord Jesus Christ, for life and salvation. The beginning of this work is instantaneous. It is effected by a certain kind of light communicated to the soul, to which it was before an utter stranger. The eyes of the understanding are opened and enlightened. The light at first afforded is weak and indistinct, like the morning dawn; but when it is once begun, it will certainly increase and spread to the perfect day. We commonly speak as if conviction of sin was the first work of God upon the soul that he is in mercy about to draw unto himself. But I think this is inaccurate. Conviction is only a part, or rather an immediate effect of that first work; and there are many convictions which do not at all spring from it, and therefore are only occasional and temporary, though for a season they may be very sharp, and put a person upon doing many things. In order to a due conviction of sin, we must previously have some adequate conceptions of the God with whom we have to do. Sin may be feared as dangerous without this; but its nature and demerit can only be understood by being contrasted with the holiness, majesty, goodness, and truth, of the God against whom it is committed. No outward means, no mercies, judgments, or ordinances, can communicate such a discovery of God, or produce such a conviction of sin, without the concurrence of this divine light and power to the soul. The natural conscience and passions may indeed be so far wrought upon by outward means, as to stir up some desires and endeavours; but if these are not founded in a spiritual apprehension of the perfections of God, according to the revelation he has made of himself in his word, they will sooner or later come to nothing; and the person affected will either return by degrees to his

former ways, 2 Peter ii. 20, or he will sink into a self-righteous form of godliness, destitute of the power, Luke xviii. 11. And therefore, as there are so many things in the dispensation of the gospel suited to work upon the natural passions of men, the many woful miscarriages and apostacies amongst professors are more to be lamented than wondered at. For though the seed may seem to spring up, and look green for a season, if there be not depth for it to take root, it will surely wither away. We may be unable to judge with certainty upon the first appearance of a religious profession, whether the work be thus deep and spiritual, or not; but "the Lord knows them that are his;" and wherever it is real, it is an infallible token of salvation. Now, as God only thus reveals himself by the medium of scripture-truth, the light received this way leads the soul to the scripture from whence it springs, and all the leading truths of the word of God soon begin to be perceived and assented to. The evil of sin is acknowledged, the evil of the heart is felt. There may be for a while some efforts to obtain the favour of God by prayer, repentance, and reformation; but for the most part it is not very long before these things are proved to be vain and ineffectual. The soul, like the woman mentioned Mark v. 23, wearied with vain expedients, finds itself worse and worse, and is gradually brought to see the necessity and sufficiency of the gospel salvation. A man may soon be a believer thus far: That he believes the word of God, sees and feels things to be as they are thus described, hates and avoids sin, because he knows it is displeasing to God, and contrary to his goodness; he receives the record which God has given of his Son; has his heart affected and drawn to Jesus by views of his glory, and of his love to poor sinners; ventures upon his name and promises as his only encouragement to come to a throne of grace; waits diligently in the use of all means appointed for the communion and growth of grace; loves the Lord's people, accounts them the excellent of the earth, and delights in their conversation. He is longing, waiting, and praying for a share in those blessings which he believes they enjoy, and can be satisfied with nothing less. He is convinced of the power of Jesus to save him; but through remaining ignorance and legality, the remembrance of sin committed, and the sense of present corruption, he often questions his willingness; and, not knowing the abounding of grace, and the security of the promises, he fears lest the compassionate Saviour should spurn him from his feet.

While he is thus young in the knowledge of the gospel, burdened with sin, and, perhaps, beset with Satan's temptations, the Lord, "who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom," is pleased, at

times, to favour him with cordials, that he may not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Perhaps his heart is enlarged in prayer, or under hearing, or some good promise is brought home to his mind, and applied with power and sweetness. He mistakes the nature and design of these comforts, which are not given him to rest in, but to encourage him to press forward. He thinks he is then right, because he has them, and fondly hopes to have them always. Then his mountain stands strong. But ere long he feels a change; his comforts are withdrawn; he finds no heart to pray; no attention in hearing; indwelling sin revives with fresh strength, and, perhaps, Satan returns with redoubled rage. Then he is at his wit's end: thinks his hopes were presumptuous, and his comforts delusions. He wants to feel something that may give him a warrant to trust in the free promises of Christ. His views of the Redeemer's gracefulness are very narrow; he sees not the harmony and glory of the divine attributes in the salvation of a sinner; he sighs for mercy, but fears that justice is against him. However, by these changing dispensations, the Lord is training him up, and bringing him forward. He receives grace from Jesus, whereby he is enabled to fight against sin; his conscience is tender; his troubles are chiefly spiritual troubles; and he thinks, if he could but attain a sure and abiding sense of his acceptance in the Beloved, hardly any outward trial would be capable of giving him much disturbance. Indeed, notwithstanding the weakness of his faith, and the prevalence of a legal spirit, which greatly hurts him, there are some things in his present experience which he may, perhaps, look back upon with regret hereafter, when his hope and knowledge will be more established. Particularly that sensibility and keenness of appetite with which he now attends the ordinances, desiring the sincere milk of the word with earnestness and eagerness as a babe does the breast. He counts the hours from one opportunity to another; and the attention and desire with which he hears may be read in his countenance. His zeal is likewise lively; and may be for want of more experience, too importunate and forward. He has a love for souls, and a concern for the glory of God, which, though it may at some times create him trouble, and at others be mixed with some undue motions of self, yet in its principle is highly desirable and commendable, John xviii. 10.

The grace of God influences both the understanding and the affections. Warm affections, without knowledge, can rise no higher than superstition; and that knowledge which does not influence the heart and affections, will only make a hypocrite. The true believer is rewarded in both respects; yet we

may observe, that though A is not without knowledge, this state is more usually remarkable for the warmth and liveliness of the affections. On the other hand, as the work advances, though the affections are not left out, yet it seems to be carried on principally in the understanding. The old christian has more solid, judicious, and connected views of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glories of his person and redeeming love: hence his hope is more established, his dependence more simple, and his peace and strength, *ceteris paribus*, more abiding and uniform, than in the case of a young convert; but the latter has, for the most part, the advantage in point of sensible fervency. A tree is most valuable when laden with ripe fruit; but it it has a peculiar beauty when in blossom. It is spring-time with A; he is in bloom, and, by the grace and blessing of the heavenly husbandman, will bear fruit in old age. His faith is weak, but his heart is warm. He will seldom venture to think himself a believer; but he sees and feels, and does those things which no one could, unless the Lord was with him. The very desire and bent of his soul is to God, and to the word of his grace. His knowledge is but small; but it is growing every day. If he is not a father or a young man in grace, he is a dear child. The Lord has visited his heart, delivered him from the love of sin, and fixed his desire supremely upon Jesus Christ. The spirit of bondage is gradually departing from him, and the hour of liberty, which he longs for is approaching, when, by a further discovery of the glorious gospel, it shall be given him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the Lord's finished salvation. We shall then take notice of him by the name of B in a second letter, if you are not unwilling that I should prosecute the subject.—I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

B; or Grace in the Ear.—Mark iv. 23.

DEAR SIR,—The manner of the Lord's work in the hearts of his people is not easily traced, though the fact is certain, and the evidence demonstrable from scripture. In attempting to explain it, we can only speak in general, and are at a loss to form such a description as shall take in the immense variety of cases which occur in the experience of believers. I have already attempted such a general delineation of a young convert, under the character of A, and am now to speak of him by the name of B.

This state I suppose to commence when the soul, after an interchange of hopes and fears, according to the different frames it passes through, is brought to rest in Jesus, by a spiritual apprehension of his complete

suitableness and sufficiency, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of all who trust in him, and is enabled, by an appropriating faith, to say, "He is mine, and I am his." There are various degrees of this persuasion; it is of a growing nature, and is capable of increase so long as we remain in this world. I call it assurance, when it arises from a simple view of the grace and glory of the Saviour, independent of our sensible frames and feelings, so as to enable us to answer all objections from unbelief and Satan, with the apostle's words, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Rom. viii. 34. This in my judgment does not belong to the essence of faith, so that B should be deemed more truly a believer than A, but to the establishment of faith. And now faith is stronger, it has more to grapple with. I think the characteristic of the state of A is desire, and of B is conflict. Not that B's desires have subsided, or that A was a stranger to conflict; but as there was a sensible eagerness and keenness in A's desires, which, perhaps, is seldom known to be equally strong afterwards; so there are usually trials and exercises in B's experience, something different in their kind, and sharper in their measure, than what A was exposed to or indeed had strength to endure. A, like Israel, has been delivered from Egypt by great power and a stretched-out arm, has been pursued and terrified by many enemies, has given himself up for lost again and again. He has at last seen his enemies destroyed, and has sung the song of Moses and the Lamb upon the banks of the Red Sea. Then he commences B. Perhaps, like Israel, he thinks his difficulties are at an end, and expects to go on rejoicing till he enters the promised land. But alas! his difficulties are in a manner but beginning; he has a wilderness before him, of which he is not aware. The Lord is now about to suit his dispensations to humble and to prove him, and to show what is in his heart, that he may do him good at the latter end, that all the glory may redound to his own free grace.

Since the Lord hates and abhors sin, and teaches his people, whom he loves, to hate it likewise; it might seem desirable (and all things are equally easy to him,) that at the same time they are delivered from the guilt and reigning power of sin, they should likewise be perfectly freed from the defilement of indwelling sin, and be made fully conformable to him at once. His wisdom has, however, appointed otherwise. But from the above premises of his hatred of sin, and his love to his people, I think we may certainly conclude, that he would not suffer sin to remain in them, if he did not purpose to overrule it, for the fuller manifestation of the

glory of his grace and wisdom, and for the making his salvation more precious to their souls. It is, however, his command, and therefore their duty; yea, further, from the new nature he has given them, it is their desire, to watch and strive against sin; and to propose the mortification of the whole body of sin, and the advancement of sanctification in their hearts, as their great and constant aim, to which they are to have an habitual persevering regard. Upon this plan B sets out. The knowledge of our acceptance with God, and of our everlasting security in Christ, has, in itself, the same tendency upon earth as it will have in heaven, and would, in proportion to the degree of evidence and clearness, produce the same effects, of continual love, joy, peace, gratitude, and praise, if there was nothing to counteract it. But B is not all spirit. A depraved nature still cleaves to him, and he has the seeds of every natural corruption yet remaining in his heart. He lives likewise in a world that is full of snares and occasions suited to draw forth those corruptions; and he is surrounded by invisible spiritual enemies, the extent of whose power and subtlety he is yet to learn by painful experience. B knows, in general, the nature of his Christian warfare, and sees his right to live upon Jesus for righteousness and strength. He is not unwilling to endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and believes, that though he may be sore thrust at that he may fall, the Lord will be his stay. He knows, that his heart is "deceitful and desperately wicked;" but he does not, he cannot know at first, the full meaning of that expression. Yet it is for the Lord's glory, and will, in the end, make his grace and love still more precious, that B should find new and mortifying proofs of an evil nature as he goes on, such as he could not once have believed, had they been foretold to him, as in the case of Peter, Mark xiv. 29. And in effect, the abominations of the heart do not appear in their full strength and aggravation, but in the case of one, who, like B, has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and rejoiced in his salvation. The exceeding sinfulness of sin is manifested, not so much by its breaking through the restraint of threatenings and commands, as by its being capable of acting against light and against love. Thus it was with Hezekiah. He had been a faithful and zealous servant of the Lord for many years; but I suppose he knew more of God and of himself, in the time of his sickness, than he had ever done before. The Lord, who had signally defended him from Sennacherib, was pleased likewise to raise him from the borders of the grave by a miracle, and prolonged the time of his life in answer to prayer. It is plain from the song which he penned upon his recovery, that he was greatly affected with the mer-

cies he had received; yet still there was something in his heart which he knew not, and which it was for the Lord's glory he should be made sensible of; and therefore he was pleased to leave him to himself. It is the only instance in which he is said to have been left to himself, and the only instance in which his conduct is condemned. I apprehend, that in the state of B, that is, for a season after we have known the Lord, we have usually the most sensible and distressing experience of our evil natures. I do not say, that it is necessary that we should be left to fall into gross outward sin, in order to know what is in our hearts; though I believe many have thus fallen, whose hearts, under a former sense of redeeming love, have been as truly set against sin, as the hearts of others who have been preserved from such outward falls. The Lord makes some of his children examples and warnings to others, as he pleases. They who are spared, and whose worst deviations are only known to the Lord and themselves, have great reason to be thankful. I am sure I have: the merciful Lord has not suffered me to make any considerable blot in my profession during the time I have been numbered amongst his people. But I have nothing to boast of herein. It has not been owing to my wisdom, watchfulness, or spirituality, though in the main he has not suffered me to live in the neglect of his appointed means. But I hope to go softly all my days under the remembrance of many things, for which I have as great cause to be abased before him, as if I had been left to sin grievously in the sight of men. Yet, with respect to my acceptance in the Beloved, I know not if I have had a doubt of a quarter of an hour's continuance for many years past. But oh! the multiplied instances of stupidity, ingratitude, impatience, and rebellion, to which my conscience has been witness! And as every heart knows its own bitterness, I have generally heard the like complaints from others of the Lord's people with whom I have conversed, even from those who have appeared to be eminently gracious and spiritual. B does not meet with these things perhaps at first, nor every day. The Lord appoints occasions and turns in life, which try our spirits. There are particular seasons, when temptations are suited to our frames, tempers, and situations; and there are times when he is pleased to withdraw, and to permit Satan's approach, that we may feel how vile we are in ourselves. We are prone to spiritual pride, to self dependence, to vain confidence, to create attachments, and a train of evils. The Lord often discovers to us one single disposition by exposing us to another. He sometimes shows us what he can do for us and in us; and at other times how little we can do, and how unable we are to stand without him.

By a variety of these exercises, through the over-ruling and edifying influences of the Holy Spirit, B is trained up in a growing knowledge of himself and of the Lord. He learns to be more distrustful of his own heart, and to suspect a snare in every step he takes. The dark and disconsolate hours which he has brought upon himself in times past, make him doubly prize the light of God's countenance, and teach him to dread whatever might grieve the Spirit of God, and cause him to withdraw again. The repeated and multiplied pardons which he has received, increase his admiration of, and the sense of his obligations to, the rich, sovereign, abounding mercy of the covenant. Much has been forgiven him, therefore he loves much, and therefore he knows how to forgive and to pity others. He does not call evil good, or good evil; but his own experiences teach him tenderness and forbearance. He experiences a spirit of meekness towards those who are overtaken in a fault, and his attempts to restore such, are according to the pattern of the Lord's dealings with himself. In a word, B's character, in my judgment, is complete, and he becomes a C when the habitual frame of his heart answers to that passage in the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xvi. 63, "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more (to boast, complain, or censure,) because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."—I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

C; or, Grace in the Full Corn in the Ear.
Mark iv. 28.

DEAR SIR,—By way of distinction, I assigned to A the characteristic of desire, to B that of conflict. I can think of no single word more descriptive of the state of C than contemplation. His eminence, in comparison of A, does not consist in the sensible warmth and fervency of his affections: in this respect many of the most exemplary believers have looked back with a kind of regret upon the time of their espousals, when, though their judgments were but imperfectly formed, and their views of gospel-truths were very indistinct, they felt a fervour of spirit, the remembrance of which is both humbling and refreshing; and yet they cannot recall the same sensations. Nor is he properly distinguished from B by a consciousness of his acceptance in the Beloved, and an ability of calling God his father; for this I have supposed B has attained to. Though as there is a growth in every grace, C having had his views of the gospel, and of the Lord's

faithfulness and mercy, confirmed by a longer experience, his assurance is of course more stable and more simple, than when he first saw himself safe from all condemnation. Neither has C, properly speaking, any more strength or stock of grace inherent in himself than B, or even than A. He is in the same state of absolute dependence, as incapable of performing spiritual acts, or of resisting temptations by his own power, as he was at the first day of his setting out. Yet, in a sense, he is much stronger, because he has a more feeling and constant sense of his own weakness. The Lord has been long teaching him this lesson by a train of various dispensations; and through grace he can say, He has not suffered so many things in vain. His heart has deceived him so often, that he is now in a good measure weaned from trusting to it; and therefore he does not meet with so many disappointments. And having found again and again the vanity of all other helps, he is now taught to go to the Lord at once for "grace to help in every time of need." Thus he is strong not in himself, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

But C's happiness and superiority to B lies chiefly in this, that by the Lord's blessing on the use of means, such as prayer, reading, and hearing of the word, and by a sanctified improvement of what he has seen of the Lord, and of his own heart, in the course of his experience, he has attained clearer, deeper, and more comprehensive views of the mystery of redeeming love; of the glorious excellency of the Lord Jesus, in his person, offices, grace, and faithfulness; of the harmony and glory of all the divine perfections manifested in and by him to the church; of the stability, beauty, fulness, and certainty of the holy scriptures, and of the heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of the love of God in Christ. Thus, though his sensible feelings may not be so warm as when he was in the state of A, his judgment is more solid, his mind more fixed, his thoughts more habitually exercised upon the things within the veil. His great business is to behold the glory of God in Christ; and by beholding, he is changed into the same image, and brings forth, in an eminent and uniform manner, the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. His contemplations are not barren speculations, but have a real influence, and enable him to exemplify the Christian character to more advantage, and with more consistence, than can, in the present state of things, be expected either from A or B. The following particulars may illustrate my meaning.

I. Humility. A measure of this grace is to be expected in every true christian; but it can only appear in proportion to the knowledge they have of Christ, and of their own

hearts. It is a part of C's daily employment to look back upon the way by which the Lord has led him: and while he reviews the Ebezers he has set up all along the road, he sees, in almost an equal number, the monuments of his own perverse returns, and how he has, in a thousand instances, rendered to the Lord evil for good. Comparing these things together, he can, without affectation, adopt the apostle's language, and style himself "less than the least of all saints, and of sinners the chief." A and B know that they ought to be humbled; but C is truly so, and feels the force of that text which I mentioned in my last, Ezek. xvi. 63. Again, as he knows most of himself, so he has seen most of the Lord. The apprehension of infinite majesty combined with infinite love, makes him shrink into the dust. From the exercise of this grace he derives two others, which are exceedingly ornamental, and principal branches of the mind which was in Christ.

The one is, submission to the will of God. The views he has of his own vileness, unworthiness, and ignorance, and of the divine sovereignty, wisdom, and love, teach him to be content in every state, and to bear his appointed lot of suffering with resignation, according to the language of David in a time of affliction, "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it."

The other is, tenderness of spirit towards his fellow Christians. He cannot but judge of their conduct according to the rule of the word. But his own heart, and the knowledge he has acquired of the snares of the world, and the subtilty of Satan, teach him to make all due allowances, and qualify him for admonishing and restoring, in the spirit of meekness, those who have been overtaken in a fault. Here A is usually blamable; the warmth of his zeal, not being duly corrected by a sense of his own imperfections, betrays him often into a censorious spirit. But C can bear with A likewise, because he hath been so himself, and he will not expect green fruit to be ripe.

2. Spirituality. A spiritual taste, and a disposition to account all things mean and vain, in comparison of the knowledge and love of God in Christ, are essential to a true Christian. The world can never be his prevailing choice, 1 John ii. 13. Yet we are renewed but in part, and are prone to an undue attachment to worldly things. Our spirits cleave to the dust, in defiance of the dictates of our better judgments; and I believe the Lord seldom gives his people a considerable victory over this evil principle, until he has let them feel how deeply it is rooted in their hearts. We may often see persons entangled and clogged in this respect, of whose sincerity in the main we cannot justly doubt; especially upon some sudden and unexpected turn

in life, which brings them into a situation they have not been accustomed to. A considerable part of our trials are mercifully appointed to wean us from this propensity; and it is gradually weakened by the Lord's showing us at one time the vanity of the creature, and at another his own excellence and all-sufficiency. Even C is not perfect in this respect; but he is more sensible of the evil of such attachments, more humbled for them, more watchful against them, and more delivered from them. He still feels a fetter, but he longs to be free. His allowed desires are brought to a point; and he sees nothing worth a serious thought, but communion with God and progress in holiness. Whatever outward changes C may meet with, he will, in general, be the same man still. He has learned with the apostle, not only to suffer want, but which is perhaps the harder lesson, how to abound. A palace would be a prison to him, without the Lord's presence; and with this a prison would be a palace. From hence arises a peaceful reliance upon the Lord: he has nothing which he cannot commit into his hands, which he is not habitually aiming to resign to his disposal. Therefore, he is not afraid of evil tidings; but when the hearts of others shake like the leaves of a tree, he is fixed, trusting in the Lord, who, he believes, can and will make good every loss, sweeten every bitter, and appoint all things to work together for his advantage. He sees that the time is short, lives upon the foretastes of glory, and therefore accounts not his life, or any inferior concernment dear, so that he may finish his course with joy.

3. A union of heart to the glory and will of God, is another noble distinction of C's spirit. The glory of God, and the good of his people are inseparably connected. But of these great ends, the first is unspeakably the highest and most important, and into which every thing else will be finally resolved. Now, in proportion as we advance nearer to him, our judgment, aim, and end, will be conformable to his, and his glory will have the highest place in our hearts. At first it is not so, or but very imperfectly. Our concern is chiefly about ourselves; nor can it be otherwise. The convinced soul inquires, What shall I do to be saved? The young convert is intent upon sensible comforts; and in the seasons when he sees his interest secure, the prospect of the troubles he may meet with in life makes him often wish for an early dismissal, that he may be at rest, and avoid the heat and burden of the day. But C has attained to more enlarged views; he has a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which would be importunate, if he considered only himself; but his chief desire is, that God may be glorified in him, whether by his life, or by his death. He is not his own; nor does he desire to be his own; but

so that the power of Jesus may be manifested in him, he will take pleasure in infirmities, in distresses, in temptations; and though he longs for heaven, would be content to live as long as Methuselah upon earth, if by any thing he could do or suffer, the will and glory of God might be promoted. And though he loves and adores the Lord for what he has done and suffered for him, delivered him from, and appointed him to; yet he loves and adores him likewise, with a more simple and direct love, in which self is in a manner forgot, from the consideration of his glorious excellence and perfections, as he is in himself. That God in Christ is glorious over all, and blessed for ever, is the very joy of his soul; and his heart can frame no higher wish, than that the sovereign, wise, holy will of God, may be accomplished in him, and all his creatures. Upon this grand principle his prayers, schemes, and actions are formed. Thus C is already made like the angels, and, so far as consistent with the inseparable remnants of a fallen nature, the will of God is regarded by him upon earth, as it is by the inhabitants of heaven.

The power of divine grace in C may be exemplified in a great variety of situations. C may be rich or poor, learned or illiterate, of a lively natural spirit, or of a more slow and phlegmatical constitution. He may have a comparatively smooth, or a remarkably thorny path in life; he may be a minister or a layman: these circumstances will give some tincture and difference in appearance to the work; but the work itself is the same; and we must, as far as possible, drop the consideration of them all, or make proper allowances for each, in order to form a right judgment of the life of faith. The outward expression of grace may be heightened and set off to advantage by many things which are merely natural, such as evenness of temper, good sense, a knowledge of the world, and the like: and it may be darkened by things which are not properly sinful, but unavoidable, such as lowness of spirits, weak abilities, and pressure of temptations, which may have effects that they who have not had experience in the same things, cannot properly account for. A double quantity of real grace, if I may so speak, that has a double quantity of hinderances to conflict with, will not be easily observed, unless these hinderances are likewise known and attended to; and a smaller measure of grace may appear great when its exercise meets with no remarkable obstruction. For these reasons we can never be competent judges of each other, because we cannot be competently acquainted with the whole complex case. But our great and merciful High Priest knows the whole; he considers our frame, "remembers that we are but dust:" makes gracious allowances, *pities, bears, accepts,* and approves, with un-

erring judgment. The sun, in his daily course, beholds nothing so excellent and honourable upon earth as C, though perhaps he may be confined to a cottage, and is little known or noticed by men. But he is the object and residence of divine love, the charge of angels, and ripening for everlasting glory. Happy C! his toils, sufferings, and exercises will be soon at an end; soon his desires will be accomplished; and he who has loved him, and redeemed him with his own blood, will receive him to himself, with a "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

If this representation is agreeable to the scriptures, how greatly are they mistaken, and how much to be pitied, who, while they make profession of the gospel, seem to have no idea of the effects it is designed to produce upon the hearts of believers, but either allow themselves in a worldly spirit and conversation, or indulge their unsanctified tempers, by a fierce contention for names, notions, and parties. May the Lord give to you and to me daily to grow in the experience of that wisdom which "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."—I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

On Hearing Sermons.

DEAR SIR,—I am glad to find that the Lord has at length been pleased to fix you in a favoured situation, where you have frequent opportunities of hearing the gospel. This is a great privilege; but, like all other outward privileges, it requires grace and wisdom to make a due improvement of it: and the great plenty of ordinances you enjoy, though in itself a blessing, is attended with snares, which, unless they are carefully guarded against, may hinder, rather than promote, your edification. I gladly embrace the occasion you afford me, of offering you my advice upon this subject. A remembrance of the mistakes I have myself formerly committed, and the observations I have made upon the conduct of professors, considered as hearers, will, perhaps, in some measure qualify me for the task you have assigned me.

The faithful ministers of the gospel, are all the servants and ambassadors of Christ; they are called and furnished by his Holy Spirit; they speak in his name; and their success in the discharge of their office, be it more or less, depends entirely upon his blessing: so far they are all upon a par. But in the measure of their ministerial abilities, and in the peculiar turn of their preaching, there is a great variety. There are "diversities of

gifts from the same Spirit; and he distributes to every man severally according to his own will." Some are more happy in alarming the careless, others in administering consolation to the wounded conscience. Some are set more especially for the establishment and confirmation of the gospel-doctrines; others are skilful in solving casuistical points; others are more excellent in enforcing practical godliness; and others again, having been led through depths of temptation and spiritual distress, are best acquainted with the various workings of the heart, and know best how to speak a word in season to weary and exercised souls. Perhaps no true minister of the gospel (for all such are taught of God) is wholly at a loss upon either of these points; but few, if any, are remarkably and equally excellent in managing them all. Again, as to their manner, some are more popular and pathetic, but at the same time more general and diffuse; while the want of that life and earnestness in delivery is compensated in others, by the closeness, accuracy, and depth of their compositions. In this variety of gifts, the Lord has a gracious regard to the different tastes and dispositions, as well as to the wants of his people; and by their combined effects, the complete system of his truth is illustrated, and the good of his church promoted with the highest advantage; while his ministers, like officers assigned to different stations in an army, have not only the good of the whole in view, but each one his particular post to maintain. This would be more evidently the case, if the remaining depravity of our hearts did not afford Satan but too much advantage in his subtle attempts to hurt and ensnare us. But alas! how often has he prevailed to infuse a spirit of envy or dislike in ministers towards each other, to withdraw hearers from their proper concernment, by dividing them into parties and stirring them up to contend for a Paul, an Apollos, or a Cephas, for their own favourites, to the disparagement of others who are equally dear to the Lord, and faithful in his service! You may think my preamble long: but I shall deduce my advices chiefly from it; taking it for granted, that to you I may have no need of proving at large what I have advanced.

As the gifts and talents of ministers are different, I advise you to choose for your stated pastor and teacher, one whom you find most suitable, upon the whole, to your own taste, and whom you are likely to hear with the most pleasure and advantage. Use some deliberation and much prayer in this matter. Intreat the Lord, who knows better than you do yourself, to guide you where your soul may be best fed; and when your choice is fixed, you will do well to make a point of attending his ministry constantly, I mean, at least the stated times of worship on the Lord's day. I do not say, that *no circumstance will*

justify your going elsewhere at such times occasionally; but I think the seldomer you are absent the better. A stated and regular attendance encourages the minister, affords a good example to the congregation; and a hearer is more likely to meet with what is directly suited to his own case, from a minister who knows him, and expects to see him, than he can be from one who is a stranger. Especially, I would not wish you to be absent for the sake of gratifying your curiosity, to hear some new preacher, who you have, perhaps, been told, is a very extraordinary man. For in your way such occasions might possibly offer almost every week. What I have observed of many, who run about unseasonably after new preachers, has reminded me of Prov. xxvii. 8. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is the man that wandereth from his place." Such unsettled hearers seldom thrive, they usually grow wise in their own conceits, have their heads filled with notions, acquire a dry, critical, and censorious spirit; and are more intent upon disputing who is the best preacher, than upon obtaining benefit to themselves from what they hear. If you could find a man, indeed, who had a power in himself of dispensing a blessing to your soul, you might follow him from place to place; but as the blessing is in the Lord's hand, you will be more likely to receive it by waiting where his providence has placed you, and where he has met with you before.

But as human nature is prone to extremes, permit me to give you a caution on the other hand. If the minister under whom you stately attend, is made very acceptable to you, you will be in the less danger of slighting him. But be careful that you do not slight any other minister of Christ. If, therefore, when you come to hear your own preacher, you find another in the pulpit, do not let your looks tell him, that if you had known he had been there you would not have come. I wish indeed you may never think so in your heart; but though we cannot prevent evil thoughts from rising in our minds, we should endeavour to combat and suppress them. Some persons are so curious, or rather so weak, that if their favourite minister is occasionally absent, they hardly think it worth their while to hear another. A judicious and faithful minister, in this case, instead of being delighted with such a mark of peculiar attachment to himself, will be grieved to think that they have profited no more by his labours; for it is his desire to win souls, not to himself, but to Jesus Christ. I hope you, my friend, will always attend the ordinances with a view to the Lord's presence; and when you are in your proper place, consider the preacher (if he preaches the truth) as one providentially and expressly sent by the Lord to you at that time; and that you could not choose better for yourself, all things con-

sidered, than he has chosen for you. Do not limit the Almighty, by confining your expectations to a single instrument. If you do, you will probably procure your own disappointment. If you fix your hopes upon the man, the Lord may withhold his blessing, and then the best men and the best sermons will prove to you but as clouds without water. But, besides the more stated seasons of worship on the Lord's day, you have many opportunities of hearing sermons occasionally in the course of the week; and thus you may partake of that variety of gifts which I have already spoken of. This will be either a benefit, or otherwise, according to the use you make of it. I would recommend to you to improve these occasions, but under some restrictions.

In the first place, be cautious that you do not degenerate into the spirit of a mere hearer, so as to place the chief stress of your profession upon running hither and thither after preachers. There are many who are always upon the wing: and, without a due regard to what is incumbent upon them in the shop, in the family, or in the closet, they seem to think they were sent into the world only to hear sermons, and to hear as many in a day as they possibly can. Such persons may be fitly compared to Pharaoh's lean kine; they devour a great deal; but for want of a proper digestion, they do not flourish; their souls are lean; they have little solid comfort; and their profession abounds more in leaves than in fruit. If the twelve apostles were again upon earth, and you could hear them all every week; yet if you were not attentive to the duties of the closet, if you did not allow yourself time for reading, meditation, and prayer; and if you did not likewise conscientiously attend to the concerns of your particular calling, and the discharge of your duties in relative life, I should be more ready to blame your indiscretion, than to admire your zeal. Every thing is beautiful in its season; and if one duty frequently jostle out another, it is a sign either of a weak judgment, or of a wrong turn of mind. No public ordinances can make amends for the neglect of secret prayer; nor will the most diligent attendance upon them justify us in the neglect of those duties, which, by the command and appointment of God, we owe to society.

Again, as it is our trial to live in a day wherein so many contentions, and winds of strange doctrines abound, I hope you will watch and pray that you may not have itching ears, inclining you to hearken after novel and singular opinions, and the erroneous sentiments of men of unstable minds, who are not sound in the faith. I have known persons, who, from a blameable curiosity, have gone to hear such, not for the sake of edification, which they could not ex-

pect, but to know what they had to say, supposing that they themselves were too well established in the truth to be hurt by them. But the experiment (without a just and lawful call) is presumptuous and dangerous. In this way many have been hurt, yea, many have been overthrown. Error is like poison; the subtilty, quickness, and force of its operation, is often amazing. As we pray not to be led into temptation, we should take care not to run into it wilfully. If the Lord has shown you what is right, it is not worth your while to know (if you could know it) how many ways there are of being wrong.

Farther, I advise you, when you hear a gospel sermon, and it is not in all respects to your satisfaction, be not too hasty to lay the whole blame upon the preacher. The Lord's ministers have not much to say in their own behalf. They feel (it is to be hoped) their own weakness and defects, and the greatness and difficulty of their work. They are conscious that their warmest endeavours to proclaim the Saviour's glory are too cold; and their most importunate addresses to consciences of men are too faint; and sometimes they are burdened with such discouragements, that even their enemies would pity them, if they knew their case. Indeed, they have much to be ashamed of; but it will be more useful for you, who are a hearer, to consider whether the fault may not possibly be in yourself. Perhaps you thought too highly of the man, and expected too much from him; or perhaps you thought too meanly of him, and expected too little. In the former case, the Lord justly disappointed you; in the latter, you received according to your faith. Perhaps you neglected to pray for him; and then, though he might be useful to others, it is not at all strange that he was not so to you. Or possibly you have indulged a trifling spirit, and brought a dearth and deadness upon your own soul, for which you had not been duly humbled, and the Lord chose that time to rebuke you.

Lastly, as a hearer, you have a right to try all doctrines by the word of God; and it is your duty so to do. Faithful ministers will remind you of this; they will not wish to hold you in an implicit and blind obedience to what they say upon their own authority, nor desire that you should follow them farther than they have the scriptures for their warrant. They would not be lords over your conscience, but helpers of your joy. Prize this gospel-liberty, which sets you free from the doctrines and commandments of men; but do not abuse it to the purposes of pride and self. There are hearers who make themselves, and not the scripture, the standard of their judgment. They attend not so much to be instructed, as to pass their sentence. To them the pulpit is the bar at which the minister stands to take his trial

before them,—a bar at which few escape censure, from judges at once so severe and inconsistent. For as these censors are not all of a mind, and, perhaps, agree in nothing so much as in the opinion they have of their own wisdom, it has often happened, that, in the course of one and the same sermon, the minister has been condemned as a legalist, and an antinomian; as too high in his notions, and too low; as having too little action, and too much. Oh! this is a hateful spirit, that prompts hearers to pronounce *ex cathedra*, as if they were infallible, breaks in upon the rights of private judgment, even in matters not essential, and makes a man an offender for a word. This spirit is one frequent unhappy evil, which springs from the corruption of the heart, when the Lord affords the means of grace in great abundance. How highly would some of the Lord's hidden ones, who are destitute of the ordinances, prize the blessing of a preached gospel, with which too many professors seem to be surfeited. I pray God to preserve you from such a spirit (which, I fear, is spreading, and infects us like the pestilence,) and to guide you in all things.—I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

On Temptation.

DEAR SIR,—What can you expect from me on the subject of temptation, with which you have been so much more conversant than myself! On this point I am more disposed to receive information from you, than to offer my advice. You, by the Lord's appointment, have had much business and exercise on these great waters; whereas the knowledge I have of what passes there, I have gained more from observation than from actual experience. I shall not wonder, if you think I write like a novice; however, your request has the force of a command with me. I shall give you my thoughts, or rather shall take occasion to write, not so much to you as to others, who, though they may be plunged in the depths of temptation, have not yet seen so much of the wisdom and power of God in these dispensations as yourself. I shall first inquire, why the Lord permits some of his people to suffer such violent assaults from the powers of darkness; and then suggest a few advices to tempted souls.

The temptations of Satan (which though not the most painful, are in reality the most dangerous) do not directly belong to my present design. I mean those by which he is too successful in drawing many professors from the path of duty, in filling them with spiritual pride, or lulling them into carnal security. In these attempts, he is often

most powerful and prevalent when he is least perceived. He seldom distresses those whom he can deceive. It is chiefly when these endeavours fail, that he fights against the peace of the soul. He hates the Lord's people, grudges them all their privileges and all their comforts; and will do what he can to disquiet them, because he cannot prevail against them. And though the Lord sets such bounds to his rage as he cannot pass, and limits him both as to manner and time, he is often pleased to suffer him to discover his malice to a considerable degree; not to gratify Satan, but to humble and prove them; to show them what is in their hearts, to make them truly sensible of their immediate and absolute dependence upon himself, and to quicken them to watchfulness and prayer. Though temptations, in their own nature are grievous and dreadful, yet, when by the grace of God, they are productive of these effects, they deserve to be numbered among the "all things," which are appointed to work together for the good of those who love him. The light carriage, vain confidence, and woful backslidings of many professors, might, perhaps (speaking after the manner of men,) have been in some measure prevented, had they been more acquainted with this spiritual warfare, and had they drunk of the cup of temptation, which but few of those who walk humbly and uprightly are exempted from tasting of, though not all in the same degree. One gracious end, therefore, that the Lord has in permitting his people to be tempted, is for the prevention of greater evils, that they may not grow proud or careless, or be ensnared by the corrupt customs of the world. In this view, I doubt not, however burdensome your trials may at some seasons prove, you are enabled, by your composed judgment, to rejoice in them, and be thankful for them. You know what you suffer now; but you know not what might have been the consequence, if you had never smarted by the fiery darts of the wicked one. You might have been taken in a more fatal snare, and been numbered with those who, by their grievous declensions and falls, have caused the ways of truth to be evil spoken of.

Another design is, for the manifestation of his power, and wisdom, and grace, in supporting the soul under such pressures as are evidently beyond its own strength to sustain. A bush on fire, and not consumed, engaged the attention of Moses. This emblem is generally applicable to the state of a Christian in the present life; but never more so than when he is in the fire of temptation. And though his heaviest sufferings of this kind are usually hidden from the notice of his fellow-creatures, yet there are other eyes always upon him. "We are," says the apostle, "a spectacle to the world;" not only to

men, but to angels also. Many things probably pass in the invisible state, in which we have a nearer concernment than we are ordinarily aware of. The beginning of the book of Job throws some light upon this point, and informs us (of which we should have been otherwise totally ignorant) of the true source of his uncommon sufferings.—Satan had challenged him, charged him as a hypocrite, and thought he was able to prove him one, if he could have permission to attack him. The Lord, for the vindication of Job's integrity, and for the manifestation of his own faithfulness and power in favour of his servant, was pleased to give Satan leave to try what he could do. The experiment answered many good purposes; Job was humbled, yet approved; his friends were instructed; Satan was confuted and disappointed; and the wisdom and mercy of the Lord, in his darkest dispensations towards his people, were gloriously illustrated. This contest, and the event, were recorded for the direction and encouragement of his church to the end of time. Satan's malice is not abated; and though he has met with millions of disappointments, he still, like Goliath of old, defies the armies of God's Israel; he challenges the stoutest, and "desires to have them, that he may sift them as wheat." Indeed, he is far an overmatch for them, considered as in themselves; but though they are weak, their Redeemer is mighty, and they are for ever secured by his love and intercession. "The Lord knows them that are his," and no weapon formed against them can prosper. That this may appear with the fullest evidence, Satan is allowed to assault them. We handle vessels of glass or china with caution, and endeavour to preserve them from falls and blows, because we know they are easily broken. But if a man had the art of making glass malleable, and, like iron, capable of bearing the stroke of a hammer without breaking, it is probable, that instead of locking it carefully up, he would rather, for the commendation of his skill, permit many to attempt to break it, when he knew their attempts would be in vain. Believers are compared to earthen vessels, liable in themselves to be destroyed by a small blow; but they are so strengthened and tempered by the power and supply of divine grace, that the fiercest efforts of their fiercest enemies against them may be compared to the dashing of waves against a rock. And that this may be known and noticed, they are exposed to many trials; but the united and repeated assaults of the men of the world, and the powers of darkness, afford but the more incontestible demonstration, that the Lord is with them of a truth, and that his strength is made perfect in their weakness. Surely *this thought, my friend, will afford you consolation; and you will be content to suf-*

fer, if God may be glorified by you and in you.

Farther, by enduring temptation, you, as a living member of the body of Christ, have the honour of being conformed to your head. He suffered, being tempted; and because he loves you, he calls you to a participation of his sufferings, and to taste of his cup; not the cup of the wrath of God; this he drank alone, and he drank it all. But in affliction he allows his people to have fellowship with him. Thus they fill up the measure of his sufferings, and can say, "As he was, so are we in the world." Marvel not that the world hates you, neither marvel that Satan rages against you. Should not the disciple be as his Lord? Can the servant expect or desire peace from the avowed enemies of his Master? We are to follow his steps; and can we wish, if it were possible, to walk in a path strewn with flowers, when his was strewn with thorns? Let us be in nothing terrified by the power of our adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to us of salvation, and that of God. To us it is given, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. If we would make peace with the world, the world would let us alone; if we would be content to walk in the ways of sin, Satan would give us no disturbance; but because grace has rescued us from his dominion, and the love of Jesus constrains us to live to him alone, therefore the enemy, like a lion robbed of his prey, roars against us. He roars, but he cannot devour; he plots and rages, but he cannot prevail; he disquiets, but he cannot destroy. If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him. In due time he will bruise Satan under our feet, make us more than conquerors, and place us where we shall hear the voice of war no more for ever.

Again, as by temptations we are conformed to the life of Christ, so likewise, by the sanctifying power of grace, they are made subservient to advance our conformity to his image; particularly as we thereby acquire a sympathy and fellow-feeling with our suffering brethren. This is eminently a branch of the mind that was in Christ. He knows how to pity and help those who are tempted, because he has been tempted himself. He knows what temptations mean, not only with that knowledge whereby he knows all things, but by experience. He well remembers what he endured in the wilderness and in the garden; and though it is for his glory and our comfort that he suffered temptation without sin, yet for that very reason, and because he was perfectly holy, the temptations of Satan were unspeakably more bitter to him than they can be to us. The great duty and refuge of the tempted now is, to apply to him, and they have the highest encouragement to do so, in that they are assured he is touched

with a feeling of our infirmities. And, for the like reason, they find some consolation in applying to those of their brethren who have suffered the same things. None but these can either understand or pity their complaints. If the Lord has any children who are not exercised with spiritual temptations, I am sure they are but poorly qualified to "speak a word in season to them that are weary." In this school you have acquired the tongue of the learned; and let it not seem a small thing to you, if the Lord has given you wisdom and ability to comfort the afflicted ones. If your prayers, your conversation, and the knowledge they have of your trials, afford them some relief in a dark hour, this is an honour and a privilege which I am persuaded you will think you have not purchased too dear by all that you have endured.

Once more, temptations, by giving us a painful sensibility of the weakness of our graces, and the strength of our inward corruptions, tend to mortify the evil principles of self-dependence and self-righteousness, which are so deeply rooted in our fallen nature; to make Christ, in all his relations, offices, and characters, more precious to us; and to convince us, that without him we can do nothing. It would be easy to enlarge upon these and other advantages which the Lord enables his people to derive from the things which they suffer; so that they may say, with Samson, "Out of the eater comes forth meat;" and that what their adversary designs for their overthrow, contributes to their establishment. But I have already exceeded my limits.—Enough I hope has been said to prove, that he has wise and gracious ends in permitting them, for a season, to be tossed with tempest, and not comforted. Ere long these designs will be more fully unfolded to us; and we shall be satisfied that he has done all things well. In the mean while it is our duty, and will be much for our comfort, to believe it upon the authority of his word.

I should now proceed to offer some advices to those who are tempted; but I am ready to say, To what purpose? When the enemy comes in like a flood; when the very foundations of hope are attacked; when suspicions are raised in the mind, not only concerning the truth of the scripture itself; when a dark cloud blots out, not only the sense, but almost the remembrance of past comforts; when the mind is overwhelmed with torrents of blasphemous, unclean, or monstrous imaginations, things horrible and unutterable; when the fiery darts of Satan have set the corruptions of the heart in a flame; at such a season a person is little disposed or able to listen to advice. I shall, however, mention some things by which ordinarily Satan maintains his advantage against them in these

circumstances, that they may be upon their guard as much as possible.

His principal devices are:

1. To hide from them the Lord's designs, in permitting him thus to rage. Some of these I have noticed; and they should endeavour to keep them upon their minds. It is hard for them, during the violence of the storm, to conceive that any good can possibly arise from the experience of so much evil. But when the storm is over, they find that the Lord is still mindful of them. Now, though a young soldier may well be startled at the first onset in the field of battle, it seems possible, that those who have been often engaged, should at length gain confidence from the recollection of the many instances in which they have formerly found, by the event, that the Lord was surely with them in the like difficulties, and that their fears were only groundless and imaginary. When the warfare is hottest, they have still reason to say, "Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him."

2. To make them utter impatient speeches, which do but aggravate their distress. It is said of Job, under his first trials, "In all this he sinned not with his lips, nor charged God foolishly." So long Satan was unable to prevail. Afterwards he opened his mouth, as Jeremiah did likewise, and cursed the day of his birth. When he once began to complain, his causes of complaint increased. We cannot prevent dreadful thoughts from arising in our hearts; but we should be cautious of giving them vent by speaking unadvisedly. This is like letting in wind upon a smothering fire, which will make it burn more fiercely.

3. To persuade them that all they feel and tremble at, arises immediately from their own hearts. Indeed, it is a most awful proof of our depravity, that we feel something within ready to close with the suggestions of the enemy, in defiance of our better judgment and desires. But it is not so in all cases. It is not always easy, nor is it needful, exactly to draw the line between the temptations of Satan and our own corruptions; but sometimes it is not impossible to distinguish them. When a child of God is tempted to blaspheme the name that he adores, or to commit such evils as even un sanctified nature would recoil at; the enemy has done it, and shall be answerable for the whole guilt. The soul, in this case, is passive, and suffers with extreme reluctance, what it more dreads than the greatest evils which can affect the body.—Nor do the deepest wounds of this kind leave a scar upon the conscience, when the storm is over; which is a proof that they are not our own act.

4. To drive them from the throne of grace. Prayer, which is at all times necessary, is especially so in a time of temptation. But

how hard is it to come boldly, that we may obtain help in this time of need! But, however hard, it must be attempted. By discontinuing prayer, we give the enemy the greatest encouragement possible; for then he sees that his temptations have the effect which he intends by them, to intercept us from our strong-hold. When our Lord was in an agony, he prayed the most earnestly; the ardour of his prayer increased with the distress of his soul. It would be happy if we could always imitate him in this; but too often temptations and difficulties, instead of rousing our application, disheartens and enfeebles us; so that our cries are the faintest when we stand most in need of assistance. But, so long as prayer is restrained, our burden is increased, Psalm xxxii. 3, 5. If he cannot make them omit praying, he will repeatedly endeavour to weary them, by working upon the legality which cleaves so close to the heart. Satan is a hard task-master, when he interferes in the performance of our spiritual duties. This he does, perhaps, more frequently than we think of; for he can, if it serves his purpose, appear as an angel of light. When the soul is in a tempest, and attempts to pray, he will suggest, that prayer on these occasions should be protracted to such a length, and performed with such steadiness, as is found to be at that season quite impracticable. Such constrained efforts are wearisome; and from the manner of the performance, he takes occasion to fix fresh guilt upon the conscience. Short, frequent, and fervent petitions, which will almost necessarily arise from what is felt when temptation is violent, are best suited to the case; and we need not add to the burden, by tasking ourselves beyond our power, as if we expected to be heard for our much speaking. Blessed be God, that we fight with an enemy already vanquished by our Lord, and that we have a sure promise of victory. The Lord is our banner.—I am, &c.

LETTER XV.

A Plan of a Compendious Christian Library.

DEAR SIR,—An eager desire of reading many books, though it is often supposed to be the effect of a taste for knowledge, is perhaps a principal cause of detaining multitudes in ignorance and perplexity. When an unexperienced person thus ventures into the uncertain tide of opinions, he is liable to be hurried hither and thither with the changing stream; to fall in with every new proposal, and to be continually embarrassed with the difficulty of distinguishing between probability and truth. Or if, at last, he happily finds a clue to lead him through the

labyrinth wherein so many have been lost he will acknowledge, upon a review, that from what he remembers to have read (for perhaps, the greater part he has wholly forgotten) he has gained little more than a discovery of what mistakes, uncertainty, insignificance, acrimony, and presumption, are often obtruded on the world under the disguise of a plausible title-page.

It is far from my intention to depreciate the value, or deny the usefulness of books, without exception: a few well chosen treatises, carefully perused, and thoroughly digested, will deserve and reward our pains; but a multiplicity of reading is seldom attended with a good effect. Besides the confusion it often brings upon the judgment and memory, it occasions a vast expense of time, indisposes for close thinking, and keeps us poor in the midst of seeming plenty, by reducing us to live upon a foreign supply, instead of labouring to improve and increase the stock of our own reflections.

Every branch of knowledge is attended with this inconvenience; but it is in no one more sensibly felt than when the inquiry is directed to the subject of religion. Perhaps no country has abounded so much with religious books as our own; many of them are truly excellent; but a very great number of those which are usually more obvious to be met with, as they stand recommended by great names, and the general taste of the public, are more likely to mislead an inquirer, than to direct him into the paths of true peace and wisdom.

And even in those books which are in the main agreeable to the word of God, there is often so great a mixture of human infirmity, so much of the spirit of controversy and party, such manifest defects in some, and so many unwarrantable additions to the simple truth of the gospel in others, that, unless a person's judgment is already formed, or he has a prudent friend to direct his choice, he will probably be led into error or prejudice before he is aware, by his attachment to a favourite author.

Allowing, therefore, the advantage of a discreet and seasonable use of human writings, I would point out a still more excellent way for the acquisition of true knowledge: a method, which, if wholly neglected, the utmost diligence in the use of every other means will prove ineffectual; but which, if faithfully pursued in an humble dependence upon the divine blessing, will not only of itself lead us by the straightest path to wisdom, but will also give a double efficacy to every subordinate assistance.

If I may be allowed to use the term book in a metaphorical sense, I may say, that the most high God, in condescension to the weakness of our faculties, the brevity of our lives, and our many avocations, has comprised all

the knowledge conducive to our real happiness in four comprehensive volumes. The first, which may be considered as the text, is cheap, portable, and compendious, so that hardly any person in our favoured land, who is apprized of its worth, need be without it; and the other three, which are the best and fullest commentaries upon this, are always at hand for our perusal, and pressing upon our attention in every place and circumstance of our lives.

It will be easily apprehended, that, by the first book, or volume, I mean that perfect and infallible system of truth, the Bible. The internal characters of this book, arising from its comprehensiveness, simplicity, majesty, and authority, sufficiently prove to every enlightened mind, that it is given by inspiration of God. They who are competent judges of this evidence, are no more disturbed by the suggestions of some men reputed wise, that it is of human composition, than if they were told that men had invented the sun, and placed it in the firmament. Its fullness speaks its author. No case has yet occurred, or ever will, for which there is not a sufficient provision made in this invaluable treasury. Here we may seek (and we shall not seek in vain) wherewith to combat and vanquish every error, to illustrate and confirm every spiritual truth. Here are promises suited to every want, directions adapted to every doubt that can possibly arise. Here is milk for babes, meat for strong men, medicines for the wounded, refreshment for the weary. The general history of all nations and ages, and the particular experience of each private believer, from the beginning to the end of time, are wonderfully comprised in this single volume; so that whoever reads and improves it aright, may discover his state, his progress, his temptations, his danger, and his duty, as distinctly and minutely marked out, as if the whole had been written for him alone. In this respect, as well as in many others, great is the mystery of godliness.

The simplicity, as well as the subject-matter of the Bible, evinces its divine original. Though it has depths sufficient to embarrass and confound the proudest efforts of unsanctified reason, it does not, as to its general import, require an elevated genius to understand it, but is equally addressed to the level of every capacity. As its contents are of universal concernment, they are proposed in such a manner as to engage and satisfy the inquiries of all; and the learned, with respect to their own personal interest, have no advantage above the ignorant. That it is in fact read by many who receive no instruction or benefit from it, is wholly owing to their inattention or vanity. This event may rather excite grief than wonder. The Bible teaches us to expect it. It forewarns us that the natural man cannot receive the things of God,

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can neither understand nor approve them. It points out to us the necessity of a heavenly teacher, the Holy Spirit, who has promised to guide those who seek him by prayer, into all necessary truth. They who implore his assistance, find the seals opened, the veil taken away, and the way of salvation made plain before them.

The language of the Bible is likewise clothed with inimitable majesty and authority. God speaks in it, and reveals the glory of his perfections, his sovereignty, holiness, justice, goodness, and grace, in a manner worthy of himself, though, at the same time, admirably adapted to our weakness. The most laboured efforts of human genius are flat and languid, in comparison of those parts of the Bible which are designed to give us due apprehension of the God with whom we have to do. Where shall we find such instances of the true sublime, the great, the marvellous, the beautiful, the pathetic, as in the holy scriptures! Again, the effects which it performs demonstrate it to be the word of God. With a powerful and penetrating energy, it alarms and pierces the conscience, discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart, convinces the most obstinate, and makes the most careless tremble. With equal authority and efficacy, it speaks peace to the troubled mind, heals the wounded spirit, and can impart a joy unspeakable and full of glory, in the midst of the deepest distress. It teaches, persuades, comforts, and reproves with an authority that can neither be disputed nor evaded; and often communicates more light, motives, and influence, by a single sentence, to a plain unlettered believer, than he could derive from all the voluminous commentaries of the learned. In a word, it answers the character the apostle gives of it: "It is able to make us wise unto salvation; it is completely and alone sufficient to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work." The doctrines, histories, prophecies, promises, precepts, exhortations, examples, and warnings, contained in the Bible, form a perfect whole, a complete summary of the will of God concerning us, in which nothing is wanting, nothing is superfluous.

The second volume which deserves our study is the book of Creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work;" nor can we cast our eyes any where, without meeting innumerable proofs of his wisdom, power, goodness, and presence. God is revealed in the least, as well as in the greatest of his works. The sun and the glow-worm, the fabric of the universe, and each single blade of grass, are equally the effects of divine power. The lines of this book, though very beautiful and expressive in themselves, are not immediately legible by fallen man. The

works of creation may be compared to a fair character in cypher, of which the Bible is the key: and without this key they cannot be understood. This book was always open to the Heathens; but they could not read it, nor discern the proofs of his eternal power and godhead which it affords. "They became vain in their own imaginations, and worshipped the creature more than the Creator."

* The case is much the same at this day with many reputed wise, whose hearts are not subjected to the authority of the Bible. The study of the works of God, independent of his word, though dignified with the name of philosophy, is no better than an elaborate trifling and waste of time. It is to be feared none are more remote from the true knowledge of God, than many of those who value themselves most upon their supposed knowledge of his creatures. They may speak in general terms of his wisdom; but they live without him in the world; and their philosophy cannot teach them either to love, or serve, to fear, or trust him. They who know God in his word, may find both pleasure and profit in tracing his wisdom in his works, if their inquiries are kept within due bounds, and in a proper subservience to things of greater importance; but they are comparatively few who have leisure, capacity, or opportunity, for these inquiries. But the book of creation is designed for the instruction of all believers. If they are not qualified to be astronomers or anatomists, yet, from a view of the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, which he hath created, they learn to conceive of his condescension, power, and faithfulness. Though they are unacquainted with the theory of light and colours, they can see in the rainbow a token of God's covenant-love. Perhaps they have no idea of the magnitude or distance of the sun; but it reminds them of Jesus the Sun of righteousness, the source of light and life to their souls. The Lord has established a wonderful analogy between the natural and the spiritual world. This is a secret only known to them that fear him; but they contemplate it with pleasure; and almost every object they see, when they are in the right frame of mind, either leads their thoughts to Jesus, or tends to illustrate some spiritual truth or promise. This is the best method of studying the book of Nature, and for this purpose it is always open and plain to those who love the Bible, so that he who runs may read.

The book of Providence is the third volume, by which those who fear the Lord are instructed. This likewise is inextricable and unintelligible to the wisest of men who are not governed by the word of God. But when the principles of scripture are admitted and understood, they throw a pleasing light upon the study of divine providence, and at the

same time, are confirmed and illustrated by it. What we read in the Bible of the sovereignty, wisdom, power, omniscience, and omnipresence of God, of his overruling all events to the accomplishment of his counsels, and the manifestation of his glory, of the care he maintains of his church and people, and of his attention to their prayers, is exemplified by the history of nations and families, and the daily occurrences of private life. The believer receives hourly and indubitable proofs that the Lord reigns; that verily there is a God that judges in the earth. Hence arises a solid confidence: he sees that his concerns are in safe hands; and he needs not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; while others live at an uncertainty, exposed to the impressions of every new appearance; and, like a ship in a storm, without rudder or pilot, abandoned to the power of the winds and waves. In the history of Joseph, and in the book of Esther, and indeed throughout the Bible, we have specimens of the wise unerring providence of God; what important consequences depend, under his management, upon the smallest events; and with what certainty seeming contingencies are directed to the issue which he has appointed. By these authentic specimens we learn to judge of the whole; and with still greater advantage by the light of the New Testament, which shows us, that the administration of all power in heaven and earth is in the hands of Jesus. The government is upon his shoulders. The King of saints is King of nations, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor a hair from our heads without his cognizance. And though his ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts; though his agency is veiled from the eye of sense by the intervention of second causes, yet faith perceives, acknowledges, admires, and trusts his management. This study, like the former, does not require superior natural abilities, but is obvious to the weakest and meanest of his people, so far as their own duty and peace are concerned.

The fourth volume is the book of the Heart or of Human Nature, comprehending the experience of what passes within our own breasts, and the observations we make upon the principles and conduct of others, compared with what we read in the word of God. The heart of man is deep; but all its principles and workings in every possible situation, and the various manners in which it is affected by sin, by Satan, by worldly objects, and by grace, in solitude and in company, in prosperity and in affliction, are disclosed and unfolded in the scriptures. Many who are proud of their knowledge of what they may be safely ignorant of, are utter strangers to themselves. Having no acquaintance with the scrip-

tures they have neither skill nor inclination to look into their own hearts, nor any certain criterion whereby to judge of the conduct of human life. But the Bible teaches us to read this mysterious book also; shows us the source, nature, and tendency of our hopes, fears, desires, pursuits, and perplexities; the reasons why we cannot be happy in ourselves, and the vanity and insufficiency of every thing around us to help us. The rest and happiness proposed in the gospel, is likewise found to be exactly suitable to the desires and necessities of the awakened heart; and the conduct of those who reject this salvation as well as the gracious effects produced in those who receive it, prove to a demonstration, that the word of God is indeed a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

My limits will admit but of a few hints upon these extensive subjects. I shall only observe that whoever is well read in these four books, is a wise person, how little soever he may know of what the men of the world call science. On the other hand, though a man should be master of the whole circle of classical, polite, and philosophical knowledge, if he has no taste for the Bible, and has no ability to apply it to the works of creation and providence, and his own experience, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. I have pointed out a treasure of more worth than all the volumes in the Vatican.—I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

On the Inefficacy of our Knowledge.

DEAR SIR,—To be enabled to form a clear, consistent, and comprehensive judgment of the truths revealed in the scriptures, is a great privilege: but they who possess it are exposed to the temptation of thinking too highly of themselves, and too meanly of others, especially of those who not only refuse to adopt their sentiments, but venture to oppose them. We see few controversial writings, however excellent in other respects, but are tinged with this spirit of self-superiority; and they who are not called to this service, if they are attentive to what passes in their hearts, may feel it working within them, upon a thousand occasions; though, so far as it prevails, it brings forcibly home to ourselves the charge of ignorance and inconsistency, which we are so ready to fix upon our opponents. I know nothing as a means more likely to correct this evil, than a serious consideration of the amazing difference between our acquired judgment, and our actual experience; or, in other words, how little influence our knowledge and judg-

ment have upon our own conduct. This may confirm to us the truth and propriety of the apostle's observation, "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Not that we are bound to be insensible that the Lord has taught us what we were once ignorant of; nor is it possible that we should be so; but, because, if we estimate our knowledge by its effects, and value it no farther than it is experimental and operative (which is the proper standard whereby to try it,) we shall find it so faint and feeble as hardly to deserve the name.

How firmly, for instance, are we persuaded, in our judgments, that God is omnipresent. Great as the difficulties may be which attend our conceptions of this point, the truth itself is controverted by few. It is generally acknowledged by unawakened persons; and, I may add, too frequently known even by believers, as if they knew it not. If the eyes of the Lord are in every place, how strong a guard should this thought be upon the conduct of those who profess to fear him! We know how we are often affected when in the presence of a fellow-worm; if he is one on whom we depend, or who is considerably our superior in life, how careful are we to compose our behaviour, and to avoid whatever might be deemed improper or offensive! Is it not strange, that those who have taken their ideas of the divine majesty, holiness, and purity from the scriptures, and are not wholly insensible of their inexpressible obligations to regulate all they say or do by his precepts, should, upon many occasions, be betrayed into improprieties of behaviour, from which the presence of a nobleman, or a prince, would have effectually restrained them, yea, sometimes, perhaps, even the presence of a child! Even in the exercise of prayer, by which we profess to draw near the Lord, the consideration that his eye is upon us, has little power to engage our attention, or prevent our thoughts from wandering, like the fool's eyes, to the ends of the earth. What should we think of a person, who, being admitted into the king's presence upon business of the greatest importance, should break off in the midst of his address, to pursue a butterfly! Could such an instance of weakness be met with, it would be but a faint emblem of the inconsistencies which they who are acquainted with their own hearts, can often charge themselves with in prayer. They are not wholly ignorant in what a frame of spirit becomes a needy, dependent sinner to approach that God, before whom the angels are represented as veiling their faces; yet, in defiance of their better judgment, their attention is diverted from him with whom they have to do, to the merest trifles; they are not able to realize that presence with which they be-

lieve themselves to be surrounded, but speak as if they were speaking to the air. Further, if our sense that God is always present, was in any good measure answerable to the conviction of our judgment, would it not be an effectual preservative from the many importunate, though groundless fears, with which we are harassed! He says, "Fear not, I am with thee:" he promises to be a shield and a guard to those who put their trust in him; yet though we profess to believe his word, and to hope that he is our protector, we seldom think ourselves safe, even in the path of duty, a moment longer than danger is kept out of our view. Little reason have we to value ourselves upon our knowledge of this indisputable truth, when it has no more effective and habitual influence upon our conduct.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty likewise, though not so generally owned as the former, is no less fully assented to by those who are called Calvinists. We zealously contend for this point in our debates with the Arminians, and are ready to wonder that any should be hardy enough to dispute the Creator's right to do what he will with his own. While we are only engaged in defence of the election of grace, and have a comfortable hope that we are ourselves of that number, we seem so convinced, by the arguments scripture affords us in support of this truth, that we can hardly forbear charging our adversaries with perverse obstinacy and pride for opposing it. Undoubtedly the ground of this opposition lies in the pride of the human heart; but this evil principle is not confined to any party; and occasions frequently arise, when they who contend for the divine sovereignty are little more practically influenced by it than their opponents. This humiliating doctrine concludes as strongly for submission to the will of God, under every circumstance of life, as it does for our acquiescing in his purpose to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. But, alas! how often do we find ourselves utterly unable to apply it, so as to reconcile our spirits to those afflictions which he is pleased to allot us. So far as we are enabled to say, when we are exercised with poverty, or heavy losses or crosses, "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it," so far, and no farther, are we truly convinced that God has a sovereign right to dispose of us, and all our concerns, as he pleases. How often, and how justly, at such seasons, might the argument we offer to others, as sufficient to silent all their objections, be retorted upon ourselves: "Nay, but who art thou, O man, who repliest against God! Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"—a plain proof that our knowledge is more notional than experimental. What an

inconsistence, that while we think God is just and righteous in withholding from others the things which pertain to their everlasting peace, we should find it so hard to submit to his dispensations to ourselves in matters of unspeakably less importance!

But the Lord's appointments, to those who fear him, are not only sovereign, but wise and gracious. He has connected their good with his own glory, and is engaged, by promise, to make all things work together for their advantage. He chooses for his people better than they could choose for themselves. If they are in heaviness, there is a need-be for it, and he withholds nothing from them but what, upon the whole, it is better they should be without. Thus the scriptures teach, and thus we profess to believe. Furnished with these principles, we are at no loss to suggest motives of patience and consolation to our brethren that are afflicted. We can assure them, without hesitation, that if they are interested in the promises, their concerns are in safe hands; that the things which at present are not joyous, but grievous, shall in due season yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness, and that their trials are as certainly mercies as their comforts. We can prove to them, from the history of Joseph, David, Job, and other instances recorded in scripture, that, notwithstanding any present dark appearances, it shall certainly be well with the righteous; that God can and will make crooked things straight; and that he often produces the greatest good from those events which we are apt to look upon as evil. From hence we can infer, not only the sinfulness but the folly of finding fault with any of his dispensations. We can tell them, that in the worst, the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed; and that, therefore, under the greatest pressures, they should weep as those who expect, in a little time, to have all their tears wiped away. But when the case is our own, when we are troubled on every side, or touched in the tender part, how difficult is it to feel the force of these reasonings, though we know they are true to a demonstration! Then, unless we are endued with fresh strength from on high, we are as liable to complain and despond, as if we thought our afflictions sprung out of the ground, and that the Lord had forgotten to be gracious.

I might proceed to show the difference between our judgment, when most enlightened, and our actual experience with respect to every spiritual truth. We know there is no proportion between time and eternity, between God and the creature, the favour of the Lord and the favour or the frowns of men; and yet often, when these things are brought into close competition, we are sorely put to it to keep steadfast in the path of duty;

may, without new supplies of grace, we should certainly fail in the time of trial, and our knowledge would have no other effect than to render our guilt more inexcusable. We seem to be as sure that we are weak, sinful, fallible creatures, as we are that we exist; and yet we are prone to act as if we were wise and good. In a word, we cannot deny that a great part of our knowledge is, as I have described it, like the light of the moon, destitute of heat and influence; and yet we can hardly help thinking of ourselves too highly upon the account of it.

May we not say with the psalmist, "Lord, what is man!" yea, what an enigma, what a poor inconsistent creature, is a believer? In one view, how great are his character and privileges! He knows the Lord; he knows himself. His understanding is enlightened to apprehend and contemplate the great mysteries of the gospel. He has just ideas of the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the beauties of holiness, and the nature of true happiness. He was once darkness, but now he is light in the Lord. He has access to God by Jesus Christ, to whom he is united, and in whom he lives by faith. While the principles he has received are enlivened by the agency of the Holy Spirit, he can do all things. He is humble, gentle, patient, watchful, faithful. He rejoices in afflictions, triumphs over temptation, lives upon the foretastes of eternal glory, and counts not his life dear, so he may glorify God his Saviour, and finish his course with joy. But his strength is not his own; he is absolutely dependent, and is still encompassed with infirmities, and burdened with a depraved nature. If the Lord withdraws his power, he becomes weak as another man, and drops, as a stone sinks to the earth by its own weight. His inherent knowledge may be compared to the windows of a house, which can transmit the light, but cannot retain it. Without renewed and continual communications from the Spirit of grace, he is unable to withstand the smallest temptation, to endure the slightest trial, to perform the least service in a due manner, or even to think a good thought. He knows this, and yet he too often forgets it. But the Lord reminds him of it frequently, by suspending that assistance, without which he can do nothing. Then he feels what he is, and is easily prevailed upon to act in contradiction to his better judgment. Thus repeated experience of his own weakness teaches him, by degrees, where his strength lies: that it is not in any thing that he has already attained, or can call his own, but in the grace, power, and faithfulness of his Saviour. He learns to cease from his own understanding, to be ashamed of his best endeavours, to abhor himself in dust and ashes, and to glory only in the Lord.

From hence we may observe, that be-

lievers who have most knowledge, are no, therefore, necessarily the most spiritual.—Some may, and do, walk more honourably and more comfortably with two talents, than others with five. He who experimentally knows his own weakness, and depends simply upon the Lord, will surely thrive, though his acquired attainments and abilities may be but small; and he who has the greatest gifts, the clearest judgment, and the most extensive knowledge, if he indulges high thoughts of his advantages, is in imminent danger of mistaking and falling at every step; for the Lord will suffer none whom he loves to boast in themselves. He will guide the meek with his eye, and fill the hungry with good things; but the rich he sendeth empty away. It is an invariable maxim in his kingdom, that whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.—I am, &c.

LETTER XVII.

On a Believer's Frames.

DEAR SIR,—You ask me, in your letter, What one should do when he finds himself always still, quiet, and stupid, except in the pulpit; when he is made useful there, but cannot get either comfort or sorrow out of it, or but very rarely? You describe a case which my own experience has made very familiar to me: I shall therefore take the occasion to offer you a few miscellaneous thoughts upon the subject of a believer's frames; and I send them to you, not by post, but from the press; because I apprehend the exercise you speak of is not peculiar to you or to me, but is, in a greater or less degree, the burden of all who are spiritually minded, and duly attentive to what passes in their own hearts, whether they are in the ministry or not.

As you intimate that you are, in the main, favoured with liberty and usefulness in the pulpit, give me leave to ask you, What you would do, if you did not find yourself occasionally poor, insufficient, and, as you express it, stupid, at other times? Are you aware of what might be the possible, the probable, the almost certain consequences, if you always found your spirit enlarged, and your frames lively and comfortable? Would you not be in great danger of being puffed up with spiritual pride? Would you not be less sensible of your absolute dependence upon the power of Christ, and of your continual need of his blood, pardon, and intercession? Would you not be quite at a loss to speak suitably and feelingly to the case of many gracious souls, who are groaning under those effects of a depraved nature, from

which, upon that supposition, you would be exempted? How could you speak properly upon the deceitfulness of the heart, if you did not feel the deceitfulness of your own; or adapt yourself to the changing experiences through which your hearers pass, if you yourself were always alike or nearly so? Or how could you speak pertinently of the inward warfare, the contrary principles of flesh and spirit fighting one against another, if your own spiritual desires were always vigorous and successful, and met with little opposition or controul?

The apostle Paul, though favoured with a singular eminency in grace, felt at times that he had no sufficiency in himself, even so much as to think a good thought; and he saw there was a danger of his being exalted above measure, if the Lord had not wisely and graciously tempered his dispensations to prevent it. By "being exalted above measure," perhaps there may be a reference, not only to his spirit, lest he should think more highly of himself than he ought, but likewise to his preaching, lest, not having the same causes of complaint and humiliation in common with others, he should shoot over the heads of his hearers, confine himself chiefly to speak of such comforts and privileges as he himself enjoyed, and have little to say for the refreshment of those who were discouraged and cast down by continual conflict with indwelling sin. The angel who appeared to Cornelius, did not preach the gospel to him, but directed him to send for Peter; for, though the glory and grace of the Saviour seems a fitter subject for an angel's powers, than for the poor stammering tongues of sinful men, yet, an angel could not preach experimentally, nor describe the warfare between grace and sin from his own feelings. And if we could suppose a minister as full of comforts, and as free from failings as an angel, though he would be a good and happy man, I cannot conceive that he would be a good or useful preacher; for he would not know how to sympathize with the weak and afflicted of the flock, or to comfort them under their difficulties with the consolations wherewith he himself, in similar circumstances, had been comforted of God. It belongs to your calling of God as a minister, that you should have a taste of the various spiritual trials which are incident to the Lord's people, that thereby you may possess the tongue of the learned, and know how to speak a word in season to them that are weary; and it is likewise needful to keep you perpetually attentive to that important admonition, "Without me ye can do nothing."

Thus much, considering you as a minister. But we may extend the subject so as to make it applicable to believers in general. I would observe, therefore, that it is a sign of a sad declension, if one, who has tasted that the

Lord is gracious, should be capable of being fully satisfied with any thing short of the light of his countenance, which is better than life. A resting in notions of gospel-truth, or in the recollection of past comforts, without a continual thirst for fresh communications from the fountain of life, is, I am afraid, the canker which eats away the beauty and fruitfulness of many professors in the present day; and which, if it does not prove them to be absolutely dead, is, at least, a sufficient evidence that they are lamentably sick. But, if we are conscious of the desire, if we seek it carefully in the use of all appointed means, if we willingly allow ourselves in nothing which has a known tendency to grieve the Spirit of God, and to damp our sense of divine things; then, if the Lord is pleased to keep us short of those comforts which he has taught us to prize, and, instead of lively sensations of joy and praise, we feel a languor and deadness of spirit, provided we do indeed feel it, and are humbled for it, we have no need to give way to despondency or excessive sorrow; still the foundation of our hope, and the ground of our abiding joys, is the same; and the heart may be as really alive to God, and grace as truly in exercise, when we walk in comparative darkness and see little light, as when the frame of our spirits is more comfortable. Neither the reality nor the measure of grace can be properly estimated by the degree of our sensible comforts. The great question is, How are we practically influenced by the word of God as the ground of our hope, and as the governing rule of our tempers and conversation? The apostle exhorts believers to rejoice in the Lord always. He well knew that they were exposed to trials and temptations, and to much trouble, from an evil heart of unbelief; and he prevents the objections we might be ready to make, by adding, "And again, I say, rejoice!" As if he had said, I speak upon mature consideration; I call upon you to rejoice, not at some times only, but at all times; not only when upon the mount, but when in the valley; not only when you conquer, but while you are fighting; not only when the Lord shines upon you, but when he seems to hide his face. When he enables you to do all things, you are no better in yourselves than you were before; and when you feel you can do nothing, you are no worse. Your experiences will vary; but his love and promises are always unchangeable. Though our desires of comfort, and what we call lively frames, cannot be too importunate, while they are regulated by a due submission to his will, yet they may be inordinate for want of such submission. Sinful principles may, and too often do, mix with and defile our best desires. I have often detected the two vile abominations self-will and self-righteousness, insinuating themselves into this

concern; like Satan, who works by them, they can occasionally assume the appearance of an angel of light. I have felt an impatience in my spirit, utterly unsuitable to my state as a sinner and a beggar, and to my profession of yielding myself and all my concerns to the Lord's disposal. He has mercifully convinced me that I labour under a complication of disorders, summed up in the word sin; he has graciously revealed himself to me as the infallible Physician, and has enabled me to commit myself to him as such, and to expect my cure from his hand alone. Yet how often, instead of thankfully accepting his prescriptions, have I foolishly and presumptuously ventured to prescribe to him, and to point out how I would have him deal with me! How often have I thought something was necessary, which he saw best to deny, and that I could have done better without those dispensations which his wisdom appointed to work for my good! He is God, and not man, or else he would have been weary of me, and left me to my own management long ago. How inconsistent! to acknowledge that I am blind, to intreat him to lead me, and yet to want to choose my own way, in the same breath. I have limited the Holy One of Israel, and not considered, that he magnifies his wisdom and grace in working by contraries, and bringing good out of seeming evil. It has cost me something to bring myself to confess that he is wiser than I; but I trust, through his blessing, I have not suffered wholly in vain. My sensible comforts have not been great; the proofs I have had of the evils of my sinful nature, my incapacity and aversion to good, have neither been few nor small; but by these unpromising means, I hope, he has made his grace and salvation precious to my soul, and in some measure weaned me from leaning to my own understanding.

Again, self-righteousness has had a considerable hand in dictating many of my desires for an increase of comfort and spiritual strength. I have wanted some stock of my own. I have been wearied of being so perpetually beholden to him, and necessitated to come to him always in the same strain, as a poor miserable sinner. I could have liked to have done something for myself in common, and to have depended upon him chiefly upon extraordinary occasions. I have found, indeed, that I could do nothing without his assistance, nor any thing, even with it, but what I have reason to be ashamed of. If this had only humbled me, and led me to rejoice in his all-sufficiency, it would have been well. But it has often had a different effect, to make me sullen, angry, and discontented; as if it was not best and most desirable, that he should have all the glory of his own work, and I should have nothing to boast of, but that in the Lord I have righteousness and

strength. I am now learning to glory only in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; to be content to be nothing, that he may be all in all. But I find this a hard lesson; and when I seem to have made some proficiency, a slight turn in my spirit throws me back, and I have to begin all again.

This is an inseparable connexion between causes and effects. There can be no effect without a cause, no active cause without a proportionable effect. Now indwelling sin is an active cause; and therefore, while it remains in our nature, it will produce effects according to its strength. Why then should I be surprised, that if the Lord suspends his influence for a moment, in that moment sin will discover itself! Why should I wonder that I can feel no lively exercise of grace, no power to raise my heart to God any farther than he is pleased to work in me mightily,—any more than I wonder that I do not find fire in the bottom of a well, or that it should not be day when the sun is withdrawn from the earth! Humbled I ought to be, to find I am so totally depraved; but not discouraged, since Jesus is appointed to me of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and since I find that, in the midst of all this darkness and deadness, he keeps alive the principle of grace which he has implanted in my heart.

As to Mr. Rutherford's expression which you mention, that "there is no temptation like being without temptation;" I allow it in a qualified sense; that is, it is the better of the two, to suffer from Satan's fiery darts, than to be lulled asleep, and drawn into a careless security, by his more subtle, though less perceptible devices; so as to grow indifferent to the means of grace, and sink into a worldly spirit, or, like the church of Laodicea, to imagine ourselves rich, and increased in goods, and that we have need of nothing. But I am persuaded this is not your case; the deadness you complain of, and which is a burden you groan under, is a very different thing. And I advise you to be cautious how you indulge a desire to be exercised with Satan's temptations, as supposing they would be conducive to make you more spiritual, or would, of course, open you a way to greater consolations. If you have such a desire, I may say to you, in the Lord's words, "You know not what you ask." He who knows our weakness, and the power of our adversary, has graciously directed us to pray, that we enter not into temptation. Have you considered what the enemy can do, if he is permitted to come in like a flood! In one hour he could raise such a storm, as would put you to your wit's end. He could bring such a dark cloud over your mind as would blot out all remembrance of your past comforts, or at least prevent you from deriving

the least support from them. He could not only fight against your peace, but shake the very foundations of your hope, and bring you to question, not only your interest in the promise, but even to doubt of the most important and fundamental truths upon which your hopes have been built. Be thankful, therefore, if the Lord restrains his malice. A young sailor is often impatient of a short calm; but the experienced mariner, who has been often tossed with tempests, and upon the point of perishing, will seldom wish for a storm. In a word, let us patiently wait upon the Lord, and be content to follow as he leads, and he will surely do us good.—I am, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

Thoughts on the Exercise of Social Prayer.

SIR,—I account it a great mercy, that, at this time, when iniquity so generally abounds, there is a number, I hope a growing number, whose eyes affect their hearts, and who are stirred up to unite in prayer for the spreading of gospel-knowledge, and a blessing upon our sinful land. Meetings for social prayer are frequent in different parts of the kingdom, and among various denominations of Christians. As the Lord has promised, that when he prepares the heart to pray, he will graciously incline his ear to hear, who can tell but he may yet be intreated for us, and avert the heavy and justly-deserved judgments which seem to hang over us?

It is much to be desired, that our hearts might be so affected with a sense of divine things, and so closely engaged when we are worshipping God, that it might not be in the power of little circumstances to interrupt and perplex us, and to make us think the service wearisome, and the time which we employ in it tedious. But as your infirmities are many and great, and the enemy of our souls is watchful to discompose us, if care is not taken by those who lead in social prayer, the exercise which is approved by the judgment, may become a burden, and an occasion of sin. Complaints of this kind are frequent, and might perhaps be easily rectified, if the persons chiefly concerned were spoken to in love. But as they are usually the last who hear of it, it may perhaps be of service to communicate a few remarks on a subject of such general concern.

The chief fault of some good prayers is, that they are too long; not that I think we should pray by the clock, and limit ourselves precisely to a certain number of minutes; but it is the better of the two, that the hearers should wish the prayer had been longer, than spend half or a considerable part of the

time in wishing it was over. This is frequently owing to an unnecessary enlargement upon every circumstance that offers, as well as to the repetition of the same things. If we have been copious in pleading for spiritual blessings, it may be best to be brief and summary in the article of intercession for others; or if the frame of our spirits, or the circumstances of affairs, lead us to be more large and particular in laying the cases of others before the Lord, respect should be had to this intention in the former part of the prayer. There are, doubtless, seasons when the Lord is pleased to favour those who pray with a peculiar liberty; they speak because they feel; they have a wrestling spirit, and hardly know how to leave off. When this is the case, they who join with them are seldom wearied, though the prayer should be protracted something beyond the usual limits. But I believe it sometimes happens, both in praying, and in preaching, that we are apt to spin out our time to the greatest length, when we have, in reality, the least to say. Long prayers should in general be avoided, especially where several persons are to pray successively; or else even spiritual hearers will be unable to keep up their attention. And here I would just notice an impropriety we sometimes meet with, that when a person gives expectation that he is just going to conclude his prayer, something not thought of in its proper place occurring that instant to his mind, leads him as it were to begin again. But unless it is a matter of singular importance, it would be better omitted for that time.

The prayers of some good men are more like preaching than praying. They rather express the Lord's mind to the people, than the desires of the people to the Lord. Indeed this can hardly be called prayer. It might, in another place, stand for a part of a good sermon; but will afford little help to those who desire to pray with their hearts. Prayer should be sententious, and made up of breathings to the Lord, either of confession, petition, or praise. It should be, not only scriptural and evangelical, but experimental, a simple and unstudied expression of the wants and feelings of the soul. It will be so if the heart is lively and affected in the duty; it must be so if the edification of others is the point in view.

Several books have been written to assist in the gift and exercise of prayer, as by Dr. Watts, and others; and many useful hints may be borrowed from them; but a too close attention to the method and transitions therein recommended, gives an air of study and formality, and offends against that simplicity which is so essentially necessary to a good prayer, that no degree of acquired abilities can compensate for the want of it. It is possible to learn to pray mechanically, and by rule; but it is hardly possible to do so with

acceptance, and benefit to others. When the several parts of invocation, adoration, confession, petition, &c. follow each other in a stated order, the hearer's mind generally goes before the speaker's voice, and we can form a tolerable conjecture what is to come next. On this account we often find, that unlettered people, who have had little or no help from books, or rather have not been fettered by them, can pray with an unction and savour in an unpremeditated way, while the prayers of persons of much superior abilities, perhaps even of ministers themselves, are, though accurate and regular, so dry and starched, that they afford little either of pleasure or profit to a spiritual mind. The spirit of prayer is the truth and token of the spirit of adoption. The studied addresses with which some approach the throne of grace, remind us of a stranger's coming to a great man's door; he knocks and waits, sends in his name, and goes through a course of ceremony before he gains admittance; while a child of the family uses no ceremony at all, but enters freely when he pleases because he knows he is at home. It is true we ought always to draw near the Lord with great humiliation of spirit, and a sense of our unworthiness. But this spirit is not always best expressed or promoted by a pompous enumeration of the names and titles of the God with whom we have to do, or by fixing in our minds beforehand, the exact order in which we propose to arrange the several parts of our prayer. Some attention to method may be proper, for the prevention of repetitions; and plain people may be a little defective in it sometimes; but this defect will not be half so tiresome and disagreeable as a studied and artificial exactness.

Many, perhaps most people, who pray in public, have some favourite word or expression which recurs too often in their prayers, and is frequently used as a mere expletive, having no necessary connexion with the sense of what they are speaking. The most disagreeable of these is, when the name of the blessed God, with the addition of perhaps one or more epithets, as Great, Glorious, Holy, Almighty, &c. is introduced so often, and without necessity, as seems neither to indicate a due reverence in the person who uses it, or suited to excite reverence in those who hear. I will not say, that this is taking the name of God in vain, in the usual sense of the phrase; it is, however, a great impropriety, and should be guarded against. It would be well if they who use redundant expressions had a friend to give them a caution, as they might, with a little care, be retrenched; and hardly any person can be sensible of the little peculiarities he may inadvertently adopt, unless he is told of it.

There are several things likewise respecting the voice and manner of prayer, which a

person may, with due care, correct in himself, and which, if generally corrected, would make meetings for prayer more pleasant than they sometimes are. These I shall mention by pairs, as the happy and agreeable way is a medium between two inconvenient extremes.

Very loud speaking is a fault, when the size of the place, and the number of hearers do not render it necessary. The end of speaking is, to be heard; and, when that end is attained, a greater elevation of the voice is frequently hurtful to the speaker, and is more likely to confuse a hearer than to fix his attention. I do not deny but allowance must be made for constitution, and the warmth of the passions, which dispose some persons to speak louder than others. Yet such will do well to restrain themselves as much as they can. It may seem indeed to indicate great earnestness, and that the heart is much affected; yet it is often but false fire. It may be thought speaking with power; but a person who is favoured with the Lord's presence may pray with power in a moderate voice; and there may be very little power of the Spirit, though the voice should be heard in the street and neighbourhood.

The other extreme, of speaking too low, is not so frequent; but if we are not heard, we might as well altogether hold our peace. It exhausts the spirits, and wearies the attention, to be listening for a length of time to a very low voice. Some words or sentences will be lost, which will render what is heard less intelligible and agreeable. If the speaker can be heard by the person farthest distant from him the rest will hear of course.

The tone of the voice is likewise to be regarded. Some have a tone in prayer, so very different from their usual way of speaking, that their nearest friends, if not accustomed to them, could hardly know them by their voice. Sometimes the tone is changed, perhaps more than once, so that if our eyes did not give us more certain information than our ears, we might think two or three persons had been speaking by turns. It is pity that when we approve what is spoken, we should be so easily disconcerted by an awkwardness of delivery; yet so it often is, and probably so it will be, in the present weak and imperfect state of human nature. It is more to be lamented than wondered at, that sincere Christians are sometimes forced to confess, "He is a good man, and his prayers, as to their substance, are spiritual and judicious; but there is something so displeasing in his manner, that I am always uneasy when I hear him."

Contrary to this, and still more offensive, is a custom that some have of talking to the Lord in prayer. It is their natural voice, in-

deed, but it is that expression of it which they use upon the most familiar and trivial occasions. The human voice is capable of so many inflexions and variations, that it can adapt itself to the different sensations of our mind, as joy, sorrow, fear, desire, &c. If a man was pleading for his life, or expressing his thanks to the king for a pardon, common sense and decency would teach him a suitability of manner; and any one who could not understand his language might know, by the sound of his words, that he was not making a bargain, or telling a story. How much more, when we speak to the King of kings, should the consideration of his glory, and our own vileness, and of the important concerns we are engaged in before him, impress us with an air of seriousness and reverence, and prevent us from speaking to him as if he was altogether such a one as ourselves! The liberty to which we are called by the gospel, does not at all encourage such a pertness and familiarity as would be unbecoming to use towards a fellow-worm who was a little advanced above us in worldly dignity.

I shall be glad if these hints may be of any service to those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth, and who wish that whatever has a tendency to damp the spirit of devotion, either in themselves or in others, might be avoided. It is a point of delicacy and difficulty to tell any one what we wish could be altered in his manner of prayer, but it can give no just offence to ask a friend, if he has read a letter on this subject, in "A Collection of Twenty-six Letters," published in 1775.—I am, &c.

LETTER XIX.

On Controversy.

DEAR SIR,—As you are likely to be engaged in controversy, and your love of truth is joined with a natural warmth of temper, my friendship makes me solicitous on your behalf. You are of the strongest side; for truth is great, and must prevail; so that a person of abilities, inferior to yours, might take the field with a confidence of victory. I am not therefore anxious for the event of the battle; but I would have you more than a conqueror, and to triumph not only over your adversary, but over yourself. If you cannot be vanquished, you may be wounded. To preserve you from such wounds as might give you cause of weeping over your conquests, I would present you with some considerations, which, if duly attended to, will do you the service of a coat of mail; such armour, that you need not complain, as David did of Saul's, that it will be more cumbersome than useful;

for you will easily perceive it is taken from that great magazine provided for a christian soldier, the word of God. I take it for granted, that you will not expect any apology for my freedom, and therefore I shall not offer one. For method's sake, I may reduce my advice to three heads,—respecting your opponent, the public, and yourself.

As to your opponent, I wish, that before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by earnest prayer to the Lord's teaching and blessing. This practice will have a direct tendency to conciliate your heart to love and pity him; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write. If you account him a believer, though greatly mistaken in the subject of debate between you, the words of David to Joab, concerning Absalom, are very applicable: "Deal gently with him for my sake." The Lord loves him and bears with him; therefore you must not despise him, or treat him harshly. The Lord bears with you likewise, and expects that you should show tenderness to others, from a sense of the much forgiveness you need yourself. In a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now. Anticipate that period in your thoughts; and though you may find it necessary to oppose his errors, view him personally as a kindred soul, with whom you are to be happy in Christ for ever. But if you look upon him as an unconverted person, in a state of enmity against God and his grace (a supposition which, without good evidence, you should be very unwilling to admit,) he is a more proper object of your compassion than of your anger. Alas! he knows not what he does: but you know who has made you to differ. If God in his sovereign pleasure had so appointed, you might have been as he is now; and he, instead of you, might have been set for the defence of the gospel. You were both equally blind by nature. If you attend to this, you will not reproach or hate him, because the Lord has been pleased to open your eyes, and not his. Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation. If, indeed, they who differ from us have a power of changing themselves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften their own hearts, then we might with less inconsistency be offended at their obstinacy; but if we believe the very contrary to this, our part is, not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who oppose, "if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth." If you write with a desire of being an instrument of correcting mistakes, you will of

course be cautious of laying stumbling-b'ocks in the way of the blind, or of using any expressions that may exasperate their passions, confirm them in their prejudices, and thereby make their conviction, humanly speaking, more impracticable.

By printing, you will appeal to the public, where your readers may be ranged under three divisions. First, such as differ from you in principle. Concerning these I may refer you to what I have already said. Though you have your eyes upon one person chiefly, there are many like-minded with him; and the same reasoning will hold, whether as to one or to a million. There will be likewise many who pay too little regard to religion, to have any settled system of their own, and yet are pre-engaged in favour of those sentiments which are least repugnant to the good opinion men naturally have of themselves. These are very incompetent judges of doctrines, but they can form a tolerable judgment of a writer's spirit. They know that meekness, humility, and love, are the characteristics of a christian temper; and though they affect to treat the doctrines of grace as mere notions and speculations, which, supposing they adopted them, would have no salutary influence upon their conduct; yet from us, who profess these principles, they always expect such dispositions as correspond with the precepts of the gospel. They are quick-sighted to discern when we deviate from such a spirit, and avail themselves of it to justify their contempt of our arguments. The scriptural maxim, That "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," is verified by daily observation. If our zeal is embittered by expressions of anger, invective, or scorn, we may think we are doing service to the cause of truth, when in reality we shall only bring it into discredit. The weapons of our warfare, and which alone are powerful to break down the strong holds of error, are not carnal, but spiritual; arguments fairly drawn from scripture and experience, and enforced by such a mild address, as may persuade our readers, that, whether we can convince them or not, we wish well to their souls, and contend only for the truth's sake: if we can satisfy them that we act up to these motives, our point is half gained; they will be more disposed to consider calmly what we offer; and if they should still dissent from our opinions, they will be constrained to approve of our intentions.

You will have a third class of readers, who, being of your own sentiments, will readily approve of what you advance, and may be further established and confirmed in their views of scripture doctrines, by a clear and masterly elucidation of your subject. You may be instrumental to their edification, if the laws of kindness, as well as of truth, re-

gulates your pen; otherwise you may do them harm. There is a principle of self, which disposes us to despise those who differ from us; and we are often under its influence, when we think we are only showing a becoming zeal in the cause of God. I readily believe, that the leading points of Arminianism spring from, and are nourished by, the pride of the human heart; but I should be glad if the reverse was always true; and that to embrace what are called the Calvinistic doctrines was an infallible token of an humble mind. I think I have known some Arminians, that is, persons who, for want of clearer light, have been afraid of receiving the doctrines of free grace, who yet have given evidence that their hearts were in a degree humbled before the Lord. And, I am afraid, there are Calvinists, who, while they account it a proof of their humility, that they are willing, in words, to debase the creature, and to give all the glory of salvation to the Lord, yet know not what manner of spirit they are of. Whatever it be that makes us trust in ourselves that we are comparatively wise or good, so as to treat those with contempt who do not subscribe to our doctrines, or follow our party, is a proof and fruit of a self-righteous spirit. Self-righteousness can feed upon doctrines, as well as upon works; and a man may have the heart of a Pharisee, while his head is stored with orthodox notions of the unworthiness of the creature, and the riches of free grace. Yea, I would add, the best of men are not wholly free from this leaven; and therefore are too apt to be pleased with such representations as hold up our adversaries to ridicule, and, by consequence, flatter our own superior judgments. Controversies, for the most part, are so managed as to indulge, rather than to repress this wrong disposition; and, therefore, generally speaking, they are productive of little good. They provoke those whom they should convince, and puff up those whom they should edify. I hope your performance will savour of a spirit of true humility, and be a means of promoting it in others.

This leads me, in the last place, to consider your own concern in your present undertaking. It seems a laudable service to defend the faith once delivered to the saints; we are commanded to contend earnestly for it, and to convince gainsayers. If ever such defences were seasonable and expedient, they appear to be so in our day, when errors abound on all sides, and every truth of the gospel is either directly denied, or grossly misrepresented. And yet we find but very few writers of controversy who have not been manifestly hurt by it. Either they grow in a sense of their own importance, or imbibe an angry, contentious spirit, or they insensibly withdraw their attention from those things which are the food, and imme-

diate support of the life of faith, and spend their time and strength upon matters which, at most, are but of a secondary value. This shows, that if the service is honourable, it is dangerous. What will it profit a man, if he gain his cause and silence his adversary, if at the same time he loses that humble, tender frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is made? Your aim, I doubt not, is good; but you have need to watch and pray, for you will find Satan at your right hand, to resist you. He will try to debase your views; and though you set out in defence of the cause of God, if you are not continually looking to the Lord to keep you, it may become your own cause, and awaken in you those tempers which are inconsistent with true peace of mind, and will surely obstruct communion with God. Be upon your guard against admitting any thing personal into the debate. If you think you have been ill treated, you will have an opportunity of showing that you are a disciple of Jesus, who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not." This is our pattern; thus we are to speak and write for God, "not rendering railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; knowing that hereunto we are called." The wisdom that is from above is not only pure, but peaceable and gentle; and the want of these qualifications, like the dead fly in the pot of ointment, will spoil the savour and efficacy of our labours. If we act in a wrong spirit, we shall bring little glory to God, do little good to our fellow-creatures, and procure neither honour nor comfort to ourselves. If you can be content with showing your wit, and gaining the laugh on your side, you have an easy task; but I hope you have a far nobler aim, and that, sensible of the solemn importance of gospel-truths, and the compassion due to the souls of men, you would rather be a means of removing prejudices in a single instance, than obtain the empty applause of thousands. Go forth, therefore, in the name and strength of the Lord of Hosts, speaking the truth in love; and may he give you a witness in many hearts, that you are taught of God, and favoured with the unction of his Holy Spirit. I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

On Conformity to the World.

DEAR SIR,—You will, perhaps, be surprised to see my thoughts on your query in print, rather than to receive them by post, as you expected. But as the subject of it is of general concern, I hope that you will not be displeased that I have taken this method.

It would do honour to the pen of an able casuist, and might be of considerable service in the present day, clearly to explain the force of the apostle's precept, "Be not conformed to this world;" and to state the just boundary between a sinful compliance with the world, and that scrupulous singularity which springs from a self-righteous principle, and a contracted view of the spirit and liberty of the gospel. To treat this point accurately, would require a treatise, rather than a letter; I only undertake to offer you a few hints; and, indeed, when the mind is formed to a spiritual taste, a simple desire to be guided by the word and Spirit of God, together with a due attention to our own experience, will, in most practical cases, supersede the necessity of long and elaborate disquisitions.

By the world, in the passage alluded to, Rom. xii. 2, I suppose the apostle means the men of the world, in distinction from believers; these, not having the love of God in their hearts, or his fear before their eyes, are, of course, engaged in such pursuits and practices as are inconsistent with our holy calling, and which we cannot imitate or comply with them, without hurting our peace and our profession. We are, therefore, bound to avoid conformity to them in all such instances; but we are not obliged to decline all intercourse with the world, or to impose restraints upon ourselves, when the scriptures do not restrain us, in order to make us as unlike the world as possible. To instance in a few particulars:—

It is not necessary, perhaps it is not lawful, wholly to renounce the society of the world. A mistake of this kind took place in the early ages of christianity, and men (at first, perhaps, with a sincere desire of serving God without distraction) withdrew into deserts and uninhabited places, and wasted their lives at a distance from their fellow-creatures. But unless we could flee from ourselves likewise, this would afford us no advantage; so long as we carry our own wicked hearts with us, we shall be exposed to temptation, go where we will. Besides, this would be thwarting the end of our vocation. Christians are to be the salt and the light of the world, conspicuous as cities set upon a hill; they are commanded to "let their light shine before men, that they, beholding their good works, may glorify their Father who is in heaven." This injudicious deviation from the paths of nature and providence, gave occasion, at length, to the vilest abominations; and men, who withdrew from the world under the pretence of retirement, became the more wicked and abandoned, as they lived more out of public view and observation.

Nor are we at liberty, much less are we enjoined, to renounce the duties of relative

life, so as to become careless in the discharge of them. Allowances should, indeed, be made for the distress of persons newly awakened, or under the power of temptation, which may, for a time, so much engross their thoughts, as greatly to indispose them for their bounden duty. But in general, the proper evidence of true christians, is, not merely that they can talk about divine things, but that, by the grace of God, they live and act agreeable to the rules of his word, in the state in which his providence has placed them, whether as masters or servants, husbands or wives, parents or children: bearing rule, or yielding obedience, as in his sight. Diligence and fidelity in the management of temporal concerns, though observable in the practice of many worldly men, may be maintained without a sinful conformity to the world.

Neither are we required to refuse a moderate use of the comforts and conveniences of life, suitable to the station which God has appointed us in the world. The spirit of self-righteousness and will-worship works much in this way, and supposes that there is something excellent in long fastings, in abstaining from pleasant food, in wearing meaner clothes than is customary with those in the same rank of life, and in many other austerities and singularities not commanded by the word of God. And many persons, who are in the main sincere, are grievously burdened with scruples respecting the use of lawful things. It is true, there is need of a constant watch, lest what is lawful in itself become hurtful to us by its abuse. But these outward strictnesses may be carried to great lengths, without a spark of true grace, and even without the knowledge of the true God. The mortifications and austerities practised by the Bramins in India (if the accounts we have of them be true) are vastly more severe than the most zealous effects of modern superstition in our country. There is a strictness which arises rather from ignorance than knowledge, is wholly conversant about externals, and gratifies the spirit of self as much in one way as it seems to retrench it in another. A man may almost starve his body to feed his pride; but to those who fear and serve the Lord, every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the precept is very extensive and important, "Be not conformed to the world." As believers, we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Heaven is our country, and the Lord is our King. We are to be known and noticed as his subjects, and therefore, it is his pleasure, that we do not speak the language, or adopt the customs of the land in which we sojourn.

We are not to conform to the world, as we did in the days of our ignorance. And though we have received the principles of grace, and have tasted of the goodness of the Lord, the admonition is still needful; for we are renewed but in part, and are liable to be drawn aside to our hurt, by the prevalence of evil examples and customs around us.

We must not conform to the spirit of the world. As members of society, we have a part to act in it, in common with others. But if our business is the same, our principles and ends are to be entirely different. Diligence in our respective callings is, as I have already observed, commendable, and our duty; but not with the same views which stimulate the activity of the men of the world. If they rise early, and take rest late, their endeavours spring from, and terminate in self, to establish and increase their own importance, to add house to house, and field to field, that, like the builders of Babel, they may get themselves a name, or provide means for the gratification of their sinful passions. If they succeed, they sacrifice to their own net; if they are crossed in their designs, they are filled with anxiety and impatience; they either murmur or despond. But a christian is to pursue his lawful calling with an eye to the providence of God, and with submission to his wisdom. Thus, so far as he acts in the exercise of faith, he cannot be disappointed. He casts his care upon his heavenly Father, who has promised to take care of him. What he gives, he receives with thankfulness, and is careful, as a faithful steward, to improve for the furtherance of the cause of God, and the good of mankind; and if he meets with losses and crosses, he is not disconcerted, knowing that all his concerns are under a divine direction; that the Lord, whom he serves, chooses for him better than he could choose for himself: and that his best treasure is safe, out of the reach of the various changes to which all things in the present state are liable.

We must not conform to the maxims of the world. The world, in various instances, calls evil good, and good evil. But we are to have recourse to the law and to the testimony, and to judge of things by the unerring word of God, uninfluenced by the determination of the great, or the many. We are to obey God rather than man, though upon this account, we may expect to be despised or reviled, to be made a gazing-stock or a laughing-stock to those who set his authority at defiance. We must bear our testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, avow the cause of his despised people, and walk in the practice of universal obedience, patiently endure reproaches, and labour to overcome evil with good. Thus we shall show that we are not ashamed of him. And there is an hour coming, when he will not be ashamed of us, who

have followed him, and borne his cross, in the midst of a perverse generation, but will own our worthless names before the assembled world.

We must not conform to the world in their amusements and diversions. We are to mix with the world so far as our necessary and providential connexions engage us; so far as we have a reasonable expectation of doing, or getting good, and no further. "What fellowship hath light with darkness, or what concord hath Christ with Belial?" What can a believer have into those places and companies, where every thing tends to promote a spirit of dissipation; where the fear of God has no place; where things are purposely disposed to inflame, or indulge corrupt and sinful appetites and passions, and to banish all serious thoughts of God and ourselves! If it is our duty to redeem time, to walk with God, to do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to follow the example which he set us when he was upon earth, and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling; it must of course be our duty to avoid a conformity with the world in those vain and sensual diversions, which stand in as direct contradiction to a spiritual frame of mind as darkness to light.

The leading desires of every person under the influence of gospel-principles, will be to maintain a habitual communion with God in his own soul, and to manifest the power of his grace in the sight of men. So far as a christian is infected by a conformity to the spirit, maxims, and sinful customs of the world, these desires will be disappointed. Fire and water are not more opposite than that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and that poor precarious pleasure which is sought in a compliance with the world; a pleasure (if worthy the name) which grieves the Spirit of God and stupifies the heart. Whoever, after having tasted that the Lord is gracious, has been prevailed on to make the experiment, and to mingle with the world's vanities, has certainly thereby brought a damp upon his experience, and indisposed himself for the exercise of prayer, and the contemplation of divine truths. And if any are not sensible of a difference in this respect, it is because the poison has taken a still deeper effect, so as to benumb their spiritual senses. Conformity to the world is the bane of many professors in this day. They have found a way, as they think, to serve both God and mammon. But because they are double-minded, they are unstable; they make no progress; and notwithstanding their frequent attendance upon ordinances, they are lean from day to day; a form of godliness, a scheme of orthodox notions they may attain to, but they will remain destitute of the life, power, and comfort of religion, so long as they cleave to those things which are incompatible with it.

Conformity to the world is equally an obstruction in the way of those who profess a desire of glorifying God in the sight of men. Such professors do rather dishonour him; by their conduct, as far as in them lies, they declare, that they do not find the religion of the gospel answer their expectations; that it does not afford them the satisfaction they once hoped for from it; and that therefore they are forced to seek relief from the world. They grieve the people of God by their compliances, and oftentimes they mislead the weak, and, by their examples encourage them to venture upon the like liberties, which otherwise they durst not have attempted. They embolden the wicked likewise in their evil ways, while they see a manifest inconsistency between their avowed principles and their practice; and thus they cause the ways of truth to be evil spoken of.—The paper constrains me to conclude abruptly. May the Lord enable you and me to lay this subject to heart, and to pray that we may, on the one hand, rightly understand and prize our christian liberty; and, on the other hand, be preserved from that growing evil, a conformity to the world.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXI.

"I was once blind, but now I see."

DEAR SIR,—The question, What is the discriminating characteristic nature of a work of grace upon the soul? has been upon my mind; if I am able to give you satisfaction concerning it, I shall think my time well employed.

The reason why men in a natural state are utterly ignorant of spiritual truths, is, that they are wholly destitute of a faculty suited to their perception. A remarkable instance we have in the absurd construction which Nicodemus put upon what our Lord had spoken to him concerning the new birth. And in the supernatural communication of this spiritual faculty, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, I apprehend the inimitable and abiding criterion, which is the subject of our inquiry, does primarily consist. Those passages of scripture wherein the gospel-truth is compared to light, lead to a familiar illustration of my meaning. Men, by nature, are stark blind with respect to this light; by grace the eyes of the understanding are opened. Among a number of blind men, some may be more ingenious and of better capacity than others. They may be better qualified for such studies and employments which do not require eye-sight, than many who can see, and may attain to considerable skill in them; but with respect to the true nature of light and colours, they are all ex-

actly upon a level. A blind man, if ingenious and inquisitive, may learn to talk about the light, the sun, or the rainbow, in terms borrowed from those who have seen them; but it is impossible that he can have (I mean a man born blind) a just idea of either; and whatever hearsay knowledge he may have acquired, he can hardly talk much upon these subjects without betraying his real ignorance. The case of one mentioned by Mr. Locke has been often quoted. He believed, that after much inquiry and reflection, he had at last found out what scarlet was; and being asked to explain himself, "I think," says he, "scarlet has something like the sound of a trumpet." This man had about the same knowledge of natural light as Nicodemus had of spiritual. Nor can all the learning or study in the world enable any person to form a suitable judgment of divine truth, till the eyes of his mind are opened, and then he will perceive it at once.

Indeed this comparison is well suited to show the entire difference between nature and grace, and to explain the ground of that enmity and scorn which fills the hearts of blinded sinners, against those who profess to have been enlightened by the Spirit of God. The reason why blind men are not affronted when we tell them they cannot see, seems to be, that they are borne down by the united testimony of all who are about them. Every one talks of seeing; and they find by experience, that those who say they can see, can do many things which the blind cannot. Some such conviction as this many have who live where the gospel is preached, and is made the power of God to the salvation of others. The conversation and conduct of the people of God convinces them, that there is a difference, though they cannot tell wherein it consists. But if we would suppose it possible, that there was a whole nation of blind men, and one or two persons should go amongst them, and profess that they could see, while they could not offer them such a proof of their assertion as they were capable of receiving, nor even explain, to their satisfaction, what they meant by sight, what may we imagine would be the consequence? I think there is little doubt but these innovators would experience much the same treatment as the believers of Jesus often meet with from a blind world. The blind people would certainly hate and despise them for presuming to pretend to what they had not. They would try to dispute them out of their senses, and bring many arguments to prove, that there could be no such thing as either light or sight. They would say, as many say now, How is it if these things are so, that we should know nothing of them? Yea, I think it probable, they would rise against them as deceivers and enthusiasts, and disturbers of the public peace, and say, "Away with such fellows from

the earth; it is not fit that they should live." But if we should suppose further, that during the heat of the contest, some of these blind men should have their eyes suddenly opened, the dispute as to them would be at an end in a minute: they would confess their former ignorance and obstinacy, confirm the testimony of those whom they before despised, and of course share in the same treatment from their blind brethren, perhaps be treated still worse, as apostates from the opinion of the public.

If this illustration is justly applicable to our subject, it may lead us to several observations, or inferences, which have a tendency to confirm what we are elsewhere expressly taught by the word of God.

In the first place, it shows, that regeneration, or that great change without which a man cannot see the kingdom of God, is the effect of almighty power. Neither education, endeavours, or arguments, can open the eyes of the blind. It is God alone, who at first caused light to shine out of darkness, who can shine into our hearts "to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." People may attain some natural ideas of spiritual truths by reading books, or hearing sermons, and may thereby become wise in their own conceits: they may learn to imitate the language of an experienced christian; but they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm, and are as distant from the true meaning of the terms, as a blind man who pronounces the words blue or red, is from the ideas which those words raise in the minds of a person who can distinguish colours by his sight. And from hence we may infer the sovereignty as well as the efficacy of grace; since it is evident, not only that the objective light, the word of God, is not afforded universally to all men; but that those who enjoy the same outward means have not all the same perceptions. There are many who stumble in the noon-day, not for want of light but for want of eyes; and they who now see, were once blind even as others, and had neither power nor will to enlighten their own minds. It is a mercy, however, when people are so far sensible of their own blindness as to be willing to wait for the manifestation of the Lord's power, in the ordinances of his appointment. He came into the world, and he sends forth his gospel, that those who see not may see; and when there is a desire raised in the heart for spiritual sight, it shall in his due time be answered.

From hence likewise we may observe the proper use and value of the preaching of the gospel, which is the great instrument by which the Holy Spirit opens the blind eyes. Like the rod of Moses, it owes all its efficacy to the appointment and promises of God. Ministers cannot be too earnest in the dis-

charge of their office; it behoves them to use all diligence to find out acceptable words, and to proclaim the whole counsel of God. Yet when they have done all, they have done nothing, unless their word is accompanied to the heart by the power and demonstration of the Spirit. Without this blessing, an apostle might labour in vain: but it shall be in a measure afforded to all who preach the truth in love, in simplicity, and in an humble dependence upon him who alone can give success. This, in a great measure, puts all faithful ministers on a level, notwithstanding any seeming disparity in gifts and abilities. Those who have a lively and pathetic talent may engage the ear, and raise the natural passions of their hearers; but they cannot reach the heart. The blessing may be rather expected to attend the humble than the voluble speaker.

Further we may remark, that there is a difference in kind, between the highest attainments of nature, and the effects of grace in the lowest degree. Many are convinced, who are not truly enlightened; are afraid of the consequences of sin, though they never saw its evil; have a seeming desire of salvation, which is not founded upon a truly spiritual discovery of their own wretchedness, and the excellency of Jesus. These may, for a season, hear the word with joy, and walk in the way of professors; but we need not be surprised if they do not hold out, for they have not root. Though many shall fall, the foundation of God still standeth sure. We may confidently affirm, upon the warrant of scripture, that they who, having for awhile escaped the pollutions of the world, are again habitually entangled in them, or who, having been distressed upon the account of sin, can find relief in a self-righteous course, and stop short of Christ, "who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth;" we may affirm, that these, whatever profession they may have made, were never capable of receiving the beauty and glory of the gospel-salvation. On the other hand, though where the eyes are divinely enlightened, the soul's first views of itself and of the gospel may be confused and indistinct, like him who saw men, as it were trees walking; yet this light is like the dawn, which, though weak and faint at its first appearance, shineth more and more unto the perfect day. It is the work of God; and his work is perfect in kind, though progressive in the manner. He will not despise or forsake the day of small things. When he thus begins, he will make an end; and such persons, however feeble, poor, and worthless, in their own apprehensions, if they have obtained a glimpse of the Redeemer's glory, as he is made unto us, of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that his name is precious, and the desire of their hearts is towards him, have good

reason to hope and believe, as the wife of Manoah did in a similar case, that if the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have showed them such things as these.

Once more, this spiritual sight and faculty is that which may be principally considered as inherent in a believer. He has no stock of grace, or comfort, or strength, in himself. He needs continual supplies; and if the Lord withdraws from him, he is as weak and unskilful, after he has been long engaged in the christian warfare, as he was when he first entered upon it. The eye is of little present use in the dark; for it cannot see without light. But the return of light is no advantage to a blind man. A believer may be much in the dark; but his spiritual sight remains. Though the exercise of grace may be low, he knows himself, he knows the Lord, he knows the way of access to a throne of grace. His frames and feelings may alter; but he has received such a knowledge of the person and offices, the power and grace, of Jesus the Saviour, as cannot be taken from him; and could withstand even an angel that should preach another gospel, because he has seen the Lord.—The paper constrains me to break off. May the Lord increase his light in your heart, and in the heart of, &c.

LETTER XXII.

On the Advantages of a State of Poverty.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I confess myself almost ashamed to write to you. You are pinched by poverty, suffer the want of many things, and your faith is often sharply tried, when you look at your family, and, perhaps, can hardly conceive how you shall be able to supply them with bread to the end of the week. The Lord has appointed me a different lot. I am favoured, not only with the necessaries, but with the comforts of life. Now, I could easily give you plenty of good advice; I could tell you, it is your duty to be patient, and even thankful, in the lowest state; that if you have bread and water, it is more than you deserve at the Lord's hands; and that, as you are out of hell, and made a partaker of the hope of the gospel, you ought not to think any thing hard that you meet with in the way of heaven. If I should say thus, and say no more, you would not dispute the truth of my assertions; but, as coming from me, who live at ease, to you, who are beset with difficulties, you might question their propriety, and think that I know but little of my own heart, and could feel but little for your distress. You would probably compare me to one who should think himself a mariner, because he has studied the art of navigation by the fireside, though he had never

seen the sea. Yet I hope, by my frequent converse with the Lord's poor (for I live in the midst of an afflicted and poor people,) I have made some observations, which, though not strictly the fruit of my own experience, may not be wholly unseasonable or unacceptable to you.

Whether the rich or the poor, who live without God in the world, are most to be pitied is not easy to determine. It is a dreadful case to be miserable in both worlds; but yet the parade and seeming prosperity in which some live for a few years, will be no abatement, but rather a great aggravation, of their future torment. A madman is equally to be pitied, whether he is laid upon a bed of state, or a bed of straw. Madness is in the heart of every unregenerate sinner; and the more he possesses of this world's goods, he is so much the more extensively mischievous. Poverty is so far a negative good to those who have no other restraint, that it confines the effects of the evil heart within narrower bounds, and the small circle of their immediate connexions; whereas the rich, who live under the power of sin, are unfaithful stewards of a larger trust, and, by their pernicious influence, are often instrumental in diffusing profaneness and licentiousness through a country or a kingdom, besides the innumerable acts of oppression, and the ravages of war, which are perpetrated to gratify the insatiable demands of luxury, ambition, and pride. But to leave this, if we turn our eyes from the false maxims of the world, and weigh things in the balance of the sanctuary, I believe we shall find that the believing poor, though they have many trials which call for our compassion, have some advantages above those of the Lord's people to whom he has given a larger share of the good things of the present life. Why else does the apostle say, "God has chosen the poor?" or why do we see, in fact, that so few of the rich or wise, or mighty are called! Certainly he does not choose them because they are poor; for "he is no respecter of persons:" rather, I think, we may say, that knowing what is in their hearts, the nature of the world through which they are to pass, and what circumstances are best suited to manifest the truth and efficacy of his grace, he has, in the general, chosen poverty as the best state for them. Some exceptions he has made that his people may not be wholly without support and countenance, and that the sufficiency of his grace may be made known in every state of life; but, for the most part, they are a poor and afflicted people; and in this appointment he has had a regard to their honour, their safety, and their comfort. I have room but for a very brief illustration of these particulars.

Sanctified poverty is an honourable state: not so, indeed, in the judgment of the world.

X

The rich have many friends; the poor are usually despised. But I am speaking of that honour which cometh from God only. The poor, who are "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," are honoured with the nearest external conformity to Jesus, their Saviour, who, though he was Lord of all, was pleased, for our sakes, to make himself so poor, that he had not where to lay his head, and submitted to receive assistance from the contributions of his followers, Luke viii. 3. By this astonishing humiliation, he poured contempt upon all human glory, and made the state of poverty honourable: and now, "he that reproacheth the poor, despiseth his Maker." And as he was, so were his apostles in this world. They were not only destitute of rank, titles, and estates, but were often in hunger and nakedness, and had no certain dwelling place. To infer from hence as some have done, that riches, and the accommodations of life, are unsuitable to the state of a christian, is the mark of a superstitious and legal spirit. There were, in those days, several believers that were in a state of affluence; as, for instance, Theophilus, whom Luke addresses by a title of honour, *Κρατιστος* (most noble, or excellent,) the same which St. Paul ascribes to the Roman governor. But we may safely infer, that that state of life in which our Lord was pleased to converse with men, and which was the lot of his apostles, and most favoured servants, is honourable in the sight of God.

Again, poverty is honourable, because it affords a peculiar advantage for glorifying God, and evidencing the power of his grace, and the faithfulness of his promises, in the sight of men. A believer, if rich, lives by faith, and his faith meets with various trials. He himself knows by whom he stands; but it is not ordinarily so visible to others, as in the case of the poor. When ministers speak of the all-sufficiency of God to those who trust in him, and the certain effect of the principles of the gospel, in supporting, satisfying, and regulating the mind of man, the poor are the best and most unsuspected witnesses for the truth of their doctrine. If we are asked, Where do these wonderful people live, who can delight themselves in God, esteem a day in his courts better than a thousand, and prefer the light of his countenance to all earthly joy? we can confidently send them to the poor of the flock. Amongst the number who are so called, there are some who will not disappoint our appeal. Let the world, who refuse to believe the preachers, believe their own eyes; and when they see a poor person content, thankful, rejoicing, admiring the Lord's goodness for affording him what they account hard fare, and, in the midst of various pressures, incapable of being bribed by offers, or terrified by threats, to swerve a step from the path of known

duty, let them acknowledge that this is the finger of God. If they harden themselves against this evidence, "neither would they be persuaded, though one should arise from the dead."

And as poverty is an honourable, so it is comparatively a safe state. True, it is attended with its peculiar temptations; but it is not near so suitable to draw forth and nourish the two grand corruptions of the heart, self-importance, and an idolatrous cleaving to the world, as the opposite state of riches. They who are rich in this world, and who know the Lord and their own hearts, feel the wisdom and propriety of the apostle's charge, "Not to be high-minded, nor to trust in uncertain riches." If poor believers consider the snares to which their brethren are exposed, they will rather pray for and pity, than envy them. Their path is slippery; they have reason to cry continually, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe;" for they live in the midst of the hurries and vanities of the world, are engaged in a large sphere of action, and are incessantly exposed to interruptions and snares. The carriage of all around them reminds them of their supposed consequence; and, by the nature of their situation, they are greatly precluded from plain dealing and friendly advice. But the poor are not surrounded with flatterers, nor teased with impertinences. They meet with little to stimulate their pride, or to soothe their vanity. They not only believe in their judgments, but are constrained to feel, by the experience of every day, that this world cannot afford them rest. If they have food and raiment, and grace therewith to be content, they have reason to be thankful for an exemption from those splendid cares and delusive appearances, which are the inseparable attendants of wealth and worldly distinction, and which, if not more burdensome, are, humanly speaking, much more dangerous, and greater impediments to the progress of a spiritual life, than the ordinary trials of the poor.

The believing poor have likewise, for the most part, the advantage in point of spiritual comfort, and that principally in two respects. First, As they are called to a life of more immediate dependence upon the promise and providence of God (having little else to trust to,) they have a more direct and frequent experience of his interposition in their favour. Obadiah was a servant of God, though he lived in the court of Ahab. He, doubtless, had his difficulties in such a situation; but he was not in want. He had not only enough for himself in a time of dearth, but was able to impart to others. We may believe that he well knew he was indebted to the Lord's goodness for his provision; but he could hardly have so sweet, so strong, so sensible an impression of God's watchful care over

him as Elijah had, who, when he was deprived of all human support, was stately fed by the ravens. Such of the Lord's people who have estates in land, or thousands in the bank, will acknowledge, that even the bread they eat is the gift of the Lord's bounty; yet, having a moral certainty of a provision for life, I should apprehend that they cannot exercise faith in the divine providence, with respect to their temporal supplies, so distinctly as the poor, who, having no friend or resource upon earth, are necessitated to look immediately to their Father who is in heaven, for their daily bread. And though it is not given to the world to know what an intercourse is carried on between heaven and earth, nor with what acceptance the prayers of the poor and afflicted enter into the ears of the Lord of hosts; yet many of them have had such proofs of his attention, wisdom, faithfulness, power, and love, in supplying their wants, and opening them a way of relief, when they have been beset with difficulties on all sides, as have been, to themselves at least, no less certain and indisputable, I had almost said, no less glorious, than the miracles which he wrought for Israel, when he divided the Red Sea before them, and gave them food from the clouds. Such evidences of the power of faith, the efficacy of prayer, and the truth of the scriptures (preferable to mountains of gold and silver, and for which the state of poverty furnishes the most frequent occasions,) are a rich overbalance for all its inconveniences. But,

Secondly, I apprehend that the humble and believing poor have, in general, the greatest share of those consolations, which are the effect of the light of God's countenance lifted up upon the soul, of his love shed abroad in the heart, or of a season of refreshment from his presence. By such expressions as these, the scriptures intimate that "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" a description of which, those who have tasted it will not require, and those who are strangers to it, could not understand. This joy is not always the companion of faith, not even of strong faith; but it is that which a believer, whether rich or poor, incessantly thirsts after; and, in comparison whereof, all worldly good is but vanity and disappointment. The Lord imparts this joy to his people, in season and measure, as he sees fit; but his poor people have the largest share. They have little comfort from the world, therefore he is pleased to be their comforter. They have many trials and sufferings; and he with whom they have to do, knows their situation and pressures; he has promised to make their strength equal to their day, and to revive their fainting spirits with heavenly cordials. When it is thus with them, they can say with Jacob, "I have enough;" or, as it is in the original, "I have all." This makes

hard things easy, and the burden light, which the flesh would otherwise complain of as heavy. This has often given a sweeter relish to bread and water, than the sensualist ever found to be in the most studied and expensive refinements of luxury. Blessed are the poor, who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him. They often enjoy the most lively foretastes of the glory which shall be revealed.

Have not you, my friend, found these things true in your own experience? Yes; the Lord has sanctified your crosses, and supported you under them. Hitherto he has helped you, and he will be with you to the end. As you have followed him upon earth, you will ere long follow him to heaven. You are now called to sow in tears; there you shall reap in joy, and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes. In the mean time, be thankful that he honours you, in appointing you to be a witness for the truth and power of his grace, in the midst of an unbelieving world.

It is true, that even where the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. You have sharp trials, which, for the present, cannot be joyous, but grievous; and you have doubtless felt the depravity of your nature, and the subtilty of Satan, at some times prompting you to impatience, envy, and distrust. But these evils are not peculiar to a state of poverty; you would have been exposed to the same had you lived in affluence, together with many others, from which you are now exempted; for riches and poverty are but comparative terms, and it is only the grace of God that can teach us to be content in any possible situation of life. The rich are as prone to desire something which they have not as the poor; and they who have most to lose have most to fear. That a man's life (the happiness of his life) "consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," is an aphorism founded upon the highest authority, and confirmed by universal experience and observation.

In a word, you are not poor, but rich. The promises are your inheritance; heaven is your home; the angels of the Lord are ministering spirits, who rejoice to watch over you for good; and the Lord of angels himself is your sun, and shield, and everlasting portion. It is impossible that you, to whom he has given Himself, his Son, his Spirit, his grace, his kingdom, can want any thing that is truly good for you. If riches were so, he could pour them upon you in abundance, as easily as he provides you your daily bread. But these, for the most part, he bestows on those who have no portion but in the present life. You have great reason to rejoice in the lot he has appointed for you, which secures you from numberless imagi-

nary wants and real dangers, and furnishes us with the fairest opportunities for the manifestation, exercise, and increase of the graces he has implanted in you.—Influenced by these views, I trust you can cheerfully say,

What others value I resign:
Lord, 'tis enough that thou art mine.

I commend you to the blessing of our covenant God, and to Jesus our Saviour, who, when he was rich, made himself poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might be rich.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

On Simplicity and godly Sincerity.

DEAR SIR,—It would be a happy time if all professors of the gospel could, with the apostle, rejoice in the testimony of their consciences, that they walked in simplicity and godly sincerity. How many evils and scandals would be then prevented? But, alas! too many who name the name of Christ, seem to have hardly any idea of this essential part of the christian character. A few thoughts upon a subject so little attended to, may not be unseasonable. The most advanced in the christian life have something of this lesson yet to learn; and the greater proficiency we make in it, the greater will be our inward peace, and the more will our light shine before men, to the glory of our heavenly Father.

Simplicity and sincerity, though inseparable, may be distinguished. The former is the principle from which the latter is derived. Simplicity primarily respects the frame of our spirit in the sight of God; sincerity more directly regards our conduct as it falls under the observation of men. It is true, the terms are frequently used indifferently for each other, and may be so without occasioning any considerable mistake; but as they are not precisely the same, it may be proper, if we would speak accurately, to keep this distinction in view.

Some persons who have been more enamoured with the name of simplicity, than acquainted with its nature, have substituted in its stead a childishness of language and manners, as if they understood the word simple only in the mere vulgar sense, as equivalent to foolish. But this infantine softness gives just disgust to those who have a true taste and judgment of divine things; not only as it is an unnecessary deviation from the common usages of mankind, but because, being the effect of art and imitation, it palpably defeats its own pretences. An artificial, or affected simplicity, is a contradiction in

terms, and differs as much from the simplicity of the gospel, as paint does from beauty.

The true simplicity, which is the honour and strength of a believer, is the effect of a spiritual perception of the truths of the gospel. It arises from, and bears a proportion to, the sense we have of our own unworthiness, the power and grace of Christ, and the greatness of our obligations to him. So far as our knowledge of these things is vital and experimental, it will make us simple-hearted. This simplicity may be considered in two respects,—a simplicity of intention, and a simplicity of dependence. The former stands in opposition to the corrupt workings of self, the latter to the false reasonings of unbelief.

Simplicity of intention implies, that we have but one leading aim, to which it is our deliberate and unreserved desire, that every thing else in which we are concerned may be subordinate and subservient; in a word, that we are devoted to the Lord, and have, by grace, been enabled to choose him, and to yield ourselves to him, so as to place our happiness in his favour, and to make his glory and will the ultimate scope of all our actions. He well deserves this from us. He is the all-sufficient good. He alone is able to satisfy the vast capacity he has given us; for he formed us for himself: and they who have tasted that he is gracious, know that his "loving-kindness is better than life;" and that his presence and fulness can supply the want, or make up the loss of all creature-comforts. So likewise, he has a just claim to us that we should be wholly his; for besides that, as his creatures, we are in his hand as clay in the hands of the potter, he has a redemption title to us. He loved us, and bought us with his own blood. He did not hesitate or halt between two opinions, when he engaged to redeem our souls from the curse of the law, and the power of Satan. He could, in the hour of his distress, have summoned legions of angels, had that been needful, to his assistance, or have destroyed his enemies with a word or a look; he could easily have saved himself: but how then could his people have been saved, or the promises of the scriptures have been fulfilled? Therefore he willingly endured the cross, he gave his back to the smiters, he poured out his blood, he laid down his life. Here was an adorable simplicity of intention in him; and shall we not, O thou lover of souls, be simply, heartily, and wholly thine? Shall we refuse the cup of affliction from thy hand, or for thy sake? Or shall we desire to drink of the cup of sinful pleasure, when we remember what our sins have cost thee? Shall we wish to be loved by the world that hated thee, or to be admired by the world that despised thee? Shall we be ashamed of professing our attachment to such a Saviour? Nay, Lord, forbid it. Let thy love constrain us, let thy name be glori-

fied, and thy will be done by us and in us. Let us count all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us not desire any thing thou seest fit to withhold, nor repine to part with what thou callest for; nor even take pleasure in what thou bestowest, unless we can improve it for thee, and ever prefer thy love above our chief temporal joy! Such is the language of the heart that is blessed with gospel simplicity. It was once the stronghold of sin, the throne of self: but now self is cast down, and Jesus rules by the golden sceptre of love. This principle preserves the soul from low, sordid, and idolatrous pursuits, will admit of no rival near the Beloved, nor will it yield either to the bribes or threats of the world.

There is likewise a simplicity of dependence. Unbelief is continually starting objections, magnifying and multiplying difficulties. But faith in the power and promises of God, inspires a noble simplicity, and casts every care upon him, who is able, and has engaged to support and provide. Thus, when Abraham, at the Lord's call, forsook his country and his father's house, the apostle observes, "He went out, not knowing whither he went." It was enough that he knew whom he followed. The all-sufficient God was his guide, his shield, and his exceeding great reward. So, when exercised with long waiting for the accomplishment of the promise, he staggered not, *or dissatisfied*, he did not dispute or question, but simply depended upon God, who had spoken and was able also to perform. So likewise, when he received that hard command, to offer up his son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," he simply obeyed, and depended upon the Lord to make good his own word, Heb. xi. 17, 18, 19. In this spirit David went forth to meet Goliath, and overcame him; and thus the three worthies were unawed by the threats of Nebuchadnezzar, and rather chose to be cast into a burning furnace, than to sin against the Lord. And thus Elijah, in a time of famine, was preserved from anxiety and want, and supported by extraordinary methods, 1 Kings xvii. 4, 6, 14. In these times we do not expect miracles, in the strict sense of the word, but they who simply depend upon the Lord, will meet with such tokens of his interposition in a time of need, as will, to themselves at least, be a satisfying proof that he careth for them. How comfortable is it to us, as well as ornamental to our profession, to be able to trust the Lord in the path of duty; to believe that he will supply our wants, direct our steps, plead our cause, and control our enemies! Thus he has promised, and it belongs to gospel-simplicity to take his word against all discouragements. This will animate us in the use of all lawful means, because the Lord has com-

manded us to wait upon him in them; but it will likewise inspire confidence and hope when all means seem to fail, Heb. iii. 17, 18. For want of this dependence, many dishonour their profession, and even make shipwreck of the faith. Their hearts are not simple; they do not trust in the Lord, but lean unto their own understandings, and their hopes or fears are influenced by worms like themselves. This causes a duplicity of conduct. They fear the Lord and serve other gods. By their language, at some times, one would suppose, they desire to serve the Lord only; but, as if they feared that he was not able to protect or provide for them, they make a league with the world, and seek either security or advantage from sinful compliances. These cannot rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience. They must live miserably. They are attempting to reconcile what our Lord has declared to be utterly incompatible, the service of God and mammon. They have so much sense of religion as embitters their worldly pursuits; and so much regard to the world as prevents their receiving any real comfort from religion. These are the lukewarm professors, neither hot nor cold; neither approved of men nor accepted of God. They can attend upon ordinances, and speak like christians; but their tempers are un-sanctified, and their conduct irregular and blamable. They are not simple; and therefore they cannot be sincere.

I need not take time to prove, that the effect of simplicity will be sincerity. For they who love the Lord above all, who prefer the light of his countenance to thousands of gold and silver, who are enabled to trust him with all their concerns, and would rather be at his disposal than at their own, will have but little temptation to insincerity. The principles and motives upon which their conduct is formed, are the same in public as in private. Their behaviour will be all of a piece, because they have but one design. They will speak the truth in love, observe a strict punctuality in their dealings, and do unto others as they would have others should do unto them; because these things are essential to their great aim of glorifying and enjoying their Lord. A fear of dishonouring his name, and of grieving his Spirit, will teach them not only to avoid gross and known sins, but to abstain from all appearance of evil. Their conduct will therefore be consistent; and they will be enabled to appeal to all who know them, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world."

To a sincere christian, that craft and cunning which passes for wisdom in the world, appears to be not only unlawful but unnecessary. He has no need of the little reserves, evasions, and disguises, by which de-

signing men endeavour (though often in vain) to conceal their proper characters, and to escape deserved contempt. He is what he seems to be, and therefore is not afraid of being found out. He walks by the light of the wisdom that is from above, and leans upon the arm of almighty power: therefore he walks at liberty, trusting in the Lord, whom he serves with his spirit in the gospel of his Son.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

On Communion with God.

DEAR SIR,—Though many authors have written largely and well concerning communion with God, I shall not refer you to books, or have recourse to them myself; but in compliance with your request, shall simply offer you what occurs to my thoughts upon the subject. I propose not to exceed the limits of a sheet of paper, and must therefore come immediately to the point.

That God is to be worshiped, is generally acknowledged; but that they who worship him in spirit and in truth, have real friendship and communion with him, is known only to themselves. The world can neither understand nor believe it. Many who would not be thought to have cast off all reverence for the scriptures, and therefore do not choose flatly to contradict the apostle's testimony, 1 John i. 3, attempt to evade its force by restraining it to the primitive times. They will allow that it might be so then; but they pretend that circumstances with us are greatly altered. Circumstances are, indeed, altered with us, so far, that men may now pass for christians who confess and manifest themselves strangers to the Spirit of Christ: but who can believe that the very nature and design of christianity should alter in the course of time? And that communion with God, which was essential to it in the apostles, days, should now be so unnecessary and impracticable, as to expose all who profess an acquaintance with it, to the charge of enthusiasm and folly? However, they who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, will not be disputed out of their spiritual senses. If they are competent judges whether they ever saw the light, or felt the beams of the sun, they are no less certain that, by the knowledge of the gospel, they are brought into a state of communion with God.

Communion presupposes union. By nature we are strangers, yea, enemies to God; but we are reconciled, brought nigh, and become his children by faith in Christ Jesus. We can have no true knowledge of God, desire towards him, access unto him, or gracious communications from him, but in and through the Son of his love. He is the medium of

this inestimable privilege; for he is the way, the only way of intercourse between heaven and earth; the sinner's way to God, and God's way of mercy to the sinner. If any pretend to know God, and to have communion with him, otherwise than by the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, and by faith in his name, it is a proof that they neither know God nor themselves. God, if considered abstracted from the revelation of himself in the person of Jesus, is a consuming fire; and if he should look upon us without respect to his covenant of mercy established in the Mediator, we could expect nothing from him but indignation and wrath. But when his Holy Spirit enables us to receive the record which he has given of his Son, we are delivered and secured from condemnation: we are accepted in the Beloved; we are united to him in whom all the fulness of the Godhead substantially dwells, and all the riches of divine wisdom, power, and love, are treasured up. Thus, in him, as the temple wherein the glory of God is manifested, and by him, as the representative and high priest of his people, and through him, as the living head of his mystical body the church, believers maintain communion with God. They have meat to eat which the world knows not of, honour which cometh of God only, joy which a stranger intermeddleth not with. They are, for the most part, poor and afflicted, frequently scorned and reproached, accounted hypocrites or visionaries, knaves or fools; but this one thing makes amends for all, "They have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

I would observe further, that as the incarnation of that mighty One, on whom our help is laid, was necessary, that a perfect obedience to the law, and a complete and proper atonement for sin, might be accomplished in the human nature that had sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God; so in another view it affords us unspeakable advantage for our comfortable and intimate communion with God by him. The adorable and awful perfections of Deity are softened, if I may so speak, and rendered more familiar and engaging to our apprehensions, when we consider them as resident in him, who is very bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and who, having by himself purged our sins, is now seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and reigns, in the nature of man, over all, God blessed for ever. Thus he who knows our frame by becoming man like ourselves, is the supreme and ultimate object of that philanthropy, that human affection which he originally implanted in us. He has made us susceptible of the endearments of friendship and relative life; and he admits us to communion with himself under the most engaging characters and relations, as *our friend, our brother, and our husband.*

They who, by that faith which is of the operation of God, are thus united to him in Christ, are brought thereby into a state of real habitual communion with him. The degree of its exercise and sensible perception on our parts, is various in different persons, and in the same person at different times; for it depends upon the communications we receive from the Lord the Spirit, who distributes to every man severally according to his will, adjusting his dispensations with a wise and merciful respect to our present state of discipline. If we were wholly freed from the effects of a depraved nature, the snares of an evil world; and the subtle temptations of Satan, our actual communion with God would be always lively, sensible, and fervent. It will be thus in heaven; there its exercise will be without obstruction, abatement, or interruption. But so long as we are liable to security, spiritual pride, indolence, an undue attachment to worldly things, and irregular distempered passions, the Lord is pleased to afford, increase, suspend, or renew the sensible impressions of his love and grace, in such seasons and measures as he sees most suitable to prevent or control these evils, or to humble us for them. We grieve his Spirit, and he withdraws; but, by his secret power over our hearts, he makes us sensible of our folly and loss, teaches us to mourn after him, and to entreat his return. These desires, which are the effects of his own grace, he answers in his own time, and shines forth upon the soul with healing in his beams. But such is our weakness, and so unapt are we to retain even those lessons which we have learned, by painful experience, that we are prone to repeat our former miscarriages, and to render a repetition of the same changes necessary. From hence it is, that what we call our frames are so very variable, and our comfortable sense of divine communion is rather transient than abiding. But the communion itself, upon which the life and safety of our souls depend, is never totally obstructed, nor can it be, unless God should be unfaithful of his covenant, and forsake the work of his own hands. And when it is not perceptible to sense, it may ordinarily be made evident to faith, by duly comparing what we read in the scriptures with what passes in our hearts. I say ordinarily, because there may be some excepted cases. If a believer is unhappily brought under the power of some known sin, or has grievously and notoriously declined from his profession, it is possible that the Lord may hide himself behind so dark a cloud, and leave him for a while to such hardness of heart, as that he shall seem to himself to be utterly destitute and forsaken. And the like apprehensions may be formed under some of Satan's violent temptations, when he is permitted to come

in as a flood, and to overpower the apparent exercise of every grace, by a torrent of blasphemous and evil imaginations. Yet the Lord is still present with his people in the darkest hours, or the unavoidable event of such cases would be apostasy or despair. Psalm xli. 11.

The communion we speak of comprises a mutual intercourse and communication in love, in counsels, and in interests.

In love.—The Lord, by his Spirit, manifests and confirms his love to his people. For this purpose he meets them at his throne of grace, and in his ordinances. There he makes himself known unto them, as he does not unto the world; causes his goodness to pass before them; opens, applies, and seals to them his exceeding great and precious promises; and gives them the Spirit of adoption, whereby, unworthy as they are, they are enabled to cry, "Abba, Father." He causes them to understand that great love wherewith he has loved them, in redeeming them by price and by power, washing them from their sins in the blood of the Lamb, recovering them from the dominion of Satan, and preparing for them an everlasting kingdom, where they shall see his face, and rejoice in his glory. The knowledge of this his love to them, produces a return of love from them to him. They adore him and admire him; they make an unreserved surrender of their hearts to him. They view him, and delight in him as their God, their Saviour, and their portion. They account his favour better than life. He is the sun of their souls: if he is pleased to shine upon them, all is well, and they are not greatly careful about other things; but if he hides his face, the smiles of the whole creation can afford them no solid comfort. They esteem one day or hour spent in the delightful contemplation of his glorious excellences, and in the expression of their desires towards him, better than a thousand; and when their love is most fervent, they are ashamed that it is so faint, and chide and bemoan themselves, that they can love him no more. This often makes them long to depart, willing to leave their dearest earthly comforts, that they may see him as he is, without a veil or cloud; for they know that then, and not till then, they shall love him as they ought.

In counsels.—The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. He deals familiarly with them. He calls them not servants only, but friends; and he treats them as friends. He affords them more than promises; for he opens to them the plan of his great designs from everlasting to everlasting; shows them the strong foundations and inviolable securities of his favour towards them, the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of his love, which passeth knowledge, and the unsearchable riches of his grace.

He instructs them in the mysterious conduct of his providence, the reasons and ends of all his dispensations in which they are concerned; and solves a thousand hard questions to their satisfaction, which are inexplicable to the natural wisdom of man. He teaches them likewise the beauty of his precepts, the path of their duty, and the nature of their warfare. He acquaints them with the plots of their enemies, the snares and dangers they are exposed to, and the best methods of avoiding them. And he permits and enables them to acquaint him with all their cares, fears, wants, and troubles, with more freedom than they can unbosom themselves to their nearest earthly friends. His ear is always open to them; he is never weary of hearing their complaints, and answering their petitions. The men of the world would account it a high honour and privilege to have an unrestrained liberty of access to an earthly king; but what words can express the privilege and honour of believers, who, whenever they please, have audience of the King of kings, whose compassion, mercy, and power, are like his majesty, infinite. The world wonders at their indifference to the vain pursuits and amusements by which others are engrossed; that they are so patient in trouble, so inflexible in their conduct, so well satisfied with that state of poverty and obscurity which the Lord, for the most part, allots them; but the wonder would cease if what passes in secret were publicly known. They have obtained the pearl of great price; they have communion with God; they derive their wisdom, strength, and comfort from on high, and cast all their cares upon him who, they assuredly know, vouchsafes to take care of them. This reminds me of another branch of their communion, namely,

In interests.—The Lord claims them for his portion; he accounts them his jewels; and their happiness in time and in eternity is the great end which, next to his own glory, and inseparable connexion with it, he has immediately and invariably in view. In this point all his dispensations of grace and providence shall finally terminate. He himself is their guide and their guard; he keeps them as the apple of his eye; the hairs of their heads are numbered; and not an event in their lives takes place but in an appointed subserviency to their final good. And as he is pleased to espouse their interest, they, through grace, are devoted to his. They are no longer their own; they would not be their own; it is their desire, their joy, their glory, to live to him who died for them. He has won their hearts by his love, and made them a willing people in the day of his power. The glory of his name, the success of his cause, the prosperity of his people, the accomplishment of his will, these are the

great and leading objects which are engraven upon their hearts, and to which all their prayers, desires, and endeavours, are directed. They would count nothing dear, not even their lives, if set in competition with these. In the midst of their afflictions, if the Lord is glorified, if sinners are converted, if the church flourishes, they can rejoice. But when iniquity abounds, when love waxes cold, when professors depart from the doctrines of truth and the power of godliness, then they are grieved and pained to the heart; then they are touched in what they account their nearest interest, because it is their Lord's.

This is the spirit of a true christian. May the Lord increase it in us, and in all who love his name. I have room only to subscribe myself, &c.

LETTER XXV.

On Faith and the Communion of Saints.

DEAR SIR,—In compliance with your request, I freely give you my sentiments on the particulars you desired. Your candour will pass over all inadvertencies, when I give you such thoughts as offer themselves spontaneously, and without study. If the Lord is pleased to bring any thing valuable to my mind, I shall be glad to send it to you; and I am willing to believe, that when christians, in his name and fear, are writing to one another, he does often imperceptibly guide us to drop "a word in season," which, I hope, will be the case at present.

The first object of solicitude to an awakened soul, is safety. The law speaks, the sinner hears and fears. A holy God is revealed, the sinner sees and trembles. Every false hope is swept away; and an earnest inquiry takes place, "What shall I do to be saved?" In proportion as faith is given, Jesus is discovered as the only Saviour, and the question is answered; and as faith increases, fear subsides, and a comfortable hope of life and immortality succeeds.

When we have thus "a good hope through grace," that heaven shall be our home, I think the next inquiry is, or should be, How we may possess as much of heaven by the way as is possible? in other words, How a life of communion with our Lord and Saviour may be maintained in the greatest power, and with the least interruption that is consistent with the present imperfect state of things? I am persuaded, dear Sir, this is the point that lies nearest your heart; and, therefore, I shall speak freely my mind upon it.

In the first place, it is plain from scripture and experience, that all our abatements, de-

clensions, and languors, arise from a defect of faith; from the imperfect manner in which we take up the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the scriptures. If our apprehensions of him were nearly suitable to the characters which he bears in his own word; if we had a strong and abiding sense of his power and grace always upon our hearts, doubts and complaints would cease. This would make hard things easy, and bitter things sweet, and dispose our hearts with cheerfulness to do and suffer the whole will of God; and living upon and to him, as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, joy, and supreme end, we should live a heaven upon earth. The face of the question is, therefore, a little changed, and amounts to this, What are the means to increase and strengthen our faith?

I apprehend that the growth of faith, no less than of all other graces, of which faith is the root, is gradual, and ordinarily effected in the use of appointed means; yet not altogether arbitrary, but appointed by him who knows our frame, and therefore works in us, in a way suited to those capacities he has endued us with.

1. If faith arises from the knowledge of Christ, and this knowledge is only contained in the word of God, it follows, that a careful and frequent perusal of the scriptures, which testify of him, is a fit and a necessary means of improving our faith.

2. If, besides the outward revelation of the word, there must be a revelation of the Spirit of God likewise, whose office it is to take of the things of Jesus, and show them to the soul, by and according to the written word, John xvi. 14; 2 Cor. iii. 18; and if this Spirit is promised and limited to those who ask it; then it follows likewise, that secret prayer is another necessary means of strengthening faith. Indeed, these two I account the prime ordinances. If we were providentially, and not wilfully restrained from all the rest, the word of grace, and the throne of grace, would supply their wants. With these we might be happy in a dungeon or in a desert; but nothing will compensate the neglect of these. Though we should be engaged in a course of the best conversation, and attend upon sermons from one end of the week to the other, we would languish and starve in the midst of plenty; our souls would grow dry and lean, unless these secret exercises are kept up with some degree of exactness.

3. Another means to this purpose, is faithfulness to light already received, John xiv. 15—24, especially ver. 21. It is worth observation, that faith and fidelity, the act of dependence, and the purpose of obedience, are expressed in the Greek by the same word. Though the power is all of God, and the blessing of mere free grace; yet, if there is

any secret reserve, any allowed evil connived at in the heart and life, this will shut up the avenues to comfort, and check the growth of faith. I lay very little stress upon that faith or comfort which is not affected by unsteady walking.

The experience of past years has taught me to distinguish between ignorance and disobedience. The Lord is gracious to the weakness of his people: many involuntary mistakes will not interrupt their communion with him; he pities their infirmity, and teaches them to do better. But if they dispute his known will, and act against the dictates of conscience, they will surely suffer for it. This will weaken their hands, and bring distress into their hearts. Wilful sin sadly perplexes and retards our progress. May the Lord keep us from it! It raises a dark cloud, and hides the Sun of righteousness from our view; and till he is pleased freely to shine forth again, we can do nothing; and for this, perhaps, he will make us wait, and cry out often, "How long, O Lord! how long?"

Thus, by reading the word of God, by frequent prayer, by a simple attention to the Lord's will, together with the use of public ordinances, and the observations we are able to make upon what passes within us and without us, which is what we call experience, the Lord watering and blessing with the influence of his Holy Spirit, may we grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, be more humbled in our own eyes, more weaned from self, more fixed on him as our all in all, till at last we shall meet before his throne.

The communion of saints, another point you desire my thoughts upon, is the great privilege of all the children of God: they may be separate from each other in body, and yet may daily meet at the throne of grace. This is one branch of the communion of saints, to be present in spirit to each other; sharing in common of the influences of the same Spirit, they feel the same desires, aim at the same objects, and, so far as they are personally acquainted, are led to bear each other upon their hearts in prayer. It has often been an encouragement to me in a dark and dull hour, when rather the constraint of duty, than the consideration of privilege, has brought me upon my knees, to reflect how many hearts, and eyes, and hands, have been probably lifted up in the same moment with mine. This thought has given me new courage. O, what a great family has our Father! and what David says of the natural, is true of the spiritual life, Psalm civ. "These all wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them, they gather: thou openest thine hand, and they are filled with good." Then I par-

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ticularly think of those who have been helpful to me in time past; the seasons of sweet communion we have enjoyed together, the subjects of our mutual complaints, &c. Where are they, or how engaged, now? Perhaps this moment praying, or thinking about me. Then I am roused to make their cases my own, and by attempting to plead for them, I get strength to pray for myself. It is an encouragement, no doubt, in a field of battle, to know that the army we belong to is large, unanimous, all in action, pressing on from every side against the common enemy, and gaining ground in every attack. But if we derive fresh spirits from considering our friends and associates on earth, how should we take fire, if we could penetrate within the veil, and take a view of the invisible world! We should not then complain that we were serving God alone. O the numbers, the voices, the raptures, of that heavenly host! Not one complaining note, not one discordant string. How many thousand years has the harmony been strengthening, by the hourly accession of new voices!

I sometimes compare this earth to a temporary gallery or stage, erected for all the heirs of glory to pass over, that they may join in the coronation of the Great King! a solemnity in which they shall not be mere spectators, but deeply interested parties; for he is their husband, their Lord; they bear his name, and shall share in all his honours. Righteous Abel led the van; the procession has been sometimes broader, sometimes narrowed to almost a single person, as in the days of Noah. After many generations had successively entered and disappeared, the King himself passed on in person, preceded by one chosen harbinger. He received many insults on his passage; but he bore all for the sake of those he loved, and entered triumphant into his glory.

He was followed by twelve faithful servants, and after them the procession became wider than ever. There are many yet unborn who must, as we do now, tread in the steps of those gone before; and when the whole company is arrived, the stage shall be taken down and burnt.

Then all the faithful, chosen race
Shall meet before the throne,
Shall bless the conduct of his grace,
And make its wonders known.

Let us then, dear Sir, be of good courage; all the saints on earth, all the saints in heaven, the angels of the Lord, yea, the Lord of angels himself, all are on our side. Though the company is large, yet there is room; there are many mansions;—a place for you; a place, I trust, for worthless me.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

On the gradual Increase of Gospel-illumination.

DEAR SIR,—The day is now breaking: how beautiful its appearance! how welcome the expectation of the approaching sun! It is this thought makes the dawn agreeable, that it is the presage of a brighter light; otherwise, if we expect no more day than it is this minute, we should rather complain of darkness, than rejoice in the early beauties of the morning. Thus the life of grace is the dawn of immortality; beautiful beyond expression, if compared with the night and thick darkness which formerly covered us, yet faint, indistinct, and unsatisfying, in comparison of the glory which shall be revealed.

It is, however, a sure earnest. So surely as we now see the light of the Sun of righteousness, so surely shall we see the Sun himself, Jesus the Lord, in all his glory and lustre. In the mean time, we have reason to be thankful for a measure of light to walk and work by, and sufficient to show us the pits and snares by which we might be endangered; and we have a promise, that our present light shall grow stronger and stronger, if we are diligent in the use of the appointed means, till the messenger of Jesus shall lead us within the veil, and then farewell shades and obscurity for ever!

I can now almost see to write, and shall soon put the extinguisher over my candle. I do this without the least reluctance, when I enjoy a better light; but I should have been unwilling half an hour ago. Just thus, methinks, when the light of the glorious gospel shines into the heart, all our former feeble lights, our apprehensions, and our contrivances, become at once unnecessary and unnoticed. How cheerfully did the apostle put out the candle of his own righteousness, attainments, and diligence, when the true Sun arose upon him? Phil. iii. 7, 8. Your last letter is as a comment upon his determination. Adored be the grace that has given us to be like-minded, even to "account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord."

While I am writing, a new lustre, which gilds the house on the hill, opposite to my study-window, informs me that the sun is now rising: he is rising to others, but not yet to me; my situation is lower, so that they enjoy a few gleams of sunshine before me; yet this momentary difference is inconsiderable, when compared to the duration of a whole day. Thus, some are called by grace earlier in life, and some later; but the seeming difference will be lost and vanish when the *great day of eternity* comes on. There is a *time*, the Lord's best appointed time, when

he will arise and shine upon many a soul that now sits "in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death."

I have been thinking on the Lord's conference with Nicodemus: it is a copious subject, and affords room, in one part or other, for the whole round of doctrinal or experimental topics. Nicodemus is an encouraging example to those who are seeking the Lord's salvation. He had received some favourable impressions of Jesus; but he was very ignorant, and much under the fear of man. He durst only come by night; and at first, though he heard, he understood not; but he, who opens the eyes of the blind, brought him surely, though gently forward. The next time we hear of him, he durst put in a word in behalf of Christ, even in the midst of his enemies, John vii.; and at last, he had the courage openly and publicly to assist in preparing the body of his Master for its funeral, at a time when our Lord's more avowed followers had all forsaken him, and fled. So true is that, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord;" and again, "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength."

Hope then, my soul, against hope: though thy graces are faint and languid, he who planted them, will water his own work, and not suffer them wholly to die. He can make a little one as a thousand; at his presence mountains sink into plains, streams gush out of the flinty rock, and the wilderness blossoms as the rose. He can pull down what sin builds up, and build up what sin pulls down; that which was impossible to us, is easy to him, and he has bid us expect seasons of refreshment from his presence. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXVII.

On Union with Christ.

DEAR SIR,—The union of a believer with Christ is so intimate, so unalterable, so rich in privilege, so powerful in influence, that it cannot be fully represented by any description or similitude taken from earthly things. The mind, like the sight, is incapable of apprehending a great object, without viewing it on different sides. To help our weakness, the nature of this union is illustrated in the scriptures, by four comparisons, each throwing additional light on the subject, yet all falling short of the thing signified.

In our natural state, we are *πλωμένοι* and *περιετρεμένοι*, driven and tossed about by the changing winds of opinion, and the waves of trouble, which hourly disturb and threaten

us upon the uncertain sea of human life. But faith, uniting us to Christ, fixes us upon a sure foundation, the Rock of Ages, where we stand immovable, though storms and floods unite their force against us.

By nature we are separated from the divine life, as branches broken off, withered and fruitless. But grace, through faith, unites us to Christ the living vine, from whom, as the root of all fulness, a constant supply of sap and influence is derived into each of his mystical branches, enabling them to bring forth fruit unto God, and to persevere and abound therein.

By nature we are *στυγνῆτοι καὶ μισοῦντες*, hateful and abominable in the sight of a holy God, and full of enmity and hatred towards each other. By faith uniting us to Christ, we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and join communion among ourselves; even as the members of the same body have each of them union, communion, and sympathy with the head, and with their fellow members.

In our natural estate, we were cast out naked and destitute, without pity, and without help, Ezek. xvi.; but faith uniting us to Christ, interests us in his righteousness, his riches, and his honours. Our Redeemer is our husband; our debts are paid, our settlement secured, and our names changed.

Thus the Lord Jesus, in declaring himself the foundation, root, head, and husband of his people, takes in all the ideas we can frame of an intimate, vital, and inseparable union. Yet all these fall short of truth; and he has given us one farther similitude, of which we can by no means form a just conception, till we shall be brought to see him as he is in his kingdom, John xvii. 21. "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us."

Well may we say, What hath God wrought! How inviolable is the security, how inestimable the privilege, how inexpressible the happiness, of a believer! How greatly is he indebted to grace! He was once afar off, but he is brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ; he was once a child of wrath, but is now an heir of everlasting life. How strong then are his obligations to walk worthy of God, who has called him to his kingdom and glory!—I am, &c.

LETTER XXVIII.

Answer to the Question, In what Manner are we to expect the Lord's promised Guidance, to influence our Judgments, and direct our Steps in the Path of Duty?

DEAR SIR,—It is well for those who are duly sensible of their own weakness and falli-

bility, and of the difficulties with which they are surrounded in life, that the Lord has promised to guide his people with his eye, and to cause them to hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it," when they are in danger of turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. For this purpose he has given us the written word to be a lamp to our feet; and encouraged us to pray for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, that we may rightly understand and apply it. It is, however, too often seen, that many widely deviate from the path of duty, and commit gross and perplexing mistakes, while they profess a sincere desire to know the will of God, and think they have his warrant and authority. This must certainly be owing to misapplication of the rule by which they judge, since the rule itself is infallible, and the promise sure. The scriptures cannot deceive us, if rightly understood; but they may, if perverted, prove the occasion of confirming us in a mistake. The Holy Spirit cannot mislead those who are under his influence; but we may suppose that we are so, when we are not. It may not be unseasonable to offer a few thoughts upon a subject of great importance to the peace of our minds, and to the honour of our holy profession.

Many have been deceived as to what they ought to do, or in forming a judgment beforehand of events in which they are nearly concerned, by expecting direction in ways which the Lord has not warranted.—I shall mention some of the principal of these, for it is not easy to enumerate them all.

Some persons, when two or more things have been in view, and they could not immediately determine which to prefer, have committed their case to the Lord by prayer, and have then proceeded to cast lots; taking it for granted, that after such a solemn appeal, the turning up of the lot might be safely rested in as an answer from God. It is true, the scriptures, and, indeed, right reason assures us, that the Lord disposes the lot; and there are several cases recorded in the Old Testament, in which lots were used by divine appointment; but I think neither these, nor the choosing Matthias by lot to the apostleship, are proper precedents for our conduct. In the division of the land of Canaan, in the affair of Achan, and in the nomination of Saul to the kingdom, recourse was had to lots by God's express command. The instance of Matthias likewise was singular, such as can never happen again, namely, the choice of an apostle, who would not have been upon a par with the rest, who were chosen immediately by the Lord, unless He had been pleased to interpose in some extraordinary way; and all these were before the canon of scripture was completed, and before the full descent and communication of

the Holy Spirit, who was promised to dwell with the church to the end of time. Under the New-Testament dispensation, we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, to make our request known to the Lord, and to cast our cares upon him: but we have neither precept nor promise, respecting the use of lots; and to have recourse to them without his appointment, seems to be tempting him rather than honouring him, and to savour more of presumption than dependence. The effects likewise of this expedient, have often been unhappy and hurtful. A sufficient proof how little it is to be trusted to as a guide of our conduct.

Others, when in doubt, have opened the Bible at a venture, and expected to find something to direct them, in the first verse they should cast their eye upon. It is no small discredit to this practice, that the heathens who knew not the Bible, used some of their favourite books in the same way; and grounded their persuasions of what they ought to do, or of what should befall them, according to the passage they happened to open upon. Among the Romans, the writings of Virgil were frequently consulted upon these occasions; which gave rise to the well-known expression of the *Sortes Virgilianæ*. And indeed Virgil is as well adapted to satisfy inquirers in this way, as the Bible itself; for if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of scripture, without regarding the context, or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances, expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the word of God on their side. Can the opening upon 2 Samuel vii. 3. when Nathan said unto David, "Do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee," be sufficient to determine the lawfulness or expediency of actions! Or can a glance of the eye upon our Lord's words to the woman of Canaan, Matthew xv. 28, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt," amount to a proof, that the present earnest desire of the mind (whatever it may be) shall be surely accomplished! Yet it is certain that matters, big with important consequences, have been engaged in, and the most sanguine expectations formed, upon no better warrant than dipping (as it is called) upon a text of scripture.

A sudden strong impression of a text, that seems to have some resemblance to the concern upon the mind, has been accepted by many as an infallible token that they were right, and that things would go just as they would have them; or, on the other hand, if the passage bore a threatening aspect, it has filled them with fears and inquietudes, which they have afterwards found were groundless and unnecessary. These impressions, being

more out of their power than their former method, have been more generally regarded and trusted to, but have frequently proved no less delusive. It is allowed, that such impressions of a precept or a promise, as humble, animate, or comfort the soul, by giving it a lively sense of the truth contained in the words, are both profitable and pleasant: and many of the Lord's people have been instructed and supported (especially in a time of trouble) by some seasonable word of grace applied and sealed by his Spirit with power to their hearts. But if impressions or impulses are received as a voice from heaven, directing to such particular actions as could not be proved to be duties without them, a person may be unwarily misled into great evils, and gross delusions; and many have been so. There is no doubt but the enemy of our souls, if permitted, can furnish us with scriptures in abundance in this way, and for these purposes.

Some persons judge of the nature and event of their designs, by the freedom which they find in prayer. They say, they commit their ways to God, seek his direction, and are favoured with much enlargement of spirit; and therefore they cannot doubt but what they have in view is acceptable in the Lord's sight. I would not absolutely reject every plea of this kind, yet without other corroborating evidence I could not admit it in proof of what it is brought for. It is not always easy to determine when we have spiritual freedom in prayer. Self is deceitful; and when our hearts are much fixed and bent upon a thing, this may put words and earnestness into our mouths. Too often we first secretly determine for ourselves, and then come to ask counsel of God; in such a disposition we are ready to catch at every thing that may seem to favour our darling scheme: and the Lord, for the detection and chastisement of our hypocrisy, (for hypocrisy it is, though perhaps hardly perceptible to ourselves,) may answer us according to our idols; see Ezek. xiv. 3, 4. Besides, the grace of prayer may be in exercise, when the subject-matter of the prayer may be founded upon a mistake, from the intervention of circumstances which we are unacquainted with. Thus, I may have a friend in a distant country: I hope he is alive, I pray for him, and it is my duty so to do. The Lord, by his Spirit, assists his people in what is their present duty. If I am enabled to pray with much liberty for my distant friend, it may be a proof that the Spirit of the Lord is pleased to assist my infirmities, but it is no proof that my friend is certainly alive at the time I am praying for him: and if the next time I pray for him I should find my spirit straitened, I am not to conclude that my friend is dead, and therefore the Lord will not assist me in praying for him any longer.

Once more, a remarkable dream has sometimes been thought as decisive as any of the foregoing methods of knowing the will of God. That many wholesome and seasonable admonitions have been received in dreams, I willingly allow; but though they may be occasionally noticed, to pay a great attention to dreams, especially to be guided by them, to form our sentiments, conduct our expectations upon them, is superstitious and dangerous. The promises are not made to those who dream, but to those who watch.

Upon the whole, though the Lord may give to some persons, upon some occasions, a hint or encouragement out of the common way, yet expressly to look for and seek his direction in such things as I have mentioned is unscriptural and ensnaring. I could fill many sheets with a detail of the inconveniences and evils which have followed such a dependence, within the course of my own observation. I have seen some presuming they were doing God's service while acting in contradiction to his express commands. I have known others, infatuated to believe a lie, declaring themselves assured, beyond the shadow of a doubt, of things which, after all, never came to pass; and, when at length disappointed, Satan has improved the occasion to make them doubt of the plainest and most important truths, and to account their whole former experience a delusion. By these things weak believers have been stumbled, cavils and offences against the gospel multiplied, and the ways of truth evil spoken of.

But how, then, may the Lord's guidance be expected? After what has been premised negatively, the question may be answered in a few words. In general, he guides and directs his people by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand and to love the scriptures. The word of God is not to be used as a lottery, nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which, detached from their proper places, have no determined import; but it is to furnish us with just principles, right apprehensions, to regulate our judgments and affections, and thereby to influence and direct our conduct. They who study the scriptures, in an humble dependence upon divine teaching, are convinced of their own weakness, are taught to make a true estimate of every thing around them, are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God, discover the nature and duties of their several situations and relations in life, and the snares and temptations to which they are exposed. The word of God dwells richly in them, is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up the doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of scrip-

ture in their minds, and daily comparing themselves with the rule by which they walk, they grow into an habitual frame of spiritual wisdom, and acquire a gracious taste, which enables them to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty, as a musical ear judges of sounds; and they are seldom mistaken, because they are influenced by the love of Christ which rules in their hearts, and a regard to the glory of God, which are the great objects they have in view.

In particular cases the Lord opens and shuts for them, breaks down walls of difficulty which obstruct their path, or hedges up their way with thorns, when they are in danger of going wrong, by the dispensations of his providence. They know that their concerns are in his hands; they are willing to follow whither and when he leads, but are afraid of going before him. Therefore they are not impatient. Because they believe, they will not make haste, but wait daily upon him in prayer; especially when they find their hearts most engaged in any purpose or pursuit, they are most jealous of being deceived by appearances, and dare not move farther or faster than they can perceive his light shining upon their paths. I express at least their desire, if not their attainment: thus they would be. And though there are seasons when faith languishes, and self too much prevails, this is their general disposition, and the Lord, whom they serve, does not disappoint their expectations; he leads them by a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares, and satisfies them that he is and will be their guide even unto death.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXIX.

Thoughts on Rom. viii. 19, 20, 21.

DEAR SIR,—The apostle evidently introduces this passage in confirmation of what he had said before, ver. 17, 18. The privileges of the children of God are not only great, but sure. Every thing we see confirms our expectation of what God has promised. The whole frame of nature, in its present state of imperfection, strongly pleads for a future and better dispensation, as necessary to vindicate the wisdom, goodness, and justice of God; and this shall take place when the sons of God shall be manifested, and shall shine forth in the kingdom of their Father. It would be injurious to the honour of God to suppose that things were at first created in the state they are now in, or that they will always continue so, and therefore the creature, which was originally designed to show forth the glory of God, is represented as burdened and groaning till those impediments are removed

which prevent it from fully answering its proper end.

Dr. Guyse's proposal of reading the 20th verse (the words *in hope* excepted) in a parenthesis, seems greatly to free the sense from embarrassment. Then the proposition in the 19th and 21st verses will be, "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth in hope for the manifestation of the sons of God; because then the creature also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption," &c. The 20th verse expresses the creature's present state, "It is subject to vanity;" and intimates the cause, "Not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same."

By the *creature* some understand mankind, as the word is used Mark xvi. 15; and it is certain that, partly from imperfect tradition, and partly from a general rumour of the prophecies extant among the Jews, the heathens had some confused apprehension of a deliverer from misery; agreeably to which, or rather on account of their need of a saviour, whether they knew it or not, Christ is styled "the desire of all nations." But this does not seem to be the sense; because the creature here is said to be subject to vanity, *not willingly*, and is represented as groaning, travailing, and longing (ver. 22,) for deliverance. But it is so far from being the concurrent desire of all mankind, or indeed the desire of any single person, to obtain freedom from the bondage of sin, that we are naturally pleased with it, and yield a willing subjection. Besides, the period referred to is beyond the present life, and intends not a partial relief here, but a full deliverance hereafter. It seems, therefore, that *creature*, in these verses, and *creation*, in ver. 22, as they are both expressed by the same word in the Greek, are to be taken in the same sense. The whole frame of this lower world, which is now subject to vanity on account of the sin of man, is represented as longing and waiting for deliverance.

The word *ἀποκρίσει*, which we render "earnest expectation," is very emphatical; it imports a raising up or thrusting forward the head, as persons who are in suspense for the return of a messenger, or the issue of some interesting event. Compare Judges v. 28, Luke xxi. 28. It occurs but once more in the New Testament, Phil. i. 20, where the apostle is describing, in one view, the confidence of his hope and the many conflicts and oppositions which were the daily exercise of his faith.

Now it is a frequent beauty in the scripture language to apply human affections to the inanimate creation, and these expressions are to be taken in a figurative sense, as denoting the importance and evidence of what is said. See Gen. iv. 11, Isa. i. 2, Luke xix. 40. The "earnest expectation of the creature," therefore, teaches us two things, the

weight and burden of the evils under which the world groans, and the sure purpose of God to restore all things by Jesus Christ. There is a period approaching when all that is now rough and crooked shall be made plain and straight. The Lord has promised it, and therefore all his works are represented as expecting and waiting for it.

This shall be at "the manifestation of the sons of God." They are now hidden, unknown, unnoticed, and misrepresented, for the most part. Their life is in many respects hidden from themselves, and their privileges altogether hidden from the world; but ere long they will be manifested, their God will openly acknowledge them, every cloud by which they are now obscured shall be removed, and they shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. They have now a gracious liberty; they are freed from condemnation, from the power of sin, from the law as a covenant of works, from the yoke of carnal ordinances, from the traditions and inventions of men, and from the spirit of bondage; yet they suffer much from indwelling sin, the temptations of Satan, and their situation in a wicked and ensnaring world. But they are animated with the hope of a glorious liberty, when every evil, imperfection, and abatement shall cease, when they shall be put in the full possession of a happiness answerable to the riches of divine love, and the efficacy of the blood and mediation of Jesus; and then the curse shall be fully removed from the creation; the Lord shall create all things new, and again pronounce all things good. When they are thus manifested, the creature's expectation shall be answered; it shall be restored to its honour and use. Under what circumstances, and to what particular purposes, this change will take place we know not, but a change worthy of divine wisdom, though beyond the limits of our weak apprehensions, we are warranted from scripture to expect. It is asserted in this passage, to which, perhaps, we may properly add 2 Pet. iii. 13, Rev. xxi. 1. It would be easy to indulge in vain conjectures upon this subject, but it is more safe to restrain them, and to content ourselves with what is clearly revealed. The hour is coming when all difficulties shall be explained, when the mysterious plan of divine providence shall be unfolded, vindicated, and completed; then it shall appear that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head and restorer of the creation, and how fully, in every sense, he has repaired the ruin brought into the world by sin, and destroyed the works of the devil.

In the meantime, the sons of God groan, waiting for their adoption, and the creation groans with them. At present it is subject to vanity. Its original design was to fulfil the will, and to set forth the glory of God; but, by the sin of man, it is disappointed with

respect to these ends, not absolutely, for still the heavens declare his glory and the earth is full of his goodness; but, with regard to outward appearances, there is a great abatement in both these respects. We may instance a few particulars in which the creature is abused and oppressed contrary to the design of its creation.

The creature was intended to show forth the glory of God; but here it has been disappointed, and has groaned, being burdened in all ages. Vain man has always been disposed to serve and worship the creature more than the Creator. The whole world formerly, except the Jews, were sunk in idolatry, paying divine honours to the sun and moon, yea, to stocks and stones; and a great part of the earth is to this moment covered with the same darkness. When this is the case, the creature groans under vanity, being perverted directly contrary to its proper end; and there is another idolatry, if not so gross, yet in us more inexcusable, by which the generality of those who bear the name of christians are no less alienated from the knowledge and love of the true God, than the heathens themselves.

Again, the creatures, as the servants of God, are properly designed to promote the welfare of his children, 1 Cor. iii. 22, Job v. 23. This great end is indeed finally secured by the promise, that all shall work together for their good; but at present they are exposed to great sufferings; all things seem to come alike to all. This, on the Lord's part, is a wise and gracious appointment for the exercise of faith, the mortification of sin, and the advancement of sanctification; but still, in itself, it is a vanity under which the creature groans. When Jesus was crucified in person, the sun withdrew his light, rocks rent, and the earth quaked. There is a proportionable constraint upon nature when he suffers in his members. Sometimes this part of the vanity has been suspended, as in the case of Daniel and his companions; and, doubtless, the creatures would in general reverence the Heir of glory, were not the effects of sin upon them continued for wise reasons. They were subject to man, when man was subject to his Maker. At present there is an apparent inconsistency, when beasts, and storms, and seas rage against those whom the Creator is pleased to favour.

Once more, the creatures of God might be expected to engage in his behalf against his enemies; but it is subject to vanity here likewise. The earth is the Lord's, yet the chief parts and possessions of it are in the hands of those who hate him; yea, his enemies employ his creatures against his own friends. Surely, if the secret powerful restraint of his providence were taken off, it would be otherwise. How ready all the creatures are to

fight in the Lord's cause, if he please to employ them, we may learn from the history of Egypt, in Exodus, from the death of Dathan and Abiram, and the destruction of Sennacherib's army. It is therefore a bondage introduced by sin, and under which they groan, that they are compelled to prolong the lives and serve the occasions of ungodly sinners.

The effect being manifest, that the creature is subject to vanity, the apostle briefly intimates the cause: "Not willingly." The creature, considered in itself, is not in fault. All things were created good in the beginning, and in themselves are good still. Not the fault, but the perversion and subjection of the creature, are here complained of. A beauty, variety, and order in the works of God are still discernible, sufficient to fill an attentive and enlightened mind with wonder, love, and praise; though it must be allowed, that sin has not only alienated our hearts, and disabled our faculties, so that we cannot rightly contemplate God and his works, but has likewise occasioned a considerable alteration in the visible state of things. One instance is expressly specified, Gen. iii. 16.

The positive cause is ascribed to "him who has subjected the same." These words may bear three different senses in agreement with the current doctrine of the scriptures. The prime author of the mischief was Satan. Full of malice and enmity against God and his creatures, he attempted to bring evil into this lower world, and was permitted to succeed; the Lord purposing to over-rule it to his own glory. But for a season, the work of the devil has been to introduce and maintain a sad scene of vanity and misery. Our first father Adam was the direct and immediate cause of the entrance of sin and vanity into the creation. He was created upright, and all things good about him; but he listened to Satan, and sinned, and by his sin

Brought death into the world, and all our woe;

for we were concerned in his transgression, as he was our head, both in nature and law. But we may refer the *him* to God; and this seems best to suit the apostle's design here. God, the righteous judge, subjected the creature to vanity, as the just consequence and desert of man's disobedience. But he has subjected it in hope, with a reserve in favour of his own people, by which, though they are liable to trouble, they are secured from the penal desert of sin, and the vanity of the creature is, by his wisdom, over-ruled to wise and gracious purposes. The earth, and all in it, was made for the sake of man; for his sin it was first cursed, and afterwards destroyed by water; and sin at last shall set it on fire. But God, who is rich in mercy, appointed a people to himself out of the fallen

race. For their sakes, and as a theatre whereon to display the wonders of his providence and grace, it was renewed after the flood, and still continues, but not in its original state; there are marks of the evil of sin, and of God's displeasure against it, wherever we turn our eyes. This truth is witnessed to by every thing without us, and within us. But there shall be a deliverance to those who fear him; and by his word and Spirit, he teaches them to receive instruction and benefit even from this root of bitterness. Even now they are the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what they will be when he shall appear, and be admired in all them that believe. Then they shall be manifested, and then the creature also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption.

How blind, then, are they who expect happiness from the creature, which is itself subject to vanity, and who are meanly content with the present state of things! It is because they are estranged from God, have no sense of his excellency, no regard for his glory, no knowledge of their own proper good. They are farther removed from the desires they ought to have, in their present circumstances, than the brute creation, or the very ground they walk on; for all things but man have an instinct, or natural principle to answer the end for which they were appointed. Fire and hail, wind and storm, fulfil the word of God, though we poor mortals dare to disobey it. But if the secret voice of the whole creation desires the consummation of all things, surely they who have the light of God's word and Spirit will look forward, and long for that glorious day. Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!—I am, &c.

LETTER XXX.

On the right Use of the Law.

DEAR SIR,—You desire my thoughts on 1 Tim. i. 8. "We know the law is good if a man use it lawfully," and I willingly comply. I do not mean to send you a sermon on the text; yet a little attention to method may not be improper upon this subject, though in a letter to a friend. Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes. This is the root of self-righteousness, the grand reason why the gospel of Christ is no more regarded, and the cause of that uncertainty and inconsistency in many, who, though they profess themselves teachers, understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. If we previously state what is meant by the law, and by what means we know the law to be good, I think it will, from these premises, be easy

to conclude what it is to use the law lawfully.

The law, in many passages of the Old Testament, signifies the whole revelation of the will of God, as in Psalm i. 2, and xix. 7. But the law, in a strict sense, is contradistinguished from the gospel. Thus the apostle considers it at large in his epistle to the Romans and Galatians. I think it is evident, that, in the passage you have proposed, the apostle is speaking of the law of Moses. But, to have a clearer view of the subject, it may be proper to look back to a more early period.

The law of God, then, in the largest sense, is that rule, or prescribed course, which he has appointed for his creatures, according to their several natures and capacities, that they may answer the end for which he has created them. Thus it comprehends the inanimate creation: the wind and storm fulfil his word, or law. He hath appointed the moon for seasons; and the sun knoweth his time for going down, and going forth, and performs all his revolutions according to his Maker's pleasure. If we could suppose the sun was an intelligent being, and should refuse to shine, or should wander from the station in which God had placed him, he would then be a transgressor of the law. But there is no such disorder in the natural world. The law of God in this sense, or what many choose to call the law of nature, is no other than the impression of God's power, whereby all things continue and act according to his will from the beginning; for "he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."

The animals, destitute of reason, are likewise under a law; that is, God has given them instincts according to their several kinds, for their support and preservation, to which they invariably conform. A wisdom unspeakably superior to all the contrivances of man disposes their concerns, and is visible in the structure of a bird's nest, or the economy of a bee-hive. But this wisdom is restrained within narrow limits; they act without any remote design, and are incapable either of good or evil in a moral sense.

When God created man, he taught him more than the beasts of the earth, and made him wiser than the fowls of heaven. He formed him for himself, breathed into him a spirit immortal and incapable of dissolution, gave him a capacity not to be satisfied with any creature-good, endued him with an understanding, will, and affections, which qualified him for the knowledge and service of his Maker, and a life of communion with him. The law of God, therefore, concerning man, is that rule of disposition and conduct to which a creature so constituted ought to conform; so that the end of his creation might be answered and the wisdom of God

be manifested in him and by him. Man's continuance in this regular and happy state was not necessary as it is in the creatures, who, having no rational faculties, have properly no choice, but act under the immediate agency of divine power. As man was capable of continuing in the state in which he was created, so he was capable of forsaking it. He did so, and sinned, by eating the forbidden fruit. We are not to suppose that this prohibition was the whole of the law of Adam, so that if he had abstained from the tree of knowledge, he might, in other respects, have done (as we say) what he pleased. This injunction was the test of his obedience; and while he regarded it, he could have no desire contrary to holiness, because his nature was holy. But when he broke through it, he broke through the whole law, and stood guilty of idolatry, blasphemy, rebellion, and murder. The divine light in his soul was extinguished, the image of God defaced; he became like Satan, whom he had obeyed, and lost the power to keep that law which was connected with happiness. Yet, still the law remained in force: the blessed God could not lose his right to that reverence, love, and obedience, which must always be due to him from his intelligent creatures. Thus Adam became a transgressor, and incurred the penalty, death. But God, who is rich in mercy, according to his eternal purpose, revealed the promise of the seed of the woman, and instituted sacrifices as types of that atonement for sin, which He, in the fulness of time, should accomplish by the sacrifice of himself.

Adam, after his fall, was no longer a public person; he was saved by grace through faith; but the depravity he had brought upon human nature remained. His children, and so all his posterity, were born in his sinful likeness, without either ability or inclination to keep the law. The earth was soon filled with violence. But a few in every successive age were preserved by grace, and faith in the promise. Abraham was favoured with a more full and distinct revelation of the covenant of grace; he saw the day of Christ, and rejoiced. In the time of Moses, God was pleased to set apart a peculiar people to himself, and to them he published his law with great solemnity at Sinai. This law consisted of two distinct parts, very different in their scope and design, though both enjoined by the same authority.

The decalogue, or ten commandments, uttered by the voice of God himself, is an abstract of that original law under which man was created, but published in a prohibitory form; the Israelites, like the rest of mankind, being depraved by sin, and strongly inclined to the commission of every evil. This law could not be designed as a covenant, by obedience to which man should be justi-

fied: for long before its publication, the gospel had been preached to Abraham, Galatians iii. 8. But the law entered that sin might abound; that the extent, the evil, and the desert of sin might be known; for it reaches to the most hidden thoughts of the heart, requires absolute and perpetual obedience, and denounces a curse upon all who continue not therein.

To this was superadded the ceremonial or levilical law, prescribing a variety of institutions, purifications, and sacrifices, the observance of which were, during that dispensation, absolutely necessary to the acceptable worship of God. By obedience to these prescriptions, the people of Israel preserved their legal right to the blessings promised to them as a nation, and which were not confined to spiritual worshippers only; and they were likewise ordinances and helps to lead those who truly feared God, and had consciences of sin, to look forward, by faith, to the great sacrifice, the Lamb of God, who, in the fulness of time, was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. In both these respects, the ceremonial law was abrogated by the death of Christ. The Jews then ceased to be God's peculiar people; and Jesus having expiated sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness, by his obedience unto death, all other sacrifices became unnecessary and vain. The gospel supplies the place of the ceremonial law, to the same advantage as the sun abundantly compensates for the twinkling of the stars, and the feeble glimmering of the moon-light, which are conceded by its glory. Believers of old were relieved from the strictness of the moral law by the sacrifices which pointed to Christ. Believers under the gospel are relieved by a direct application to the blood of the covenant. Both renounce any dependence on the moral law for justification, and both accept it as a rule of life in the hands of the Mediator, and are enabled to yield it a sincere, though not a perfect obedience.

If an Israelite, trusting in his obedience to the moral law, had ventured to reject the ordinances of the ceremonial, he would have been cut off. In like manner, if any who are called christians are so well satisfied with their moral duties, that they see no necessity of making Christ their only hope, the law, by which they seek life, will be to them a ministration unto death. Christ, and he alone, delivers us, by faith in his name, from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us.

A second inquiry is, How we come to know the law to be good! for naturally we do not, we cannot think so. We cannot be at enmity with God, and at the same time approve of his law; rather this is the ground of our dislike to him, that we conceive the law, by which we are to be judged, is too strict in

its precepts, and too severe in its threatenings; and therefore men, so far as in them lies, are for altering this law. They think it would be better if it required no more than we can perform; if it allowed us more liberty; and especially if it was not armed against transgressors with the penalty of everlasting punishment. This is evident from the usual pleas of unawakened sinners. Some think, "I am not so bad as some others;" by which they mean, God will surely make a difference, and take favourable notice of what they suppose good in themselves. Others plead, "If I should not obtain mercy, what will become of the greater part of mankind?" by which they plainly intimate, that it would be hard and unjust in God to punish such multitudes. Others endeavour to extenuate their sins, as Jonathan once said, "I did but taste a little honey, and I must die:" "These passions are natural to me, and must I die for indulging them!" In short, the spirituality and strictness of the law, its severity, and its levelling effect, confounding all seeming differences in human characters, and stopping every mouth without distinction, are three properties of the law, which the natural man cannot allow to be good.

These prejudices against the law can only be removed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is his office to enlighten and convince the conscience; to communicate an impression of the majesty, holiness, justice, and authority of the God with whom we have to do, whereby the evil and desert of sin are apprehended. The sinner is then stripped of all his vain pretences, is compelled to plead guilty, and must justify his judge even though he should condemn him. It is his office likewise to discover the grace and glory of the Saviour, as having fulfilled the law for us, and as engaged, by promise, to enable those who believe in him to honour it with a due obedience in their own persons. Then a change of judgment takes place, and the sinner consents to the law, that it is holy, just, and good. Then the law is acknowledged to be holy; it manifests the holiness of God; and a conformity to it is the perfection of human nature. There can be no excellence in man, but so far as he is influenced by God's law; without it, the greater his natural powers and abilities are, he is but so much the more detestable and mischievous. It is ascribed to as just, springing from his indubitable right and authority over his creatures, and suited to their dependence upon him, and the abilities with which he originally endowed them. And though we, by sin, have lost those abilities, his right remains unalienable; and therefore he can justly punish transgressors. And as it is just in respect to God, so it is good for man; his obedience to the law, and the favour of God therein, being his proper happiness; and it is

impossible for him to be happy in any other way. Only, as I have hinted, to sinners these things must be applied according to the gospel, and to their new relation, by faith, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has obeyed the law, and made atonement for sin on their behalf; so that through him they are delivered from condemnation, and entitled to all the benefits of his obedience. From him likewise they receive the law, as a rule enforced by his own example, and their unspeakable obligations to his redeeming love. This makes obedience pleasing, and the strength they derive from him makes it easy.

We may now proceed to inquire, in the last place, What it is to use the law lawfully? The expression implies, that it may be used unlawfully; and it is so by too many. It is not a lawful use of the law too seek justification and acceptance with God by our obedience to it; because it is not appointed for this end, or capable of answering it, in our circumstances. The very attempt is a daring impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God; for if righteousness could come by the law, then Christ has died in vain, Gal. ii. 21, iii. 21; so that such a hope is not only groundless, but sinful; and, when persisted in under the light of the gospel, is no less than a wilful rejection of the grace of God. Again, it is an unlawful use of the law, that is, an abuse of it, an abuse both of law and gospel, to pretend that its accomplishment by Christ releases believers from any obligation to it as a rule. Such an assertion is not only wicked, but absurd and impossible in the highest degree; for the law is founded in the relation between the Creator and the creature, and must unavoidably remain in force so long as that relation subsists. While he is God, and we are creatures, in every possible or supposable change of state or circumstances, he must have an unrivalled claim to our reverence, love, trust, service, and submission. No true believer can deliberately admit a thought or a wish of being released from his obligation of obedience to God, in whole or in part; he will rather start from it with abhorrence. But Satan labours to drive unstable souls from one extreme to the other, and has too often succeeded. Wearied with vain endeavours to keep the law, that they might obtain life by it, and afterwards taking up with a notion of the gospel devoid of power, they have at length despised that obedience which is the honour of a christian, and essentially belongs to his character, and have abused the grace of God to licentiousness. But we have not so learned Christ.

To speak affirmatively, the law is lawfully used as a means of conviction of sin. For this purpose it was promulgated at Sinai. The law, entered that sin might abound; not to make men more wicked, though occasionally, and by abuse, it has that effect, but to

make them sensible how wicked they are. Having God's law in our hands, we are no longer to form our judgments by the maxims and customs of the world, where evil is called good, and good evil; but are to try every principle, temper, and practice by this standard. Could men be prevailed upon to do this, they would soon listen to the gospel with attention. On some the spirit of God does thus prevail; then they earnestly make the jailor's inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Here the work of grace begins; and the sinner, condemned in his own conscience, is brought to Jesus for life.

Again, when we use the law as a glass, to behold the glory of God, we use it lawfully. His glory is eminently revealed in Christ; but much of it is with a special reference to the law, and cannot be otherwise discerned. We see the perfection and excellence of the law in his life. God was glorified by his obedience as a man. What a perfect character did he exhibit! yet it is no other than a transcript of the law. Such would have been the character of Adam and all his race, had the law been duly obeyed. It appears, therefore, a wise and holy institution, fully capable of displaying that perfection of conduct by which man would have answered the end of his creation. And we see the inviolable strictness of the law in his death. There the glory of God in the law is manifested. Though he was the beloved Son, and had yielded personal obedience in the utmost perfection, yet, when he stood in our place, to make atonement for sin, he was not spared. From what he endured in Gethsemane and upon the cross, we learn the meaning of that awful sentence, "The soul that sinneth shall die."

Another lawful use of the law is, to consult it as a rule and pattern, by which to regulate our spirit and conversation. The grace of God, received by faith, will dispose us to obedience in general; but through remaining darkness and ignorance, we are much at a loss as to particulars. We are, therefore, sent to the law, that we may learn how to walk worthy of God, who has called us to his kingdom and glory; and every precept has its proper place and use.

Lastly, we use the law lawfully when we improve it as a test whereby to judge of the exercise of grace. Believers differ so much from what they once were, and from what many still are, that without this right use of the law, comparing themselves with their former selves, or with others, they would be prone to think more highly of their attainments than they ought. But when they recur to this standard, they sink into the dust, and adopt the language of Job, "Behold, I am vile: I cannot answer thee one of a thousand."

From hence we may collect, in brief, how the law is good to them that use it lawfully.

It furnishes them with a comprehensive and accurate view of the will of God, and the path of duty. By the study of the law, they acquire an habitual spiritual taste of what is right or wrong. The exercised believer, like a skilful workman, has a rule in his hand, whereby he can measure and determine with certainty, whereas others judge as it were by the eye, and can only make a random guess, in which they are generally mistaken. It likewise, by reminding them of their deficiencies and short-comings, is a sanctified means of making and keeping them humble; and it exceedingly endears Jesus, the law-fulfiller, to their hearts, and puts them in mind of their obligations to him, and of their absolute dependence upon him every moment.

If these reflections should prove acceptable to you, I have my desire; and I send them to you by the press, in hopes that the Lord may accompany them with his blessing to others. The subject is of great importance, and were it rightly understood, might conduce to settle some of the angry controversies which have been lately agitated. Clearly to understand the distinction, connexion, and harmony between the law and the gospel, and their mutual subserviency to illustrate and establish each other, is a singular privilege, and a happy means of preserving the soul from being entangled by errors on the right hand or the left.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXXI.

On Love to the Brethren.

DEAR SIR,—The apostle having said "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you," immediately subjoins, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." By the manner of his expression, he sufficiently intimates, that the want of this love is so universal, till the Lord plants it in the heart, that if we possess it, we may thereby be sure he has given us of his Spirit, and delivered us from condemnation. But as the heart is deceitful, and people may be awfully mistaken in the judgment they form of themselves, we have need to be very sure that we rightly understand what it is to love the brethren, before we draw the apostle's conclusion from it, and admit it as an evidence in our own favour, that we have passed from death unto life. Let me invite you, reader, to attend with me a little to this subject.

There are some counterfeits of this love to the brethren, which, it is to be feared, have often been mistaken for it, and have led people to think themselves something, when, indeed, they were nothing. For instance:—

There is a natural love of the brethren. People may sincerely love their relations, friends, and benefactors, who are of the brethren, and yet be utter strangers to the spiritual love the apostle speaks of. So Orpah had a great affection for Naomi, though it was not strong enough to make her willing, with Ruth, to leave her native country, and her idol-gods. Natural affection can go no farther than to a personal attachment; and they who thus love the brethren, and upon no better ground, are often disgusted with those things in them, for which the real brethren chiefly love one another.

There is likewise a love of convenience. The Lord's people are gentle, peaceable, benevolent, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. They are desirous of adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour, and approving themselves followers of him who pleased not himself, but spent his life in doing good to others. Upon this account they who are full of themselves, and love to have their own way, may like their company, because they find more compliances, and less opposition from them, than from such as themselves. For a while Laban loved Jacob: he found him diligent and trust-worthy, and perceived that the Lord had prospered him upon Jacob's account; but when he saw that Jacob flourished, and apprehended he was likely to do without him, his love was soon at an end; for it was only founded in self-interest.

A party-love is also common. The objects of this are those who are of the same sentiment, who worship in the same way, or are attached to the same minister. They who are united in such narrow and separate associations, may express warm affections, without giving any proof of true christian love; for, upon such grounds as these, not only professed Christians, but Jews and Turks, may be said to love one another. Though it must be allowed, that believers being renewed but in part, the love which they bear to the brethren is too often debased and allayed by a mixture of selfish affections.

The principle of true love to the brethren, is the LOVE OF GOD, that love which produceth obedience, 1 John v. 2. "By this we know that we love the children of God, if we love God, and keep his commandments." When people are free to form their connexions and friendships, the ground of their communion is in a sameness of inclination. The love spoken of is spiritual. The children of God, who therefore stand in the relation of brethren to each other, though they have too many unhappy differences in points of smaller importance, agree in the supreme love they bear to their heavenly Father, and to Jesus their Saviour; of course they agree in disliking and avoiding *sin*, which is contrary to the will and command of the God whom they love and worship. Upon these accounts they love one

another, they are like-minded; and they live in a world where the bulk of mankind are against them, have no regard their Beloved, and live in the sinful practices which his grace has taught them to hate. Their situation, therefore, increases their affection to each other. They are washed by the same blood, supplied by the same grace, opposed by the same enemies, and have the same heaven in view; therefore they love one another with a pure heart fervently.

The properties of this love, where its exercise is not greatly impeded by ignorance and bigotry, are such as prove its heavenly original. It extends to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, cannot be confined within the pale of a denomination, nor restrained to those with whom it is more immediately connected. It is gentle, and not easily provoked; hopes the best, makes allowances for infirmities, and is easily intreated. It is kind and compassionate; and this, not in words only, but sympathises with the afflicted, and relieves the indigent, according to its ability; and as it primarily respects the image of Christ in its objects, it feels a more peculiar attachment to those whom it judges to be the most spiritual, though without undervaluing or despising the weakest attainments in the true grace of the gospel.

They are happy who thus love the brethren. They have passed from death unto life; and may plead this gracious disposition, though not before the Lord as the ground of their hope, yet against Satan, when he would tempt them to question their right to the promises. But alas! as I before hinted, the exercise of this love, when it really is implanted, is greatly obstructed through the remaining depravity which cleaves to believers. We cannot be too watchful against those tempers which weaken the proper effects of brotherly love, and thereby have a tendency to darken the evidence of our having passed from death unto life. We live in a day, when the love of many (of whom we would hope the best) is, at least, grown very cold. The effects of a narrow, suspicious, a censorious, and a selfish spirit, are but too evident amongst professors of the gospel. If I were to insist at large upon the offences of this kind which abound amongst us, I should seem almost reduced to the necessity, either of retracting what I have advanced, or of maintaining, that a great part (if not the greatest part) of those who profess to know the Lord, are deceiving themselves with a form of godliness, being destitute of its power: for though they may abound in knowledge and gifts, and have much to say upon the subject of christian experience, they appear to want the great, the inimitable, the indispensable criterion of true christianity, a love to the brethren; without which all other seem-

ing advantages and attainments are of no avail. How is this disagreeable dilemma to be avoided?

I believe they who are most under the influence of divine love, will join with me in lamenting their deficiency. It is well that we are not under the law, but under grace; for on whatever point we try ourselves by the standard of the sanctuary, we shall find reason to say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." There is an amazing and humbling difference between the conviction we have of the beauty and excellence of divine truths, and our actual experience of their power ruling in our hearts. In our happiest hours, when we are most affected with the love of Jesus, we feel our love fervent towards his people. We wish it were always so; but we are poor, inconsistent creatures, and find we can do nothing as we ought, but as we are enabled by his grace. But we trust we do not allow ourselves in what is wrong; and, notwithstanding we may, in particular instances, be misled by ignorance and prejudice, we do in our hearts love the brethren, account them the excellent of the earth, and desire to have our lot and portion with them in time and in eternity. We know that the love we bear them is for his sake; and when we consider his interest in them, and our obligations to him, we are ashamed and grieved that we love them no better.

If we could not conscientiously say thus much, we should have just reason to question our sincerity, and the safety of our state; for the scriptures cannot be broken; nor can the grace of God fail of producing, in some degree, its proper fruits. Our Saviour, before whom we must shortly appear as our judge, has made love the characteristic of his disciples; and without some evidence that this is the prevailing disposition of our hearts, we could find little comfort in calling him God. Let not this be accounted legality, as if our dependence was upon something in ourselves. The question is not concerning the method of acceptance with God, but concerning the fruits or tokens of an accepted state. The most eminent of these, by our Lord's express declaration, is brotherly love. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." No words can be plainer; and the consequence is equally plain, however hard it may bear upon many professors, that though they could speak with the tongues of angels, had the knowledge of all mysteries, a power of working miracles, and a zeal prompting them to give their bodies to be burned in defence of the truth; yet if they love not the brethren, they are but as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals; they may make a great noise in the church and in the world; they may be wise and able

men, as the words are now frequently understood; they may pray or preach with great fluency; but in the sight of God their faith is dead, and their religion is vain.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXXII.

On Candour.

DEAR SIR,—I am with you an admirer of candour; but let us beware of counterfeits. True candour is a christian grace, and will grow in no soil but a believing heart. It is an eminent and amiable property of that love which beareth, believeth, hopeth, and endureth all things. It forms the most favourable judgment of persons and characters, and puts the kindest construction upon the conduct of others that it possibly can, consistent with the love of truth. It makes due allowances for the infirmities of human nature, will not listen with pleasure to what is said to the disadvantage of any, nor repeat it without a justifiable cause. It will not be confined within the walls of a party, nor restrain the actings of benevolence to those whom it fully approves; but prompts the mind to an imitation of Him who is kind to the evil and the unthankful, and has taught us to consider every person we see as our neighbour.

Such is the candour which I wish to derive from the gospel: and I am persuaded, they who have imbibed most of this spirit, will acknowledge that they are still defective in it. There is an unhappy propensity, even in good men, to a selfish, narrow, censorious turn of mind; and the best are more under the power of prejudice than they are aware. A want of candour among the professors of the same gospel, is too visible in the present day. A truly candid person will acknowledge what is right and excellent in those from whom he may be obliged to differ; he will not charge the faults or extravagances of a few upon a whole party or denomination. If he thinks it his duty to point out or refute the errors of any persons, he will not impute to them such consequences of their tenets as they expressly disavow; he will not wilfully misrepresent or aggravate their mistakes, or make them offenders for a word: he will keep in view the distinction between those things which are fundamental and essential to the christian life, and those concerning which a difference of sentiment may, and often has, obtained among true believers. Were there more candour among those who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, the emotions of anger or scorn would not be so often felt or excited, by pronouncing or hearing the words, churchman, or dissenter, or Calvinist, or even

Arminian. Let us, my friend, be candid; let us remember how totally ignorant we ourselves once were, how often we have changed our sentiments in one particular or other, since we first engaged in the search of truth; how often we have been imposed upon by appearances; and to how many different persons and occurrences we have been indebted, under God, for the knowledge which we have already attained. Let us likewise consider what treatment we like to meet with from others; and do unto them as we would they should do unto us. These considerations will make the exercise of candour habitual and easy.

But there is a candour, falsely so called, which springs from an indifference to the truth, and is governed by the fear of men and the love of praise. This pretended candour depreciates the most important doctrines of the gospel, and treats them as points of speculation and opinion. It is a temporizing expedient to stand fair with the world, and to avoid that odium which is the unavoidable consequence of a steadfast, open, and hearty adherence to the truth as it is in Jesus. It aims to establish an intercommunity between light and darkness, Christ and Belial; and, under a pretence of avoiding harsh and uncharitable judgments, it introduces a mutual connivance in principles and practices, which are already expressly condemned by clear decisions of scripture. Let us not listen to the advocates for a candour of this sort; such a lukewarm temper in those, who would be thought the friends of the gospel, is treason against God and treachery to the souls of men. It is observable that they who boast most of this candour, and pretend to the most enlarged and liberal way of thinking, are generally agreed to exclude from their comprehension all whom they call bigots; that is, in other words, those who, having been led by divine grace to build their hopes upon the foundation which God has laid in Zion, are free to declare their conviction that other foundation can no man lay; and who, having seen that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, dare no longer conform to its leading maxims or customs, nor express a favourable judgment of the state or conduct of those who do. Candour itself knows not how to be candid to these: their singularity and importunity are offensive; and it is thought no way inconsistent with the specious boast of benevolence and moderation to oppose, hate, and revile them. A sufficient proof that the candour which many plead for is only a softer name for that spirit of the world which opposes itself to the truth and obedience of the gospel.

If a person be an avowed Socinian or deist, I am still to treat him with candour; he has a right from me, so far as he comes in my

way, to all the kind offices of humanity. I am not to hate, reproach, or affront him, or to detract from what may be valuable in his character, considered as a member of society. I may avail myself of his talents and abilities in points where I am not in danger of being misled by him. He may be a good lawyer, or historian, or physician; and I am not to lessen him in these respects because I cannot commend him as a divine. I am bound to pity his errors, and to pray if peradventure God will give him repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth; and, if I have a call to converse with him, I should speak with all gentleness and meekness, remembering that grace alone has made me to differ. But I am not to compliment him, to insinuate, or even to admit, that there can be any safety in his principles. Far be that candour from us, which represents the scriptures as a nose of wax, so that a person may reject or elude the testimonies there given to the deity and atonement of Christ, and the all-powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, with impunity.

On the other hand, they who hold the Head, who have received the record which God hath given of his Son; who have scriptural views of sin and grace, and fix their hopes for time and eternity upon the Saviour; in a word, all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;—these, I apprehend, if they are prevented from receiving, acknowledging, and loving each other, as he has received, owned, and loved them, are justly chargeable with a want of candour. Shall I be cold to those whom Jesus loves? Shall I refuse them whom he has accepted? I find, perhaps, that they cannot rightly understand, and therefore cannot readily embrace, some points of doctrine in which the Lord has been pleased to enlighten me; that is, I (supposing my knowledge to be real and experimental) have received five talents, and they have as yet obtained but two: must I for this estrange myself from them? Rather let me be careful, lest they be found more faithful and exemplary in the improvement of two talents, than I am in the management of five. Again, why should some of those who know, or might know, that my hope, my way, my end, and my enemies are the same with theirs, stand aloof from me, and treat me with coldness and suspicion because I am called a Calvinist? I was not born a Calvinist, and possibly they may not die as they are. However that may be, if our hearts are fixed upon the same Jesus, we shall be perfectly of one mind ere long: why should we not encourage and strengthen one another now? O that the arm of the Lord might be revealed, to revive that candour which the apostle so strongly enforces both by precept and example! Then the strong would bear the infirmities of the weak, and believers would receive each other without doubtful disputation.

Once more, however sound and orthodox (as the phrase is) professors may be in their principles, though true candour will make tender allowances for the frailty of nature and the power of temptation, yet neither candour nor charity will require us to accept them as real believers, unless the general strain and tenor of their deportment be as becometh the gospel of Christ. It is to be lamented that too many judge rather by the notions which people express than by the fruits which they produce; and, as they judge of others, so they often judge of themselves. We cannot have opportunity to say all we could wish, and to all to whom we would wish to say it, upon this subject, in private life; therefore it is the wisdom and duty of those who preach, and of those who print, to drop a word of caution in the way of their hearers and readers, that they may not mistake notion for life, nor a form of godliness for the power. The grace of God is an operative principle, and, where it really has place in the heart, the effects will be seen, (Acts xi. 23;) effects so uniform and extensive that the apostle James makes one single branch of conduct, and that such a one as is not usually thought the most important, a sufficient test of our state before God; for he affirms universally, that if any man seem to be religious, and "bridleth not his tongue, his religion is vain:" and again he assures us, that "whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God:" and to the same purpose, Paul expresses himself on the subject of love (that love which he describes so accurately that none can mistake it unless they willingly deceive themselves,) he declares that, without this love, the brightest knowledge, the warmest zeal, and the most splendid gifts, are nothing worth. It is to be feared these decisions will bear hard upon many who have a name to live among the churches of Christ. They are hearers and approvers of the gospel, and express a regard for those who preach it: they will stickle and fight for the doctrines, and know not how to bear those who fall a hair's breadth short of their standard, and yet there is so much levity or pride, censoriousness or worldliness, discoverable in their general behaviour, that their characters appear very dubious; and, though we are bound to wish them well, candour will not oblige or warrant us to judge favourably of such conduct; for the unerring word of God is the standard to which our judgments are to be referred and conformed.

In the sense, and under the limitations which I have expressed, we ought to cultivate a candid spirit, and learn from the experience of our own weakness to be gentle and tender to others, avoiding, at the same time, that indifference and cowardice which, under the name of candour, countenances error, extenuates sin, and derogates from the authority of scripture.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXXIII.

(1.) *On Man in his Fallen Estate.*

"Lord what is Man!"

DEAR SIR,—We hear much in the present day of the dignity of human nature, and it is allowed that man was an excellent creature as he came out of the hands of God; but, if we consider this question with a view to fallen man as depraved by sin, how can we but join with the psalmist in wonder that the great God should make any account of him.

Fallen as man is from his original state of happiness and holiness, his natural faculties and abilities afford sufficient evidence that the hand which made him is divine. He is capable of great things: his understanding, will, affections, imagination, and memory are noble and amazing powers. But view him in a moral light, as an intelligent being, incessantly dependent upon God, accountable to him, and appointed by him to a state of existence in an unchangeable world. Considered in this relation, man is a monster, a vile, base, stupid, obstinate, and mischievous creature: no words can fully describe him. Man, with all his boasted understanding and attainments is a fool. So long as he is destitute of the saving grace of God, his conduct, as to his most important concerns, is more absurd and inconsistent than that of the meanest idiot; with respect to his affections and pursuits, he is degraded far below the beasts; and, for the malignity and wickedness of his will, can be compared to nothing so properly as the devil.

The question here is not concerning this or that man, a Nero or a Heliogabalus, but concerning human nature, the whole race of mankind, the few excepted who are born of God. There is indeed a difference among men, but it is owing to the restraints of divine providence, without which earth would be the very image of hell. A wolf or a lion, while chained, cannot do so much mischief as if they were loose; but the nature is the same in the whole species. Education and interest, fear and shame, human laws, and the secret power of God over the mind, combine to form many characters, that are externally decent and respectable; and even the most abandoned are under a restraint which prevents them from manifesting a thousandth part of the wickedness which is in their hearts; but the heart itself is universally deceitful and desperately wicked.

Man is a fool.—He can, indeed, measure the earth, and almost count the stars: he abounds in arts and inventions, in science and policy; and shall he then be called a fool! The ancient heathens, the inhabitants of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were eminent for this kind of wisdom. They are to this day studied as

models by those who aim to excel in history, poetry, painting, architecture, and other exertions of human genius, which are suited to polish the manners without improving the heart; but their most admired philosophers, legislators, logicians, orators, and artists, were as destitute, as infants or idiots, of that knowledge which alone deserves the name of true wisdom. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Ignorant and regardless of God, yet conscious of their weakness and of their dependence upon a power above their own, and stimulated by an inward principle of fear, of which they knew neither the origin nor right application, they worshipped the creature instead of the Creator; yea, placed their trust in stocks and stones, in the work of men's hands, in nonentities and chimeras. An acquaintance with their mythology, or system of religious fables, passes with us for a considerable branch of learning, because it is drawn from ancient books written in languages not known to the vulgar; but, in point of certainty or truth, we might receive as much satisfaction from a collection of dreams, or from the ravings of lunatics. If, therefore, we admit these admired sages as a tolerable specimen of mankind, must we not confess that man in his best estate, while uninstructed by the Spirit of God, is a fool? But are we wiser than they? Not in the least, till the grace of God makes us so. Our superior advantages only show our folly in a more striking light. Why do we account any persons foolish? A fool has no sound judgment: he is governed wholly by appearances, and would prefer a fine coat to the writings of a large estate: he pays no regard to consequences. Fools have sometimes hurt or killed their best friends, and thought that they did no harm. A fool cannot reason, therefore arguments are lost upon him. At one time, if tied with a straw, he dares not stir; at another time, perhaps, he can hardly be persuaded to move, though the house were on fire. Are these the characteristics of a fool? Then there is no fool like the sinner, who prefers the toys of earth to the happiness of heaven; who is held in bondage by the foolish customs of the world, and is more afraid of the breath of man than of the wrath of God.

Again, man in his natural state is a beast, yea, below the beasts that perish. In two things he strongly resembles them; in looking no higher than to sensual gratifications, and in that selfishness of spirit which prompts him to propose himself and his own interest as his proper and highest end. But in many respects he sinks sadly beneath them. Unnatural lusts, and the want of natural affection towards their offspring, are abominations not to be found among the brute creation. What shall we say of mothers destroying their children with their own hands, or of the hor-

rid act of self-murder! Men are worse than beasts, likewise, in their obstinacy; they will not be warned. If a beast escapes from a trap, he will be cautious how he goes near it again, and in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird: but man, though he be often reprov'd, hardens his neck; he rushes upon his ruin with his eyes open, and can defy God to his face, and dare damnation.

Once more, let us observe how man resembles the devil. There are spiritual sins, and from these in their height the scriptures teach us to judge of Satan's character. Every feature in this description is strong in man; so that what our Lord said to the Jews is of general application, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father that you will do." Man resembles Satan in pride. This stupid wicked creature values himself upon his wisdom, power, and virtue, and will talk of being saved by his good works; though, if he can, Satan himself need not despair. He resembles him in malice; and this diabolical disposition often proceeds to murder, and would daily, if the Lord did not restrain it. He derives from Satan the hateful spirit of envy: he is often tormented beyond expression, by beholding the prosperity of his neighbours; and proportionably pleased with their calamities, though he gains no other advantage from them than the gratification of this rancorous principle. He bears the image likewise of Satan in his cruelty. This evil is bound up in the heart even of a child. A disposition to take pleasure in giving pain to others appears very early. Children, if left to themselves, soon feel a gratification in torturing insects and animals. What misery does the wanton cruelty of men inflict upon cocks, dogs, bulls, bears, and other creatures, which, they seem to think, were formed for no other end than to feast their savage spirits with their torments! If we form our judgment of men, when they seem most pleased, and have neither anger nor resentment to plead in their excuse, it is too evident, even from the nature of their amusements, whose they are, and whom they serve; and they are the worst of enemies to each other. Think of the horrors of war, the rage of duellists, of the murders and assassinations with which the world is filled, and then say, "Lord, what is man!" Farther, if deceit and treachery belong to Satan's character, then surely man resembles him. Is not the universal observation and complaint of all ages an affecting comment upon the prophet's words, "Trust ye not in a friend, put not confidence in a guide, keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom, for they hunt every man his brother with a net!" How many have at this moment cause to say with David, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet

were they drawn swords!" Again, like Satan, men are eager in tempting others to sin. Not content to damn themselves, they employ all their arts and influence to draw as many as they can with them into the same destruction. Lastly, in direct opposition to God and goodness, in contemptuous enmity to the gospel of his grace, and a bitter persecuting spirit against those who profess it, Satan himself can hardly exceed them. Herein, indeed, they are his agents and willing servants; and because the blessed God is himself out of their reach, they labour to show their despite to him in the persons of his people.

I have drawn but a sketch, a few outlines, of the picture of fallen man. To give an exact copy of him, to charge every feature with its full aggravation of horror, and to paint him as he is, would be impossible. Enough has been observed to illustrate the propriety of the exclamation, "Lord, what is man!" Perhaps some of my readers may attempt to deny or extenuate the charge, and may plead that I have not been describing mankind, but some of the most abandoned of the species, who hardly deserve the name of men. But I have already provided against this exception. It is human nature I describe; and the vilest and most profligate individuals cannot sin beyond the powers and limits of that nature which they possess in common with the more mild and moderate. Though there may be a difference in the fruitfulness of trees, yet the production of one apple decides the nature of the tree upon which it grew, as certainly as if it had produced a thousand; so in the present case, should it be allowed that these enormities cannot be found in all persons, it would be a sufficient confirmation of what I have advanced, if they can be found in any; unless it could be likewise proved, that those who appeared more wicked than others were of a different species from the rest. But I need not make this concession; they must be insensible indeed, who do not feel something within them so very contrary to our common notions of goodness, as would perhaps make them rather submit to be banished from human society, than to be compelled *bona fide* to disclose to their fellow-creatures every thought and desire which arises in their hearts.

Many useful reflections may be drawn from this displeasing subject. We cannot at present conceive how much we owe to the guardian care of divine providence, that any of us are preserved in peace and safety for a single day, in such a world as this. Live where we will, we have those near us, who, both by nature, and by the power which Satan has over them, are capable of the most atrocious crimes. But he whom they know not, restrains them, so that they cannot do

the things that they would. When he suspends the restraint, they act immediately; then we hear of murders, rapes, and outrages. But did not the Lord reign with a strong hand, such evils would be perpetrated every hour, and no one would be safe in the house or in the field. His ordinance of civil government is one great means of preserving the peace of society; but this is in many cases inadequate. The heart of man, when fully bent upon evil, will not be intimidated or stopt by gibbets or racks.

How wonderful is the love of God in giving his Son to die for such wretches! And how strong and absolute is the necessity of a new birth if we would be happy! Can beasts and devils inherit the kingdom of God! The due consideration of this subject is likewise needful, to preserve believers in an humble, thankful, watchful frame of spirit. Such we once were, and such, with respect to the natural principle remaining in us, which the apostle calls the flesh, or the old man, we still are. The propensities of fallen nature are not eradicated in the children of God, though by grace they are made partakers of a new principle, which enables them, in the Lord's strength, to resist and mortify the body of sin, so that it cannot reign in them. Yet they are liable to sad surprisals; and the histories of Aaron, David, Solomon, and Peter, are left on record, to teach us what evil is latent in the hearts of the best men, and what they are capable of doing, if left but a little to themselves. "Lord, what is man!"—I am, &c.

LETTER XXXIV.

(2.) *On Man in his Fallen Estate.*

"Lord, what is man!"

DEAR SIR,—The nature of fallen man agrees to the description the apostle has given us of his boasted wisdom: it is earthly, sensual, devilish. I have attempted some general delineation of it in the preceding letter; but the height of its malignity cannot be properly estimated, unless we consider its actings with respect to the light of the gospel. The Jews were extremely wicked at the time of our Lord's appearance upon earth; yet he said of them, "If I had not come and spoken to you, ye had not had sin;" that is, as the light and power of his ministry deprived them of all excuse for continuing in sin, so it proved the occasion of showing their wickedness in the most aggravated manner; and all their other sins were but faint proofs of the true state of their hearts, if compared with the discovery they made of themselves, by their pertinacious

opposition to him. In this sense, what the apostle has observed of the law of Moses, may be applied to the gospel of Christ: it entered, that sin might abound. If we would estimate the utmost exertions of human depravity, and the strongest effects it is capable of producing, we must select our instances from the conduct of those to whom the gospel is known. The Indians, who roast their enemies alive, give sufficient proof that man is barbarous to his own kind; which may likewise be easily demonstrated without going so far from home; but the preaching of the gospel discovers the enmity of the heart against God, in ways and degrees, of which the unlightened savages and heathens are not capable.

By the gospel, I now mean, not merely the doctrine of salvation, as it lies in the holy scriptures, but that public and authoritative dispensation of this doctrine which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to his true ministers, who, having been themselves, by the power of his grace, brought out of darkness into marvellous light, are, by his Holy Spirit, qualified and sent forth to declare to their fellow-sinners what they have seen, and felt, and tasted, of the word of life. Their commission is, to exalt the Lord alone, to stain the pride of all human glory. They are to set forth the evil and demerit of sin, the strictness, spirituality, and sanction of the law of God, the total apostacy of mankind; and from these premises to demonstrate the utter impossibility of a sinner's escaping condemnation by any works or endeavours of his own; and then to proclaim a full and free salvation from sin and wrath, by faith in the name, blood, obedience, and mediation of God manifest in the flesh; together with a denunciation of eternal misery to all who shall finally reject the testimony which God has given of his Son. Though these several branches of the will of God respecting sinners, and other truths in connexion with them, are plainly revealed, and repeatedly inculcated in the Bible, and though the Bible is to be found in almost every house, yet we see, in fact, it is as a sealed book, little read, little understood, and, therefore, but little regarded, except in those places which the Lord is pleased to favour with ministers who can confirm them from their own experience; and who, by a sense of his constraining love, and the worth of souls, are animated to make the faithful discharge of their ministry the one great business of their lives; who aim not to possess the wealth, but to promote the welfare, of their hearers, are equally regardless of the frowns or smiles of the world, and count not their lives dear, so that they may be wise and successful in winning souls to Christ.

When the gospel, in this sense of the word, first comes to a place, though the peo-

ple are going on in sin, they may be said to sin ignorantly; they have not yet been warned of their danger. Some are drinking down iniquity like water; others more soberly burying themselves alive in the cares and business of the world; others find a little time for what they call religious duties, which they persevere in, though they are utter strangers to the nature or the pleasure of spiritual worship; partly, as thereby they think to bargain with God, and to make amends for such sins as they do not choose to relinquish; and partly because it gratifies their pride and affords them (as they think) some ground for saying, "God, I thank thee, I am not as other men." The preached gospel declares the vanity and danger of these several ways which sinners choose to walk in. It declares and demonstrates, that, different as they appear from each other, they are equally remote from the path of safety and peace, and all tend to the same point, the destruction of those who persist in them. At the same time, it provides against that despair into which men would be otherwise plunged, when convinced of their sins, by revealing the immense love of God, the glory and grace of Christ, and inviting all to come to him, that they may obtain pardon, life, and happiness. In a word, it shows the pit of hell under men's feet, and opens the gate, and points out the way to heaven. Let us now briefly observe the effects it produces in those who do not receive it as the power of God unto salvation. These effects are various, as tempers and circumstances vary; but they may all lead us to adopt the psalmist's exclamation, "Lord, what is man!"

Many who have heard the gospel once or a few times, will hear it no more; it awakens their scorn, their hatred, and rage. They pour contempt upon the wisdom of God, despise his goodness, defy his power; and their very looks express the spirit of the rebellious Jews, who told the prophet Jeremiah to his face, "As to the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee at all." The ministers who preach it are accounted men that turn the world upside down; and the people who receive it, fools or hypocrites. The word of the Lord is a burden to them, and they hate it with a perfect hatred. How strongly is the disposition of the natural heart manifested, by the confusion which often takes place in families, where the Lord is pleased to awaken one or two in a house, while the rest remain in their sins! To profess, or even to be suspected of an attachment to the gospel of Christ, is frequently considered and treated as the worst of crimes, sufficient to cancel the strongest obligations of relation or friendship. Parents upon such a provocation, will hate their children, and children ridicule their parents. Many find, agreeably to our Lord's declara-

tion, that from the time a sense of his love engaged their hearts to love him again, their worst foes have been those of their own household; and that they who expressed the greatest love and tenderness for them before their conversion, can now hardly bear to see them.

The bulk of a people will perhaps continue to hear, at least now and then; and to those who do, the Spirit of God usually, at one time or other, bears testimony to the truth. Their consciences are struck, and for a season they believe and tremble. But what is the consequence? No man who has taken poison seeks more earnestly or speedily for an antidote, than those do for something to stifle and smother their convictions. They run to company, to drink, to any thing, for relief against the unwelcome intrusion of serious thoughts; and when they succeed, and recover their former indifference, they rejoice, as if they had escaped some great danger. The next step is, to ridicule their own convictions; and next to that, if they see any of their acquaintance under the like impressions, to use every art, and strain every nerve, that they may render them as obstinate as themselves. For this purpose, they watch as a Fowler for the bird, flatter or revile, tempt or threaten; and if they can prevail, and are the occasion of hardening any in their sins, they rejoice and triumph, as if they accounted it their interest and their glory to ruin the souls of their fellow-creatures.

By frequent hearing, they receive more light. They are compelled to know, whether they will or not, that the wrath of God hangs over the children of disobedience. They carry a sting in their consciences, and at times feel themselves most miserable, and cannot but wish they had never been born, or that they had been dogs or toads, rather than rational creatures. Yet they harden themselves still more. They affect to be happy and at ease, and force themselves to wear a smile, when anguish preys upon their hearts. They blaspheme the way of truth, watch for the faults of professors, and, with a malicious joy, publish and aggravate them. They see, perhaps, how the wicked die, but are not alarmed; they see the righteous die, but are not moved. Neither providences nor ordinances, mercies nor judgments, can stop them; for they are determined to go on, and perish with their eyes open, rather than submit to the gospel.

But they do not always openly reject the gospel-truths. Some who profess to approve and receive them, do thereby discover the evils of the heart of man if possible in a yet stronger light. They make Christ the minister of sin, and turn his grace into licentiousness. Like Judas, they say, Hail Master! and betray him. This is the highest pitch of iniquity. They pervert all the doctrines

of the gospel. From election they draw an excuse for continuing in their evil ways; and contend for salvation without works, because they love not obedience. They extol the righteousness of Christ, but hold it in opposition to personal holiness. In a word, because they hear that God is good, they determine to persist in evil. "Lord what is man?"

Thus wilful and impenitent sinners go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. The word which they despise, becomes to them a savour of death unto death. They take different courses, but all are travelling down to the pit; and, unless sovereign mercy interpose, will soon sink to rise no more. The final event is usually twofold. Many, after they have been more or less shaken by the word, settle in formality. If hearing would supply the place of faith, love and obedience, they would do well; but by degrees they become sermon-proof. The truths which once struck them, lose their power by being often heard; and thus multitudes live and die in darkness, though the light has long shone around them. Others are more openly given up to a reprobate mind. Contempt of the gospel makes infidels, deists, and atheists. They are filled with a spirit of delusion to believe a lie. These are scoffers, walking after their own lusts; for where the principles of religion are given up, the conduct will be vile and abominable. Such persons sport themselves with their own deceivings, and strongly prove the truth of the gospel, while they dispute against it. We often find that people of this cast have formerly been the subjects of convictions; but when the evil spirit has seemed to depart for a season, and returns again, the last state of that person is worse than the first.

It is not improbable that some of my readers may meet with their own characters under one or other of the views I have given of the desperate wickedness of the heart, in its acting against the truth. May the Spirit of God constrain them to read with attention. Your case is dangerous, but I would hope not utterly desperate. Jesus is mighty to save. His grace can pardon the most aggravated offences, and subdue the most inveterate habits of sin. The gospel you have hitherto slighted, resisted, or opposed, is still the power of God unto salvation. The blood of Jesus, upon which you have hitherto trampled, speaks better things than the blood of Abel, and is of virtue to cleanse those whose sins are scarlet and crimson, and to make them white as snow. As yet you are spared; but it is high time to stop, to throw down your arms of rebellion, and humble yourselves at his feet. If you do, you may yet escape; but if not, know assuredly that wrath is coming upon you to the uttermost: and you will shortly find, to your unspeak-

able dismay, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXXV.

Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report,—think on these things. Phil. iv. 8.

DEAR SIR,—The precept which I have chosen for my motto is applicable to many particulars, which are but seldom and occasionally mentioned from the pulpit. There are improprieties of conduct, which, though usually considered as foibles that hardly deserve a censure, are properly sinful; for though some of them may not seem to violate any express command of scripture, yet they are contrary to that accuracy and circumspection which become our profession. A christian, by the tenor of his high calling, is bound to avoid even the appearance of evil; and his deportment should not only be upright as to his leading principles, but amiable and engaging, and as free as possible from every inconsistency and blemish. The characters of some valuable persons are clouded; and the influence they might otherwise have, greatly counteracted by comparatively small faults; yet faults they certainly are; and it would be well if they could be made so sensible of them, and of their ill effects, as that they might earnestly watch and strive, and pray against them. I know not how to explain myself better than by attempting the outlines of a few portraits, to each of which I apprehend some strong resemblances may be found in real life. I do not wish to set my readers to work to find out such resemblances among their neighbours; but would advise them to examine carefully, whether they cannot, in one or other of them, discover some traces of their own features. And though I speak of men only, counterparts to the several characters, may, doubtless, be found here and there among the women: for the imperfections and evils of a fallen nature, are equally entailed upon both sexes.

AUSTERUS is a solid and exemplary christian. He has a deep, extensive, and experimental knowledge of divine things. Inflexibly and invariably true to his principles, he stems with a noble singularity the torrent of the world, and can neither be bribed nor intimidated from the path of duty. He is a rough diamond of great intrinsic value, and would sparkle, with a distinguished lustre, if he were more polished. But though the word of God is his daily study, and he prizes the precepts, as well as the promises, more than thousands of gold and silver, there is one precept he seems to have overlooked: I mean

that of the apostle, *be courteous*. Instead of that gentleness and condescension which will always be expected from a professed follower of the meek and lowly Jesus; there is a harshness in his manner, which makes him more admired than beloved; and they who truly love him, often feel more constraint than pleasure when in his company. His intimate friends are satisfied that he is no stranger to true humility of heart: but these are few. By others he is thought proud, dogmatic, and self-important; nor can this prejudice against him be easily removed, until he can lay aside that cynical air which he has unhappily contracted.

HUMANUS is generous and benevolent. His feelings are lively, and his expressions of them strong. No one is more distant from sordid views, or less influenced by a selfish spirit. His heart burns with love to Jesus, and he is ready to receive, with open arms, all who love his Saviour. Yet, with an upright and friendly spirit, which entitles him to the love and esteem of all who know him, he has not every thing we would wish in a friend. In some respects, though not in the most criminal sense, he bridleth not his tongue. Should you, without witness or writing, intrust him with untold gold, you would run no risk of loss; but if you intrust him with a secret, you thereby put it in the possession of the public. Not that he would wilfully betray you, but it is his infirmity. He knows not how to keep a secret; it escapes from him before he is aware. So, likewise, as to matters of fact: in things which are of great importance, and where he is sufficiently informed, no man has a stricter regard to truth; but in the smaller concerns of common life, whether it be from credulity, or from a strange and blameable inadvertency, he frequently grieves and surprises those who know his real character, by saying the thing that is not. Thus they to whom he opens his very heart, dare not make him returns of equal confidence; and they who, in some cases, would venture their lives upon his word, in others are afraid of telling a story after him. How lamentable are such blemishes in such a person.

PRUDENS, though not of a generous natural temper, is a partaker of that grace which opens the heart, and inspires a disposition to love and to good works. He bestows not his alms to be seen of men; but they who have the best opportunities of knowing what he does for the relief of others, and of comparing it with his ability, can acquit him in good measure of the charge which another part of his conduct exposes him to. For Prudens is a great economist; and though he would not willingly wrong or injure any person, yet the meanness to which he will submit, either to save or gain a penny, in what he accounts an honest way, are a great

discredit to his profession. He is punctual in fulfilling his engagements; but exceedingly hard, strict, and suspicious in making his bargains. And in his dress, and every article of his personal concerns, he is content to be so much below the station in which the providence of God has placed him, that to those who are not acquainted with his private benefactions to the poor, he appears under the hateful character of a miser, and to be governed by that love of money which the scriptures declare to be the root of all evil, and inconsistent with the true love of God and of the saints.

VOLATILIS is sufficiently exact in performing his promises in such instances as he thinks of real importance. If he bids a person depend upon his assistance he will not disappoint his expectations. Perhaps he is equally sincere in all his promises at the time of making them; but for want of method in the management of his affairs, he is always in a hurry, always too late, and has always some engagement upon his hands with which it is impossible he can comply. Yet he goes on in this way, exposing himself and others to continual disappointments. He accepts, without a thought, proposals which are incompatible with each other, and will perhaps undertake to be at two or three different and distant places at the same hour. This has been so long his practice that nobody now expects him till they see him. In other respects he is a good sort of man; but this want of punctuality, which runs through his whole deportment, puts every thing out of course in which he is concerned, abroad and at home. Volatilis excuses himself as well as he can, and chiefly by alleging, that the things in which he fails are of no great consequence. But he would do well to remember, that truth is a sacred thing, and ought not to be violated in the smallest matters, without an unforeseen and unavoidable prevention. Such a trifling turn of spirit lessens the weight of a person's character, though he makes no pretensions to religion, and is still a greater blemish in a professor.

CESSATOR is not chargeable with being buried in the cares and business of the present life, to the neglect of the one thing needful; but he greatly neglects the duties of his station. Had he been sent into the world only to read, pray, hear sermons, and join in religious conversation, he might pass for an eminent Christian. But though it is to be hoped, that his abounding in these exercises springs from a heart-attachment to divine things, his conduct evidences that his judgment is weak, and his views of his christian calling are very narrow and defective. He does not consider that waiting upon God in the public and private ordinances, is designed, not to excuse us from a discharge of the duties of civil life, but to instruct, strengthen,

and qualify us for their performance. His affairs are in disorder, and his family connexions are likely to suffer by his indolence. He thanks God that he is not worldly-minded; but he is an idle and unfaithful member of society, and causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of. Of such the apostle has determined, that "if any man will not work, neither should he eat."

CURIOSUS is upright and unblamable in his general deportment, and no stranger to the experiences of a true christian. His conversation upon these subjects is often satisfactory and edifying. He would be a much more agreeable companion, were it not for an impertinent desire of knowing every body's business, and the grounds of every hint that is occasionally dropped in discourse where he is present. This puts him upon asking a multiplicity of needless and improper questions, and obliges those who know him, to be continually upon their guard, and to treat him with reserve. He catechises even strangers, and is unwilling to part with them till he is punctually informed of all their connexions, employments, and designs. For this idle curiosity he is marked and avoided as a busybody; and they who have the best opinion of him cannot but wonder, that a man who appears to have so many better things to employ his thoughts, should find leisure to amuse himself with what does not at all concern him. Were it not for the rules of civility he would be affronted every day: and if he would attend to the cold and evasive answers he receives to his inquiries, or even to the looks with which they are accompanied, he might learn, that, though he means no harm, he appears to a great disadvantage, and that this prying disposition is very displeasing.

QUERULUS wastes much of his precious time in declaiming against the management of public affairs; though he has neither access to the springs which move the wheels of government, nor influence either to accelerate or retard their motions. Our national concerns are no more affected by the remonstrances of Querulus, than the heavenly bodies are by the disputes of astronomers. While the newspapers are the chief sources of his intelligence, and his situation precludes him from being a competent judge, either of matters of fact, or matters of right, why should Querulus trouble himself with politics! This would be a weakness, if we consider him only as a member of society; but if we consider him as a christian, it is worse than weakness; it is a sinful conformity to the men of the world, who look no farther than to second causes, and forget that the Lord reigns. If a christian be placed in a public sphere of action, he should undoubtedly be faithful to his calling, and endeavour, by all lawful methods, to transmit our privi-

eges to posterity; but it would be better for Querulus to let the dead bury their dead. There are people enough to make a noise about political matters, who know not how to employ their time to better purpose. Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world; and most of his people may do their country much more essential service by pleading for it in prayer, than by finding fault with things which they have no power to alter. If Querulus had opportunity of spending a few months under some of the governments upon the continent, I may indeed say, under any of them, he would probably bring home with him a more grateful sense of the Lord's goodness to him, in appointing his lot in Britain. As it is, his zeal is not only unprofitable to others, but hurtful to himself. It embitters his spirit, it diverts his thoughts from things of greater importance, and prevents him from feeling the value of those blessings, civil and religious, which he actually possesses; and could he, as he wishes, prevail on many to act in the same spirit, the governing powers might be irritated to take every opportunity of abridging that religious liberty which we are favoured with, above all the nations upon earth. Let me remind Querulus, that the hour is approaching, when many things, which at present too much engross his thoughts and inflame his passions, will appear as foreign to him, as what is now transacting among the Tartars or Chinese.

Other improprieties of conduct, which lessen the influence and spot the profession of some who wish well to the cause of Christ, might be enumerated, but these may suffice for a specimen.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVI.

To a Gay Friend, on his Recovery from Illness.

DEAR SIR,—I suppose you will receive many congratulations on your recovery from your late dangerous illness; most of them, perhaps, more sprightly and better turned, but none, I persuade myself, more sincere and affectionate than mine. I beg you would prepare yourself by this good opinion of me, before you read further; and let the reality of my regard excuse what you may dislike in my manner of expressing it.

When a person is returned from a doubtful, distant voyage, we are naturally led to inquire into the incidents he has met with, and the discoveries he has made. Indulge me in a curiosity of this kind, especially as my affection gives me an interest and concern in the event. You have been, my friend, upon the brink, the very edge of an eternal state; but God has restored you back

to the world again. Did you meet with, or have you brought back, nothing new? Did nothing occur to stop or turn your usual train of thought? Were your apprehensions of invisible things exactly the same in the height of your disorder, when you were cut off from the world and all its engagements, as when you were in perfect health, and in the highest enjoyment of your own inclinations? If you answer me, "Yes, all things are just the same as formerly, the difference between sickness and health only excepted;" I am at a loss how to reply. I can only sigh and wonder: sigh, that it should be thus with any, that it should be thus with you, whom I dearly love; and wonder, since this unhappy case, strange as it seems in one view, is yet so frequent, why it was not always thus with myself; for long and often it was just so. Many a time, when sickness had brought me, as we say, to death's door, I was as easy and insensible as the sailor, who, in the height of a storm, should presume to sleep upon the top of the mast, quite regardless that the next tossing wave might plunge him into the raging ocean, beyond all possibility of relief. But at length a day came, which, though the most terrible day I ever saw, I can now look back upon with thankfulness and pleasure; I say, the time came, when, in such a helpless extremity, and under the expectation of immediate death, it pleased God to command the veil from my eyes, and I saw things in some measure as they really were. Imagine with yourself, a person trembling upon the point of a dreadful precipice, a powerful and inexorable enemy eager to push him down, and an assemblage of all that is horrible waiting at the bottom for his fall; even this will give you but a faint representation of the state of my mind at that time. Believe me, it was not a whim, or a dream, which changed my sentiments and conduct, but a powerful conviction, which will not admit the least doubt; an evidence which, like that I have of my own existence, I cannot call in question, without contradicting all my senses. And though my case was in some respects uncommon, yet something like it is known by one and another every day; and I have myself conversed with many, who, after a course of years spent in defending deistical principles, or indulging libertine practices, when they have thought themselves confirmed in their schemes by the cool assent of what they then deemed impartial reason, have been like me, brought to glory in the cross of Christ, and to live by that faith which they had before slighted and opposed. By these instances, I know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. The same power which humbled me, can undoubtedly bring down the most haughty infidel upon earth. And as I likewise knew, that, to show his

power, he is often pleased to make use of weak instruments, I am encouraged, notwithstanding the apparent difficulty of succeeding, to warn those, over whom friendship or affection gives me any influence, of the evil and the danger of a course of life formed upon the prevailing maxims of the world. So far as I neglect this, I am unfaithful in my professions, both to God and man.

I shall not at present trouble you in an argumentative way. If by dint of reasoning I could effect some change in your notions, my arguments, unless applied by a superior power, would still leave your heart unchanged and untouched. A man may give his assent to the gospel, and be able to defend it against others, and yet not have his own spirit truly influenced by it. This thought I shall leave with you, that if your scheme be not true to a demonstration, it must necessarily be false; for the issue is too important to make a doubt on the dangerous side tolerable. If the christian could possibly be mistaken, he is still upon equal terms with those who pronounce him to be so; but if the deist be wrong (that is, if we are in the right,) the consequence to him must be unavoidable and intolerable. This, you will say, is a trite argument: I own it; but, beaten as it is, it will never be worn out or answered.

Permit me to remind you that the points in debate between us are already settled in themselves, and that our talking cannot alter or affect the nature of things, for they will be as they are, whatever apprehensions we may form of them; and remember, likewise, that we must all, each one for himself, experience on which side the truth lies. I used a wrong word when I spoke of your *recovery*: my dear friend, look upon it only as a *reprieve*, for you carry the sentence of death about with you still, and unless you should be cut off (which God in his mercy forbid!) by a sudden stroke, you will as surely lie upon a deathbed as you have been now raised from a bed of sickness; and remember likewise (how can I bear to write it!) that should you neglect my admonitions, they will, notwithstanding, have an effect upon you, though not such an effect as I could wish: they will render you more inexcusable. I have delivered my own soul by faithfully warning: but if you will not examine the matter with that seriousness it calls for; if you will not look up to God, the former of your body and the preserver of your spirit, for direction and assistance how to please him; if you will have your reading and conversation only on one side of the question; if you determine to let afflictions and dangers, mercies and deliverances, all pass without reflection and improvement; if you will spend your life as though you thought you were sent into the world only to eat, sleep, and play, and, after a course

of years, be extinguished like the snuff of a candle;—why, then, you must abide the consequences. But assuredly, sooner or later, God will meet you. My hearty daily prayer is, that it may be in a way of mercy, and that you may be added to the number of the trophies of his invincible grace.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVII.

Some Points of Christian Experience Considered.

TO A FRIEND.

DEAR SIR,—I trust the difference of our sentiments, since we are agreed in the one thing needful, will no more interrupt our union and fellowship than the difference of our features or the tone of our voices. I wish you to believe that I would be no advocate for carelessness or formality. I hope my conscience bears me witness that, besides trusting in the letter of scripture, I likewise desire an increase of that inward and comfortable sense of divine things, in which I believe you are happy; and that I wish not only to be a subject of the kingdom of Jesus, but likewise to have that kingdom powerfully set up in my heart, which consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Indeed I see not how these can be distinguished, or what ground I could have to think myself a subject of his kingdom, unless I earnestly desired to have that kingdom in all its branches and blessings flourishing in my soul. I do not know that I live in the neglect of any means appointed of God for my growth in these blessings, or willingly allow myself in what is inconsistent with them: I think my heart is habitually in the pursuit of them, and that there is seldom an hour in any day when lively communion with my God, in Christ, is not present to my view as the chief good. To this purpose, through grace, I can venture to express myself to man, though still it is true, when I come before the Lord, notwithstanding the diligence and circumspection I would aim at, I see myself a poor inconsistent creature, that my strength is perfect weakness, and all I have is sin. I confess I am afraid of fixing the criterion of a work of grace too high, lest the mourners in Zion should be discouraged; because I find it is the will of God that such should not be discouraged, but comforted, and because it appears that the scriptural marks have respect rather to desires, if real, than to attainments, or at least to those attainments which are often possessed by persons who are kept very short of sensible comforts, Matt. v. 3—9, Luke xxiii. 42, 13, 1 Pet. ii. 7.

The points between you and me seem chiefly the following: 1. When may a person be properly denominated a believer? 2. What are the proper evidences and necessary concomitants of a lively, thriving frame of spirit? 3. Whether such a degree of faithfulness to light received as is consistent with the remnant of a depraved nature in our present state, will certainly and always preserve our souls from declensions and winter-seasons? 4. Whether that gracious humility which arises from a due sense of our own vileness and of the riches of divine grace be ordinarily attainable without some mortifying experience of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our own hearts? A few lines upon each of these particulars will, I think, take in the chief parts of your letter.

1. We differ something with respect to what constitutes a believer. I own nothing has surprised me more, in the course of our friendly debate, than your supposing that a person should date his conversion and his commencing a believer from the time of his receiving the gospel-truths with that clearness and power as to produce in him an abiding assurance. The apostle, in Eph. i. 13, makes a plain distinction between believing and being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. By the experience and observation of many years, I have been more and more persuaded, that to represent assurance as being of the essence of faith, is not agreeable to scripture, which, in many places, either expressly asserts or strongly intimates the contrary, John i. 50, and xx. 29, Rom. x. 9, 1 John v. 1. Whoever is not a believer must be an unbeliever; there can be no medium. Either there are many believers who have not assurance, or else there are many unbelievers who love the Lord Jesus, hate sin, are poor in spirit, and adorn the doctrine of the gospel by their temper and conversation; and I doubt not but those who now have assurance, had before they attained it, a something which wrought by love, and overcame the world. I know no principle capable of these effects but faith, which though at first it be like a grain of mustard-seed, is the seed of God: though it be faint, it is genuine, as the dawning of light is of the same nature with that which flows from the noon-day sun. I allow that, while faith is weak, there may be little solid comfort, if by that expression abiding comfort be meant. Faith gives safety and spiritual life; abiding peace and establishment follow the sealing of the Spirit. But though an infant has not the strength, activity, and understanding, which he will attain when he arrives to the age of manhood, he is as fully possessed of a principle of life while he is an infant as at any time afterwards.

2. We seem to differ likewise as to the marks of a lively, thriving spirit; at least if

any are supposed to be better or surer than those to which our Lord has promised blessedness, Matt. v. 3—9. He has said, "Blessed are they that mourn;" but he has not said, "More blessed are they that are comforted." They are, to be sure, more happy at present; but their blessedness consists not in their present comforts, but in those perceptions of gospel-truths which form them to that contrite spirit in which God delighteth, Isa. lvii. 13, and which make them capable of divine comforts, and spiritual hungering and thirsting after them. Perhaps we do not argue *ad idem*; we may mean different things. I would not represent myself as a stranger to peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. In the midst of all my conflicts I have a heartfelt satisfaction from the gospel, which nothing else could give. But I mean, though this be with me as an abiding principle, it rarely affords me what I think you intend when you speak of sensible comforts. I cannot feel that warmth of heart, that glowing of love, which the knowledge of such a Saviour should inspire. I account it my sin, and I feel it my burden that I cannot. And when I truly do this, when I abhor myself for my stupidity, mourn over it, and humbly look up to the Lord for relief against it, I judge my soul to be at such times as much alive to God as it would be if he saw fit to increase my comfort. Let me always either rejoice in him or mourn after him: I would leave the alternative to him, who knows best how to suit his dispensations to my state; and I trust he knows that I do not say this because I set a small value upon his presence. As to the experience of the apostles, I believe they were patterns to all succeeding believers: but, with some regard to the several trials and services to which we may be called in this world, he distributes severally to all his people according to his own will, yet with a wise and gracious accommodation to the circumstances and situations of each. The apostle Paul connects the abounding of his consolations with the abounding of his afflictions, and with the state of the people to whom he preached, 2 Cor. i. 4—7; and if, instead of preaching the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum in the face of persecution, he had lived in a land of liberty, and been confined to a parochial cure, for aught I know, his cup might not have run over so often. Succeeding ministers of the gospel, when called to very laborious and painful services, have, for the like reasons, been often favoured with a double portion of that joy which makes hard things easy and bitter things sweet; and, in general, all the Lord's people who walk humbly before him, may expect that in, or after seasons of great trial, and in proportion to their pressures, he will favour them with peculiar comforts. It is in this way, he, in a great measure, fulfils his promise of making

their strength equal to their day; and I am enabled to trust him in this matter, that if he should, at any time, see fit to call me to a more difficult and dangerous sphere of service, or lead me into the furnace of affliction, he would, if he saw it needful, support and refresh me by such manifestations of his glory and love, as I know but little of at present. In a word, an humble, dependent frame of spirit, perseverance in the use of appointed means, care to avoid all occasions of sin, an endeavour to glorify God in our callings, and an eye to Jesus as our all in all;—these things are to me sure indications that the soul is right, that the Lord is present, and that grace is thriving and in exercise, whether sensible consolations abound or not.

3. I propose the third question, concerning such a degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnants of a depraved nature, because I apprehend one effect of indwelling sin is, to render it morally impossible for us to be entirely faithful to that light and power which God has given us. It may sound like a contradiction, to say we cannot do what we can do; but there are many enigmas in a believer's experience, at least in mine; and I never expect to meet the man that knows his own heart, that will say he is always faithful, diligent, and obedient, to the full extent of his ability; I rather expect he would confess with me, that he feels a need of more ability, and fresh supplies of grace, to enable him to make a better improvement of what he had already received. If some, as you suppose, in their dullest frames can read the Bible, go to the throne of grace, and mourn (as they ought) over what is amiss, I must say for myself, I can, and I cannot. Without doubt I can take the Bible in my hand, and force myself to read it; I can kneel down, and I can see I ought to mourn; but to understand and attend to what I read, to engage my heart in prayer, or to be duly humbled under the sense of so dark and dissipated a state of mind; these things, at some seasons, I can no more do than raise the dead, and yet I cannot plead positive inability; I am satisfied that what prevents me is my sin, but it is the sin of my nature, the sin that dwelleth in me: and I expect it will be thus with me at times, in a greater or less degree, till this body of sin shall be wholly destroyed. Yet I believe the Lord is with me, even when he seems to be absent, otherwise my corruptions, at such seasons, might easily prevail to betray me into open or allowed sin, which, blessed be the grace and care of my good Shepherd, is not the case. I know not if I rightly understand the expression, "We may humbly hope, that those things we fall into, which are not in our power to prevent, will not be set to our account." The least

of the evils I feel, and which seem most involuntary, if set to my account, would ruin me; and I trust, that even my worst deviations shall not appear against me, because I am a believer in Jesus; and I know, and am sure, that I do not wish to continue in sin that grace may abound. My conscience bears me witness, that I would not desire the rule of duty to be narrowed or accommodated to my imperfections in a single instance. If the expression only means, that these unavoidable effects of our evil nature should not break our peace of conscience, or discourage us in our approaches to God, I am of the same mind; through mercy I have seldom any more doubt of my acceptance in the Beloved, when in a dark frame, than when I am most favoured with liberty.

4. Whether true evangelical humility, and an enlarged view of the grace of God in Christ, triumphing over all obstacles, be ordinarily attainable without an experience of declensions, backslidings, and repeated forgiveness, is the last question I shall consider. I dare say you will do me the justice to believe, that I would not advise any one to run into sin in order to get a knowledge of his own heart. David broke his bones thereby; he obtained an affecting proof of his inability of standing in his own strength, and of the skill and goodness of his Physician who healed him; yet no man in his wits would break his bones for the sake of making experiments, if he were ever so sure they would be well set again. You think that a believer is never more humble in his own eyes, or admires Jesus more than when he is filled with joy and peace. I readily allow, that the present impressions of divine love are humbling: however, the direct tendency of gracious consolations in themselves is one thing; what evils they may afterwards occasion through the desperate depravity of our hearts, is another. We have a memorable case in point to explain my meaning. The apostle Paul's recollection of his course while in a natural state, and the singular manner of his conversion, were evidently suited to make him an humble christian, and he was so. By an especial favour of the Lord, he was afterwards taken up into the third heaven; what he saw or heard there he has not told us, but surely he met with nothing that could have a tendency to make him proud; doubtless he saw Jesus in his glory, and the humble spiritual worship of heaven; a sight which we might deem sufficient to make him walk in self-abasement all the days of his life: but Paul, though an eminent saint, was still liable to the effects of indwelling sin; he was in danger of being exalted through the abundance of revelations, and the Lord, his wise and gracious keeper, saw fit, in order to prevent it, that a messenger from Satan should be given him to buffet

him. Pride is so subtle, that it can gather strength, even from those gracious manifestations which seem directly calculated to mortify it; so dangerous, that a messenger from Satan himself may be esteemed a mercy, if over-ruled and sanctified by the Lord, to make or keep us more humble: therefore, though we can never be too earnest in striving against sin, too watchful in abstaining from all appearance of evil, and though they who wait upon the Lord may comfortably hope, that he will preserve them from such things as would dishonour their profession in the sight of men, yet I apprehend they who appear most to adorn the gospel in their outward conversation, are conscious of many things between the Lord and their own souls, which covers them with shame, and that his tenderness and mercy to them, notwithstanding their perverseness, constrains them with admiration to adopt the language of Micah, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage!" and I believe likewise, that, without such striking and repeated proofs of what is in their hearts, they would not so feelingly enter into the spirit of Job's confession, "Behold, I am vile!" nor would they have such a lively sense of their obligations to the merciful care and faithfulness of their great Shepherd, or of their entire and absolute dependence upon him, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I find these considerations useful and necessary to reconcile me to my lot. The Lord knows what I need, and what I can bear: gladly would I receive, earnestly would I desire, more of comforts while here; but if I mourn now, I hope to be comforted in heaven. In the mean time it is more immediately necessary for me, both as a christian and a minister, that I should be humbled; the Lord's will be done. I cannot pretend to determine what ministers, or what body of people come nearest the character of the primitive times, but in my judgment they are the happiest who have the lowest thoughts of themselves, and in whose eyes Jesus is most glorious and precious.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVIII.

That True Religion is necessary, in order to the best Enjoyment of the Pleasures of the present Life.

TO A GAY FRIEND.

DEAR SIR,—Though I truly love you, and have no reason to doubt of the reality of your friendship to me; yet I cannot but apprehend, that notwithstanding our mutual regard,

and my frequent attempts to be witty, if I could, for your diversion, there is a something in most of my letters (which I cannot, dare not, wholly suppress,) that disgusts and wearies you, and makes you less inclined to keep up a frequent intercourse than you would otherwise be. Rather than lose you quite, I will in general spare you as much as I can; but at present you must bear with me, and allow me full scope. You have given me a challenge, which I know not how to pass over; and since you so far justify my preaching, as to condescend to preach (in your way) yourself, permit me, for this time, to preach again, and to take some passages in your letter for my text.

In the present debate, I will accept your compliment, and suppose myself to be, as you say, a man of sense. You allow, then, that all the sense is not on your side. This, indeed, you cannot deny; for whatever becomes of me, it is needless to tell you, that Hal-Boyle, and other great names I could mention, were men of as great penetration and judgment, had as good opportunities, and took as much pains to be informed of the truth, as any of the advocates for infidelity can pretend to. And you cannot, with any modesty or consistence, absolutely determine, that they had not as good grounds for thinking themselves right, as you can have for concluding they were wrong.

But declining the advantage of human authority, I am content the point should rest between you and me. And here I beg you to observe, that I have one evident advantage over you in judging, namely, that I have experienced the good and evil on both sides, and you only on one. If you were to send me an inventory of your pleasures, how charmingly your time runs on, and how dexterously it is divided between the coffee-house, play-house, the card-table, and tavern, with intervals of balls, concerts, &c.; I could answer, that most of these I have tried, and tried again, and know the utmost they can yield, and have seen enough of the rest, most heartily to despise them all. Setting religion entirely out of the question, I profess I had rather be a worm to crawl upon the ground, than to bear the name of Man upon the poor terms of whiling away my life in an insipid round of such insignificant and unmanly trifles. I will return your own expression,—I believe you to be a person of sense; but alas! how do you prostitute your talents and capacity; how far do you act below yourself, if you know no higher purpose of life than these childish dissipations, together with the more serious business of rising early and sitting up late, to amass money, that you may be able to enlarge your expenses! I am sure, while I lived in these things, I found them unsatisfying and empty to the last degree; and the only advantage they afforded (miserable are they who

forced to deem it an advantage) was, that they often relieved me from the trouble and burden of thinking. If you have any other pleasures than these, they are such as must be evil and inconvenient, even upon your own plan; and, therefore, my friendship will not allow me to bring them into the account. I am willing to hope you do not stoop still lower in pursuit of satisfaction. Thus far we stand upon even ground. You know all that a life of pleasure can give, and I know it likewise.

On the other hand, if I should attempt to explain to you the source and streams of my best pleasures, such as a comfortable assurance of the pardon of my sins, an habitual communion with the God who made heaven and earth, a calm reliance on the divine providence, the cheering prospect of a better life in a better world, with the pleasing foretastes of heaven in my own soul; should I, or could I, tell you the pleasure I often find in reading the scriptures, in the exercise of prayer, and in that sort of preaching and conversation which you despise; I doubt not but you would think as meanly of my happiness as I do of yours. But here lies the difference, my dear friend, you condemn that which you have never tried. You know no more of these things than a blind man does of colours; and, notwithstanding all your flourishes, I defy you to be at all times able to satisfy yourself, that things may not possibly be as I have represented them.

Besides, what do I lose upon my plan, that should make me so worthy of your pity? Have you a quicker relish in the prudent use of temporal comforts? Do you think I do not eat my food with as much pleasure as you can do, though perhaps, with less cost and variety? Is your sleep sounder than mine? Have not I as much satisfaction in social life? It is true, to join much with the gay fluttering tribe, who spend their days in laugh and sing-song, is equally contrary to my duty and inclination. But I have friends and acquaintance as well as you. Among the many who favour me with their esteem and friendship, there are some who are persons of sense, learning, wit, and (what, perhaps, may weigh as much with you) of fortune and distinction. And if you should say, "Ay, but they are all enthusiasts like yourself," you would say nothing to the purpose, since, upon your maxim, that "happiness is according to opinion," it cannot be an objection, but the contrary, to have my acquaintance to my own taste. Thus much for the brighter side of your situation; or, let me add one thing more. I know you have thoughts of marriage; do you think, if you should enter into this relation, your principles are calculated to make you more happy in it than I am? You are well acquainted with our family-life. Do you propose to know more of the peace and

heartfelt joy of domestic union than I have known, and continue to know to this hour? I wish you may equal us; and if you do, we shall still be as before, but upon even ground. I need not turn deist, to enjoy the best and the most that this life can afford.

But I need not tell you, that the present life is not made up of pleasureable incidents only. Pain, sickness, losses, disappointments, injuries, and affronts with men, will more or less, at one time or other be our lot. And can you bear these trials better than I? You will not pretend to it. Let me appeal to yourself: How often do you toss and disquiet yourself, like a wild bull in a net, when things cross your expectations? As your thoughts are more engrossed by what you see, you must be more keenly sensible of what you feel. You cannot view these trials as appointed by a wise and heavenly Father, in subservience to your good: you cannot taste the sweetness of his promises, nor feel the secret supports of his strength, in an hour of affliction; you cannot so cast your burden and care upon him as to find a sensible relief to your spirit thereby; nor can you see his hand engaged and employed in effecting your deliverance. Of these things you know no more than of the art of flying; but I seriously assure you, and I believe my testimony will go farther with you than my judgment, that they are realities, and that I have found them to be so. When my worldly concerns have been most thorny and discouraging, I have once and again felt the most of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away. However, I may state the case still lower. You do pretty well among your friends; but how do you like being alone? Would you not give something for that happy secret, which could enable you to pass a rainy day pleasantly, without the assistance of business, company, or amusement? Would it not mortify you greatly to travel for a week in an unfrequented road, where you should meet with no lively incidents to recruit and raise your spirits? Alas! what a poor scheme of pleasure is yours, that will not support an interval of reflection!

What you have heard is true: I have a few friends, who meet at my house once a fortnight, and we spend an hour or two in worshipping the God who made us. And can this move your indignation or your compassion? Does it show a much nobler spirit, a more refined way of thinking, to live altogether without God in the world? If I kept a card-assembly at those times, it would not displease you. How can you, as a person of sense, avoid being shocked at your own unhappy prejudice? But I remember how it was once with myself, and forbear to wonder. May He who has opened my eyes, open yours. He only can do it. I do not expect to con-

vince you by any thing I can say as of myself; but if He is pleased to make use of me as his instrument, then you will be convinced. How should I then rejoice! I should rejoice to be useful to any one, but especially to you, whom I dearly love. May God show you your true self, and your true state; then you will attentively listen to what you now disdain to hear of, his goodness in providing redemption and pardon for the chief of sinners, through him who died upon the cross for sins not his own. Keep this letter by you at my request; and when you write, tell me that you receive it in good part, and that you still believe me to be, &c.

LETTER XXXIX.

A Word in Season.

DEAR SIR,—In this dark and declining day, when iniquity abounds, the awful tokens of God's displeasure are multiplying around us, and too many professors, not duly sensible of the real cause of all the evils we either feel or have reason to fear, are disputing, instead of praying, may the Lord bestow upon you, and me, and upon all who fear his name, a spirit suited to the times; that the words of David, "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved," may express the very sensation and frame of our hearts. Permit me to keep this expression in my view while I write, though it may perhaps give my letter something of the air of a sermon.

The Hebrew word answering to "I was grieved," signifies such a kind of grief as is mixed with dislike; such a grief as a believer must feel when he has a sense of his own corruptions. It is frequently rendered as in Ezek. xx. 43. *to loathe*: "You shall loathe yourselves in your own sight." We are not required strictly to hate ourselves, but the evil that is in us. So, when we look at transgressors, we are not to hate but to pity them, mourn over them, and pray for them; nor have we any right to boast over them; for by nature, and of ourselves, we are no better than they. But their sinfulness should cause a dislike, an holy indignation; as it is recorded of our Lord, who though full of compassion and tenderness, so that he wept over his enemies, and prayed for his actual murderers, yet looked upon transgressors with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.

A feeling of this kind seems essential to that new nature which characterises the children of God; and, where it is not in habitual exercise, it is a sufficient evidence that the soul, if truly alive to God at all, is at least in a lean and distempered state. Who can avoid being grieved and hurt by

that which is in direct opposition to what he most loves! Believers love holiness, and, unless when stupified by the arts of Satan, can hardly bear themselves for what they find contrary to it within their own breasts, and must therefore, of course, be grieved with the sins of others. Like righteous Lot, and from his principles, they are "vexed with the conversation of the wicked." Can they who reverence the name of God be easy and unconcerned when they hear it blasphemed? No: their ears are wounded and their hearts are pained. Can they who are followers of peace and purity behold unmoved the riots, licentiousness, and daring wickedness of those who have cast off both shame and fear! Can they who have bowels of mercy and compassion, be unaffected when they see the iron hand of oppression grinding the faces of the poor! Or can any who love the songs of Zion, help being shocked with the songs of drunkards! I trust there are many, who, upon these accounts are daily crying, "My soul is among lions:" "Wo is me that I dwell in Meshech!" "O gather not my soul with sinners." The thought of being shut up forever with the ungodly would be terrible as hell to a gracious soul, though there were no devouring fire, no keen sense of the wrath of God to be feared.

They are grieved likewise upon their Lord's account, for they have obtained a spark of zeal for his honour and glory. With Elijah, they are "very jealous for the Lord of hosts." They feel their obligations to him and know he well deserves to reign in every heart. But when, on the contrary, they see almost every one in a conspiracy against him, despising him to his face, trampling upon his laws, rejecting his authority, and abusing his patience, their eyes affect the hearts. What man of sensibility could brook to see every one about him contriving how to affront and injure the person whom he most loved! Now the Lord is the believer's best friend, the beloved of his soul; and therefore he is grieved and troubled when he beholds the transgressors.

This emotion is likewise heightened by compassion to souls. Grace gives some view of the evil of sin, the dreadfulness of the wrath of God, and the vast importance of that word eternity. Thus instructed in the sanctuary of God, they would be stocks and stones, were they capable of beholding sinners rushing upon destruction without being grieved for them. But they cannot bear it; they cannot but give and repeat a faithful warning, though they have little reason to expect any better return than scorn and ill-treatment for what the world accounts an impertinent officiousness.

But who then are believers? Who are thus "on the Lord's side?" If these senti-

ments are common and radical to all who are born of God, can we make no abatement! Or must we unchristian perhaps the greater part of professors at this time! for it is too evident that many, who bear the name of gospel professors, discover but little of this concern. In general, I think this subject affords no improper test for the trial of our spirits. The effects of grace, in similar circumstances, are uniform; but if any, who think themselves possessors of it, feel no grief for the abounding of sin and the obstinacy of sinners, they differ from the saints recorded both in the Old and New Testament, and it will be their wisdom to examine and take heed lest they be deceived. It is easy to call Christ, Lord, Lord; but a criminal lukewarmness of spirit, where his cause, honour, and gospel are in question, will one day meet with an awful rebuke, and be treated, in those who make mention of his name, as high treason against his person and government.

But if we allow that, through the contagion of the times and the power of Satan, it is possible for true christians to sink into this indifference, and for the wise, as well as the foolish virgins, to sleep, when they should be watching unto prayer; even these have much to fear, lest they should largely participate in the sufferings which the provocations they connive at have a direct tendency to bring upon a sinful people. When national sins draw down national judgments, the Lord has given us a hope, that he will fix a mark of protection upon them who sigh and mourn in secret before him, for the evils which they are unable to prevent. To these he will be a sanctuary; he will either preserve them unhurt in the midst of surrounding calamities, or he will support them with consolations superior to all their troubles, when the hearts of others are shaken like leaves in a storm. But none have reason to expect to be thus privileged, who have not a heart given them to lament their own sins and the sins of those among whom they live.

Surely the Lord has a controversy with this land; and there hardly can be a period assigned in the annals of ages, when it was more expedient or reasonable for those who fear him to stir up each other to humiliation and prayer than at present. What is commonly called our national debt is swelled to an enormous greatness. It may be quickly expressed in figures; but a person must be something versed in calculation to form a tolerable idea of accumulated millions. But what arithmetic is sufficient to compute the immensity of our national debt in a spiritual sense! or, in other words, the amount of our national sins! The spirit of infidelity, which, for a time, distinguished comparatively a few, and, like a river, was restrained within narrow bounds, has of late years broken down

its banks and deluged the land. This wide-spreading evil has, in innumerable instances, as might be expected, emboldened the natural heart against the fear of God, hardened it to an insensibility of moral obligation, and strengthened its prejudices against the gospel. The consequence has been, that profligate wickedness is become almost as universal as the air we breathe, and is practised with little more reserve or secrecy than the transactions of common business, except in such instances as would subject the offender to the penalty of human laws. O the unspeakable patience of God! The multiplied instances of impiety, blasphemy, cruelty, adultery, villany, and abominations not to be thought of without horror, under which this land groans, are only known to him who knoweth all things. There are few sins which imply greater contempt of God, or a more obdurate state of mind in the offender, than perjury, yet the guilt of it is so little regarded, and temptations to it so very frequent, that perhaps I do not go too far in supposing there are more deliberate acts of perjury committed amongst us than among all the rest of mankind taken together. Though some of the Roman poets and historians have given very dark pictures of the times they lived in, their worst descriptions of this kind would hardly be found exaggerated if applied to our own. But what are the sins of heathens, if compared with the like evils perpetrated in a land bearing the name of christian, favoured with the word of God, the light of the gospel, and enjoying the blessings of civil and religious liberty and peace in a higher degree, and for a longer continuance, than was afforded to any people of whose history we have heard!

The state of the churches of Christ at this time affords likewise ample cause for humiliation and grief. The formality, conformity to the world, the want of love, the intemperate, and unprofitable contentions, which prevail among us, show how faintly the power of the gospel is felt, even by many who profess to have embraced it. The true and undefiled doctrine of Jesus is not only opposed by its declared enemies, but wounded and dishonoured in the house of its friends. And though the sins of those who avow subjection to the institutions of Christ, may not have so gross a stamp of profligacy and immorality, as of those who set him openly at defiance; yet they have, in some respects, an aggravation, of which the others are not capable; as being committed against clearer light, and peculiar acknowledged obligations. From the consideration of both taken together, who, that has a spark of seriousness and attention, and that has learned from scripture and history the sure connexion between sin and trouble, can forbear trembling at that alarming question, so often proposed

to the consciences of ungrateful Israel of old, "Shall not I visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" especially when we see the dispensations of God's providence so awfully corresponding with the threatenings in his word.

How much is it to be desired, then, that all who truly fear the Lord, instead of wasting their time in useless squabbles, may unite in earnest prayer; and, with deep compunction of heart, bemoan those evils, which, unless repented of and forsaken, may bring upon us, as a people, such distress as neither we nor our fathers have known! If he is pleased thus to give us a heart to seek him, he will yet be found of us; but if when his hand is lifted up, we cannot, or will not see, nor regard the signs of the times, there is great reason to fear, that our case is deplorable indeed.

A few, however, there will be, who will lay these things suitably to heart; and whom the Lord will favour and spare, as a man spareth his only son that serveth him. That you and I may be of this happy number, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER XI.

A Word to Professors in Trade.

DEAR SIR.—It is suspected, or rather it is too certainly known, that, among those who are deemed gospel-professors, there are some persons who allow themselves in the practice of dealing in prohibited, uncustomed, or, as the common phrase is, smuggled goods, to the prejudice of the public revenue, and the detriment of the fair trader.

The decisions of the word of God upon this point, are so plain and determinate, that it is rather difficult to conceive how a sincere mind can either overlook or mistake them. The same authority which forbids us to commit adultery, or murder, requires us to "render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's;" to render unto all their dues: tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom. These precepts enjoin no more than what the common sense of mankind pronounces to be due from subjects and members of society, to the governments they live under, and by which they are protected. But the obligation is greatly enforced upon those who acknowledge themselves the disciples of Christ, since he has been pleased to make their compliance herein a part of the obedience they owe to himself. And it is plain, that these injunctions are universal and binding, under all civil governments, as such; for none can justly suppose that tributes exacted by the Roman emperors, (under whose dominion the

first christians lived) such as Tiberius or Nero, had the sanction of our Lord and his apostles on account of their peculiar equity.

The vending smuggled goods, or the buying them, if known to be so, is likewise injurious to the fair trader, who conscientiously paying the prescribed duties, cannot afford to sell so cheap as the smuggler: and therefore, must expect the fewer customers. In this view, it offends the royal law, of "doing to others as we would they should do unto us." The force of this argument may be easily felt by any one who will honestly make the case his own. Without any nice reasoning, people may know in a moment, that they should not like to be put to this disadvantage. It is, therefore, unjust, (i. e. sinful, and utterly unbecoming a professor of religion) to purchase smuggled goods, even in small quantities, and for family-use. As for those who, being in trade themselves, make this practice a branch of their business, and, under the semblance of a fair reputation, are doing things in secret, which they would tremble to have discovered, being afraid of the exchequer, though not of God, I can only pray, that God may give them repentance; for it is a work of darkness, and needs it. Transactions of this kind cannot be carried on for a course of time, without such a series and complication of fraud and meanness,* and, for the most part, of perjury likewise, as would be scandalous, not only in a professed christian, but in an avowed infidel.

It should be observed likewise, that there is hardly any set of men more lost to society, or in a situation more dangerous to themselves and others, than the people who are called smugglers. Frequent fightings, and sometimes murder itself, are the consequence of their illicit commerce. Their money is ill gotten, and it is generally ill spent. They are greatly to be pitied. The employment they are accustomed to, has a direct tendency to deprive them of character, and the privileges of social life, and to harden their hearts, and stupify their consciences, in the ways of sin. But for whom are they risking their lives, and ruining their souls? I would hope, reader, not for you, if you account yourself a christian. If you, for the sake of gain, encourage or assist them, by buying or selling their goods, you are so far responsible for the consequences. You encourage them in sin; you expose them to mischief. And have you so learned Christ? Is this the testimony you give of the uprightness of your hearts and ways? Is it thus you show your compassion for the souls of men? Ah! shake your hands from gain so dearly earned. Think not to support the cause of God with such gain; he hates robbery for burnt-offer-

* Dr Johnson, defining a smuggler, says, he is "a wretch who imports or exports goods without payment of the customs."

ing. Think it not lawful, or safe, to put a farthing of it into your treasury, lest it secretly communicate a moth and a curse to all that you possess; for it is the price of blood, the blood of souls. If you are indeed a child of God, and will persist in this path after admonition received, be assured your sin will find you out. If the Lord loves you, he will not suffer you to prosper in your perverseness. You may rather expect, that as a little damaged corn is sufficient to spoil a whole heap to which it is laid, so money, thus obtained, will deprive you of the blessing and comfort you might otherwise expect from your lawful acquisitions.

If you are determined to persist in opposition to scripture, to law, to equity and humanity, you have, doubtless, as I suppose you a professor, some plea or excuse with which you attempt to justify yourself and to keep your conscience quiet. See to it, that it be such a one as will bear the examination of a trying hour. You will not surely plead that "things are come to such a pass, there is no carrying on business upon other terms to advantage!" Will the practice of the world, who knew not Christ, be a proper precedent for you who call yourself by his name? That cannot be, since his command is, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." That the truth and power of his grace may be manifested, he is pleased to put his servants into such situations, that they must forego some seeming advantages, and suffer some seeming hardships, in their worldly connexions, if they will approve themselves faithful to him, and live in the exercise of a good conscience. He promises, that his grace shall be sufficient for them. It is the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich; and, for want of this, we see many rise early, take late rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, to no purpose. And I believe, integrity and diligence in business, with a humble dependence upon his providence, are the best methods of thriving even in temporals. However, they who lose for him are in no danger of losing by him. They may be confident of so much as he sees best for them; and they shall have his peace and blessing with it. But if, when you are placed in a state of trial, the love of the world is so powerful in your heart, that you cannot resist the temptation of enriching yourself by unlawful means, you have great reason to fear you have not his Spirit, and are therefore none of his.—I am, &c.

LETTER XLI.

On the Ministry of Angels.

DEAR SIR,—The saints on earth, though exposed to many sufferings, and assaulted

by many enemies, are as safe as the saints in glory. They have been enabled, in the day of God's power to commit themselves to the care of Jesus, the great shepherd, who is faithful to his trust, and able to save them to the uttermost. His eye is always upon them, his everlasting arms are underneath them, and no power, or policy, can separate them from his love.

The apostle, in the name and behalf of the church militant, having taken a leisurely and distinct survey of all the difficulties and opposition they can possibly meet with, in life or in death, from the visible or invisible worlds, triumphs in an assurance, that none of these things singly, nor all of them together, shall prevail; but that, on the contrary, believers shall be made conquerors, yea, more than conquerors, through him who has loved them.

In the course of his enumeration of the real and supposed dangers to which the people of Christ are exposed, he particularly mentions, angels, principalities, and powers, intimating to us a subject of great importance, though too seldom and too faintly attended to by us; I mean the part which the inhabitants of the unseen world take in our concerns. Angel is a general name; the terms, principalities and powers, and elsewhere, thrones and dominions, apply to them, we shall not, perhaps, clearly understand, till we mingle with the world of spirits. These different names seem, however, to imply that some difference of degree, and possibly some subordination of rule, obtains among them. But they shall not be able either singly or collectively to separate believers from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

The general distribution of angels, principalities, and powers, is into good and evil. They were all created glorious and excellent creatures; for nothing but good could originally proceed from God, the fountain of goodness. But some of them "kept not their first estate." Sin dispoiled them of their glory, and changed them from angels of light into powers of darkness. And though they have a permissive liberty, subservient to the limitations and designs of divine wisdom, to influence the minds, and to interfere in the affairs of mankind; yet they are confined in chains of darkness which they cannot break, and are reserved to the judgment of the great day.

There are likewise an innumerable company of elect and good angels, Rev. iii. 11. who were preserved by sovereign grace, and are now established (together with believers) in Christ Jesus, the great head of the whole family of God, in heaven and in earth. From these, we may be sure, believers have nothing to fear. They are our brethren and fellow-servants. They join in the song of the

redeemed before the throne; and rejoice in the conversion of a sinner upon earth. We cannot include these in the apostle's challenge, any farther than by way of supposition; as he expresses himself upon another occasion, Gal. i. 8. It is not possible that an angel from heaven should preach, if he came to preach any other gospel than that which is revealed in scripture; but if such a thing could be supposed, we ought not to regard him. So it is not to be thought that the elect angels of God should wish to hinder the salvation of a sinner. But if you conceive for a moment, that any, or all of them could form such a design, they would not be able to succeed; for they are all subject to him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. So far, however, are the holy angels from designing us harm, that they are greatly instrumental in promoting our good. They are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation;" and they rejoice in the service, and account it their honour to be thus employed.

I propose, in this paper, briefly to consider the ministry of good angels; and may, perhaps, hereafter offer a few thoughts on the influence and interference of evil angels, who are continually labouring to disturb and trouble those whom they are not permitted to destroy. And I shall not attempt to amuse the reader with new and strange conjectures upon these subjects, or to intrude into those things which are not revealed, but shall confine myself to the express declarations of the word of God.

The great God works all in all, in both worlds. It is he who filleth the earth with good things, causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and provides corn for the food of man. But in thus spreading a table for us he makes use of instruments. He commands his sun to shine and his rain to descend. So he is the life, strength, and comfort of the renewed soul. All the streams of grace flow from Christ the fountain. But, from the analogy observable in his works, we might reasonably suppose, that, on many occasions, he is pleased to use means and instruments, and particularly the ministry of his angels, to communicate good to his children. Scripture expressly confirms this inference, and leaves it no longer a point of mere conjecture. He gives his angels charge over them, and they encamp round about them that fear him. In this way honour is given to Jesus, as the Lord both of angels and men; and a sweet intercourse is kept up between the different parts of the household of God. That angels have been thus employed in fact, is plain from the history both of the Old and New Testament. They have often made themselves visible when sent to declare the will of God; as to Jacob, Elijah, and David. Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and Mary;

and a multitude joined in ascribing "glory to God in the highest" when they brought to the shepherds the joyful news of a Saviour's birth. An angel delivered Peter from prison, and comforted Paul when tossed by a tempest upon the sea. How far the visible ministrations of angels is continued in these days is not easy to determine. Many persons have been imposed upon by Satan, through such expectations; and it is not safe to look for extraordinary things; yet I do not know that we have warrant from scripture to limit the Lord, so far as to affirm that he doth not, nor ever will, upon any occasion, permit his angels to be seen by men, as in former times. The apostle, pressing believers to exercise hospitality, uses this argument, that "thereby some have entertained angels unawares;" which would hardly seem to be a pertinent motive, if it were absolutely certain that angels would never offer themselves as visitants to the servants of God in future times as they had formerly done. But, waving speculations as to their visible appearance, it is sufficient to know that they are really, though invisibly, near us, and mindful of us.

May we not receive assistance from the angels in our spiritual warfare? That evil angels have an influence and power to distress and disquiet us, is well known to exercised souls; and it seems quite reasonable to believe that the good angels are as willing and as able to communicate helpful and encouraging impressions. As it is not always easy to distinguish between the temptations of Satan and the workings of our own evil hearts; so it may be equally or more difficult to distinguish these assistances from the effects of gracious principles abiding in us, or from the leadings and motions of the Holy Spirit. Nor need we be anxious about it. We cannot err in ascribing all to the Lord. Yet there is something cheering in the thought that we are accompanied and surrounded by these blessed spirits, who have both inclination and ability to relieve, strengthen, and admonish us, in ways which we cannot fully understand. Who can tell how often, and how seasonably a promise, a caution, a direction, from or agreeable to the word of God, is darted upon our minds by these kind messengers of our Father's love?

We may warrantably think they are employed in restraining, over-ruling, and controlling the designs of Satan and his angels. The power, malice, and subtilty of our enemy are very great. We may learn what he would do to us all, if he could, from the instance of Job. But the Lord rebukes him, and that most probably by the ministry of unfallen angels, who are said to encamp round his people to deliver them; and doubtless their care is especially employed where the greatest danger lies. Much to this pur-

pose seems to be implied in the following passages, Dan. x. 13, Rev. xii. 7, Jude 9.

They are witnesses to the sufferings and to the worship of his people, 1 Cor. iv. 9. Though they do not show themselves to us as heretofore to Peter or Paul, they are still near and attentive, are interested in the conflicts and rejoice in the victories of a poor believer. They are present likewise in our solemn assemblies; therefore the apostle charges Timothy, as "Before the elect angels," and seems to refer to them in 1 Cor. xi. 10. This reflection should enliven and regulate our thoughts when we come together; for, though the presence of our Lord and Saviour is the great consideration, yet this likewise may, in its proper place, have some influence to compose our behaviour, Heb. xii. 22.

The ministry of angels preserves us from innumerable dangers and alarms which await us in our daily path. This is expressly taught in Psalm xci. When we receive little or no harm from a fall, or when a sudden motion of our minds leads us to avoid a danger which we were not aware of, perhaps the angels of God have been the means of our preservation; nay, it may be owing to their good offices that we ever perform a journey in safety, or are preserved from the evils we are liable to when sleeping upon our beds, and incapable of taking any care of ourselves.

Finally they are appointed to attend the saints in their last hours, and, in a manner beyond our present apprehension, to keep off the powers of darkness, and bear the children, of God safely home to their Father's house, Luke xvi. 22.

The limits of a sheet will not admit of enlargement upon these particulars. The subject is pleasing and comfortable, and well suited to encourage believers under two very common trials.

1. We are often cast down to think how few there are who worship God in spirit and in truth, and are ready to complain, with Elijah, that we are almost left to serve him alone. But Jesus is not slighted and despised in yonder world as he is in this. If, like the servant of Elisha, our eyes were supernaturally opened to take a glance within the vail, what a glorious and astonishing prospect would the innumerable host of angels afford us! Then we should be convinced that, far from being alone, there are unspeakably

more for us than against us. Faith supplies the want of sight, is the evidence of things not seen, and, upon the authority of the word of God, is as well satisfied of their existence and employment as if they were actually in our view.

Again, 2. Many of the Lord's people are tempted to think themselves neglected by their fellow-christians because they are poor, a discouragement for which there is often too much occasion given. But, poor believer, be not greatly distressed upon this account. If your brethren upon earth are too prone to slight you, your heavenly friends are not so proud and foolish. The angels will attend and assist you, though you live in a poor mud-walled cottage, as willingly as if you were lodged in the palace of a king. They are not affected, one way or the other, with those trivial distinctions which are so apt to bias the judgment and regard of mortals.

May we take a pattern from the angels! Their whole desire is to fulfil the will of God, and they account no service mean in which he is pleased to employ them, otherwise, great and holy as they are, they might disdain to wait upon sinful worms. Our vanity prompts us to aim at something great, and to wish for such services as might make us known, talked of, and regarded. But a child of God, if in the way of duty, and in the place which the Lord's providence has allotted him, is well employed, though he should have no higher service than to sweep the streets, provided he does it humbly, thankfully, and heartily, as to the Lord. An angel so placed could do no more.

This paper will doubtless fall into the hands of some who are not believers, but are spending their days in sin. With a word to such as these, I would conclude. To you this is but a dark subject. You have reason to be alarmed; for, be assured, the whole host of heaven is against you, while they consider you in a state of rebellion against their Lord. They burn with an holy zeal to avenge his cause, and only wait his command to smite you as one of them smote Herod, for not giving glory to God. Pray for faith and repentance. If you believe in Jesus, and turn from your evil ways, the angels will love you, rejoice over you, watch over you, fight for you, and at last convey you into his glorious presence. —I am, &c.

March 5, 1777.

CARDIPHONIA;

OR,

THE UTTERANCE OF THE HEART:

IN THE COURSE OF

A REAL CORRESPONDENCE.

Hæc res et jungit, junctos et servat amicos.—Hor. Lib. i. Sat. 3.

As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.—Prov. xxvii. 19.

LETTERS TO A NOBLEMAN.

LETTER I.

March—1765.

MY LORD,—I remember, when I once had the pleasure of waiting on you, you were pleased to begin an interesting conversation, which, to my concern, was soon interrupted. The subject was concerning the causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace; how it happens that we lose that warm impression of divine things, which in some favoured moments we think it almost impossible to forget; how far this change of frame is consistent with a spiritual growth in other respects; how to form a comparative judgment of our proficiency upon the whole; and by what steps the losses we sustain from our necessary connexion with a sinful nature and a sinful world may be retrieved from time to time. I beg your Lordship's permission to fill up the paper with a view to these inquiries. I do not mean to offer a laboured essay on them, but such thoughts as shall occur while the pen is in my hand.

The awakened soul (especially when, after a season of distress and terror, it begins to taste that the Lord is gracious) finds itself as in a new world. No change in outward life can be so sensible, so affecting. No wonder, then, that, at such a time, little else can be thought of. The transition from darkness to light, from a sense of wrath to a hope of glory, is the greatest that can be imagined, and is often times as sudden as wonderful. Hence the general characteristics of young converts are zeal and love. Like Israel at

the Red Sea, they have just seen the wonderful works of the Lord, and they cannot but sing his praise; they are deeply affected with the danger they have lately escaped, and with the case of multitudes around them, who are secure and careless in the same alarming situation; and a sense of their own mercies, and a compassion for the souls of others, is so transporting, that they can hardly forbear preaching to every one they meet.

This emotion is highly just and reasonable, with respect to the causes from whence it springs; and it is doubtless a proof, not only of the imperfection, but the depravity of our nature, that we are not always thus affected. Yet it is not entirely genuine. If we examine this character closely, which seems, at first sight, a pattern and a reproof to christians of longer standing, we shall, for the most part, find it attended with considerable defects.

1. Such persons are very weak in faith. Their confidence arises rather from the lively impressions of joy within, than from a distinct and clear apprehension of the work of God in Christ. The comforts which are intended as cordials, to animate them against the opposition of an unbelieving world, they mistake and rest in as the proper evidences of their hope. And hence it comes to pass, that when the Lord varies his dispensations, and hides his face, they are soon troubled, and at their wits end.

2. They who are in this state of their first love, are seldom free from something of a

ensorious spirit. They have not yet felt all the deceitfulness of their own hearts; they are not well acquainted with the devices or temptations of Satan; and therefore know not how to sympathize or make allowances where allowances are necessary and due, and can hardly bear with any who do not discover the same earnestness as themselves.

3. They are likewise more or less under the influence of self-righteousness and self-will. They mean well; but not being as yet well acquainted with the spiritual meaning and proper use of the law, nor established in the life of faith, a part (oftentimes a very considerable part) of their zeal spends itself in externals and non-essentials, prompts them to practise what is not commanded, to refrain from what is lawful, and to observe various and needless austerities and singularities, as their tempers and circumstances differ.

However, with all their faults, methinks there is something very beautiful and engaging in the honest vehemence of a young convert. Some cold and rigid judges are ready to reject these promising appearances on account of incidental blemishes. But would a gardener throw away a fine nectarine, because it is green, and has not yet attained all that beauty and flavour which a few more showers and suns will impart? Perhaps it will hold, for the most part, in grace as in nature; some exceptions there are: if there is not some fire in youth, we can hardly expect a proper warmth in old age.

But the great and good Husbandman watches over what his own hand has planted, and carries on his work by a variety of different, and even contrary dispensations. While their mountain stands thus strong, they think they shall never be moved; but at length they find a change. Sometimes it comes on by insensible degrees. That part of their affection, which was purely natural, will abate, of course, when the power of novelty ceases; they will begin, in some instances, to perceive their own indiscretions; and an endeavour to correct the excesses of imprudent zeal will often draw them towards the contrary extreme of remissness: the evils of their hearts, which, though overpowered, were not eradicated, will revive again: the enemy will watch his occasions to meet them with suitable temptations; and as it is the Lord's design that they should experimentally learn and feel their own weakness, he will, in some instances, be permitted to succeed. When guilt is thus brought upon the conscience, the heart grows hard, the hands feeble, and the knees weak; then confidence is shaken, the spirit of prayer interrupted, the armour gone, and thus things grow worse and worse, till the Lord is pleased to interpose; for though we

can fall of ourselves, we cannot rise without his help. Indeed, every sin, in its own nature, has a tendency towards a final apostacy; but there is a provision in the covenant of grace, and the Lord, in his own time, returns to convince, humble, pardon, comfort, and renew the soul. He touches the rock and the waters flow. By repeated experiments and exercises of this sort (for this wisdom is seldom acquired by one or a few lessons,) we begin at length to learn that we are nothing, have nothing, can do nothing but sin. And thus we are gradually prepared to live more out of ourselves, and to derive all our sufficiency of every kind from Jesus, the fountain of grace. We learn to tread more warily, to trust less to our own strength, to have lower thoughts of ourselves, and higher thoughts of him; in which two last particulars, I apprehend, what the scriptures mean by a growth of grace does properly consist. Both are increasing in the lively christian, every day show him more of his own heart, and more of the power, sufficiency, compassion, and grace of his adorable Redeemer; but neither will be complete till we get to heaven.

I apprehend, therefore, that though we find an abatement of that sensible warmth of affection which we felt at first setting out; yet, if our views are more evangelical, our judgment more ripened, our hearts more habitually humbled under a sense of inward depravity, our tempers more softened into sympathy and tenderness; if our prevailing desires are spiritual, and we practically esteem the precepts, ordinances, and people of God; we may warrantably conclude, that his good work of grace in us is, upon the whole, on the increase.

But still it is to be lamented, that an increase of knowledge and experience should be so generally attended with a decline of fervour. If it was not for what has passed in my own heart, I should be ready to think it impossible. But this very circumstance gives me a still more emphatical conviction of my own vileness and depravity. The want of humiliation humbles me, and my very indifference rouses and awakens me to earnestness. There are, however, seasons of refreshment, ineffable glances of light and power upon the soul, which, as they are derived from clearer displays of divine grace, if not so tumultuous as the first joys, are more penetrating, transforming, and animating. A glance of these, when compared with our sluggish stupidity when they are withheld, weans the heart from this wretched state of sin and temptation, and makes the thoughts of death and eternity desirable. Then this conflict shall cease: I shall sin and wander no more, see him as he is, and be like him forever.

If the question is, How are these bright

moments to be prolonged, renewed, or retrieved! We are directed to faith and diligence. A careful use of the appointed means of grace, a watchful endeavour to avoid the occasions and appearances of evil, and especially assiduity in secret prayer, will bring as much as the Lord sees good for us. He knows best why we are not to be trusted with them continually. Here we are to walk by faith, to be exercised and tried; by and by we shall be crowned, and the desires he has given shall be abundantly satisfied.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

April—1766.

MY LORD,—I shall embrace your permission to fill my paper.—As to subject, that which has been a frequent theme of my heart of late, I shall venture to lay before your Lordship: I mean the remarkable and humbling difference which I suppose all who know themselves may observe, between their acquired and their experimental knowledge, or, in other words, between their judgment and their practice. To hear a believer speak his apprehensions of the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the love of Christ, the beauty of holiness, or the importance of eternity, who would not suppose him proof against temptation! To hear with what strong arguments he can recommend watchfulness, prayer, forbearance, and submission, when he is teaching or advising others, who would not suppose but he could also teach himself, and influence his own conduct? Yet, alas! *quam dispar sibi!* The person who rose from his knees, before he left his chamber, a poor, indigent, fallible, dependant creature, who saw and acknowledged that he was unworthy to breathe the air, or to see the light, may meet with many occasions, before the day is closed, to discover the corruptions of his heart, and to show how weak and faint his best principles and clearest convictions are in their actual exercise. And in this view, how vain is man! what a contradiction is a believer to himself! He is called a believer emphatically, because he cordially assents to the word of God; but, alas! how often unworthy of the name! If I was to describe him from the scripture-character, I should say, he is one whose heart is athirst for God, for his glory, his image, his presence; his affections are fixed upon an unseen Saviour; his treasures, and consequently his thoughts, are on high, beyond the bounds of sense. Having experienced much forgiveness, he is full of bowels of mercy to all around; and having been often deceived by *his own heart*, he dares trust it no more, but *lives by faith* in the Son of God, for wisdom,

righteousness, and sanctification, and derives from him grace for grace; sensible that without him he has not sufficiency even to think a good thought. In short, he is dead to the world, to sin, to self, but alive to God, and lively in his service. Prayer is his breath, the word of God his food, and the ordinances more precious to him than the light of the sun. Such is a believer—in his judgment and prevailing desires.

But was I to describe him from experience, especially at some times, how different would the picture be! Though he knows that communion with God is his highest privilege, he too seldom finds it so; on the contrary, if duty, conscience, and necessity, did not compel, he would leave the throne of grace unvisited from day to day. He takes up the Bible, conscious that it is the fountain of life and true comfort; yet, perhaps, while he is making the reflection, he feels a secret distaste, which prompts him to lay it down, and give his preference to a newspaper. He needs not to be told of the vanity and uncertainty of all beneath the sun; and yet is almost as much elated or cast down by a trifle, as those who have their portion in this world. He believes that all things shall work together for his good, and that the most high God appoints, adjusts, and over-rules all his concerns; yet he feels the risings of fear, anxiety, and displeasure, as though the contrary was true. He owns himself ignorant, and liable to be deceived by a thousand fallacies; yet is easily betrayed into positiveness and self-conceit. He feels himself an unprofitable, unfaithful, unthankful servant, and therefore blushes to harbour a thought of desiring the esteem and commendations of men; yet he cannot suppress it. Finally (for I must observe some bounds,) on account of these, and many other inconsistencies, he is struck dumb before the Lord, stripped of every hope and plea, but what is provided in the free grace of God, and yet his heart is continually leaning and returning to a covenant of works.

Two questions naturally arise from such a view of ourselves. First, How can these things be, or why are they permitted? Since the Lord hates sin, teaches his people to hate it, and cry against it, and has promised to hear their prayers, how is it that they go thus burdened? Surely if he could not or would not over-rule evil for good, he would not permit it to continue. By these exercises he teaches us more truly to know and feel the utter depravity and corruption of our whole nature, that we are indeed defiled in every part. His method of salvation is likewise hereby exceedingly endeared to us; we see that it is and must be of grace, wholly of grace; and that the Lord Jesus Christ, and his perfect righteousness, is and must be our all in all. His power likewise in main-

taining his own work, notwithstanding our infirmities, temptations, and enemies, is hereby displayed in the clearest light, his strength is manifested in our weakness. Satan likewise is more remarkably disappointed and put to shame, when he finds bounds set to his rage and policy, beyond which he cannot pass; and that those in whom he finds too much to work upon, and over whom he so often prevails for a season, escape at last out of his hands. He casts them down, but they are raised again; he wounds them, but they are healed; he obtains his desire to sift them as wheat, but the prayer of their great Advocate prevails for the maintenance of their faith. Farther, by what believers feel in themselves they learn by degrees how to warn, pity, and bear with others. A soft, patient, and compassionate spirit, and a readiness and skill in comforting those who are cast down, is not perhaps attainable in any other way. And lastly, I believe nothing more habitually reconciles a child of God to the thought of death, than the wearisomeness of this warfare. Death is unwelcome to nature: but then, and not till then, the conflict will cease. Then we shall sin no more. The flesh, with all its attendant evils, will be laid in the grave: then the soul, which has been partaker of a new and heavenly birth, shall be freed from every incumbrance, and stand perfect in the Redeemer's righteousness before God in glory.

But though these evils cannot be wholly removed, it is worth while to enquire, Secondly, How they may be mitigated. This we are encouraged to hope for. The word of God directs and animates to a growth in grace. And though we can do nothing spiritually of ourselves, yet there is a part assigned us. We cannot conquer the obstacles in our way by our own strength, yet we can give way to them; and if we do, it is our sin, and will be our sorrow. The disputes concerning inherent power in the creature, have been carried to inconvenient lengths; for my own part, I think it safest to use spiritual language. The apostles exhort us, to give all diligence, to resist the devil, to purge ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, to give ourselves to reading, meditation, and prayer, to watch, to put on the whole armour of God, and to abstain from all appearance of evil. Faithfulness to light received, and a sincere endeavour to conform to the means prescribed in the word of God, with an humble application to the blood of sprinkling, and the promised Spirit, will undoubtedly be answered by increasing measures of light, faith, strength, and comfort: and we shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord.

I need not tell your Lordship that I am an extempore writer. I dropt the consideration

of whom I was addressing from the first paragraph; but I now return, and subscribe myself, with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER III.

April — 1770.

MY LORD,—I have a desire to fill the paper, and must therefore betake myself to the expedient I lately mentioned. Glorious things are spoken of the city of God, or (as I suppose) the state of glory, in Rev. xxi. from verse 10 *ad finem*. The description is doubtless mystical, and, perhaps, nothing short of a happy experience and participation will furnish an adequate exposition. One expression, in particular, has, I believe, puzzled wiser heads than mine to explain. "The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." The construction likewise in the Greek is difficult. Some render it *pure gold transparent as glass*: this is the sense, but then it should be neuter, *διαφανής*, to agree with *αυρούς*. If our reading is right, we must understand it either of gold pure, bright, and perspicuous as the finest transparent glass, (for all glass is not transparent,) or else, as two distinct comparisons, splendid and durable as the purest gold, clear and transparent as the finest glass. In that happy world the beauties and advantages which here are divided and incompatible, will unite and agree. Our glass is clear, but brittle; our gold is shining and solid, but it is opaque, and discovers only a surface. And thus it is with our minds. The powers of the imagination are lively and extensive, but transient and uncertain. The powers of the understanding are more solid and regular, but at the same time more slow and limited, and confined to the outside properties of the few objects around us. But when we arrive within the veil, the perfections of the glass and the gold will be combined, and the imperfections of each will entirely cease. Then we shall know more than we can now imagine. The glass will be all gold. And then we shall apprehend truth in its relations and consequences; not (as at present) by that tedious and fallible process which we call reasoning, but by a single glance of thought, as the sight pierces in an instant through the largest transparent bodies. The gold will be all glass.

I do not offer this as the sense of the passage, but as a thought which once occurred to me while reading it. I daily groan under a desultory, ungovernable imagination, and a palpable darkness of understanding, which greatly impede me in my attempts to contemplate the truths of God. Perhaps these complaints, in a greater or less degree, are common to all our fallen race, and exhibit

mournful proofs that our nature is essentially depraved. The grace of God affords some assistance for correcting the wildness of the fancy, and enlarging the capacity of the mind: yet the cure at present is but palliative; but ere long it shall be perfect, and our complaints shall cease for ever. Now it costs us much pains to acquire a pittance of solid and useful knowledge; and the ideas we have collected are far from being at the disposal of judgment, and, like men in a crowd, are perpetually clashing and interfering with each other. But it will not be so, when we are completely freed from the effects of sin. Confusion and darkness will not follow us into the world where light and order reign. Then, and not till then, our knowledge will be perfect, and our possession of it uninterrupted and secure.

Since the radical powers of the soul are thus enfeebled and disordered, it is not to be wondered at, that the best of men, and under their highest attainments, have found cause to make the acknowledgement of the apostle, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." But, blessed be God, though we must feel hourly cause for shame and humiliation for what we are in ourselves, we have cause to rejoice continually in Christ Jesus, who, as he is revealed to us under the various names, characters, relations, and offices, which he bears in the scriptures, holds out to our faith a balm for every wound, a cordial for every discouragement, and a sufficient answer to every objection which sin or Satan can suggest against our peace. If we are guilty, he is our righteousness; if we are sick, he is our infallible physician; if we are weak, helpless, and defenceless, he is the compassionate and faithful shepherd, who has taken charge of us, and will not suffer any thing to disappoint our hopes, or to separate us from his love. He knows our frame, he remembers that we are but dust, and has engaged to guide us by his counsel, support us by his power, and at length to receive us to his glory, that we may be with him for ever.—I am with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER IV.

February — 1772.

MY LORD,—I have been sitting, perhaps a quarter of an hour, with my pen in my hand, and my finger upon my upper lip, contriving how I should begin my letter. A detail of the confused, incoherent thoughts which have successively passed through my mind, would have more than filled the sheet; but your Lordship's patience, and even your charity for the writer, would have been tried to the uttermost, if I could have penned them

all down. At length my suspense reminded me of the apostle's words, Gal. v. 17, "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." This is an humbling, but a just account of a christian's attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less, the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given his people a desire and will aiming at great things: without this they would be unworthy the name of christians; but they cannot do as they would. Their best desires are weak and ineffectual, not absolutely so (for he who works in them to will, enables them in a measure to do likewise,) but in comparison with the mark at which they aim. So that while they have great cause to be thankful for the desire he has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered, they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavours. It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars which a believer would do if he could, but in which, from first to last, he finds a mortifying inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

He would willingly enjoy God in prayer. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in his judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honour and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven, that he should stoop so much lower, to afford his gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth. He can bid them expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind, and greater in degree, than all that the world can afford. By prayer, he can say, You have liberty to cast all your cares upon him that careth for you. By one hour's intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes his glory to pass before the soul that seeks him, you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort, than by a day or a week's converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios: and in this light he would consider it and improve it for himself. But, alas! how seldom can he do as he would! How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad of a just excuse to omit! and the chief pleasure he derives from the performance is to think that his task is finished: he has been drawing near to God with his lips, while his heart was far from him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief.

The like may be said of reading the scriptures. He believes them to be the word of God; he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day, he cannot do as he would. It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his privilege frequently dwindles into a task. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glad is he, indeed, of those occasions which recall the Saviour to his mind; and with this view, notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would. Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow-creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting Him out of our thoughts, of whom we say, he is the beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion. What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could we would set him always before us; his love should be the delightful theme of our hearts.

From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve.

But though we aim at this good, evil is present with us; we find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, to take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of divine providence. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God and the good of those who fear him. He doubts not but that the blessings of every kind which he possesses were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him, by the bounty and special favour of the Lord whom he serves;—that afflictions spring not out of the ground, but are fruits and tokens of divine love, no less than his comforts;—that there is a need-be, whenever for a season he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt than of what he sees with his eyes, and there are seasons

when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress, he cannot do what he would. He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, murmur, and despond. Alas! how vain is man in his best estate! How much weakness and inconsistency, even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! And what reason have we to confess that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God we are not under the law, but under grace: and even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin are over-ruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned more from self, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on him, who is appointed unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more precious he will be to us; and a deep, repeated sense of the evil of our hearts is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation where it is due. Again, a sense of these evils will, when hardly any thing else can do it, reconcile us to the thoughts of death, yea make us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep rooted in our nature, that, like the leprous house, the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not till then, we shall be able to do the thing that we would: when we see Jesus we shall be transformed into his image, and have done with sin and sorrow for ever.—I am with great deference, &c.

LETTER V.

March — 1772.

MY LORD,—I think my last letter turned upon the apostle's thought, Gal. v. 17, "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." In the parallel place, Rom. vii. 19, there is another clause subjoined, "The evil which I would not, that I do." This added to the former, would complete the dark side of my experience. Permit me to tell your Lordship a little part (for some things must not, cannot be told,) not of what I have read, but of what I have felt, in illustration of this passage.

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and worse imaginations, but this evil is present with me: my heart is like a city without walls or gate. Nothing so false,

so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid, but it can obtain access, and that at any time, or in any place: neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's table, exempt me from their intrusion. I sometimes compare my words to the treble of an instrument which my thoughts accompany with a kind of bass, or rather anti-bass, in which every rule of harmony is broken, every possible combination of discord and confusion is introduced, utterly inconsistent with, and contradictory to, the intended melody. Ah! what music would my praying and preaching often make in the ear of the Lord of Hosts, if he listened to them as they are mine only! By men, the upper part only (if I may so speak) is heard; and small cause there is for self-gratulation, if they should happen to commend, when conscience tells me they would be struck with astonishment and abhorrence could they hear the whole.

But if this awful effect of heart depravity cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature, yet at least I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment and best wishes, I find something within me which cherishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to start and flee, as I should if a toad or a serpent was put in my food or in my bed. Ah! how vile must the heart, at least my heart, be, that can hold a parley with such abominations when I so well know their nature and their tendency. Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, without the least affectation of humility (however fair his outward conduct appears,) subscribe himself less than the least of all saints, and of sinners the very chief.

I would not be influenced by a principle of self on any occasion; yet this evil I often do. I see the baseness and absurdity of such conduct as clearly as I see the light of the day. I do not affect to be thought ten feet high, and I know that a desire of being thought wise or good is equally contrary to reason and truth. I should be grieved or angry if my fellow-creatures supposed I had such a desire; and therefore I fear the very principle of self, of which I complain, has a considerable share in prompting my desires to conceal it. The pride of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own, because their good opinion of me depends much upon their own perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this dead fly taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than specious sins.

I would not indulge vain reasonings concerning the counsels, ways, and providence of God, yet I am prone to do it. That the Judge of all the earth will do right, is to me as evident and necessary as that two and two make four. I believe that he has a sovereign

right to do what he will with his own, and that his sovereignty is but another name for the unlimited exercise of wisdom and goodness. But my reasonings are often such as if I had never heard of these principles, or had formerly renounced them. I feel the workings of a presumptuous spirit, that would account for every thing, and venture to dispute whatever it cannot comprehend. What an evil is this, for a potsherd of the earth to contend with its maker! I do not act thus towards my fellow-creatures; I do not find fault with the decisions of a judge, or the dispositions of a general, because, though I know they are fallible, yet I suppose they are wiser in their respective departments than myself. But I am often ready to take this liberty when it is most unreasonable and inexcusable.

I would not cleave to a covenant of works. It should seem from the foregoing particulars, and many others which I could mention, that I have reasons enow to deter me from this: yet even this I do. Not but that I say, and I hope from my heart, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." I embrace it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; and it is the main pleasure and business of my life to set forth the necessity and all-sufficiency of the Mediator between God and man, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his only. But here, as in every thing else, I find a vast difference between my judgment and my experience. I am invited to take the water of life freely, yet I am often discouraged, because I have nothing wherewith to pay for it. If I am at times favoured with some liberty from the above mentioned evils, it rather gives me a more favourable opinion of myself than increase my admiration of the Lord's goodness to so unworthy a creature; and when the returning tide of my corruptions convince me that I am still the same, an unbelieving legal spirit would urge me to conclude that the Lord is changed; at least, I feel a weariness of being beheld to him for such continued multiplied forgiveness, and I fear that some part of my striving against sin, and my desires after an increase of sanctification arise from a secret wish that I might not be so absolutely and entirely indebted to him.

This, my Lord, is only a faint sketch of my heart, but it is taken from the life: it would require a volume rather than a letter to fill up the outlines. But I believe you will not regret that I chuse to say no more upon such a subject. But though my disease is grievous, it is not desperate; I have a gracious and infallible Physician. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.—I remain, my Lord, &c.

LETTER VI.

April — 1772.

MY LORD,—My two last letters turned upon a mournful subject, the depravity of the heart, which impedes us when we would do good, and pollutes our best intended services with evil. We have cause, upon this account, to go softly all our days; yet we need not sorrow as those who have no hope. The Lord has provided his people relief under those complaints, and teaches us to draw improvement from them. If the evils we feel were not capable of being over-ruled for good, he would not permit them to remain in us. This we may infer from his hatred to sin, and the love which he bears to his people.

As to the remedy, neither our state nor his honour are affected by the workings of indwelling sin, in the hearts of those whom he has taught to wrestle, strive, and mourn, on account of what they feel. Though sin wars, it shall not reign; and though it breaks our peace, it cannot separate from his love. Nor is it inconsistent with his holiness and perfection, to manifest his favour to such poor defiled creatures, or to admit them to communion with himself; for they are not considered as in themselves, but as one with Jesus, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live a life of faith. They are accepted in the Beloved, they have an Advocate with the Father, who once made an atonement for their sins, and ever lives to make intercession for their persons. Though they cannot fulfil the law, he has fulfilled it for them; though the obedience of the members is defiled and imperfect, the obedience of the Head is spotless and complete; and though there is much evil in them, there is something good, the fruit of his own gracious Spirit. They act from a principle of love, they aim at no less than his glory, and their habitual desires are supremely fixed upon himself. There is a difference in kind between the feeblest efforts of faith in a real believer, while he is covered with shame at the thought of his miscarriages, and the highest and most specious attainments of those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Nor shall this conflict remain long, or the enemy finally prevail over them. They are supported by almighty power, and led on to certain victory. They shall not always be as they are now; yet a little while, and they shall be freed from this vile body, which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down. Then they shall see Jesus as he is, and be like him, and with him for ever.

The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient, are manifold. Hereby his own power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, are

more signally displayed: His power,—in maintaining his own work in the midst of much opposition, like a spark burning in the water, or a bush unconsumed in the flames; His wisdom,—in defeating and controlling all the devices which Satan, from his knowledge of the evil of our nature, is encouraged to practise against us. He has overthrown many a fair professor, and, like Goliath, he challenges the whole army of Israel; yet he finds there are some against whom, though he thrusts sorely he cannot prevail; notwithstanding any seeming advantage he gains at some seasons, they are still delivered, for the Lord is on their side. The unchangeableness of the Lord's love, and the riches of his mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the multiplied pardons he bestows upon his people, than if they needed no forgiveness at all.

Hereby the Lord Jesus Christ is more endeared to the soul; all boasting is effectually excluded, and the glory of a full and free salvation is ascribed to him alone. If a mariner is surprised by a storm, and after one night spent in jeopardy, is presently brought safe into port; though he may rejoice in his deliverance, it will not affect him so sensibly, as if after being tempest-tossed for a long season, and experiencing a great number and variety of hair-breadth escapes, he at last gains the desired haven. The righteous are said to be scarcely saved, not with respect to the certainty of the event, for the purpose of God in their favour cannot be disappointed, but in respect of their own apprehensions, and the great difficulties they are brought through. But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, wilfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility, they find that none of these things can separate them from the love of God in Christ, Jesus becomes more and more precious to their souls. They love much, because much has been forgiven them. They dare not, they will not, ascribe any thing to themselves, but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished, if possible, a thousand times over, if Jesus had not been their Saviour, their shepherd, and their shield. When they were wandering, he brought them back; when fallen, he raised them; when wounded, he healed them; when fainting, he revived them. By him out of weakness they have been made strong; he has taught their hands to war, and covered their heads in the day of battle. In a word, some of the clearest proofs they have had of his excellence, have been occasioned by the mortifying proofs they have had of their own vileness. They would not have known as much of him, if they had not known so much of themselves.

Farther, a spirit of humiliation, which is both *decus et tutamen*, the strength and beauty of our profession, is greatly promoted by our feeling, as well as reading, that when we would do good, evil is present with us. A broken and a contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord; he has promised to dwell with those who have it; and experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature. But that we are so totally depraved, is a truth which no one ever truly learned by being only told it. Indeed, if we could receive, and habitually maintain a right judgment of ourselves, by what is plainly declared in the scriptures, it would probably save us many a mournful hour; but experience is the Lord's school, and they who are taught by him usually learn, that they have no wisdom by the mistakes they make, and that they have no strength by the slips and falls they meet with. Every day draws forth some new corruption, which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus, by degrees, they are weaned from leaning to any supposed wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves; they feel the truth of our Lord's words, "Without me ye can do nothing;" and the necessity of crying, with David, "O lead me and guide me, for thy name's sake." It is chiefly by this frame of mind that one christian is differed from another; for though it is an inward feeling, it has very observable outward effects, which are expressively intimated, Ezek. xvi. 63, "Thou shalt be dumb, and not open thy mouth, in the day when I am pacified towards thee, saith the Lord God." The knowledge of my full and free forgiveness, of thy innumerable backslidings and transgressions, shall make thee ashamed, and silence the unruly workings of thine heart. Thou shalt open thy mouth in praise; but thou shalt no more boast in thyself, or censure others, or repine at my dispensations. In these respects we are exceedingly prone to speak unadvisedly with our lips. But a sense of great unworthiness and much forgiveness checks these evils. Whoever is truly humbled will not be easily angry, will not be positive and rash, will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners, knowing, that if there be a difference, it is grace that has made it, and that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart; and, under all trials and afflictions, he will look to the hand of the Lord, and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved. These are some of the advantages and good fruits which the Lord enables us to obtain from that bitter root indwelling sin.—*I am, with deference, &c.*

LETTER VII.

September — 1772.

MY LORD,—Weak, unskilful, and unfaithful as I am in practice, the Lord has been pleased to give me some idea of what a christian ought to be, and of what is actually attainable in the present life, by those whom he enables earnestly to aspire towards the prize of their high calling. They who are versed in mechanics can, from a knowledge of the combined powers of a complicated machine, make an exact calculation of what it is able to perform, and what resistance it can counteract: but who can compute the possible effects of that combination of principle and motives revealed in the gospel, upon a heart duly impressed with a sense of their importance and glory! When I was lately at Mr. Cox's museum, while I was fixing my attention upon some curious movements, imagining that I saw the whole of the artist's design, the person who showed it touched a little spring, and suddenly a thousand new and unexpected motions took place, and the whole piece seemed animated from the top to the bottom. I should have formed but a very imperfect judgment of it, had I seen no more than what I saw at first. I thought it might in some measure illustrate the vast difference that is observable amongst professors, even amongst those who are, it is to be hoped, sincere. There are persons, who appear to have a true knowledge, in part, of the nature of gospel religion, but seem not to be apprized of its properties, in their comprehension and extent. If they have attained to some hope of their acceptance, if they find at seasons some communion with God in the means of grace, if they are in measure delivered from the prevailing and corrupt customs of the world, they seem to be satisfied, as if they were possessed of all. These are indeed great things; *sed meliora latent*. The profession of too many, whose sincerity charity would be unwilling to impeach, is greatly blemished, notwithstanding their hopes and their occasional comforts, by the breakings forth of unsanctified tempers, and the indulgence of vain hopes, anxious cares, and selfish pursuits. Far, very far, am I from that unscriptural sentiment of sinless perfection in fallen man. To those who have a due sense of the spirituality and ground of the divine precepts, and of what passes in their own hearts, there will never be wanting causes of humiliation and self-abasement on the account of sin; yet still there is a liberty and privilege attainable by the gospel, beyond what is ordinarily thought of. Permit me to mention two or three particulars, in which those who have a holy ambition of aspiring to them shall not be altogether disappointed.

A delight in the Lord's all-sufficiency, to be satisfied in him as our present and eternal portion. This, in the sense in which I understand it, is not the effect of a present warm frame, but of a deeply-rooted and abiding principle, the habitual exercise of which is to be estimated by the comparative indifference with which other things are regarded. The soul thus principled, is not at leisure to take or to seek satisfaction in any thing but what has a known subserviency to this leading taste. Either the Lord is present, and then he is to be rejoiced in; or else he is absent, and then he is to be sought and waited for. They are to be pitied, who, if they are sometimes happy in the Lord, can at other times be happy without him, and rejoice in broken cisterns, when their spirits are at a distance from the fountain of living waters. I do not plead for an absolute indifference to temporal blessings: he gives us all things richly to enjoy, and a capacity of relishing them is his gift likewise; but then the consideration of his love in bestowing should exceedingly enhance the value, and a regard to his will should regulate their use. Nor can they all supply the want of that which we can only receive immediately from himself. This principle likewise moderates that inordinate fear and sorrow to which we are liable upon the prospect or the occurrence of great trials, for which there is a sure support and resource provided in the all-sufficiency of infinite goodness and grace. What a privilege is this, to possess God in all things while we have them, and all things in God when they are taken from us!

An acquiescence in the Lord's will, founded in a persuasion of his wisdom, holiness, sovereignty, and goodness. This is one of the greatest privileges and brightest ornaments of our profession. So far as we attain to this, we are secure from disappointment. Our own limited views and short-sighted purposes and desires, may be, and will be often over-ruled, but then our main and leading desire, that the will of the Lord may be done, must be accomplished. How highly does it become us, both as creatures and as sinners, to submit to the appointments of our Maker! and how necessary is it to our peace! This great attainment is too often unthought of, and overlooked; we are prone to fix our attention upon the second causes and immediate instruments of events; forgetting that whatever befalls us is according to his purpose, and therefore must be right and reasonable in itself, and shall, in the issue, be productive of good. From hence arise impatience, resentment, and secret repinings, which are not only sinful but tormenting; whereas, if all things are in his hand; if the very hairs of our head are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of his providence and purpose; and, if he has a wise, holy, and

gracious end in view, to which every thing that happens is subordinate and subservient;—then we have nothing to do but, with patience and humility, to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy issue. The path of present duty is marked out; and the concerns of the next and every succeeding hour are in his hands. How happy are they who can resign all to him, see his hand in every dispensation, and believe that he chooses better for them than they possibly could for themselves!

A single eye to his glory, as the ultimate scope of all our undertakings. The Lord can design nothing short of his own glory; nor should we. The constraining love of Christ has a direct and marvellous tendency, in proportion to the measure of faith, to mortify the corrupt principle, self, which, for a season, is the grand spring of our conduct, and by which we are too much biassed after we know the Lord. But as grace prevails, self is renounced. We feel that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price; and that it is our duty, our honour, and our happiness, to be the servants of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To devote soul and body, every talent, power, and faculty to the service of his cause and will; to let our light shine (in our several situations) to the praise of his grace; to place our highest joy in the contemplation of his adorable perfections; to rejoice even in tribulations and distresses, in reproaches and infirmities, if thereby the power of Christ may rest upon us, and be magnified in us; to be content, yea, glad to be nothing, that he may be all in all; to obey him, in opposition to the threats or solicitations of men; to trust him, though all outward appearances seem against us; to rejoice in him, though we should (as will sooner or later be the case) have nothing else to rejoice in; to live above the world, and to have our conversation in heaven, to be like the angels, finding our own pleasure in performing his. This, my lord, is the prize, the mark of our high calling, to which we are encouraged, with a holy ambition, continually to aspire. It is true, we shall still fall short; we shall find, that when we would do good, evil will be present with us. But the attempt is glorious, and shall not be wholly in vain. He that gives us thus to will, will enable us to perform with growing success, and teach us to profit even by our mistakes and imperfections.

O blessed man! that thus fears the Lord, that delights in his word, and derives his principles, motives, maxims, and consolations, from that unfailing source of light and strength! He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf is always green, and fruit abundant. The wisdom that is above shall direct his plans, inspire his counsels; and the power of God shall

guard him on every side, and prepare his way through every difficulty; he shall see mountains sink into plains, and streams spring up in the dry wilderness. The Lord's enemies will be his; and they may be permitted to fight against him, but they shall not prevail, for the Lord is with him to deliver him. The conduct of such a one, though in a narrow and retired sphere of life, is of more real excellence and importance, than the most splendid actions of kings and conquerors, which fill the annals of history, Prov. xvi. 32. And if the God whom he serves is pleased to place him in a more public light, his labours and cares will be amply compensated, by the superior opportunities afforded him of manifesting the power and reality of true religion, and promoting the good of mankind.

I hope I may say, that I desire to be thus entirely given up to the Lord; I am sure, I must say, that what I have written is far from being my actual experience. Alas! I might be condemned out of my own mouth, were the Lord strict to mark what is amiss. But, O the comfort! we are not under the law, but under grace. The gospel is a dispensation for sinners, and we have an advocate with the Father. There is the unshaken ground of hope; a reconciled Father, a prevailing advocate, a powerful shepherd, a compassionate friend, a Saviour, who is able and willing to save to the uttermost. He knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust: and he has opened for us a new and blood-besprinkled way of access to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need. —I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

April — 1772.

MY LORD,—For five or six weeks past, I have been a good deal indisposed. The ground of my complaint was a cold, attended with a slight fever, and for some time with a cough, which made me feel some inconvenience in preaching. To this succeeded a deafness, so great as to cut me off from conversation; for I could not hear the sound of a voice, unless it was spoken loud in my ear. But the Lord has mercifully removed the fever and cough, opened my ears, and I am now nearly as well as usual. I had cause to be thankful, especially for two things under this dispensation: First, that I was enabled, though sometimes with a little difficulty, to go on with my public work. It is a singular favour I have to acknowledge, that for the space of almost nine years, since I have been in the ministry, our sabbath and weekly opportunities have not been once

suspended; whereas I have seen many of the Lord's servants laid by for a considerable space within that time. My other great mercy was, that the Lord was pleased to preserve me in a peaceful resigned frame; so that, when I was deaf, and could not be certain that I should recover my hearing any more, I was in general as cheerful and easy as at other times. This was the effect of his goodness: for though I know enough of his sovereignty, wisdom, and faithfulness, of his right to do what he pleases, and the certainty that he does all things well, to furnish me with arguments enough to prove that submission to his will is our absolute duty; yet I am sensible, that when the trial actually comes, notwithstanding all the advice I may have offered to others, I should myself toss like a wild bull in a net; rebel and repine; forget that I am a sinner, and that he is a sovereign: this, I say, would always and invariably be the case, unless he was graciously pleased to fulfil his word, that strength shall be according to the day. I hope my deafness has been instructive to me. The exercise of our senses is so easily and constantly performed, that it seems a thing of course; but I was then reminded how precarious the tenure is by which we hold those blessings which seem most our own, and which are most immediately necessary to the comfortable enjoyment of life. Outward senses, mental faculties, health of body, and peace of mind, are extremely valuable; but the continuance of them for a single moment depends upon him, who, if he opens, none can shut, and when he shuts, none can open. A minute is more than sufficient to deprive us of what we hold most dear, or to prevent us from deriving the least comfort from it, if it is not taken away. I am not presuming to give your Lordship information; but only mentioning the thoughts that were much upon my mind while I was incapable of conversation. These are indeed plain and obvious truths, which I have long acknowledged as indisputable; but I have reason to be thankful when the Lord impresses them with fresh power upon my heart, even though he sees fit to do it through the medium of afflictions. I have seen, of late, something of the weight and importance of that admonition, Jer. ix. 23, 24; a passage which though addressed to the wise, the mighty, and the rich, is of universal application; for self, unless corrupted and mortified by grace, will find something whereof to glory, in the meanest characters and the lowest situations. And indeed, when things come to be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, the lunatics in bedlam, some of whom glory in their straw or their chains, as marks of splendour or signs of royalty, have as much reason on their side as any persons upon earth who glory in themselves. This alone is the

proper ground of glory and joy, if we know the Lord. Then all is safe at present, and all will be happy for ever. Then, whatever changes may affect our temporal concerns, our best interests and hopes are secured beyond the reach of change; and whatever we may lose or suffer during this little span of time, will be abundantly compensated in that glorious state of eternity, which is just at hand.—I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

December — 1772.

MY LORD,—I lately employed some of my leisure hours (which, when I am not indolent, are but few) in reading the Memoirs of the duke of Sully, which occasionally came in my way. It afforded me matter for variety of reflections. I pity the duke of Sully, whose attachment to the name of Protestant seems to have been little more than a point of honour, who drew all his resources from himself, and whose chief aim seems to have been, to approve himself faithful to an earthly master. He acted as well as could be expected from natural principles; and the Lord, who employed him as an instrument in his providence, rewarded his fidelity with success, honour, and riches: a reward which, though in itself a poor one, is suited to the desires of men who place their happiness in worldly things, and is so far a compensation of their services. It is given to your Lordship to act from nobler principles, and with more enlarged views. You serve a Master, of whose favour, protection, and assistance you cannot be deprived, who will not overlook or misconstrue the smallest services you attempt for him, who will listen to no insinuations against you, who is always near, to comfort, direct, and strengthen you, and who is preparing for you such honours and blessings as he only can give, an inheritance (the reverse of all earthly good) *αὐδαιρέτων, καὶ ἀβυσσοῦν, καὶ ἀμεταβάτων**. Thus animated, and thus supported, assisted likewise by the prayers of thousands, may we not warrantably hope that your Lordship will be an instrument of great good, and that both church and state will be benefited by your example, counsels, and care.

In another view, the duke of Sully's history exhibits a comment upon the psalmist's words, "Surely man in his best estate is altogether vanity." View him in one light, he seems to have possessed all that the most aspiring mind could aim at—the favour and confidence of his prince, accumulated wealth, great honours, and such powers by his offices and influence with the king, that he could almost do what he pleased. Yet he had so

much to suffer from the fatigues and difficulties of his station, and the cabals and malice of his enemies, that, in the midst of all his grandeur, a dispassionate mind would rather pity than envy him. And how suddenly were his schemes broken by the death of the king! Then he lost his friend, his protector, his influence. The remainder of his days were embittered by many inquietudes. He lived indeed, if that could afford any consolation, in much state and pageantry afterwards; but after having toiled through more than fourscore years, died at last almost of a broken heart, from domestic uneasiness. And is this all that the world can do for those who are accounted most successful! Alas!

Too low they build who build below the skies.

And what a picture of the instability of human things have we in his master, Henry! Admired, beloved, dreaded, full of vast designs, fondly supposing himself born to be the arbiter of Europe, in an awful moment, and in the midst of his friends, suddenly struck from the height of his grandeur, and snatched into the invisible, unchangeable world. In that moment all his thoughts perished.

How unspeakably awful such a transition! How remarkable were his own forebodings of the approaching hour! O Lord, how dost thou pour contempt upon princes, and teach us that the great and the mean are equally in thy hands, and at thy disposal, as clay in the hands of the potter! Poor king! while he expected obedience to his own commands, he lived in habitual defiance of the commands of God. Men may respect his memory, for his sincerity, benevolence, and other amiable qualities; but, besides that he was engrossed by a round of sensual pleasure, (when business of state did not interfere,) his life was stained with adultery. Happy, if, in the hours he spent in retirement, when the pre- intimation of his death hung heavy upon his mind, the Lord humbled and softened his heart, and gave him repentance unto life! I wish the history afforded a proof of this. However, in his death, we see an affecting proof, that no human dignity or power can ward off the stroke of the Almighty, who by such sudden and unexpected dispensations often shows himself terrible to the princes and great men of the earth. O! that they could see his hand, and wisely consider his doing in them!

But happy is the man who fears the Lord, and delights in his commandments: who sets God always before him, and acts under the constraining influence of redeeming love. He is the real friend, and the best champion of his country, who makes not the vague notions of human wisdom and honour, but the precepts and example of the blessed Jesus, the model and the motive of his conduct. He inculcates, as occasion offers, the great

* *Incorruptible, undefiled, unfading.*

truths of religion in his conversation, and demonstrates them by his practice; yet the best part of his life is known only to God and himself. His time is divided between serving his country in public, and wrestling for it in private. Nor shall his labours or his prayers be lost. Either he shall have the desire of his heart, and shall see the religion and the liberty he so highly values transmitted to posterity; or, if he should live when wrath is decreed, and there is no remedy, the promise and the providence of God shall seal him as the peculiar charge of angels, in the midst of public calamity. And when all things are involved in confusion, when the hearts of the wicked shall shake like the leaves of the forest, he shall be kept in perfect peace, trusting in the Lord.—I am, with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER X.

March — 1773.

MY LORD,—Usually for some days before I purpose writing to your Lordship my thoughts are upon the stretch for a subject; I do not mean all day long, but it is so more or less: but I might as well spare my inquiries, I can come to no determination, and, for the most part, begin to write at an absolute uncertainty how I am to proceed. Since I cannot premeditate, my heart prays that it may be given me in the same hour what I shall offer. A simple dependence upon the teaching and influence of the good Spirit of God, so as not to supersede the use of appointed means, would, if it could be uniformly maintained, make every part of duty easy and successful. It would free us from much solicitude, and prevent many mistakes. Methinks I have a subject in view already, a subject of great importance to myself, and which, perhaps, will not be displeasing to your Lordship, viz. how to walk with God in the daily occurrences of life, so as to do every thing for his sake and by his strength.

When we are justified by faith, and accepted in the Beloved, we become heirs of everlasting life: but we cannot know the full value of our privileges till we enter upon the state of glory. For this, most who are converted, have to wait some time after they are partakers of grace. Though the Lord loves them, hates sin, and teaches them to hate it, he appoints them to remain awhile in a sinful world, and to groan under the burden of a depraved nature. He could put them in immediate possession of the heaven for which he has given them a meetness, but he does not. He has a service for them here, an honour which is worth all they can suffer, and for which eternity will not afford an opportunity, namely to be instruments of promoting his designs, and manifesting his

grace in the world. Strictly speaking, this is the whole of our business here, the only reason why life is prolonged, or for which it is truly desirable, that we may fill up our connexions and situations, improve our comforts and our crosses, in such a manner as that God may be glorified in us and by us. As he is a bountiful Master and a kind Father, he is pleased to afford a variety of temporal blessings, which sweeten our service, and as coming from his hand are very valuable, but are by no means worth living for, considered in themselves, as they can neither satisfy our desires, nor preserve us from trouble or support us under it. That light of God's countenance which can pervade the walls and dissipate the gloom of a dungeon, is unspeakably preferable to all that can be enjoyed in a palace without it. The true end of life is, to live not to ourselves, but to him who died for us; and while we devote ourselves to his service upon earth, to rejoice in the prospect of being happy with him for ever in heaven. These things are generally known and acknowledged by professors; but they are a favoured few who act consistently with their avowed principles; who honestly, diligently, and without reserve, endeavour to make the most of their talents and strength in promoting the Lord's service, and allow themselves in no views or designs, but what are plainly subordinate and subservient to it. Yea, I believe, the best of the Lord's servants see cause enough to confess, that they are not only unprofitable in comparison of what they wish to be, but in many instances unfaithful likewise. They find so many snares, hindrances, and temptations, arising from without, and so much embarrassment from sin which dwells within, that they have more cause for humiliation than self-complacence, when they seem most earnest and most useful. However, we have no scriptural evidence that we serve the Lord at all, any farther than we find an habitual desire and aim to serve him wholly. He is gracious to our imperfections and weakness; yet he requires all the heart, and will not be served by halves, nor accept what is performed by a divided spirit. I lately met with some profane scoffs of Voltaire upon the sentiment of doing all to the Glory of God (such as might be expected from such a man;) however, this is the true alchymy which turns every thing to gold, and ennobles the common actions of life into acts of religion, 1 Cor. x. 31. Nor is there a grain of real goodness in the most specious actions which are performed without a reference to God's glory. This the world cannot understand; but it will appear highly reasonable to those who take their ideas of God from the scriptures, and who have felt the necessity, and found the benefits of redemption. We are debtors many ways. The Lord has a right to us by creation, by redemption, by conquest, when he freed us from Sa-

tan's power, and took possession of our hearts by his grace; and lastly, by our own voluntary surrender in the day when he enabled us to fix our choice on himself, as our Lord and our portion. Then we felt the force of our obligations, we saw the beauty and honour of his service, and that nothing was worthy to stand in the least degree of competition with it. This is always equally true, though our perceptions of it are not always equally strong. But where it has been once really known, it cannot be wholly forgotten, or cease to be the governing principle of life; and the Lord has promised to revive the impression in those who wait upon him, and thereby to renew their strength. For in proportion as we feel by what ties we are his, we shall embrace his service as perfect freedom.

Again, when the eye is thus single, the whole body will be full of light. The principle, of acting simply for God, will in general make the path of duty plain, solve a thousand otherwise dubious questions, lead to the most proper and obvious means, and preclude that painful anxiety about events, which upon no other plan can be avoided. The love of God is the best casuist; especially as it leads us to a careful attendance to his precepts, a reliance on his promises, and a submission to his will. Most of our perplexities arise from an undue, though perhaps unperceived, attachment to self. Either we have some scheme of our own too closely connected with our general view of serving the Lord, or lay some stress upon our own management, which, though we suspect it may possibly fail us, we cannot entirely help trusting to. In these respects, the Lord permits his servants occasionally to feel their own weakness; but if they are sincerely devoted to him, he will teach them to profit by it, and bring them by degrees to a simplicity of dependence, as well as of intention. Then all things are easy. Acting from love, and walking by faith, they can neither be disappointed nor discouraged. Duty is their part, care is his, and they are enabled to cast it upon him. They know that when their expedients seem to fail, he is still all-sufficient. They know that, being engaged in his cause they cannot miscarry; and that though in some things they may seem to fall short of success, they are sure of meeting acceptance, and that he will estimate their services, not by their actual effects, but according to the gracious principle and desire he has put into their hearts, 2 Chron. vi. 7, 8.—I am, with the greatest respect, &c.

LETTER XI.

June—1773.

MY LORD,—My old cast-off acquaintance, Horace, occasionally came in my way this

morning. I opened it upon *lib. 3. od. 29.* Did I not know the proposal to be utterly impracticable, how gladly should I imitate it, and send your Lordship, in honest prose, if not in elegant verse, an invitation. But I must content myself with the idea of the pleasure it would give me to sit with you half a day under my favourite great tree, and converse with you, not concerning the comparatively petty affairs of human governments, but of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. How many delightful subjects would suggest themselves in a free and retired conversation! The excellency of our King, the permanency and glory of his kingdom, the beauty of his administration, the privileges of his subjects, the review of what he has done for us, and the prospect of what he has prepared for us in future; and if, while we were conversing, he should be pleased to join us (as he did the disciples when walking to Emmaus,) how would our hearts burn within us! Indeed, whether we are alone, or in company, the most interesting topics strike us but faintly, unless he is pleased to afford his gracious influence; but when he is present, light, love, liberty, and joy, spring up in the hearts that know him. This reminds me (as I have mentioned Horace) to restore some beautiful lines to their proper application. They are impious and idolatrous as he uses them, but have an expressive propriety in the mouth of a believer:—

Lucem redde tuse, dux bone, patrie
Instar veris enim vultus ubi tuus
Affulsit populo, gratior it dies,
Et soles melius nitent.

But we cannot meet. All that is left for me is to use the liberty you allow me of offering a few hints upon these subjects by letter, not because you know them not, but because you love them. The hour is coming when all impediments shall be removed. All distinctions shall cease that are founded upon sublunary things, and the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. Glorious day! May our souls be filled with the thought, and learn to estimate all things around us now by the view in which they will appear to us then! Then it will be of small moment who was the prince and who was the beggar in this life, but who, in their several situations, sought and loved, and feared and honoured the Lord. Alas! how many of the kings of the earth, and the rich men and the chief captains, and the mighty men will then say, in vain, to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us!" In this world they are for the most part too busy to regard the commands of God, or too happy to seek his favour: they have their good things here; they please themselves for a while, and in a moment they go down to the grave. In that

moment their thoughts perish, their schemes are left unfinished, they are torn from their possessions, and enter upon a new, an untried, an unchangeable, a never-ending state of existence. Alas! is this all the world can afford! I congratulate you, my Lord, not because God has appointed you to appear in an elevated rank (this, abstracted from the opportunity it affords you of greater usefulness, would perhaps be a more proper subject for condolence;) but that he has admitted you to those honours and privileges which come from him only, and which so few in the superior ranks of life think worthy of their attention. I doubt not but you are often affected with a sense of this distinguishing mercy. But though we know that we are debtors, great debtors to the grace of God, which alone has made us to differ, we know it but imperfectly at present. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, nor can we form a just conception of the misery from which we are redeemed, much less of the price paid for our redemption. How little do we know of the Redeemer's dignity, and of the unutterable distress he endured when his soul was made an offering for sin, and it pleased the Father to bruise him, that by his stripes we might be healed. These things will strike us quite in another manner, when we view them in the light of eternity. Then, to return to the thought from which I have rambled, then and there I trust we shall meet to the highest advantage, and spend an everlasting day together in happiness and praise. With this thought I endeavour to comfort myself, under the regret I sometimes feel that I can have so little intercourse with you in this life.

May the cheering contemplation of the hope set before us, support and animate us to improve the interval and fill us with a holy ambition of shining as lights in the world, to the praise and glory of his grace who has called us out of darkness. Encompassed as we are with snares, temptations, and infirmities, it is possible, by his promised assistance, to live in some good measure above the world while we are in it; above the influence of its cares, its smiles, or its frowns. Our conversation, *πολιτειας*, our citizenship, is in heaven. We are not at home, but only resident here for a season to fulfil an appointed service; and the Lord, whom we serve, has encouraged us to hope that he will guide us by his wisdom, strengthen us by his power, and comfort us with the light of his countenance, which is better than life. Every blessing we receive from him is a token of his favour, and a pledge of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which he has reserved for us. O! to hear him say at last, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" will be a rich amends for all that we can lose, suffer, or forbear, for

his sake.—I subscribe myself, with great sincerity, &c.

LETTER XII.

February—1774.

MY LORD,—The first line of Horace's epistle to Augustus, when rightly applied, suggests a grand and cheering idea. As addressed by the poet, nothing can be more blasphemous, idolatrous, and absurd; but with what comfort and propriety may a christian look up to him to whom all power is committed in heaven and earth, and say, *Cum tot sustineas et tanta negotia solus!* Surely a more weighty and comprehensive sentence never dropped from an uninspired pen. And how beautifully and expressively is it closed by the word *solus!* the government is upon his shoulders: and though he is concealed by a veil of second causes from common eyes, so that they can perceive only the means, instruments, and contingencies by which he works, and therefore think he does nothing, yet in reality he does all, according to his own counsel and pleasure, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

Who can enumerate the *tot et tanta negotia*, which are incessantly before his eye, adjusted by his wisdom, dependent on his will, and regulated by his power, in his kingdoms of providence and grace? If we consider the heavens, the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained; if we call in the assistance of astronomers and glasses, to help us in forming a conception of the number, distances, magnitudes, and motions of the heavenly bodies: the more we search, the more we shall be confirmed, that these are but a portion of his ways. But he calls them all by their names, upholds them by his power, and without his continual energy they would rush into confusion, or sink into nothing. If we speak of intelligences, he is the life, the joy, the sun of all that are capable of happiness. Whatever may be signified by the thrones, principalities, and powers in the world of light, they are all dependent upon his power, and obedient to his command; it is equally true of angels as of men, that without him they can do nothing. The powers of darkness are likewise under his subjection and control. Though but little is said of them in scripture, we read enough to assure us that their number must be immensely great, and that their strength, subtilty, and malice, are such, as we may tremble to think of them as our enemies, and probably should, but for our strange insensibility to whatever does not fall under the cognizance of our outward senses. But he holds them all in a chain, so that they can

do or attempt nothing but by his permission; and whatever he permits them to do (though they mean nothing less) has its appointed subserviency in accomplishing his designs.

But to come nearer home, and to speak of what seems more suited to our scanty apprehensions; still we may be lost in wonder. Before this blessed and only Potentate, all the nations of the earth are but as the dust upon the balance and the small drop of a bucket, and might be thought (if compared with the immensity of his works) scarcely worthy of his notice; yet here he presides, pervades, provides, protects, and rules. In him his creatures live, move, and have their being; from him is their food and preservation. The eyes of all are upon him; what he gives they gather, and can gather no more; and at his word they sink into the dust. There is not a worm that crawls upon the ground, or a flower that grows in the pathless wilderness, or a shell upon the seashore, but bears the impress of his wisdom, power, and goodness. With respect to men, he reigns with uncontrolled dominion over every kingdom, family, and individual. Here we may be astonished at his wisdom, in employing free agents, the greater part of whom are his enemies, to accomplish his purposes. But, however reluctant, they all serve him. His patience, likewise is wonderful. Multitudes, yea nearly our whole species, spend the life and strength which he affords them, and abuses all the bounties he heaps upon them, in the ways of sin. His commands are disregarded, his name blasphemed, his mercy disdained, his power defied; yet still he spares. It is an eminent part of his government, to restrain the depravity of human nature, and in various ways to check its efforts which, if left to itself, without his providential control, would presently make earth the very image of hell. For the vilest men are not suffered to perpetrate a thousandth part of the evil which their hearts would prompt them to. The earth, though lying in the wicked one, is filled with the goodness of the Lord. He preserveth man and beast, sustains the young lions in the forest, feeds the birds of the air, which have neither store-house nor barn, and adorns the insects and flowers of the field with a beauty and elegance, far beyond what can be found in the courts of kings.

Still more wonderful is his administration in his kingdom of grace. He is present with all his creatures, but in a peculiar manner with his own people. Each of these are monuments of a more illustrious display of power, than that which spreads abroad the heavens like a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth; for he finds them all in a state of rebellion and enmity, and makes them a willing people; and from the moment he reveals his love to them, he espouses their

cause, and takes all their concerns into his own hands. He is near and attentive to every one of them, as if there was only that one. This high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, before whom the angels veil their faces, condescends to hold communion with those whom men despise. He sees not as man seeth—rides on a cloud, disdainful by a sultan or a czar, to manifest himself to a humble soul in a mud-walled cottage. He comforts them when in trouble, strengthens them when weak, makes their beds in sickness, revives them when fainting, upholds them when failing, and so seasonably and effectually manages for them, that though they are persecuted and tempted, though their enemies are many and mighty, nothing that they feel or fear is able to separate them from his love.

And all this he does *solus*. All the abilities, powers, and instincts, that are found amongst creatures, are emanations from his fulness. All changes, successes, disappointments, all that is memorable in the annals of history, all the risings and falls of empires, all the turns in human life, take place according to his plan. In vain men contrive and combine to accomplish their own counsels; unless they are parts of his counsel likewise, the efforts of their utmost strength and wisdom are crossed and reversed by the feeblest and most unthought-of circumstances. But when he has a work to accomplish, and his time is come, however inadequate and weak the means he employs may seem to a carnal eye, the success is infallibly secured; for all things serve him, and are in his hands as clay in the hands of the potter. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!

This is the God whom we adore. This is he who invites us to lean upon his almighty arm, and promises to guide us with his unerring eye. He says to you, my Lord, and even to me, "Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed. I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Therefore, while in the path of duty, and following his call, we may cheerfully pass on, regardless of apparent difficulties; for the Lord, whose we are, and who has taught us to make his glory our highest end, will go before us, and at his word crooked things become straight, light shines out of darkness, and mountains sink into plains. Faith may and must be exercised, experience must and will confirm what his word declares, that the heart is deceitful, and that man in his best estate is vanity. But his promises to them that fear him shall be confirmed likewise, and they shall find him, in all situations, a sun, a shield, and an exceeding great reward.

I have lost another of my people, a mother unto our Israel; a person of much experience, eminent grace, wisdom, and usefulness. She walked with God forty years: she was one of the Lord's poor; but her poverty was decent, satisfied, and honourable; she lived respected, and her death is considered as a public loss. It is a great loss to me; I shall miss her advice and example, by which I have been often edified and animated. But Jesus still lives. Almost her last words were, The Lord is my portion, saith my soul.—I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

March 10, 1774.

MY LORD,—For about six weeks past I have had occasion to spend several hours of almost every day with the sick and the dying. These scenes are to a minister like walking the hospitals to a young surgeon. The various cases which occur, exemplify, illustrate, and explain, with a commanding energy, many truths, which may be learned indeed at home, but cannot be so well understood, or their force so sensibly felt, without the advantage of experience and observation. As physicians, besides that competent general knowledge of their profession which should be common to them all, have usually their several favourite branches of study, some applying themselves more to botany, others to chemistry, others to anatomy; so ministers as their inclinations and gifts differ, are led more closely to consider some particular branch of the system of divine truth. Some are directed to state and defend the doctrines of the gospel: some have a talent for elucidating difficult texts of scripture; some have a turn for explaining the prophetic parts, and so of the rest. For myself, if it be lawful to speak of myself, and so far as I can judge, anatomy is my favourite branch; I mean the study of the human heart, with its workings and counter-workings, as it is differently affected in a state of nature or of grace in the different seasons of prosperity, adversity, conviction, temptation, sickness, and the approach of death. The Lord, by sending me hither, provided me a good school for these purposes. I know not where I could have had a better, or one affording a greater variety of characters, in proportion to the number of people; and as they are mostly poor people, and strangers to that address which is the result of education and converse with the world, there is a simplicity in what they say or do, which gives me a peculiar advantage in judging of their cases.

But I was about to speak of death. Though the grand evidence of those truths upon which our hopes are built, arises from the au-

thority of God speaking them in his word, and revealing them by his Spirit, to the awakened heart (for till the heart is awakened it is incapable of receiving this evidence;) yet some of these truths are so mysterious, so utterly repugnant to the judgment of depraved nature, that, though the remaining influence of unbelief and vain reasoning, the temptations of Satan, and the subtle arguments with which some men reputed wise, attack the foundations of our faith, the minds even of believers are sometimes capable of being shaken. I know no better corroborating evidence for the relief of the mind under such assaults than the testimony of dying persons, especially of such as have lived out of the noise of controversy, and who perhaps never heard a syllable of what has been started in these evil days against the deity of Christ, his atonement, and other important articles. Permit me, my Lord, to relate, upon this occasion, some things which exceedingly struck me in the conversation I had with a young woman whom I visited in her last illness about two years ago. She was a sober, prudent person, of plain sense, could read her Bible, but had read little besides. Her knowledge of the world was nearly confined to the parish; for I suppose she was seldom, if ever, twelve miles from home in her life. She had known the gospel about seven years before the Lord visited her with a lingering consumption, which at length removed her to a better world. A few days before her death, I had been praying by her bed-side, and in my prayer, I thanked the Lord, that he gave her now to see that she had not followed cunningly-devised fables. When I had finished, she repeated that word, "No," she said, "not cunningly-devised fables, these are realities indeed: I feel their truth, I feel their comfort. O, tell my friends, tell my acquaintance, tell enquiring souls, tell poor sinners, tell all the daughters of Jerusalem (alluding to Solomon's Song, v. 16. from which she had just before desired me to preach at her funeral,) what Jesus has done for my soul. Tell them that now in the time of need I find him my beloved and my friend, and as such I commend him to them." She then fixed her eyes steadfastly upon me, and proceeded, as well as I can recollect, as follows: "Sir, you are highly favoured in being called to preach the gospel. I have often heard you with pleasure; but give me leave to tell you, that I now see all you have said or can say, is comparatively but little. Nor till you come into my situation, and have death and eternity full in your view, will it be possible for you to conceive the vast weight and importance of the truths you declare. Oh! Sir, it is a serious thing to die, no words can express what is needful to support the soul in the solemnity of a dying hour."

I believe it was the next day when I visited her again. After some discourse, as usual, she said, with a remarkable vehemence of speech, "Are you sure I cannot be mistaken?" I answered without hesitation, Yes, I am sure; I am not afraid to say, my soul for your's that you are right. She paused a little, and then replied, "You say true, I know I am right. I feel that my hope is fixed upon the Rock of ages; I know in whom I have believed. Yet if you could see with my eyes, you would not wonder at my question. But the approach of death presents a prospect, which is till then hidden from us, and which cannot be described." She said much more to the same purpose; and in all she spoke there was a dignity, weight, and evidence which I suppose few professors of divinity, when lecturing from the chair, have at any time equalled. We may well say, with Elihu, "Who teacheth like him!" Many instances of the like kind I have met with here. I have a poor girl near me who looks like an idiot, and her natural capacity is indeed very small, but the Lord has been pleased to make her acquainted alternately with great temptations and proportionably great discoveries of his love and truth. Sometimes, when her heart is enlarged, I listen to her with astonishment. I think no books or ministers I ever met with have given me such an impression and understanding of what the apostle styles *τα βαθύ των σφύδρ*,* as I have upon some occasions received from her conversation.

But I am rambling again. My attendance upon the sick is not always equally comfortable, but, could I learn aright, it might be equally instructive. Some confirm the preciousness of a Saviour to me, by the cheerfulness with which through faith in his name, they meet the king of terrors. Others no less confirm it, by the terror and reluctance they discover when they find they must die; for though there are too many who, sadly slight the blessed gospel while they are in health, yet in this place most are too far enlightened to be quite thoughtless about their souls, if they retain their senses in their last illness. Then, like the foolish virgins, they say, "Give us of your oil." Then they are willing that ministers and professors should pray with them and speak to them. Through the Lord's goodness, several whom I have visited in these circumstances have afforded me good hope; they have been savingly changed by his blessing upon what has passed at the eleventh hour. I have seen a marvellous and blessed change take place in their language, views, and tempers, in a few days. I now visit a young person, who is cut short in her nineteenth year by a con-

sumption, and I think cannot live many days. I found her very ignorant and insensible, and she remained so a good while; but of late I hope her heart is touched. She feels her lost state, she seems to have some right desires, she begins to pray, and in such a manner as I cannot but hope the Lord is teaching her, and will reveal himself to her before she departs. But it is sometimes otherwise. I saw a young woman die last week: I had been often with her; but the night she was removed she could only say, "O, I cannot live, I cannot live!" She repeated this mournful complaint as long as she could speak; for, as the vital powers were more oppressed, her voice was changed into groans; her groans grew fainter and fainter, and, in about a quarter of an hour after she had done speaking, she expired. Poor thing, I thought, as I stood by her bed-side, if you were a duchess, in this situation, what could the world do for you now! I thought likewise how many things are there that now give us pleasure or pain, and assume a mighty importance in our view, which in a dying hour, will be no more to us than the clouds which fly unnoticed over our heads. Then the truth of our Lord's aphorism will be seen, felt, and acknowledged, "One thing is needful;" and we shall be ready to apply Grotius's dying confession to, alas! a great part of our lives! *Ah vitam perdidit, nihil agendo laboriose.*†

Your Lordship allows me to send unpremeditated letters. I need not assure you this is one.—I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

March 24, 1774.

MY LORD,—What a mercy is it to be separated in spirit, conversation, and interest from the world that knows not God! where all are alike by nature. Grace makes a happy and unspeakable difference. Believers were once under the same influence of that spirit who still worketh in the children of disobedience, pursuing different paths, but all equally remote from truth and peace; some hatching cockatrice eggs, others weaving spider webs. These two general heads of mischief and vanity include all the schemes, aims, and achievements of which man is capable, till God is pleased to visit the heart with his grace. The busy part of mankind are employed in multiplying evils and miseries; the more retired, speculative, and curious are amusing themselves with what will hereafter appear as unsubstantial, unstable, and useless as a cobweb. Death will soon sweep

* The deep things of God.

† I have lost a life in laborious trifling.

away all that the philosophers, the virtuosi, the mathematicians, the antiquarians, and other learned triflers are now weaving with so much self-applauded address. Nor will the fine-spun dresses in which the moralist and the self-righteous clothe themselves, be of more advantage to them, either for ornament or defence, than the produce of a spider. But it is given to a few to know their present state and future destination. These build upon the immovable rock of ages for eternity. These are trees springing from a living root, and bear the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. These only are awake, while the rest of the world are in a sleep, indulging in vain dreams, from which likewise they will shortly awake; but O, with what consternation, when they shall find themselves irrecoverably divorced from all their delusive attachments, and compelled to appear before that God to whom they have lived strangers, and to whom they must give an account! O for a thousand tongues to proclaim in the ears of thoughtless mortals that important aphorism of our Lord, "One thing is needful!" Yet a thousand tongues would be, and are employed in vain, unless so far as the Lord is pleased to send the watchman's warning, by the power and agency of his own Spirit. I think the poet tells us, that Cassandra had the gift of truly foretelling future events; but she was afterwards laid under a painful embarrassment, that nobody should believe her words. Such, with respect to the bulk of their auditories, is the lot of gospel-ministers: they are enlightened to see, and sent forth to declare, the awful consequences of sin; but, alas! how few believe their report! To illustrate our grief and disappointment, I sometimes suppose a dangerous water to be in the way of travellers, over which there is a bridge, which those who can be prevailed upon may pass with safety. By the side of this bridge watchmen are placed, to warn passengers of the danger of the waters; to assure them, that all who attempt to go through them must inevitably perish; to invite, entreat, and beseech them, if they value their lives, to cross the bridge. Methinks this should be an easy task: yet if we should see in fact the greater part stopping their ears to the friendly importunity; many so much offended by it, as to account the watchman's care impertinent, and only deserving of scorn and ill treatment; hardly one in fifty betaking themselves to the friendly bridge, the rest eagerly plunging into the waters, from which none return, as if they were determined to try who should be drowned first. This spectacle would be no unfit emblem of the reception the gospel meets with from a blinded world. The mi-

nisters are rejected, opposed, vilified; they are accounted troublers of the world, because they dare not, cannot stand silent, while sinners are perishing before their eyes: and if, in the course of many sermons, they can prevail but on one soul to take timely warning, and to seek to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, they may account it a mercy and an honour, sufficient to overbalance all the labour and reproaches they are called to endure. From the most they must expect no better reception than the Jews gave to Jeremiah, who told the prophet to his face, "As to the word thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee at all; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." Surely, if the Lord has given us any sense of the worth of our souls, any compassion towards them, this must be a painful exercise; and experience must teach us something of the meaning of Jeremiah's pathetic exclamation, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears! that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people." It is our duty to be thus affected. Our relief lies in the wisdom and sovereignty of God. He reveals his salvation to whom he pleases, for the most part to babes; from the bulk of the wise and the prudent it is hidden. Thus it hath pleased him, and therefore it must be right. Yea he will one day condescend to justify the propriety and equity of his proceedings to his creatures: then every mouth will be stopped, and none will be able to reply against his judge. Light is come into the world, but men prefer darkness. They hate the light, resist it, and rebel against it. It is true, all do so; and therefore, if all were to perish under the condemnation, their ruin would be their own act. It is of grace that any are saved, and in the distribution of that grace, he does what he will with his own; a right which most are ready enough to claim in their own concerns, though they are so unwilling to allow it to the Lord of all. Many perplexing and acrimonious disputes have been started upon this subject; but the redeemed of the Lord are called, not to dispute, but to admire and rejoice; to love, adore, and obey. To know that he loved us, and gave himself for us, is the constraining argument and motive to love him, and surrender ourselves to him; to consider ourselves as no longer our own, but to devote ourselves, with every faculty, power, and talent to his service and glory. He deserves our all; for he parted with all for us. He made himself poor; he endured shame, torture, death, and the curse for us, that we, through him, might inherit everlasting life. Ah! the hardness of my heart, that I am no more affected, astonished, overpowered, with this thought.—I am, &c.

LETTER XV.

April 20, 1774.

MY LORD,—I have been pondering a good while for a subject, and at last I begin without one, hoping that, as it has often happened, while I am writing one line, something will occur to fill up another. Indeed, I have an inexhaustible fund at hand; but it is to me often like a prize in the hand of a fool; I want skill to improve it. O for a warm, a suitable, a seasonable train of thought, that might enliven my own heart, and not be unworthy your Lordship's perusal! Methinks the poets can have but cold comfort, when they invoke a fabled Muse; but we have a warrant, a right, to look up for the influence of the Holy Spirit, who ordains strength for us, and has promised to work in us. What a comfort, what an honour is this, that worms have liberty to look up to God! and that He, the high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity, is pleased to look down upon us, to maintain our peace, to supply our wants, to guide us with his eye, to inspire us with wisdom and grace suitable to our occasions! They who profess to know something of this intercourse, and to depend upon it, are by the world accounted enthusiasts, who know not what they mean, or perhaps hypocrites, who pretend to what they have not, in order to cover some base designs. But we have reason to bear their reproaches with patience.—Could the miser say,

—Populus me sibilat, at mihi plaudo
Ipse domi, simul ac nummos contemplet in arca.

Well, then, may the believer say, let them laugh, let them rage, let them, if they please, point at me for a fool, as I walk the streets; if I do but take up the Bible, or run over in my mind the inventory of the blessings with which the Lord has enriched me, I have sufficient amends. Jesus is mine; in him I have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, an interest in all the promises, and in all the perfections of God; he will guide me by his counsel, support me by his power, comfort me with his presence, while I am here, and afterwards, when flesh and heart fail, he will receive me to his glory.

Let them say what they will, they shall not dispute or laugh us out of our spiritual senses. If all the blind men in the kingdom should endeavour to bear me down, that the sun is not bright, or that the rainbow has no colours, I would still believe my own eyes. I have seen them both, they have not. I cannot prove to their satisfaction what I assert, because they are destitute of sight, the necessary medium; yet their exceptions produce no uncertainty in my mind; they would not, they could not hesitate a moment, if they were not blind. Just so, they who have been taught of God, who have tasted that the Lord

is gracious, have an experimental perception of the truth, which renders them proof against all the sophistry of infidels. I am persuaded we have many plain people here, who, if a wise man of the world was to suggest that the Bible is a human invention, would be quite at a loss how to answer him, by arguments drawn from external evidences; yet they have found such effects from this blessed book, that they would be no more moved by the insinuation, than if they were told, that a cunning man, or set of men, invented the sun, and placed it in the firmament. So if a wise Socinian was to tell them, that the Saviour was only a man like themselves, they would conceive just such an opinion of his skill in divinity, as a philosopher would do of a clown's skill in astronomy, who should affirm that the sun was no bigger than a cart-wheel.

It remains therefore a truth, in defiance of all the cavils of the ignorant, that the Holy Spirit does influence the hearts of all the children of God, or in other words, they are inspired, not with new revelations, but with grace and wisdom to understand, apply, and feed upon the great things already revealed in the scriptures, without which the scriptures are as useless as spectacles to the blind. Were it not so, when we become acquainted with the poverty, ignorance, and wickedness of our hearts, we must sit down in utter despair of being ever able to think a good thought, to offer a single petition aright in prayer, or to take one safe step in the path of life. But now we may be content with our proper weakness, since the power and spirit of Christ are engaged to rest upon us; and while we are preserved in a simple dependence upon this help, though unable of ourselves to do any thing, we shall find an ability to do every thing that our circumstances and duty call for. What is weaker than a worm? Yet the Lord's worms shall in his strength, thrash the mountains, and make the hills as chaff. But this life of faith, this living and acting by a power above our own, is an inexplicable mystery, till experience makes it plain. I have often wondered that St. Paul has obtained so much quarter at the hands of some people, as to pass with them for a man of sense; for surely the greatest part of his writings must be to the last degree absurd and unintelligible upon their principles. How many contradictions must they find, for instance, if they give any attention to what they read in that one passage, Gal. ii. 20, "I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

And as believers are thus inspired by the Holy Spirit, who furnishes them with desires, motives, and abilities, to perform what is

agreeable to his will; so I apprehend, that they who live without God in the world, whom the apostle styles sensual, not having the Spirit, are in a greater or less degree *ad caput recipientis*, under what I may call a *black inspiration*. After making the best allowances I can, both for the extent of human genius and the deplorable evil of the human heart, I cannot suppose that one half of the wicked wit, of which some persons are so proud, is properly their own. Perhaps such a one as Voltaire would neither have written, nor have been read or admired so much, if he had not been the amanuensis of an abler hand in his own way. Satan is always near, when the heart is disposed to receive him; and the Lord withdraws his restraints, to heighten the sinner's ability of sinning with an éclat, and assisting him with such strokes of blasphemy, malice, and falsehood, as perhaps he could not otherwise have attained. Therefore, I do not wonder that they are clever and smart, that they raise a laugh, and are received with applause among those who are like-minded with themselves. But unless the Lord is pleased to grant them repentance, though it is rather to be feared some of them are given up to judicial hardness of heart, how much better would it have been for them, had they been born idiots or lunatics, than to be distinguished as the willing, industrious, and successful instruments of the powers of darkness, in beguiling, perverting, and ruining the souls of men! Alas, what are parts and talents, or any distinctions which give pre-eminence in life, unless they are sanctified by the grace of God, and directed to the accomplishment of his will and glory! From the expression, "Bind them in bundles, and burn them," I have been led to think, that the deceivers and the deceived, they who have prostituted their gifts or influence to encourage others in sin, and they who have perished by their means, may in another world have some peculiar and inseparable connection, and spend an eternity in fruitless lamentations that ever they were connected here.

Your Lordship, I doubt not, feels the force of that line,

O, to grace how great a debtor!—

Had not the Lord separated you for himself, your rank, your abilities, your influence, which now you chiefly value as enlarging your opportunities of usefulness, might, nay certainly would, have been diverted into the opposite channel.—I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

November 5, 1774.

MY LORD,—I have not very lately had recourse to the expedient of descanting upon

a text, but I believe it the best method I can take to avoid ringing changes upon a few obvious topics, which I suppose uniformly present themselves to my mind when I am about to write to your Lordship. Just now, that sweet expression of David occurred to my thoughts, "The Lord is my shepherd." Permit me, without plan or premeditation, to make a few observations upon it; and may your Lordship feel the peace, the confidence, the blessedness, which a believing application of the words is suited to inspire.

The Socinians, and others, in their unhappy laboured attempts to darken the principal glory and foundation-comfort of the gospel, employ their critical sophistry against those texts which expressly and doctrinally declare the Redeemer's character, and affect to triumph, if in any manuscript or ancient version they can find a variation from the received copies which seems to favour their cause. But we may venture to waive the authority of every disputed or disputable text, and maintain the truth against their cavils from the current language and tenor of the whole scripture. David's words, in Psalm xxiii, are alone a decisive proof that Jesus is Jehovah, if they will but allow two things, which I think they cannot deny:—1. That our Saviour assumes to himself the character of the Shepherd of his people;—and, 2. That he did not come into the world to abridge those advantages which the servants of God enjoyed before his incarnation. Upon these premises, which cannot be gainsaid without setting aside the whole New Testament, the conclusion is undeniable: for if Jehovah was David's Shepherd, unless Jesus be Jehovah, we who live under the gospel have an unspeakable disadvantage, in being entrusted to the care of one who, according to the Socinians, is a mere man; and upon the Arian scheme, is at the most a creature, and infinitely short of possessing those perfections which David contemplated in his Shepherd. He had a Shepherd whose wisdom and power were infinite, and might therefore warrantably conclude he should not want, and need not fear. And we also may conclude the same, if our Shepherd be the Lord or Jehovah, but not otherwise. Besides, the very nature of the Shepherd's office respecting the state of such frail creatures as we are, requires those attributes for the due discharge of it which are incommunicably divine. He must intimately know every individual of the flock: his eye must be upon them every one, and his ear open to their prayers, and his arm stretched out for their relief, in all places and in all ages: every thought of every heart must be open to his view, and his wisdom must penetrate, and his arm control and over-rule all the hidden and complicated machinations of the powers of darkness: he must have the administration

of universal providence over all the nations, families, and persons upon earth, or he could not effectually manage for those who put their trust in him, in that immense variety of cases and circumstances in which they are found. Reason, as well as scripture, may convince us, that he who gathereth the outcasts of Israel, who healeth the broken in heart, who upholdeth all that fall, raiseth up all that are bowed down, and upon whom the eyes of all wait for their support, can be no other than he who telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names, who is great in power, and whose understanding is infinite. To this purpose likewise the prophet Isaiah describes this mighty Shepherd, chap. xl. 9—17, both as to his person and office.

But is not this indeed the great mystery of godliness! How just is the apostle's observation, that no man can say Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost! How astonishing the thought,—that the Maker of heaven and earth, the holy one of Israel, before whose presence the earth shook, the heavens dropped when he displayed a faint emblem of his majesty upon Sinai, should afterwards appear in the form of a servant, and hang upon a cross, the sport and scorn of wicked men! I cannot wonder that to the wise men of the world this appears absurd, unreasonable, and impossible; yet to right reason, to reason enlightened, and sanctified, however amazing the proposition be, yet it appears true and necessary, upon a supposition that a holy God is pleased to pardon sinners in a way suited to display the awful glories of his justice. The same arguments which prove the blood of bulls and goats insufficient to take away sin, will conclude against the utmost doings or sufferings of ~~ææ~~æen or angels. The Redeemer of sinners must be mighty; he must have a personal dignity, to stamp such a value upon his undertakings as that thereby God may appear just as well as merciful in justifying the ungodly for his sake; and he must be all-sufficient to bless, and almighty to protect those who come unto him for safety and life.

Such a one is our Shepherd. This is he of whom we, through grace, are enabled to say, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. We are his by every tie and right; he made us, he redeemed us, he reclaimed us from the hand of our enemies, and we are his by our own voluntary surrender of ourselves; for, though we once slighted, despised, and opposed him, he made us willing in the day of his power: he knocked at the door of our hearts; but we, at least I, barred and fastened it against him as much and as long as possible. But when he revealed his love we could stand out no longer. Like sheep, we are weak, destitute, defence-

less, prone to wander, unable to return, and always surrounded with wolves. But all is made up in the fulness, ability, wisdom, compassion, care, and faithfulness of our great Shepherd. He guides, protects, feeds, heals, and restores, and will be our guide and our God even until death. Then he will meet us, receive us, and present us unto himself, and we shall be near him, and like him, and with him for ever.

Ah! my Lord, what a subject is this! I trust it is the joy of your heart. Placed as you are by his hand in a superior rank, you see and feel that the highest honours, and the most important concerns that terminate with the present life, are trivial as the sports of children in comparison with the views and the privileges you derive from the glorious gospel; and your situation in life renders the grace bestowed upon you the more conspicuous and distinguishing. I have somewhere met with a similar reflection of Henry IV. of France, to this purpose, that, though many came into the world the same day with him, he was probably the only one among them that was born to be a king. Your Lordship is acquainted with many, who, if not born on the same day with you, were born to titles, estates, and honours; but how few of them were born to the honour of making a public and consistent profession of the glorious gospel! The hour is coming, when all honours and possessions, but this which cometh of God only, will be eclipsed and vanish, and, like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind. How miserable will they then be who must leave their ALL! What a mortifying thought does Horace put in the way of those who disdain to read the scriptures!

*Linquenda tellus, et domus, et placens
Uxor: neque harum, quas colis, arborum
Te, præter invisas cupressos,
Ulla brevem dominum sequetur.*

But grace and faith can make the lowest state of life supportable, and make a dismissal from the highest desirable. Of the former I have many living proofs and witnesses around me. Your Lordship, I trust, will have sweet experience of the latter, when, after having fulfilled the will of God in your generation, you shall be called (I hope in some yet distant day) to enter into your Master's joy. In the mean time, how valuable are life, talents, influence, and opportunities of every kind, if we are enabled to improve and lay out all for him who hath thus loved us, thus provided for us! As to myself, I would hope there are few who have so clear a sense of their obligations to him, who make such unsuitable and languid returns as I do. I think I have a desire to serve him better; but, alas! evil is present with me. Surely I shall feel something like shame and regret

for my coldness, even in heaven, for I find I am never happier than when I am most ashamed of myself upon this account here.—I am, &c.

LETTER XVII.

December 8, 1774.

MY LORD,—How wonderful is the patience of God towards sinful men! In him they live, and move, and have their being, and, if he were to withdraw his support for a single moment, they must perish. He maintains their lives, guards their persons, supplies their wants, while they employ the powers and faculties they receive from him in a settled course of opposition to his will. They trample upon his laws, affront his government, and despise his grace; yet still he spares. To silence all his adversaries in a moment would require no extraordinary exertion of his power; but his forbearance towards them manifests his glory, and gives us cause to say, Who is a God like unto thee!

Sometimes, however, there are striking instances of his displeasure against sin. When such events take place, immediately upon a public and premeditated contempt offered to Him that sitteth in the heavens, I own they remind me of the danger of standing, if I may so speak, in the Lord's way; for though his long-suffering is astonishing, and many dare him to his face daily, with seeming impunity, yet he sometimes strikes an awful and unexpected blow, and gives an illustration of that solemn word, "Who ever hardened himself against the Lord and prospered?" But how am I to make this observation! I ought to do it with the deepest humiliation, remembering that I once stood, according to my years and ability, in the foremost rank of his avowed opposers, and, with a determined and unwearied enmity renounced, defied, and blasphemed him. "But he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy;" and therefore I was spared, and reserved to speak of his goodness.

Josephus, when speaking of the death of Herod Agrippa, ascribes it to a natural cause, and says, he was seized with excruciating pains in his bowels. But Luke informs us of the true cause: an angel of the Lord smote him. Had we a modern history, written by an inspired pen, we should probably often be reminded of such an interposition where we are not ordinarily aware of it. For though the springs of actions and events are concealed from us for the most part, and vain men carry on their schemes with confidence, as though the Lord had forsaken the earth, yet they are under his eye and control; and with, in some measure, instructed by the

specimens of his government recorded in the scriptures, can trace and admire his hand, and can see how he takes the wise in their own craftiness, stains the pride of human glory; and that when sinners speak proudly, he is above them, and makes every thing bend or break before him.

While we lament the growth and pernicious effects of infidelity, and see how wicked men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived; what gratitude should fill our hearts to him, who has been pleased to call us out of the horrid darkness in which multitudes are bewildered and lost, into the glorious light of his gospel! Faint are our warmest conceptions of this mercy. In order to understand it fully, we should have a full and adequate sense of the evil from which we are delivered; the glory to which we are called; and especially, of the astonishing means to which we owe our life and hope the humiliation, sufferings, and death of the Son of God. But our views of these points while in our present state, are and must be exceedingly weak and disproportionate. We know them but in part, we see them *in part*, by reflection, rather the images than the things themselves; and though they are faithfully represented in the mirror of God's word, to us they appear indistinct, because we see them through a gross medium of ignorance and unbelief. Hereafter every veil shall be removed; we shall know, in another manner than we do now, the unspeakable evil of sin, and the insupportable dreadfulness of God's displeasure against it, when we see the world in flames, and hear the final sentence denounced upon the ungodly. We shall have far other thoughts of Jesus when we see him as he is: and shall then be able to make a more affecting estimate of the love which moved him to be made a substitute and a curse for us: and we shall then know what great things God has prepared for them that love him. Then with transport, we shall adopt the queen of Sheba's language, It was a true report we heard in yonder dark world; but, behold, the half, the thousandth part, was not told us! In the mean time, may such conceptions as we are enabled to form of these great truths, fill our hearts, and be mingled with all our thoughts, and all our concerns; may the Lord, by faith, give us an abiding evidence of the reality and importance of the things which cannot yet be seen; so shall we be enabled to live above the world while we are in it, uninfluenced either by its blandishments or its frowns; and, with a noble simplicity and singularity, avow and maintain the cause of God in truth, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He whom we serve is able to support and protect us; and he well deserves at our hands, that we should be willing to endure, for his sake, much more than he will ever permit us

to be exercised with. The believer's call, duty, and privilege, is beautifully and forcibly set forth in Milton's character of Abdiel, at the end of the fifth book:

—Faithful found
Among the faithless, faithful only he,
Among innumerable false; unmov'd,
Unshaken, uneduc'd, unferried,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal:
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
Though single—

Methinks your Lordship's situation particularly resembles that in which the poet has placed Abdiel. You are not, indeed, called to serve God quite alone; but amongst those of your own rank, and with whom, the station in which he has placed you, necessitates you to converse, how few are there who can understand, second, or approve, the principles upon which you act, or easily bear a conduct which must impress conviction, or reflect dishonour upon themselves! But you are not alone; the Lord's people (many of whom you will not know till you meet them in glory) are helping you here with their prayers; his angels are commissioned to guard and guide your steps; yea, the Lord himself fixes his eye of mercy upon your private and your public path, and is near you at your right hand, that you may not be moved. That he may comfort you with the light of his countenance, and uphold you with the arm of his power, is my frequent prayer.—I am, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

January 20, 1775.

MY LORD,—We have entered upon another year. So have thousands, perhaps millions, who will not see it close. An alarming thought to the worldling! at least it should be so. I have an imperfect remembrance of an account I read when I was a boy, of an ice-palace, built one winter at Petersburg. The walls, the roof, the floors, the furniture, were all of ice, but finished with taste; and every thing that might be expected in a royal palace was to be found there; the ice, while in the state of water, being previously coloured, so that to the eye all seemed formed of proper materials: but all was cold, useless, and transient. Had the frost continued till now, the palace might have been standing; but with the returning spring it melted away, like the baseless fabric of a vision. Methinks there should have been one stone in the building, to have retained the inscription, *Sic transit gloria mundi!* for no contrivance could exhibit a fitter illustration of the vanity of human life. Men build and plan as if their works were to endure for ever; but the wind passes over them, and they are gone. In the

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midst of all their preparations, or at farthest, when they think they have just completed their designs, their breath goeth forth, they return to their earth; in that very day their thoughts perish.

How many sleep who kept the world awake!

Yet this ice-house had something of a leisurely dissolution, though, when it began to decay, all the art of man was unable to prop it: but often death comes hastily, and, like the springing of a mine, destroys to the very foundations, without previous notice. Then all we have been concerned in here (all but the consequences of our conduct, which will abide to eternity) will be no more to us than the remembrance of a dream. This truth is too plain to be denied; but the greater part of mankind act as if they were convinced it was false: they spend their days in vanity, and in a moment they go down to the grave. What cause of thankfulness have they who are delivered from this delusion, and who, by the knowledge of the glorious gospel, have learned their true state and end, are saved from the love of the present world, from the heart-distressing fear of death; and know, that if their earthly house were dissolved, like the ice-palace, they have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!

Yet even these are much concerned to realize the brevity and uncertainty of their present state, that they may be stimulated to make the most and the best of it; to redeem their time, and manage their precarious opportunities, so as may most tend to the praise and glory of him who has called them out of darkness into marvellous light. Why should any that have tasted that the Lord is gracious wish to live another day, but that they may have the honour to be fellow-workers with him, instrumental in promoting his designs, and of laying themselves out to the utmost of their abilities and influence in his service? To enjoy a sense of his loving-kindness, and to have the light of his countenance lifted up upon our souls, is indeed, respecting ourselves, the best part of life, yea, better than life itself; but this we shall have to unspeakably greater advantage, when we have finished our course, and shall be wholly freed from the body of sin. And therefore, the great desirable while here, seems to be grace, that we may serve him and suffer for him in the world. Though our first wish immediately upon our own accounts might be, to depart and be with Jesus, which is *ὄραμα κἀλλύου ἐπιπέτω*, yet a lively thought of our immense obligations to his redeeming love, may reconcile us to a much longer continuance here, if we may by any means be subservient to diffuse the glory of his name, and the blessings of his salvation, which is God's great and principle end in preserving the world itself. When historians and politicians descant upon the rise and

fall of empires, with all their professed sagacity, in tracing the connection between causes and effects, they are totally unacquainted with the great master-wheel which manages the whole movement, that is, the Lord's design in favour of his church and kingdom. To this every event is subordinate; to this every interfering interest must stoop. How easily might this position be proved, by reviewing the history of the period about the Reformation. Whether Dr. Robertson considers things in this light, in his history of Charles V. I know not, as I have not seen his books; but if not, however elaborate his performance may be in other respects, I must venture to say, it is essentially defective, and cannot give that light and pleasure to a spiritual reader of which the subject is capable. And I doubt not, that some who are yet unborn will hereafter clearly see and remark, that the present unhappy disputes between Great Britain and America, with their consequences, whatever they may be, are part of a series of events, of which the extension and interests of the church of Christ were the principal final causes. In a word, that Jesus may be known, trusted, and adored, and sinners, by the power of his gospel, be rescued from sin and Satan, is comparatively, the *business*, the one great business, for the sake of which the succession of day and night, summer and winter, is still maintained; and when the plan of redemption is consummated, sin, which now almost fills the earth, will then set it on fire; and the united interest of all the rest of mankind, when detached from that of the people of God, will not plead for its preservation a single day. In this view, I congratulate your Lordship, that however your best endeavours to serve the temporal interests of the nation may fall short of your wishes; yet, so far as your situation gives you opportunity of supporting the gospel-cause, and facilitating its progress, you have a prospect both of a more certain and more important success. For instance, it was, under God, your Lordship's favour and influence that brought me into the ministry. And though I be nothing, yet he who put it into your heart to patronise me has been pleased not to suffer what you then did for his sake to be wholly in vain. He has been pleased, in a course of years, by so unworthy an instrument as I am, to awaken a number of persons, who were at that time dead in trespasses and sins; but now some of them are pressing on to the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus; and some of them are already before the throne. Should I suggest in some companies, that the conversion of a hundred sinners (more or less) to God, is an event of more real importance than the temporal prosperity of the greatest nation upon earth, I should be charged with ignorance and arrogance; but your Lordship is skilled in *scriptural arithmetic*, which alone can teach

us to estimate the value of souls, and will agree with me, that one soul is worth more than the whole world, on account of its redemption-price, its vast capacities, and its duration. Should we suppose a nation to consist of forty millions, the whole and each individual to enjoy as much good as this life can afford, without abatement, for a term of fifty years each; all this good, or an equal quantity, might be exhausted by a single person in two thousand millions of years, which would be but a moment in comparison of the eternity which would still follow, and if this good were merely temporal good, the whole aggregate of it would be evil and misery, if compared with that happiness in God, of which only they who are made partakers of a divine life are capable. On the other hand, were a whole nation to be destroyed by such accumulated miseries as attended the siege of Jerusalem, the sum total of these calamities would be but trifling, if set in competition with what every single person that dies in sin has to expect, when the sentence of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, shall be executed.

What an unexpected round have my thoughts taken since I set out from the ice-palace! It is time to relieve your Lordship, and to subscribe myself, &c.

LETTER XIX.

February 23, 1775.

MY LORD,—I assent to our Lord's declaration, "Without me ye can do nothing," not only upon the authority of the speaker, but from the same irresistible and experimental evidence, as if he had told me, that I cannot make the sun to shine, or change the course of the seasons. Though my pen and my tongue sometimes move freely, yet the total incapacity and stagnation of thought I labour under at other times, convinces me, that, in myself, I have not sufficiency to think a good thought; and, I believe the case would be the same, if that little measure of knowledge and abilities, which I am too prone to look upon as my own, were a thousand times greater than it is. For every new service I stand in need of a new supply, and can bring forth nothing of my supposed store into actual exercise, but by his immediate assistance. His gracious influence is that to those who are best furnished with gifts, which the water is to the mill, or the wind to the ship, without which the whole apparatus is motionless and useless. I apprehend that we lose much of the comfort which might arise from a sense of our continual dependence upon him, and of course fall short of acknowledging, as we ought, what we receive from him.

by mistaking the manner of his operation. Perhaps we take it too much for granted, that communications from himself must bear some kind of sensible impression that they are his, and therefore are ready to give our own industry or ingenuity credit for those performances in which we can perceive no such impression; yet it is very possible that we may be under his influence when we are least aware of it; and though what we say, or write, or do, may seem no way extraordinary, yet that we should be led to such a particular turn of thought at one time rather than at another, has, in my own concerns, often appeared to me remarkable, from the circumstances which have attended, or the consequences which have followed. How often, in the choice of a text, or in the course of a sermon, or in a letter to a friend, have I been led to speak a word in season! and what I have expressed at large, and in general, has been so exactly suited to some case which I was utterly unacquainted with, that I could hardly have hit it so well, had I been previously informed of it. Some instances of this kind have been so striking, as hardly to admit a doubt of superior agency. And indeed, if believers in Jesus, however unworthy in themselves, are the temples of the Holy Ghost; if the Lord lives, dwells, and walks in them; if he is their life and their light; if he has promised to guide them with his eye, and to work in them both to will and to do of his own good pleasure,—methinks what I have mentioned, and more, may be reasonably expected. That line in the hymn,

Help I every moment need,

is not a hyperbolical expression, but strictly and literally true, not only in great emergencies, but in our smoother hours, and most familiar paths. This gracious assistance is afforded in a way imperceptible to ourselves, to hide pride from us, and to prevent us from being indolent and careless with respect to the use of appointed means; and it would be likewise more abundantly, and perhaps more sensibly afforded, were our spirits more simple in waiting upon the Lord. But alas! a divided heart, an undue attachment to some temporal object, sadly deaden our spirits (I speak for myself,) and grieves the Lord's Spirit; so that we walk in darkness and at a distance, and though called to great privileges, live far below them. But methinks the thought of him who is always near, and upon whom we do and must incessantly depend, should suggest a powerful motive for the closest attention to his revealed will, and the most punctual compliance with it; for so far as the Lord withdraws we become as blind men, and with the clearest light, and upon the plainest ground, we are liable, or rather sure, to stumble at every step.

Though there is a principle of consciousness and a determination of the will, sufficient to denominate our thoughts and performances our own, yet I believe mankind in general are more under an invisible agency than they apprehend. The Lord, immediately from himself, and perhaps by the ministry of the holy angels, guides, prompts, restrains, or warns his people. So there undoubtedly is what I may call a black inspiration, the influence of the evil spirits who work in the hearts of the disobedient, and not only excite their wills, but assist their faculties, and qualify as well as incline them to be more assiduously wicked, and more extensively mischievous, than they could be of themselves. I consider Voltaire, for instance, and many writers of the same stamp, to be little more than secretaries and amanuenses of one who has unspeakably more wit and adroitness in promoting infidelity and immorality, than they of themselves can justly pretend to. They have, for a while the credit (if I may so call it) of the fund from whence they draw; but the world little imagines who is the real and original author of that philosophy and poetry, of those fine turns and sprightly inventions, which are so generally admired. Perhaps many, now applauded for their genius, would have been comparatively dolts, had they not been engaged in a cause which Satan has so much interest in supporting.

But to return to the more pleasing subject. How great and honourable is the privilege of a true believer! That he has neither wisdom nor strength in himself is no disadvantage; for he is connected with infinite wisdom and almighty power. Though weak as a worm, his arms are strengthened by the mighty God of Jacob, and all things become possible, yea easy, to him, that occur within the compass of his proper duty and calling. The Lord whom he serves, engages to proportion his strength to his day, whether it be a day of service or of suffering; and though he be fallible and short-sighted, exceeding liable to mistake and imposition, yet, while he retains a sense that he is so, and, with the simplicity of a child, asks counsel and direction of the Lord, he seldom takes a wrong step, at least not in matters of consequence, and even his inadvertencies are over-ruled for good. If he forgets his true state, and thinks himself to be something, he presently finds he is indeed nothing; but if he is content to be nothing and to have nothing, he is sure to find a seasonable and abundant communication of all that he wants. Thus he lives, like Israel in the wilderness, upon mere bounty; but then it is a bounty unchangeable, unwearied, inexhaustible, and all-sufficient. Moses, when speaking of the methods the Lord took to humble Israel, mentions his feeding them with manna as one method. I

could not understand this for a time. I thought they were rather in danger of being proud, when they saw themselves provided for in such an extraordinary way. But the manna would not keep; they could not hoard it up, and were therefore in a state of absolute dependence from day to day. This appointment was well suited to humble them. Thus it is with us in spirituals. We should be better pleased, perhaps, to be set up with a stock or sufficiency at once,—such an inherent portion of wisdom and power, as we might depend upon, at least for common occasions, without being constrained by a sense of indigence, to have continual recourse to the Lord for every thing we want. But his way is best. His own glory is most displayed, and our safety most secured, by keeping us quite poor and empty in ourselves, and supplying us from one minute to another, according to our need. This, if any thing, will prevent boasting, and keep a sense of gratitude awake in our hearts. This is well adapted to quicken us in prayer, and furnishes us with a thousand occasions for praise which would otherwise escape our notice.

But who or what are we, that the Most High should thus notice us! should visit us every morning, and water us every moment! It is an astonishing thought, that God should thus dwell with men! that he, before whom the mightiest earthly potentates are less than nothing, and vanity, should thus stoop and accommodate himself to the situation, wants, and capacities of the weakest, meanest, and poorest of his children! But so it hath pleased him. He seeth not as man seeth.—I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

August — 1775.

MY LORD,—I have no apt preface or introduction at hand; and as I have made it almost a rule not to study for what I should offer your Lordship, I therefore beg leave to begin abruptly. It is the future promised privilege of believers in Jesus, that they shall be as the angels; and there is a sense in which we should endeavour to be as the angels now. This is intimated to us where we are taught to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." I have sometimes amused myself with supposing an angel should be appointed to reside a while upon earth in a human body; not in sinful flesh, like ours, but in a body free from infirmity, and still perceiving an unabated sense of his own happiness in the favour of God, and of his unspeakable obligation to his goodness; and then I have tried to judge, as well as I could, how such an angel would com-

port himself in such a situation. I know not that I ever enlarged upon the thought, either in preaching or writing. Permit me to follow it a little in this paper.

Were I acquainted with this heavenly visitant, I am willing to hope I should greatly reverence him; and, if permitted, be glad, in some cases, to consult him: in some, but not in all; for I think my fear would be equal to my love. Methinks I could never venture to open my heart freely to him, and unfold to him my numberless complaints and infirmities; for, as he could have no experience of the like things himself, I should suppose he would not know how fully to pity me, indeed hardly how to bear with me, if I told him all. Alas! what a preposterous, strange, vile creature should I appear to an angel, if he knew me as I am! It is well for me that Jesus was made lower than the angels, and that the human nature he assumed was not distinct from the common nature of mankind, though secured from the common depravity; and because he submitted to be under the law in our name and stead, though he was free from sin himself, yet sin and its consequences being, for our sakes, charged upon him, he acquired, in the days of his humiliation, an experimental sympathy with his poor people. He knows the effects of sin and temptation upon us, by that knowledge whereby he knows all things; but he knows them likewise in a way more suitable for our comfort and relief, by the sufferings and exercises he passed through for us. Hence arises encouragement. We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted even as we are. When I add to this, the consideration of his power, promises, and grace, and that he is exalted on purpose to pity, relieve, and save, I gather courage. With him I dare be free, and am not sorry, but glad, that he knows me perfectly, that no thought of my heart is hidden from him. Without this infinite and exact knowledge of my disease, how could he effectually administer to my cure!—But whither am I rambling? I seem to have lost sight of the angel already. I am now coming back, that if he cannot effectually pity me, he may at least animate and teach me.

In the first place, I take it for granted an angel would think himself a stranger and grim upon earth. He would not forget his citizenship^a was in heaven. Surely he would look upon all the bustle of human life (rather than the design of his mission might connect him with it) with more indifference than we look upon the sports of children, or amusements of idiots and lunatics, which we look upon as an uneasiness, rather than excite a desire of joining in them. He would judge of every thing around him by the reference and

^a Citizenship, or conversation.

dency it had to promote the will of him that sent him; and the most specious or splendid appearances, considered in any other view, would make no impression upon him.

Consequently, as to his own concernment, all his aim and desire would be, to fulfil the will of God. All situations would be alike to him; whether he was commanded, as in the case of Sennacherib, to destroy a mighty army with a stroke; or, as in the case of Hagar, to attend upon a woman, a servant, a slave; both services would be to him equally honourable and important, because he was in both equally pleasing his Lord, which would be his element and his joy, whether he was appointed to guide the reins of empire, or to sweep the streets.

Again, the angel would doubtless exhibit a striking example of benevolence; for, being free from selfish bias, filled with a sense of the love of God, and a knowledge of his adorable perfections, his whole heart, and soul, and strength, would be engaged and exerted both from duty and inclination, to relieve the miseries, and advance the happiness of all around him: and in this he would follow the pattern of him who doth good to all, commanding his sun to rise, and his rain to fall, upon the just and the unjust; though, from the same pattern, he would show an especial regard to the household of faith. An angel would take but little part in the controversies, contentions, and broils, which might happen in the time of his sojourning here, but would be a friend to all, so far as consistent with the general good.

The will and glory of God being the angel's great view, and having a more lively sense of the realities of an unseen world than we can at present conceive, he would certainly, in the first and chief place, have the success and spread of the glorious gospel at heart. Angels, though not redeemed with blood, yet feel themselves nearly concerned in the work of redemption. They admire its mysteries. We may suppose them well informed in the works of creation and providence. But, unlike to many men, who are satisfied with the knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, or history, they search and pry into the counsels of redeeming love, rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, and think themselves well employed to be ministering spirits, to minister to the heirs of salvation. It would therefore be his chief delight to espouse and promote their cause, and to employ all his talents and influence in spreading the favour and knowledge of the name of Jesus, which is the only and effectual means of bringing sinners out of bondage and darkness into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Lastly, though his zeal for the glory of his Lord would make him willing to continue here till he had finished the work given him to do, he would, I am persuaded, look for-

ward with desire to the appointed moment of his recal, that he might be freed from beholding and mixing with the sin and vanity of those who know not God, render his account with joy, and be welcomed to heaven with a "Well done, good and faithful servant." Surely he would long for this, as a labourer for the setting sun; and would not form any connection with the things of time, which should prompt him to wish his removal protracted for a single hour beyond the period of his prescribed service.

Alas, why am I not more like an angel? My views, in my better judgment, are the same. My motives and obligations are even stronger; an angel is not so deeply indebted to the grace of God, as a believing sinner, who was once upon the brink of destruction, who has been redeemed with blood, and might justly have been, before now, shut up with the powers of darkness without hope. Yet the merest trifles are sufficient to debase my views, damp my activity, and impede my endeavours in the Lord's service, though I profess to have no other end or desire which can make a continuance in life worthy my wish.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXI.

November — 1775.

MY LORD,—*Dum loquimur tempus fugit.* In the midst of the hurries and changes of this unsettled state, we glide along swiftly towards an unchangeable world, and shall soon have as little connection with the scenes we are now passing through as we have with what happened before the flood. All that appears great and interesting in the present life, abstracted from its influence upon our internal character, and our everlasting allotment, will soon be as unreal as the visions of the night. This we know and confess; but though our judgments are convinced, it is seldom our hearts are duly affected by the thought. And while I find it easy to write in this moralizing strain, I feel myself disposed to be seriously engaged about trifles, and trifling in the most serious concerns, as if I believed the very contrary. It is with good reason the Lord challenges as his own prerogative the full knowledge of the deceitfulness, desperate wickedness, and latent depths of the human heart, which is capable of making even his own people so shamefully inconsistent with themselves and with their acknowledged principles.

I find that, when I have something agreeable in expectation (suppose, for instance, it were a few hours conversation with your Lordship,) my imagination paints and prepares the scene beforehand; hurries me over the intervening space of time, as though it were

a useless blank, and anticipates the pleasure I propose. Many of my thoughts of this kind are mere waking dreams; for perhaps the opportunity I am eagerly waiting for never happens, but is swallowed up by some unforeseen disappointment; or if not, something from within or without prevents its answering the idea I had formed of it. Nor does my fancy confine itself within the narrow limits of probabilities; it can busy itself as eagerly in ranging after chimeras and impossibilities, and engage my attention to the ideal pursuit of things that are never likely to happen. In these respects my imagination travels with wings; so that if the wildness, the multiplicity, the variety of the phantoms which pass through my mind in the space of a winter's day were known to my fellow-creatures, they would probably deem me, as I am often ready to deem myself, but a more sober and harmless kind of lunatic. But if I endeavour to put this active roving power in a right track, and to represent to myself those scenes which, though not yet present, I know will soon be realised, and have a greatness which the most enlarged exercise of my powers cannot comprehend: if I would fix my thoughts upon the hour of death, the end of the world, the coming of the Judge, or similar subjects; then my imagination is presently tame, cold, and jaded, travels very slowly, and is soon wearied in the road of truth; though in the fairy fields of uncertainty and folly, it can skip from mountain to mountain. Mr. Addison supposes, that the imagination alone, as it can be differently affected, is capable of making us either inconceivably happy or miserable. I am sure it is capable of making us miserable, though I believe it seldom gives us much pleasure, but such as is to be found in a fool's paradise. But I am sure, were my outward life and conduct perfectly free from blame, the disorders and defilement of my imagination are sufficient to constitute me a chief sinner in the sight of him to whom the thoughts and intents of the heart are continually open, and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

Upon this head I cannot but lament how universally almost education is suited, and as it were designed, to add to the stimulus of depraved nature. A cultivated imagination is commended and sought after as a very desirable talent, though it seldom means more than the possession of a large stock of other people's dreams and fables, with a certain quickness in compounding them, enlarging upon them, and exceeding them by inventions of our own. Poets, painters, and even historians are employed to assist us from our early years in forming an habitual relish for shadows and colourings, which *both indispose* for the search of truth and *even unfit us* for its reception, unless pro-

posed just in our own way. The best effect of the belles lettres upon the imagination seems generally expressed by the word *taste*. And what is this taste, but a certain disposition which loves to be humoured, soothed, and flattered, and which can hardly receive or bear the most important truths, if they be not decorated and set off with such a delicacy and address as taste requires! I say the most important truths; because truths of a secular importance strike so closely upon the senses, that the decision of taste perhaps is not waited for. Thus, if a man be informed of the birth of his child, or that his house is on fire, the message takes up his thoughts, and he is seldom much disgusted with the manner in which it is delivered. But what an insuperable bar is the refined taste of many to their profiting by the preaching of the gospel, or even to their hearing it. Though the subject of a discourse be weighty, and some just representation given of the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, and the love of Christ; yet, if there be something amiss in the elocution, language, or manner of the preacher, people of taste must be possessed, in a good measure, of grace likewise, if they can hear him with tolerable patience. And perhaps three fourths of those who are accounted the most sensible and judicious in the auditory, will remember little about the sermon, but the tone of the voice, the awkwardness of the attitude, the obsolete expressions, and the like; while the poor and simple, not being incumbered with this hurtful accomplishment, receive the messenger as the Lord's servant, and the truth as the Lord's word, and are comforted and edified.—But I stop. Some people would say, that I must suppose your Lordship to have but little taste, or else much grace, or I should not venture to trouble you with such letters as mine.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXII.

MY LORD,—The apostle speaks of a blessedness which it is the design of the gospel to impart to those who receive it. The Galatians once had it, and spoke of it. The apostle reminds them of their loss, which is left upon record as a warning to us. His expression has led me sometimes to consider wherein a christian's present blessedness consists; I mean, that which is attainable in this state of trial, and the sense and exercise of which may be, and too often is, suspended and taken from us. It is a blessedness which, if we speak of man in a natural state, his eye hath not seen, nor his ear heard so as to understand it, nor can the idea of it arise in his heart. It is no way dependent upon outward

circumstances. Prosperity cannot impart it, preserve or supply the want of it; nor can adversity put it out of our reach. The wise cannot acquire it by dint of superior abilities; nor shall the simple miss it for want of capacity.

The state of true believers, compared with that of others, is always blessed. If they are born from above, and united to Jesus, they are delivered from condemnation, and are heirs of eternal life, and may therefore well be accounted happy. But I consider now, not their harvest, but their first fruits; not their portion in reversion, but the earnest attainable in this life; not what they shall be in heaven, but what, in an humble attendance upon the Lord, they may be while upon earth. There is even at present a prize of our high calling set before us. It is much to be desired, that we had such a sense of its value as might prompt us so to run that we might obtain. I have thought this blessedness may be comprised in five particulars, though, in order to take a succinct view of the subject some of these might be branched out into several others; but I would not by too many subdivisions give my letter the air of a sermon.

In the first place, a clear, well grounded, habitual persuasion of our acceptance in the Beloved is attainable; and though we may be safe, we cannot be said to enjoy blessedness without it. To be in a state of suspense and uncertainty in a point of so great importance is painful; and the Lord has accordingly provided that his people may have strong consolation on this head. They are blessed therefore who have such views of the power, grace, and suitableness of Jesus, and the certainty and security of redemption in him, together with such a consciousness that they have anchored their hopes and ventured their all upon his person, work, and promise, as furnishes them with a ready answer to all the cavils of unbelief and Satan, in the apostle's manner, Rom. viii. 31—37. That Paul could thus challenge and triumph over all charges and enemies, was not an appendage of his office as an apostle, but a part of his experience as a believer; and it lies equally open to us, for we have the same gospel and the same promises as he had: nor is the efficacy of the Holy Spirit's teaching a whit weakened by length of time. But many stop short of this. They have a hope, but it rather springs from their frames and feelings than from a spiritual apprehension of the Redeemer's engagements and fulness, and therefore fluctuates and changes like the weather. Could they be persuaded to pray with earnestness and importunity, as the apostle prays for them, Ephes. i. 17, 18, and iii. 16, 19. they would find a blessedness which they have not yet known; for it is said, "Ask, and ye shall receive." And it

is said likewise, "Ye receive not because ye ask not."

Could this privilege be enjoyed singly, the natural man would have no objection to it. He would (as he thinks) be pleased to know he should be saved at last, provided that while here he might live in his sins. But the believer will not, cannot think himself blessed, unless he has likewise a conscience void of offence. This was the apostle's daily exercise, though no one was farther from a legal spirit, or more dependent upon Jesus for acceptance. But if we live in any known sin, or allow ourselves in the customary omission of any known duty, supposing it possible in such a case to preserve a sense of our acceptance (which can hardly be supposed; for if the spirit be grieved, our evidences decline of course) yet we could not be easy. If a traveller was absolutely sure of reaching his journey's end in safety, yet if he walked with a thorn in his foot, he must take every step in pain. Such a thorn will be felt in the conscience till we are favoured with a simplicity of heart, and made willing in all things, great or small, to yield obedience to the authority of the Lord's precepts, and make them the standing rule of our conduct, without wilfully admitting a single exception. At the best, we shall be conscious of innumerable shortcomings, and shameful defilements; but these things will not break our peace, if our hearts are upright. But if we trifle with light, and connive at what we know to be wrong, we shall be weak, restless, and uncomfortable. How many who, we would hope, are the children of the King, are lean from day to day, because some right-hand or right-eye evil, which they cannot persuade themselves to part with, keeps them halting between two opinions! and they are as distant from happiness, as they are from the possibility of reconciling the incompatible services of God and the world. But happy indeed is he who condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

Real communion with the Lord, in his appointed means of grace, is likewise an important branch of this blessedness. They were instituted for this end, and are sufficient, by virtue of his power and Spirit, to answer it. I do not believe this enjoyment will be always equal. But I believe a comfortable sense of it, in some measure, is generally attainable. To read the scriptures, not as an attorney may read a will, merely to know the sense, but as the heir reads it, as a description and proof of his interest; to hear the gospel, as the voice of our Beloved, so as to have little leisure either for admiring the abilities or censuring the defects of the preacher; and, in prayer, to feel a liberty of pouring out our hearts before the Lord, to behold some glances of his goodness

passing before us, and to breathe forth before him the tempers of a child, the spirit of adoption;—and thus, by beholding his glory, to be conformed more and more to his image, and to renew our strength, by drawing water out of the wells of salvation: Herein is blessedness. They who have tasted it can say, it is good for me to draw nigh to God. The soul, thus refreshed by the water of life, is preserved from thirsting after the vanities of the world, thus instructed in the sanctuary, comes down from the mount filled with heavenly wisdom, anointed with a holy unction, and therefore qualified to judge, speak, and act in character, in all the relations and occasions of secular life. In this way, besides the pleasure, a spiritual taste is acquired, something analogous to the meaning of the word taste when applied to music or good breeding, by which discords and improprieties are observed and avoided, as it were by instinct, and what is right is felt and followed, not so much by the force of rules, as by a habit insensibly acquired, and in which the substance of all necessary rules are, if I may so say, digested. O that I knew more of this blessedness, and more of its effects!

Another branch of blessedness is a power of reposing ourselves and our concerns upon the Lord's faithfulness and care, and may be considered in two respects. A reliance upon him that he will surely provide for us, guide us, protect us, be our help in trouble, our shield in danger; so that, however poor, weak, and defenceless in ourselves, we may rejoice in his all-sufficiency as our own:—and farther, in consequence of this, a peaceful, humble submission to his will, under all events, which, upon their first impression, are contrary to our own views and desires. Surely, in a world like this, where every thing is uncertain, where we are exposed to trials on every hand, and know not but a single hour may bring forth something painful, yea dreadful to our natural sensations, there can be no blessedness but so far as we are thus enabled to entrust and resign all to the direction and faithfulness of the Lord our Shepherd. For want of more of this spirit, multitudes of professing christians perplex and wound themselves, and dishonour their high calling, by continual anxieties, alarms, and complaints. They think nothing safe under the Lord's keeping, unless their own eye is likewise upon it, and are seldom satisfied with any of his dispensations; for, though he gratify their desires in nine instances, a refusal in the tenth spoils the relish of all, and they show the truths of the gospel can afford them little comfort, if self is crossed. But, blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is! He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: he shall be kept in perfect peace though the earth

be moved, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea.

The paper admonishes me it is time to relieve your Lordship. And I have not room to detain you long upon the fifth particular. It belongs to a believer's blessedness to feel his spirit cheerful and active for the Lord's service in the world. For what other end should he wish to live? If he thought of himself only, it would be better to depart and be with Jesus immediately. But he is a debtor to his grace and love; and, though strictly he can make no returns, yet he longs to show his thankfulness; and, if the Lord give him a heart to redeem his time, to devote his strength and influence, and lay himself out for his service,—that he may be instrumental in promoting his cause, in comforting his people,—or enable him to let his light shine before men, that his God and his Father may be honoured;—he will account it blessedness. This is indeed the great end of life, and he knows it will evidently appear so at the approach of death, and therefore, while others are cumbered about many things, he esteems this the one thing needful.—I remain, my Lord, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

July — 1776.

MY LORD,—That I may not weary you by a preamble, I oblige myself to take the turn of my letter from some passage of scripture; and I fix upon that which just now occurred to my thoughts, a clause in that pattern of prayer, which he who best knows our state has been pleased to leave for the instruction of his people, in their great concern of waiting at his throne of grace, Matt. vi. 13. "Lead us not into temptation." This petition is seasonable at all times, and to all persons who have any right knowledge of themselves, or their spiritual calling.

The word temptation, taken at large includes every kind of trial. To tempt is to try or prove. In this sense, it is said, the Lord tempted Abraham, that is, he tried him. God cannot tempt to evil. He proposes such an act of obedience to him, as was a test of his faith, love, dependence, and integrity. Thus, all our afflictions, under his gracious management, are appointed to prove, manifest, exercise, and purify the graces of his children. And not afflictions only; prosperity likewise is a state of temptation; and many who have endured sharp sufferings, and came off honourably, have been afterwards greatly hurt and ensnared by prosperity. To this purpose the histories of David and Hezekiah are in point. But by temptation we more frequently understand the wiles and force which Satan employs in assaulting our peace,

or spreading snares for our feet. He is always practising against us, either directly and from himself, by the access he has to our hearts, or mediately, by the influence he has over the men and the things of this world. The words which follow confirm this sense,—"Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil," *ἀπο τοῦ πονηροῦ*, from the *evil one*, as it might be properly rendered here, and in 1 John v. 19. The subtilty and power of this adversary are very great: he is an overmatch for us; and we have no hope of safety but in the Lord's protection. Satan's action upon the heart may be illustrated by the action of the wind upon the sea. The sea sometimes appears smooth, but it is always disposed to swell and rage, and to obey the impulse of every storm. Thus the heart may be sometimes quiet; but the wind of temptation will awaken and rouse it in a moment: for it is essential to our depraved nature to be unstable and yielding as the water; and when it is under the impression of the enemy, its violence can only be controlled by him who says to the raging sea, "Be still; here shall thy proud waves be stayed." The branches of temptation are almost innumerable; but the principal may be reduced to the several faculties of the soul (as we commonly speak) to which they are more directly suited.

He has temptations for the understanding. He can blind the mind with prejudices and false reasonings, and ply it with arguments for infidelity, till the most obvious truths become questionable. Even where the gospel has been received, he can insinuate error, which, for the suddenness and malignity of its effects, may be properly compared to poison. A healthy man may be poisoned in a moment; and, if he be, the baneful drug is usually mixed with his food. Many, who for a while seemed to be sound in the faith, have had their judgments strongly and strangely perverted, and prevailed upon to renounce and oppose the truths they once prized and defended. Such instances are striking proofs of human weakness, and loud calls to watchfulness and dependence, and to beware of leaning to our own understandings. For these purposes he employs both preachers and authors, who, by fine words and fair speeches beguile the hearts of the unwary. And, by his immediate influence upon the mind, he is able, if the Lord permits him, to entangle those who are providentially placed out of the reach of corrupt and designing men.

He tempts the conscience. By working upon the unbelief of our hearts, and darkening the glory of the gospel, he can hold down the soul to the number, weight, and aggravation of its sins, so that it shall not be able to look up to Jesus, nor draw any comfort from his blood, promises, and grace. How many

go burdened in this manner, seeking relief from duties, and perhaps spending their strength in things not commanded, though they hear, and perhaps acknowledge the gospel! Nor are the wisest and most established able to withstand his assaults, if the Lord withdraw, and give him leave to employ his power and subtilty unrestrained. The gospel affords sufficient ground for an abiding assurance of hope; nor should we rest satisfied without it. However, the possession and preservation of this privilege depends upon the Lord's presence with the soul, and his shielding us from Satan's attacks; for I am persuaded he is able to sift and shake the strongest believer upon earth.

He has likewise temptations suited to the will. Jesus makes his people willing in the day of his power; yet there is a contrary principle remaining with them, of which Satan knows how to avail himself. There are occasions in which he almost prevails to set self again upon the throne, as Dagon was raised after he had fallen before the ark. How else should any who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, give way to a repining spirit, account his dispensations hard, or his precepts too strict, so as to shrink from their observance through the fear of men, or a regard to their worldly interest?

Farther, he has snares for the affections. In managing these, he gains a great advantage from our situation in a world that knows not God. The scriptures give Satan the title of god of this world; and believers learn, by painful experience, how great his power is in and over the persons and things of it. So that to be steadfast in wisdom's ways, requires unremitting efforts, like pressing through a crowd, or swimming against a stream. How hard is it to live in the midst of pitch and not to be defiled! The air of the world is infectious. Our business and unavoidable connections are so interwoven with occasions of sin, and there is so much in our hearts suited to them, that unless we are incessantly upheld by almighty strength, we cannot stand a day or an hour. Past victories afford us no greater security than they did Samson, who was shamefully surprised by enemies whom he had formerly conquered. Nor are we only tempted by compliances that are evil in themselves. With respect to these, perhaps, conscience may be awake, and we stand upon our guard; but we are still upon Satan's ground, and while he may seem to allow himself defeated, he can dexterously change his method, and come upon us where we do not suspect him; for, *perimus in licitis*; perhaps our greatest danger arises from things in themselves lawful. He can tempt us by our nearest and dearest friend, and pervert every blessing of a kind providence into an occasion of drawing our hearts from the Giver; yea spiritual blessings,

gifts, comforts, and even graces, are sometimes the engines by which he practises against us, to fill us with vain confidence and self-sufficiency, or to lull us into formality and indolence.

That wonderful power which we call the imagination, is I suppose rather the medium of the soul's perceptions during its present state of union with the body, than a spiritual faculty, strictly speaking; but it partakes largely of that depravity which sin has brought upon our whole frame, and affords Satan an avenue for assaulting us with the most terrifying, if not the most dangerous of his temptations. At the best, we have but an indifferent command over it. We cannot, by an act of our own will, exclude a thousand painful, wild, inconsistent, and hurtful ideas, which are ever ready to obtrude themselves upon our minds; and a slight alteration in the animal system, in the motion of the blood or nervous spirit, is sufficient to withdraw it wholly from our dominion, and to leave us like a city without walls or gates, exposed to the incursion of our enemy. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; and, with all our boasted knowledge of other things, can form no conception of what is so vastly interesting to us, the mysterious connection between soul and body, and the manner in which they are mutually affected by each other. The effects we too sensibly feel. The wisest of men would be accounted fools or mad, were they to express in words a small part of what passes within them; and it would appear that much of the soberest life is little better than a waking dream; but how dreadful are the consequences when the Lord permits some hidden pin in the human machine to be altered! Immediately a door flies open, which no hand but his can shut, and the enemy pours in, like a flood, falsehood and horror, and the blackness of darkness; the judgment is borne down and disabled, and the most distressing illusions seize us with all the apparent force of evidence and demonstration. When this is the case in a certain degree, we call it distraction; but there are various degrees of it, which leave a person in the possession of his senses as to the things of common life, and yet are sufficient, with respect to his spiritual concerns, to shake the very foundations of his hope, and deprive him of all peace and comfort, and make him a terror to himself. All the Lord's people are not called to navigate in these deep waters of soul distress; but all are liable. Ah! if we knew what some suffer, the *horribilia de Deo*, and the *terribilia de fide*, which excruciate the minds of those over whom Satan is permitted to tyrannize in this way, surely we should be more earnest and frequent in praying, "Lead us not into temptation." From some little sense I have of the malice and *subtily* of our spiritual enemies, and the *weakness* of those barriers which we have to

prevent their assaults, I am fully persuaded that nothing less than the continual exertion of that almighty power which preserves the stars in their orbits, can maintain our peace of mind for an hour or a minute. In this view, all comparative difference in external situations seems to be annihilated; for, as the Lord's presence can make his people happy in a dungeon, so there are temptations which, if we felt them, would instantly render us incapable of receiving a moment's satisfaction from an assemblage of all earthly blessings, and make the company of our dearest friends tasteless, if not insupportable.

Ah! how little do the gay and the busy think of these things! How little indeed do they think of them who profess to believe them! How faint is the sense of our obligations to him, who freely submitted to the fiercest onsets of the powers of darkness, to free us from the punishment due to our sins! otherwise we must have been for ever shut up with those miserable and merciless spirits who delight in our torment, and who, even in the present state, if they get access to our minds, can make our existence a burden.

But our Lord, who knows and considers our weakness, of which we are so little aware, allows and directs us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." We are not to expect an absolute freedom from temptation; we are called to be soldiers, and must sometimes meet with enemies, and perhaps with wounds; yet, considering this prayer as provided by him who knows what we are, and where we are, it may afford us both instruction and consolation.

It calls to a constant reflection upon our own weakness. Believers, especially young ones, are prone to rest too much in grace received. They feel their hearts warm, and, like Peter, are ready to please themselves with thinking how they would act in such or such a state of trial. It is as if the Lord had said, "Poor worms, be not high minded; but fear; and pray, that if it may be, you may be kept from learning, by bitter experience how weak your supposed strength is." It sweetly intimates, that all our ways, and all our enemies, are in the hands of our great Shepherd. He knows our path. We are short-sighted, and cannot tell what an hour may bring forth; but we are under his protection, and, if we depend upon him, we need not be anxiously afraid. He will be faithful to the trust we repose in him, and will suffer no temptation to overtake us, but what he will support us under and bring us through. But it becomes us to beware of security and presumption, to keep our eyes upon him, and not to think ourselves safe a moment longer than our spirits feel and breathe the meaning of this petition.

It implies, likewise, the duty of watchfulness on our part, as our Lord joins them else-

where, "Watch and pray." If we desire not to be led into temptation, surely we are not to run into it. If we wish to be preserved from error, we are to guard against a curious and reasoning spirit. If we would preserve peace of conscience, we must beware of trifling with the light and motions of the Holy Spirit; for without his assistance we cannot maintain faith in exercise. If we would not be ensnared by the men of the world, we are to keep at a proper distance from them. The less we have to do with them, the better, excepting so far as the providence of God makes it our duty in the discharge of our callings and relations, and taking opportunities of doing them good. And though we cannot wholly shut Satan out of our imaginations, we should be cautious that we do not wilfully provide fuel for his flame; but entreat the Lord to set a watch upon our eyes and our ears, and to teach us to reject the first motions and the smallest appearance of evil.

I have been so intent upon my subject, that I have once and again forgot I was writing to your Lordship, otherwise I should not have let my lucubration run to so great a length, which I certainly did not intend when I began. I shall not add to this fault, by making an apology. I have touched upon a topic of great importance to myself. I am one among many who have suffered greatly for want of paying more attention to my need of this prayer. O that I could be wiser hereafter, and always act and speak as knowing that I am always upon a field of battle, and beset by legions!—I am, with great respect, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

September — 1776.

MY LORD,—Without any preamble, I purpose now to wait on your Lordship, with a few thoughts on the meaning of that name which first obtained at Antioch; in other words, what it is to be a Christian! What are the effects which, making allowance for the unavoidable infirmities attending upon the present state of mortality, may be expected from a real experimental knowledge of the gospel? I would not insinuate that none are christians who do not come up to the character I would describe; for then I fear I should unchristian myself; but only to consider what the scriptures encourage us to aim at, as the prize of our high calling in this life. It is generally allowed and lamented, that we are too apt to live below our privileges, and to stop short of what the spirit and the promises of the gospel point out to us as attainable.

Mr. Pope's admired line, "An honest man's

the noblest work of God," may be admitted as a truth when rightly explained. A christian is the noblest work of God in this visible world, and bears a much brighter impression of his glory and goodness than the sun in the firmament; and none but a christian can be strictly and properly honest: all others are too much under the power of self, to do universally to others as they would others should do unto them; and nothing but a uniform conduct upon this principle deserves the name of honesty.

The christian is a new creature, born and taught from above. He has been convinced of his guilt and misery as a sinner, has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, has seen the Son, and believed on him. His natural prejudices against the glory and grace of God's salvation have been subdued and silenced by almighty power: he has accepted the Beloved, and is made acceptable in him. He now knows the Lord: he has renounced the confused, distant, and uncomfortable notions he once formed of God; and beholds him in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, the only door by which we can enter to any true satisfying knowledge of God, or communion with him. But he sees God in Christ reconciled, a Father, a Saviour, and a Friend, who has freely forgiven him all his sins, and given him the spirit of adoption. He is now no longer a servant, much less a stranger, but a son; and because a son an heir, already interested in all the promises, admitted to the throne of grace, and an assured expectant of eternal glory. The gospel is designed to give us not only a peradventure or a probability, but a certainty, both of our acceptance and our perseverance, till death shall be swallowed up in life. And though many are sadly fluctuating and perplexed upon this head, and perhaps all are so for a season, yet there are those who can say, we know that we are of God; and therefore they are steadfast and immoveable in his way, because they are confident that their labour shall not be in vain, but that, when they shall be absent from the body, they shall be present with the Lord. This is the state of the advanced experienced christian, who, being enabled to make his profession the chief business of his life, is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Every one who has this hope in Christ, purifieth himself even as he is pure. I would now attempt a sketch of the christian's temper, formed upon these principles and hopes, under the leading branches of its exercises, respecting God, himself, and his fellow-creatures.

The christian's temper God-ward is evidenced by humility. He has received from Gethsemane and Golgotha such a sense of the evil of sin, and of the holiness of God, combined with his matchless love to sinners,

if he does permit them, it must be for the best.

I might enlarge farther.—But I shall proceed to consider the christian's temper respecting himself. He lives godly and soberly. By sobriety we mean more than that he is not a drunkard; his tempers towards God of course form him to a moderation in all temporal things. He is not scrupulous or superstitious; he understands the liberty of the gospel, that every creature of God is good if it be received with thanksgiving. He does not aim at being needlessly singular, nor practise self-devised austerities. The christian is neither a Stoic nor a Cynic; yet he finds daily cause for watchfulness and restraint. Satan will not often tempt a believer to gross crimes: our greatest snares and sorest conflicts are usually found in things lawful in themselves, but hurtful to us by their abuse, engrossing too much of our time, or of our hearts, or somehow indisposing us for communion with the Lord. The christian will be jealous of any thing that might entangle his affections, damp his zeal, or straiten him in his opportunities of serving his Saviour. He is likewise content with his situation, because the Lord chooses it for him; his spirit is not eager for additions and alterations in his circumstances. If divine providence points out and leads to a change, he is ready to follow, though it should be what the world would call from a better to a worse; for he is a pilgrim and a stranger here, and a citizen of heaven. As people of fortune sometimes, in travelling, submit cheerfully to inconvenient accommodations, very different from their homes, and comfort themselves with thinking they are not always to live so; so the christian is not greatly solicitous about externals. If he has them, he will use them moderately. If he has but little of them, he can make a good shift without them: he is but upon a journey, and will soon be at home. If he be rich, experience confirms our Lord's words, Luke xii. 15; and satisfies him, that a large room, a crowd of servants, and twenty dishes upon his table, add nothing to the real happiness of life. Therefore he will not have his heart set upon such things. If he be in a humbler state, he is more disposed to pity than to envy those above him; for he judges they must have many incumbrances from which he is freed. However, the will of God, and the light of his countenance, are the chief things the christian, whether rich or poor, regards; and therefore his moderation is made known unto all men.

A third branch of the christian's temper respects his fellow-creatures. And here, methinks, if I had not filled a sheet already, I could enlarge with pleasure. We have in this degenerate day, among those who claim and are allowed the name of Christian, too

many of a narrow, selfish, mercenary spirit; but in the beginning it was not so. The gospel is designed to cure such a spirit, but gives no indulgence to it. A christian has the mind of Christ, who went about doing good, who makes his sun to shine upon the good and the evil, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. His Lord's example forms him to the habit of diffusive benevolence; he breathes a spirit of good will to mankind, and rejoices in every opportunity of being useful to the souls and bodies of others, without respect to parties or interests. He commiserates, and would if possible alleviate the miseries of all around him; and if his actual services are restrained by want of ability, yet all share in his sympathy and prayers. Acting in the spirit of his Master, he frequently meets with a measure of the like treatment: but if his good is requited with evil, he labours to overcome evil with good. He feels himself a sinner, and needs much forgiveness: this makes him ready to forgive. He is not haughty, captious, easily offended, or hard to be reconciled; for at the feet of Jesus he has learned meekness. And when he meets with unkindness or injustice, he considers, that though he has not deserved such things from men, they are instruments employed by his heavenly Father (from whom he has deserved to suffer much more,) for his humiliation and chastisement; and is therefore more concerned for their sins than for his own sufferings, and prays, after the pattern of his Saviour, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He knows he is fallible; therefore cannot be positive. He knows he is frail; and therefore dares not be censorious. As a member of society, he is just, punctual in the discharge of every relative duty, faithful to his engagements and promises, rendering to all their dues, obedient to lawful authority, and acting to all men according to the golden rule, of doing as he would be done by. His conduct is simple, devoid of artifice, and consistent, attending to every branch of duty: and in the closet, the family, the church, and the transactions of common life, he is the same man; for in every circumstance he serves the Lord, and aims to maintain a conscience void of offence in his sight. No small part of the beauty of his profession in the sight of men, consists in the due government of his tongue. The law of truth, and kindness, and purity, is upon his lips. He abhors lying; and is so far from inventing a slander, that he will not repeat a report to the disadvantage of his neighbour, however true, without a proper call. His converse is cheerful, but inoffensive; and he will no more wound another with his wit (if he has a talent that way) than with a knife. His speech is with grace, seasoned with salt,

and suited to promote the peace and edification of all around him.

Such is the christian in civil life; but though he loves all mankind, he stands in a nearer relation, and bears an especial brotherly love, to all who are partakers of the faith and hope of the gospel. This regard is not confined within the pale of a denomination, but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He calls no man master himself; nor does he wish to impose a Shibboleth of his own upon others. He rejoices in the image of God, wherever he sees it, and in the work of God, wherever it is carried on. Though tenacious of the truths which the Lord has taught him, his heart is open to those who differ from him in less essential points, and allows to others that right of private judgment which he claims for himself, and is disposed to hold communion in love with all who hold the Head. He cannot, indeed, countenance those who set aside the one foundation which God has laid in Zion, and maintain errors derogatory to the honour of his Saviour, or subversive of the faith and experience of his people; yet he wishes well to their persons, pities and prays for them, and is ready in meekness to instruct them that oppose; but there is no bitterness in his zeal, being sensible that railery and invective are dishonourable to the cause of truth, and quite unsuitable in the mouth of a sinner, who owes all that distinguishes him from the vilest of men to the free grace of God. In a word, he is influenced by the wisdom from above, which, as it is pure, is likewise peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I must just recur to my first head, and observe, that with this spirit and deportment, the christian, while he is enabled to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and man, is still sensible and mindful of indwelling sin. He has his eye more upon his rule than upon his attainments; and therefore finds and confesses, that in every thing he comes exceedingly short, and that his best services are not only defective, but defiled. He accounts himself an unprofitable servant, is abased in his own eyes, and derives all his hope and comfort, as well as his strength, from Jesus, whom he has known, received, and trusted, to whom he has committed his soul, in whom he rejoices, and worships God in the spirit, renouncing all confidence in the flesh, and esteeming all things as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

If I have lately been rather tardy in making my payments to your Lordship, I have proportionably increased the quantity. It is *high time* I should now relieve your patience.

I hope I long to be a christian indeed; and I hope this hasty exemplification of my wishes will answer to your Lordship's experience better than I fear it does to my own. May I beg a remembrance that your prayers, that he who has given me to will and desire, may work in me to be and to do according to his own good pleasure.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXV.

November — 1776.

MY LORD,—My London journey, which prevented my writing in October, made me amends by an opportunity of waiting upon your Lordship in person. Such seasons are not only pleasant at the time, but afford me pleasure in the review. I could have wished the half-hour we were together by ourselves prolonged to half a day. The subject your Lordship was pleased to suggest has been often upon my mind; and glad should I be, were I able to offer you any thing satisfactory upon it. There is no doubt but first religious impressions are usually mingled with much of a legal spirit; and that conscience at such a time is not only tender, but misinformed and scrupulous; and I believe, as your Lordship intimated, that when the mind is more enlightened, and we feel a liberty from many fetters we had imposed upon ourselves, we are in danger of verging too far towards the other extreme. It seems to me that no one person can adjust the medium, and draw the line exactly for another. There are so many particulars in every situation, of which a stranger cannot be a competent judge, and the best human advices and models are mixed with such defects, that it is not right to expect others to be absolutely guided by our rules, nor is it safe for us implicitly to adopt the decisions or practices of others. But the scriptures undoubtedly furnish sufficient and infallible rules for every person, however circumstanced; and the throne of grace is appointed for us to wait upon the Lord for the best exposition of his precepts. Thus David often prays to be led in the right way, in the path of judgment. By frequent prayer and close acquaintance with the scriptures, and an habitual attention to the frame of our hearts, there is a certain delicacy of spiritual taste and discernment to be acquired, which renders a nice disquisition concerning the nature and limits of the *adiaphora*, as they are called, or how near we may go to the utmost bounds of what is right, without being wrong, quite unnecessary. Love is the clearest and most persuasive casuist; and when our love to the Lord is in lively exercise, and the rule of his word is in our eye, we seldom make great mistakes

And I believe the overdoings of a young convert, proceeding from an honest simplicity of heart, and a desire of pleasing the Lord, are more acceptable in his sight, than a certain coolness of conduct which frequently takes place afterwards, when we are apt to look back with pity upon our former weakness, and secretly to applaud ourselves for our present greater attainments in knowledge, though perhaps (alas that it should ever be so!) we may have lost as much in warmth as we have gained in light.

From the time we know the Lord, and are bound to him by the cords of love and gratitude, the two chief points we should have in our view, I apprehend, are to maintain communion with him in our own souls, and to glorify him in the sight of men. Agreeable to these views, though the scriptures do not enumerate or decide, *totidem verbis*, for or against many things which some plead for, and others condemn; yet they furnish us with some general canons, which, if rightly applied, will perhaps go a good way towards settling the debate, at least to the satisfaction of those who would rather please God than man. Some of these canons I will just mark to your Lordship;—Rom. xii. 1, 2; 1 Cor. viii. 13 and x. 31; 2 Cor. vi. 17; Ephes. iv. 30; Ephes. v. 11, 15, 16; 1 Thes. v. 22; Ephes. vi. 18; to which I may add, as suitable to the present times, Isa. xxii. 12; Luke xxi. 34. I apprehend the spirit of these and similar passages of scripture (for it would be easy to adduce a larger number) will bring a christian under such restrictions as follow:

To avoid and forbear, for his own sake, whatever has a tendency to damp and indispose his spirit in attendance upon the means of grace; for such things, if they be not condemned as sinful *per se*, if they be not absolutely unlawful, yea though they be, when duly regulated, lawful and right (for often our chief snares are entwined with our blessings;) yet if they have a repeated and evident tendency to deaden our hearts to divine things, of which each person's experience must determine, there must be something in them, either in season, measure, or circumstance, wrong to us; and let them promise what they will, they do but rob us of our gold to pay us with counters. For the light of God's countenance, and an open cheerfulness of spirit in walking with him in private, is our chief joy; and we must be already greatly hurt, if any thing can be pursued, allowed, or rested in, as a tolerable substitute for it.

For the sake of the church, and the influence example may have upon his fellow-christians, the law of charity and prudence will often require a believer to abstain from some things, not because they are unlawful, but inexpedient. Thus the apostle, though

strenuous for the right of his christian liberty, would have abridged himself of the use, so as to eat no flesh, rather than offend a weak brother, rather than mislead him to act against the present light of his conscience. Upon this principle, if I could, without hurt to myself, attend some public amusements, as a concert or oratorio, and return from thence with a warm heart to my closet (the possibility of which in my own case I greatly question;) yet I should think it my duty to forbear, lest some weaker than myself should be encouraged by me to make the like experiment, though in their own minds they might fear it was wrong, and have no other reason to think it lawful but because I did it; in which case, I should suspect, that though I received no harm, they would. And I have known and conversed with some, who I fear have made shipwreck of their profession, who have dated their first decline from imitating others, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves, in such kind of compliances. And it seems that an obligation to this sort of self-denial rises and is strengthened in proportion to the weight and influence of our characters. Were I in private life, I do not know that I should think it sinful to kill a partridge or a hare; but, as a minister, I no more dare do it than I dare join in a drunken frolic, because I know it would give offence to some, and be pleaded for as a licence by others.

There is a duty, and a charity likewise, which we owe to the world at large, as well as a faithfulness to God and his grace, in our necessary converse among them. This seems to require, that though we should not be needlessly singular, yet, for their instruction, and for the honour of our Lord and Master, we should keep up a certain kind of singularity, and show ourselves called to be a separated people;—that though the providence of God has given us callings and relations to fill up (in which we cannot be too exact,) yet we are not of the world, but belong to another community, and act from other principles, by other rules, and to other ends, than the generality of those about us. I have observed, that the world will often leave professors in quiet possession of their notions and sentiments, and places of worship, provided they will not be too stiff in the matter of conformity with their more general customs and amusements. But I fear many of them have had their prejudices strengthened against our holy religion by such compliances, and have thought, that if there were such joy and comfort to be found in the ways of God as they hear from our pulpits, professors would not, in such numbers, and so often, run amongst them, to beg a relief from the burden of time hanging upon their hands.

As our Lord Jesus is the great representative of his people in heaven, he does them the honour to continue a succession of them as his representatives upon earth. Happy are they who are favoured with most of the holy unction, and best enabled to manifest to all around them, by their spirit, tempers, and conversation, what is the proper design and genuine effect of his gospel upon the hearts of sinners.

In our way of little life in the country, serious people often complain of the snares they meet with from worldly people, and yet they must mix with them to get a livelihood. I advise them, if they can, to do their business with the world as they do it in the rain. If their business calls them abroad, they will not leave it undone for fear of being a little wet; but then, when it is done, they presently seek shelter, and will not stand in the rain for pleasure: so providential and necessary calls of duty, that lead us into the world, will not hurt us, if we find the spirit of the world unpleasant, and are glad to retire from it, and keep out of it as much as our relative duties will permit. That which is our cross is not so likely to be our snare; but if that spirit which we should always watch and pray against, infects and assimilates our minds to itself, then we are sure to suffer loss, and act below the dignity of our profession.

The value of time is likewise to be taken into the account. It is a precious talent, and our christian profession opens a wide field for the due improvement of it. Much of it has been already lost, and therefore we are exhorted to redeem it. I think many things which custom pleads for will be excluded from a suitableness to a christian, for this one reason, that they are not consistent with the simplest notion of the redemption of time. It is generally said, we need relaxation; I allow it in a sense; the Lord himself has provided it; and because our spirits are too weak to be always upon the wing in meditation and prayer, he has appointed to all men, from the king downwards, something to do in a secular way. The poor are to labour, the rich are not exempted from something equivalent. And when every thing of this sort in each person's situation is properly attended to, I apprehend, if the heart be alive and in a right state, spiritual concerns will present themselves, as affording the noblest, sweetest, and most interesting relaxation from the cares and business of life; as on the other hand, that business will be the best relaxation and unbending of the mind from religious exercises; and between the two, perhaps there ought to be but little mere leisure time. A life in this sense, divided between God and the world, is desirable; when one part of it is spent in

retirement, seeking after and conversing with him whom our souls love; and the other part of it employed in active services for the good of our family, friends, the church, and society, for his sake. Every hour which does not fall in with one or other of these views, I apprehend, is lost time.

The day in which we live seems likewise to call for something of a peculiar spirit in the Lord's people. It is a day of abounding sin, and, I fear, a day of impending judgment. The world, as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, is secure. We are soon to have a day of apparent humiliation; but the just causes for it are not confined to one day, but will subsist, and too probably increase, every day. If I am not mistaken in the signs of the times, there never was, within the annals of the English history, a period in which the spirit and employment described, Ezek. ix. 4, could be more suitable than the present. The Lord calls for mourning and weeping; but the words of many are stout against him. New species of dissipation are invented almost daily, and the language of those who bear the greatest sway in what is called the polite circle, I mean the interpretative language of their hearts, is like that of the rebellious Jews, Jer. xliv. 16, 17, &c. "As for the word which thou hast spoken, we will not hearken unto thee at all." In short, things are coming to a point, and it seems to be almost putting to the vote, whether the Lord or Baal be God. In this state of affairs, methinks, we cannot be too explicit in avowing our attachment to the Lord, nor too careful in avoiding an improper correspondence with those who are in confederacy against him. We know not how soon we may greatly need that mark of providential protection which is restrained to those who sigh and cry for our abominations. Upon the whole, it appears to me, that it is more honourable, comfortable, and safe (if we cannot exactly hit the golden mean,) to be thought by some too scrupulous and precise, than actually to be found too compliant with those things which, if not absolutely contrary to a divine commandment, are hardly compatible with the genius of the gospel or conformable to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, which ought also to be in his people. The places and amusements which the world frequent and admire, where occasions and temptations to sin are cultivated, where the law of what is called good breeding is the only law which may not be violated with impunity, where sinful passions are provoked and indulged, where the fear of God is so little known or regarded, that those who do fear him must hold their tongues, though they should hear his name blasphemed, can hardly be a christian's voluntary chosen ground. Yet I fear

these characters will apply to every kind of polite amusement or assembly in the kingdom.

As to family connexions, I cannot think we are bound to break or slight them. But as believers and their friends often live as it were in two elements, there is a mutual awkwardness, which makes their interviews rather dry and tedious. But, upon that account, they are less frequent than they would otherwise be, which seems an advantage. Both sides keep up returns of civility and affection; but as they cannot unite in sentiment and leading inclination, they will not contrive to be very often together, except there is something considerable given up by one or the other; and I think christians ought to be very cautious what concessions they make upon this account. But as I said at the beginning, no general positive rules can be laid down.

I have simply given your Lordship such thoughts as have occurred to me while writing, without study, and without coherence. I dare not be dogmatical; but I think what I have written is agreeable both to particular texts, and to the general tenor of scripture. I submit it to your judgment.—I am, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

July—1777.

MY LORD,—I owe your Lordship a quire of letters for the favour and pleasure of your late visit; and therefore I must begin and write away.

I have lately read Robertson's History of Charles V., which, like most other histories, I consider as a comment upon those passages of scripture which teach us the depravity of man, the deceitfulness of the heart, the ruinous effects of sin, and the powerful, though secret rule of divine providence, moving, directing, and controlling the designs and actions of men, with an unerring hand, to the accomplishment of his own purposes, both of mercy and judgment. Without the clue and the light which the word of God affords, the history of mankind, of any, of every age, only presents to view a labyrinth and a chaos; a detail of wickedness and misery to make us tremble, and a confused jumble of interfering incidents, as destitute of stability, connexion, or order, as the clouds which fly over our heads. In this view, *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi*, may serve as a motto to all the histories I have seen; but, with the scripture key, all is plain, all is instructive. Then I see verily there is a God, who governs the earth, who pours contempt upon princes, takes the wise in their own craftiness, over-rules the wrath and pride of

man, to bring his own designs to pass, and restrains all that is not necessary to that end; blasting the best concerted enterprizes at one time, by means apparently slight, and altogether unexpected, and at other times producing the most important events, from instruments and circumstances which are, at first thought, too feeble and trivial to deserve notice. I should like to see a writer of Dr. Robertson's abilities give us a history upon this plan; but I think his reflections of this sort are too general, too cold, and too few. What an empty phantom do the great men of the world pursue, while they wage war with the peace of mankind, and butcher, in the course of their lives, perhaps hundreds of thousands, to maintain the shadow of authority over distant nations, whom they can reach with no other influence than that of oppression and devastation! But when we consider those who are sacrificed to their ambition, as justly suffering for their sins, then heroes and conquerors appear in their proper light, and worthy to be classed with earthquakes and pestilences, as instruments of divine vengeance. So many cares, so much pains, so many mischiefs,—merely to support the idea a worm has formed of his own grandeur, is a proof that man, by nature, is not only depraved, but infatuated. Permit me to present my thoughts to more advantage in the words of M. Nicole:

“Un grand dans son idée n'est pas un seul homme; c'est un homme environ de tous ceux qui sont à lui, et qui s'imagine avoir autant de bras qu'ils en ont tous ensemble, parce qu'il en dispose et qu'il les remue. Un general d'armée se représente toujours à lui-même au milieu de tous ses soldats. Ainsi chacun tâche d'occuper le plus de place qu'il peut dans son imagination, et l'on ne se pousse, et ne s'aggrandit dans le monde, que pour augmenter l'idée que chacun se forme de soi-même. Voilà le but de tous les desseins ambitieux des hommes! Alexandre et César n'ont point eu d'autre vœu dans toutes leurs batailles que celle-là. Et si l'on demande pourquoi le Grand Seigneur a fait depuis peu perir cent mille hommes devant Candie, on peut répondre sûrement, que ce n'est que pour attacher encore à cette image intérieure qu'il a de lui-même, le titre de conquérant.”*

How awful is the case of those who live and die in such a spirit, and who have multiplied miseries upon their fellow-creatures, in order to support and feed it! Perhaps they may, upon their entrance on another state, be accosted by multitudes, to the purport of that sarcastical language in the prophet's sublime ode of triumph over the king of Babylon, Is. xiv. 5—17.

* Essais de Moutale, vol. i.

Hic est, quem fuga, quem pavor
Præcessit? hic, quem terricollis gravis
Strages secuta est, vastitasque? hic
Atoniti spoliator orbis?

But though the effects of this principle of self are more extensive and calamitous, in proportion as those who are governed by it are more elevated, the principle itself is deep-rooted in every heart, and is the spring of every action, till grace infuses a new principle, and self, like Dagon, falls before the

Lord of Hosts. Great and small are but relative terms; and the passions of discontent, pride, and envy, which, in the breast of a potentate, are severely felt by one half of Europe, exert themselves with equal strength in the heart of a peasant; though, for want of materials and opportunities, their operations are confined within narrow bounds. We are fallen into a state of gross idolatry, and self is the idol we worship.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. S——.

LETTER I.

June 23, 1775.

DEAR SIR,—I have met with interruptions, till now, or you would have heard from me sooner. My thoughts have run much upon the subject of your last, because I perceive it has a near connexion with your peace. Your integrity greatly pleases me; far be it from me to shake the principle of your conduct, yet in the application I think there is a possibility of carrying your exceptions too far.

From the account you give me of your sentiments, I cannot but wonder you find it so difficult to accede to the Athanasian Creed, when it seems to me you believe and avow what that Creed chiefly sets forth. The doctrine of the Trinity, some explication of the terms being subjoined, is the catholic faith, without the belief of which a man cannot be saved. This damnatory clause seems to me proved by Mark xvi. 16, "He that believeth shall be saved," &c. The object of faith must be truth. The doctrine of the deity of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, in union with the Father, so that they are not three Gods, but one God, is not merely a proposition expressed in words, to which our assent is required, but is absolutely necessary to be known, since without it no one truth respecting salvation can be rightly understood, no one promise duly believed, no one duty spiritually performed. I take it for granted, that this doctrine must appear irrational and absurd in the eye of reason, if by reason we mean the reason of man in his fallen state, before it is corrected and enlightened by a heavenly teacher. No man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. I believe with you, that a man may be saved who never heard of the Creed, who never read any book but the New Testament or perhaps a single Evangelist; but he must be taught of God the things that accompany salvation, or I do not think he can be saved. The mercies of God in Christ will not save any, as I apprehend, but according to the

method revealed in his word; that is, those who are truly partakers of faith and holiness. For as the religion of the New Testament ascribes all power to God, and considers all goodness in us as the effect of his communication, we being by nature destitute of spiritual life or light, so those whom God himself is pleased to teach, will infallibly attain the knowledge of all that they are concerned to know. This teaching you are waiting for, and it shall be given you; yea, the Lord, I trust, has begun to teach you already; but if you consider yourself as a learner, and that it is possible, under the Spirit's increasing illumination, you may hereafter adopt some things which at present you cannot approve, I should think it too early as yet to prescribe to yourself rules and determinations for the government of your future life. Should the will of God appoint you a new path for service, he may, sooner than you are aware, quiet your mind, and enable you to subscribe with as full a persuasion of mind as you now object to subscription. If it depended upon me, I could be content that the Creed should rest at the bottom of the sea, rather than embarrass a single person of your disposition. Nor am I a warm stickler for subscription in itself; but something of this kind seems necessary, upon the supposition of an establishment.

When I think of an inclosure, some hedge, wall, bank, ditch, &c. is of course included in my idea; for who can conceive of an inclosure without a boundary? So, in a national church, there must be, I apprehend, something marked out, the approbation or refusal of which will determine who do or do not belong to it; and for this purpose articles of some kind seem not improper. You think it would be better to have these articles in scriptural expressions. But if it be lawful to endeavour to exclude from our pulpits men who hold sentiments the most repugnant to the truth, I wish you to consider, whether this can be in any measure secured by articles in which the scripture-doctrines

are not explained and stated, as well as expressed. This proposal is strenuously pleaded for by many in our day, upon views very different from yours. The Socinians, for instance, would readily subscribe a scriptural declaration of the high priesthood, atonement, and intercession of Christ (while they are allowed to put their own sense upon the terms,) though the sense they maintain be utterly inconsistent with what those who are enlightened by the Holy Spirit learn from the same expressions.

I acknowledge, indeed, that the end is not answered by the present method; since there are too many, like the person you mention, who would easily subscribe nine hundred articles, rather than baulk his preferment: yet the profligacy of some seems to be no just reason why the church, why any church, should not be at liberty to define the terms upon which they will accept members or teachers, or why conscientious persons should object to these terms (if they think them agreeable to the truth,) merely because they are not expressed in the precise words of scripture. If allowance may be made for human infirmity in the Liturgy, I see not why the Articles may not be entitled to the same privilege. For it seems requisite that we should be as well satisfied with the expressions we use with our lips, in frequent solemn prayer to God, as in what we subscribe with our hands. I am persuaded that the leaders of the Association at the Feathers Tavern, some of them at least, though they begin with the affair of subscription, would not (if they might have their wish) stop there, but would go on with their projected reform, till they had overturned the Liturgy also, or at least weeded it from every expression that bears testimony to the deity of the Saviour, and the efficacious influence of the Holy Spirit. I bless God that you are far otherwise minded.

I hope, however, though you should not think yourself at liberty to repeat your subscription, the Lord will make you comfortable and useful in your present rank as a curate. Preferment is not necessary, either to our peace or usefulness. We may live and die contentedly, without the honours and emoluments which aspiring men thirst after, if he be pleased to honour us with a dispensation to preach his gospel, and to crown our endeavours with a blessing. He that winneth souls is wise; wise in the choice of the highest end he can propose to himself in this life; wise in the improvement of the only means by which this desirable end can be attained. Wherever we cast our eyes, the bulk of the people are ignorant, immoral, careless. They live without God in the world; they are neither awed by his authority, nor affected by his goodness, nor enabled to trust to his promises, nor disposed to aim at his glory. If,

perhaps, they have a serious interval, or some comparative sobriety of character, they ground their hopes upon their own doings, endeavours, or purposes; and treat the inexpressible love of God revealed in Christ, and the gospel method of salvation by faith in his name, with neglect, often with contempt. They have preachers, whom perhaps they hear with some pleasure because they neither alarm their consciences by insisting on the spirituality and sanction of the divine law, nor offend their pride by publishing the humiliating doctrines of that gospel, which is the power of God through faith unto salvation. Therefore what they do speak, they speak in vain; the world grows worse and worse under their instructions; infidelity and profligacy abound more and more; for God will own no other doctrine but what the apostle calls the truth as it is in Jesus; that doctrine which drives the sinner from all his vain pleas, and points out the Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground of hope, the supreme object of desire, as appointed of God to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, to all who believe in his name. When ministers themselves are convinced of sin, and feel the necessity of an almighty Saviour, they presently account their former gain but loss, and determine, with the apostle, to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. In proportion as they do this, they are sure to be wondered at, laughed at, and railed at, if the providence of God and the constitution of their country, secure them from severer treatment. But they have this invaluable compensation, that they no longer speak without effect. In a greater or less degree a change takes place in their auditories; the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed;—sinners are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God;—sinful practices are forsaken; and a new course of life in the converts, evidences that they have not followed cunningly-devised fables, or taken up with uncertain notions; but that God has indeed quickened them by his Spirit, and given them an understanding to know him that is true. The preachers, likewise, while they attempt to teach others, are taught themselves: a blessing descends upon their studies and labours, upon their perusal of the scriptures, upon their attention to what passes within them and around them. The events of every day contribute to throw light upon the word of God: their views of divine truth grow more enlarged, connected, and comprehensive; many difficulties which perplexed them at their first setting out, trouble them no more; the God whom they serve, and on whom they wait, reveals to them those great things, which, though plainly expressed in the letter of scripture, cannot be understood and realized without divine teaching, 1 Cor. ii. 9 to 15. Thus

they go on from strength to strength; hard things become easy, and a divine light shines upon their paths. Opposition from men perhaps may increase; they may expect to be represented, as those who turn the world upside down; the cry, *μὴ γὰρ ἡ Ἀρετιμὴ*,* will be raised against them, the gates of the temple of preferment will be seldom open to them; but they will have the unspeakable consolation of applying to themselves those lively words of the apostle, *ὡς λυτουμενοί, καὶ ὡς ἔπαυται, ὡς πτωχοί, πολλοὺς δὲ πλουτίζοντες, ὡς μὴ ἐσθῆς, καὶ πάντα καταχθόντες.*†

It is the strain of evident sincerity which runs through your letters, that gives me a pleasing confidence the Lord is with you. A disinterested desire of knowing the truth, with a willingness to follow it through all disadvantages, is a preparation of the heart which only God can give. He has directed you to the right method, searching the scriptures, with prayer. Go on, and may his blessing attend you. You may see, from what I have written above, what is the desire of my heart for you. But I am not impatient. Follow your heavenly leader, and in his own time and manner he will make your way plain. I have travelled the path before you, I see what you yet want; I cannot impart it to you, but he can, and I trust he will. It will rejoice my soul to be any way assistant to you; but I am afraid I should not afford you much, either profit or satisfaction, by entering upon a dry defence of creeds and articles.

The truths of scripture are not like mathematical theorems, which present exactly the same ideas to every person who understands the terms. The word of God is compared to a mirror, 2 Cor. iii. 18: but it is a mirror in which the longer we look the more we see; the view will be still growing upon us; and still we shall see but in part while on this side eternity. When our Lord pronounced Peter blessed, declaring he had learnt that which flesh and blood could not have taught him, yet Peter was at that time much in the dark. The sufferings and death of Jesus, though the only and necessary means of his salvation, were an offence to him. But he lived to glory in what he once could not bear to hear of. Peter had received grace to love the Lord Jesus, to follow him, to venture all, and to forsake all for him; these first good dispositions were of God, and they led to further advances. So it is still. By nature, self rules in the heart: when this idol is brought low, and we are truly willing to be the Lord's, and to apply to him for strength and direction, that we may serve him, the good work is begun; for it is a truth that upholds universally and without exception, a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven. The

Lord first finds us when we are thinking of something else, Isaiah lxx. 1; and then we begin to seek him in good earnest, and he has promised to be found of us. People may, by industry and natural abilities, make themselves masters of the external evidences of christianity, and have much to say for and against different schemes and systems of sentiments; but all this while the heart remains untouched. True religion is not a science of the head, so much as an inward and heartfelt perception, which casts down imaginations, and every *ὕψωμα* that exalteth itself in the mind, and brings every thought into a sweet and willing subjection to Christ by faith. Here the learned have no real advantage above the ignorant; both see when the eyes of the understanding are enlightened; till then both are equally blind. And the first lesson in the school of Christ is to become a little child, sitting simply at his feet, that we may be made wise unto salvation.

I was not only prevented beginning my letter so soon as I wished, but have been unusually interrupted since I began it. Often, as soon as I could well take the pen in hand, I have been called away to attend company and intervening business. Though I persuade myself, after what I have formerly said, you will put a favourable construction upon my delay, yet it has given me some pain. I set a great value upon your offer of friendship, which, I trust, will not be interrupted on either side by the freedom with which we mutually express our difference of sentiments, when we are constrained to differ. You please me with entrusting me with the first rough draught of your thoughts; and you may easily perceive by my manner of writing, that I place equal confidence in your candour. I shall be glad to exchange letters as often as it suits us, without constraint, ceremony, or apology; and may he who is always present with our hearts make our correspondence useful. I pray God to be your sun and shield, your light and strength, to guide you with his eye, to comfort you with his gracious presence in your own soul, and to make you a happy instrument of comforting many.— I am, &c.

LETTER II.

July 14, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I gladly adopt your address, and can assure you that the interchange of every letter unites my heart more closely to you. I am glad to find that your views of articles and creeds are not likely to hinder you from going forward in your present situation; and if, without contracting your usefulness, they only prove a bar to

* Great is Diana.

† 2 Cor. vi. 10.

your preferment, I am sure it will be no grief of mind to you at the hour of death, or the day of judgment, that you were enabled to follow the dictates of conscience, in opposition to all the pleas of custom or interest. Since, therefore, I have no desire of shaking your resolves, may we not drop this subject entirely? For, indeed, I act but an awkward part in it, being by no means myself an admirer of articles and creeds, or disposed to be a warm advocate for church-power. The propriety of our national establishment, or of any other, is what I have not much to do with; I found it as it is, nor have I influence to alter it were I willing. The question in which I was concerned was simply, Whether I, *rebus sic stantibus*, could submit to it, so as conscientiously to take a designation to the ministry under it? I thought I could: I accordingly did, and I am thankful that I never have seen cause to repent it.

You seem gently to charge me with a want of candour in what I observed or apprehended concerning the gentlemen of the Feathers Tavern. If I mistake not (for I retain no copies of my letters,) I expressed myself with a double restriction, by first saying "the leaders of that society," and then adding, "or some of them at least." I apprehend your candour will hardly lead you to suppose that there are none amongst them who would pull down the whole fabric, that is, I mean so far as it crosses the Socinian scheme, if it was left to their choice. I apprehend I may, without the least breach of candour, suppose that the exceptions which Mr. Lindsay has made to the Liturgy are not peculiar to himself. It seems plain in his case, and from his own writings, that the mere removal of subscriptions, which is the immediate and ostensible object of the clerical petition, could not have satisfied him; and it is past a doubt with me, that there are others of the clergy like minded with him. Indeed, I could wish to be thought candid by you; though, I confess, I am not a friend to that lukewarmness and indifference for truth, which bears the name of candour among many in the present day. I desire to maintain a spirit of candour and benevolence to all men, to wish them well, to do them every good office in my power, and to commend what appears to me commendable in a Socinian, as readily as in a Calvinist. But with some people I can only go *usque ad aras*. I must judge of principles by the word of God, and of the tree by its fruit. I meddle with no man's final state; because I know that he who is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins, can do it whenever, and to whomsoever he is pleased: yet I firmly believe, and I make no scruple of proclaiming it, that swearers, drunkards, adulterers, continuing such, cannot inherit

the kingdom of God; and I look with no less compassion upon some persons, whose characters in common life may be respectable, when I see them unhappily blinded by their own wisdom; and while they account themselves, and are accounted by many others, master-builders in Zion, rejecting the only foundation upon which a sinner's hope can be safely built.

I am far from thinking the Socinians all hypocrites; but I think they are all in a most dangerous error; nor do their principles exhibit to my view a whit more of the genuine fruits of christianity than deism itself. You say, "if they be sincere, and fail not for want of diligence in searching, I cannot help thinking, that God will not condemn them for an inevitable defect in their understandings." Indeed, my friend, I have such a low opinion of man in his depraved state, that I believe no one has real sincerity in religious matters till God bestows it; and when he makes a person sincere in his desires after truth, he will assuredly guide him to the possession of it in due time, as our Lord speaks, John vi. 44, 45. To suppose that any persons can sincerely seek the way of salvation, and yet miss it through an inevitable defect of their understandings, would contradict the plain promises of the gospel, such as Matt. vii. 7, 8, John vii. 16, 17; but to suppose that nothing is necessary to be known which some persons who profess sincerity cannot receive, would be in effect to make the scriptures a nose of wax and open a wide door for scepticism. I am not a judge of the heart; but I may be sure, that whoever makes the foundation-stone a rock of offence, cannot be sincere in his inquiries. He may study the scriptures accurately, but he brings his own preconceived sentiments with him, and, instead of submitting them to the touch-stone of truth, he makes them a rule by which he interprets. That they who lean to their own understandings should stumble and miscarry, I cannot wonder; for the same God who has promised to fill the hungry with good things, has threatened to send the rich empty away. So Matt. xi. 25. It is not through defect of understanding, but a want of simplicity and humility, that so many stumble like the blind at noon-day, and can see nothing of those great truths which are written in the gospel as with a sun-beam.

You wish me to explain myself concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. I will try; yet I know I cannot, any farther than as he who taught me shall be pleased to bear witness in your heart to what I say. My first principle in religion is what the scriptures teach me of the utter depravity of human nature, in connexion with the spirituality and sanction of the law of God. I believe we are by nature sinners, by practice universally transgressors, that we are dead in trespasses and

sins; and that the bent of our natural spirit is enmity against the holiness, government, and grace of God. Upon this ground I see, feel, and acknowledge the necessity of such a salvation as the gospel proposes, which, at the same time that it precludes boasting, and stains the pride of all human glory, affords encouragement to those who may be thought, or who may think themselves, the weakest or the vilest of mankind, I believe, that whatever notions a person may take up from education, or system, no one ever did, or ever will feel himself and own himself to be such a lost, miserable, hateful sinner, unless he be powerfully and supernaturally convinced by the Spirit of God. There is, when God pleases, a certain light thrown into the soul, which differs, not merely in degree but in kind, *toto genere*, from any thing that can be effected or produced by moral suasion or argument. But (to take in another of your queries) the Holy Spirit teaches or reveals no new truths, either of doctrine or precept; but only enables us to understand what is already revealed in the scriptures. Here a change takes place; the person that was spiritually blind begins to see. The sinner's character, as described in the word of God, he finds to be a description of himself; that he is afar off, a stranger, a rebel; that he has hitherto lived in vain. Now he begins to see the necessity of an atonement, an advocate, a shepherd, a comforter; he can no more trust to his own wisdom, strength, and goodness, but, accounting all his former gain but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, he renounces every other refuge, and ventures his all upon the person, work, and promise of the Redeemer. In this way, I say he will find the doctrine of the Trinity not only a proposition but a principle; that is, from his own wants and situation he will have an abiding conviction that the Son and Holy Spirit are God, and must be possessed of the attributes and powers of Deity, to support the offices the scriptures assign them, and to deserve the confidence and worship the scriptures require to be placed in them, and paid to them. Without this awakened state of mind, a divine, reputed orthodox, will blunder wretchedly even in defending his own opinions. I have seen laboured defences of the Trinity, which have given me not much more satisfaction than I should probably receive from a dissertation upon the rainbow, composed by a man blind from his birth. In effect, the knowledge of God cannot be attained by studious discussion on our parts; it must be by a revelation on his part, Matt. xi. 27, and xvi. 17; a revelation, not objectively of new truth, but subjectively of new light in us. Then he that runs may read. Perhaps you may not quite understand my meaning, or not accede to my sentiments at present; I have little doubt, however, but the time is

coming when you will. I believe the Lord God has given you that sincerity which he never disappoints.

Far be it from me to arrogate infallibility to myself, or to any writer or preacher; yet, blessed be God, I am not left to float up and down the uncertain tide of opinion, in those points wherein the peace of my soul is nearly concerned. I know, yea, I infallibly know, whom I have believed. I am under no more doubt about the way of salvation than of the way to London. I cannot be deceived, because the word of God cannot deceive me. It is impossible, however, for me to give you, or any person, full satisfaction concerning my evidence, because it is of an experimental nature, Rev. ii. 17. In general, it arises from the views I have received of the power, compassion, and grace of Jesus, and a consciousness that I, from a conviction of my sin and misery, have fled to him for refuge, entrusted and devoted myself and my all to him. Since my mind has been enlightened, every thing within me, and every thing around me, confirms and explains to me what I read in scripture; and though I have reason enough to distrust my own judgment every hour, yet I have no reason to question the great essentials, which the Lord himself hath taught me.

Besides a long letter, I send you a great book. A part of it, for I do not ask you to read the whole, may perhaps explain my meaning better than I have leisure to do myself. I set a high value upon this book of Mr. Halyburton's; so that, unless I could replace it with another, I know not if I would part with it for its weight in gold. The first and longest treatise is, in my judgment, a masterpiece; but I would chiefly wish you to peruse the essay concerning faith, towards the close of the book. I need not beg you to read it carefully, and to read it all. The importance of the subject, its immediate connexion with your inquiries, and the accuracy of the reasoning, will render the motive of my request unnecessary. I cannot style him a very elegant writer; and, being a Scotchman, he abounds with the Scottish idiom; but you will prefer truth to ornament. I long to hear your opinion of it. It seems to me so adapted to some things that have passed between us as if written on purpose.

The Inquiry concerning Regeneration and Justification, which stands last in the book, I do not desire, or even wish you to read; but if you should, and then think that you have read a speculation more curious than useful, I shall not contradict you. I think it must appear to you in that light; but it was bound up with the rest, and therefore could not stay behind; but I hope the Essay on Faith will please you.

I take great pleasure in your correspondence, still more in the thought of your friend-

ship, which I hope to cultivate to the utmost, and to approve myself sincerely and affectionately yours.

LETTER III.

August 11, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Next week I go to London, where I purpose, if nothing unforeseen prevents, to stay a month. Many things which must necessarily be attended to before my departure, abridge me of that leisure which I could wish to employ in answering your last. However, I will spare you what I can. I thank you for yours. Your objections neither displease nor weary me. While truth is the object of your inquiry, the more freedom you use with me the better. Nor do they surprise me; for I have formerly made the like objections myself. I have stood upon your ground, and I continue to hope you will one day stand upon mine. As I have told you more than once, I do not mean to dictate to you, or wish you to receive any thing upon my *ipse dixit*; but, in the simplicity of friendship, I will give you my thoughts from time to time upon the points you propose, and leave the event to the divine blessing.

I am glad you do not account the Socinians master-builders. However, they esteem themselves so, and are so esteemed, not only by a few, as you think, but by many. I fear Socinianism spreads rapidly amongst us, and bids fair to be the prevailing scheme in this land, especially with those who profess to be the thinking part. The term Arminian, as at present applied, is very indiscriminate, and takes in a great variety of persons and sentiments, amongst whom, I believe, there are many who hold the fundamental truths of the gospel, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. I am far from supposing that God will guide every sincere person exactly to adopt all my sentiments. But there are some sentiments which I believe essential to the very state and character of a true christian. And these make him a christian, not merely by being his acknowledged sentiments, but by a certain peculiar manner in which he possesses them. There is a certain important change takes place in the heart, by the operation of the Spirit of God, before the soundest and most orthodox sentiments can have their proper influence upon us. This work, or change, the scriptures describe by various names, each of which is designed to teach us the marvellous effects it produces, and the almighty power by which it is produced. It is sometimes called a new birth, John iii. 3; sometimes a new creature, or a new creation, as 2 Cor. v. 17; sometimes the causing light to shine out of darkness, 2 Cor. iv. 6; some-

times the opening the eyes of the blind, Acts xxvi. 18; sometimes the raising the dead to life, Ephes. ii. 5. Till a person has experienced this change, he will be at a loss to form a right conception of it: but it means, not being proselyted to an opinion, but receiving a principle of divine life and light in the soul. And till this is received, the things of God, the truths of the gospel cannot be rightly discerned or understood by the utmost powers of fallen man, who, with all his wisdom, reason, and talents, is still but what the apostle calls the natural man, till the power of God visits his heart, 1 Cor. ii. 14. This work is sometimes wrought suddenly, as in the case of Lydia, Acts xvi. 14; at other times very gradually. A person who before was a stranger even to the form of godliness, or at best, content with a mere form, finds new thoughts arising in his mind, feels some concern about his sins, some desire to please God, some suspicions that all is not right. He examines his views of religion, hopes the best of them, and yet cannot rest satisfied in them. To-day perhaps, he thinks himself fixed; to-morrow he will be all uncertainty. He inquires of others; weighs, measures, considers, meets with sentiments which he had not attended to, thinks them plausible; but is presently shocked with objections or supposed consequences, which he finds himself unable to remove. As he goes on in his inquiry, his difficulties increase. New doubts arise in his mind; even the scriptures perplex him, and appear to assert contrary things. He would sound the depths of truth by the plummet of his reason; but he finds his line is too short. Yet even now the man is under a guidance, which will at length lead him right. The importance of the subject takes up his thoughts, and takes off the relish he once had for the things of the world. He reads, he prays, he strives, he resolves; sometimes inward embarrassments and outward temptations bring him to his wits end. He almost wishes to stand where he is, and inquire no more; but he cannot stop. At length he begins to feel the inward depravity, which he had before owned as an opinion; a sense of sin and guilt cuts him out new work. Here reasoning will stand him in no stead. This is a painful change of mind; but it prepares the way for a blessing. It silences some objections better than a thousand arguments, it cuts the comb of his own wisdom and attainments; it makes him weary of working for life, and teaches him, in God's due time the meaning of that text, "To him that worketh not, but believeth in him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Then he learns that scriptural faith is a very different thing from a rational assent to the gospel,—that it is the immediate gift of God; (Ephes. ii. 8;) the operation of God; (Col. ii. 12;) that Christ is not only the object, but the author and

finisher of faith (Heb. xii. 2;) and that faith is not so properly a part of that obedience we owe to God, as an inestimable benefit we receive from him, for Christ's sake, (Phil. i. 29,) which is the medium of our justification, (Rom. v. 1,) and the principle by which we are united to Christ, as the branch to the vine (John xvii. 21.) I am well aware of the pains taken to put a different sense upon these and other seemingly mysterious passages of scripture; but thus far we speak that which we know, and testify that which we have seen. I have described a path in which I have known many led, and in which I have walked myself.

The gospel, my dear Sir, is a salvation appointed for those who are ready to perish, and is not designed to put them in a way to save themselves by their own works. It speaks to us as condemned already, and calls upon us to believe in a crucified Saviour, that we may receive redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. And the Spirit of God, by the gospel, first convinces us of unbelief, sin, and misery; and then, by revealing the things of Jesus to our minds, enables us, as helpless sinners, to come to Christ, to receive him, to behold him, or in other words, to believe in him, and expect pardon, life, and grace from him; renouncing every hope and aim in which we once rested, and accounting all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, John vi. 35; Is. xlv. 22, with John vi. 40; Col. ii. 6. In some of Omicron's letters you will find my thoughts more at large upon these subjects than I have now time to write them. For a farther illustration, I refer you to the MSS. sent herewith. The first part, written in short hand, does not so immediately concern our present point as the second, which you may read without a key. It relates to a matter of indisputable fact, concerning a person with whom, as you will perceive, I was well acquainted. You may depend upon the truth of every tittle. I entrust it to you in the confidence of friendship, and beg that it may not go out of your hands, and that, when you have perused it, you will return it, sealed up, by a safe conveyance, to my house. You will see in it the sentiments of a man of great learning, sound reasoning, an amiable and irreproachable character, and how little he accounted of all these advantages, when the Lord was pleased to enlighten his mind.

Though we have not exactly the same views of human depravity, yet as we both agree to take our measure of it from the word of God, I trust we shall not always differ about it. Adam was created in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, Ephes. iv. 24. This moral image, I believe, was totally lost by sin. In that sense he died the day, the moment, he ate the for-

bidden fruit. God was no longer his joy and delight; he was averse from the thoughts of his presence, and would, if possible, have hid himself from him. His natural powers, though doubtless impaired, were not destroyed. Man, by nature, is still capable of great things. His understanding, reason, memory, imagination, &c. sufficiently proclaim that the hand that made him is divine. He is, as Milton says of Beelzebub, majestic, though in ruins. He can reason, invent, and, by application, attain a considerable knowledge in natural things. The exertions of human genius, as specified in the characters of some philosophers, poets, orators, &c. are wonderful. But man cannot know, love, trust, or serve his Maker, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind. God has preserved in him likewise some feelings of benevolence, pity, some sense of natural justice and truth, &c. without which there could be no society: but these, I apprehend, are little more than instincts, by which the world is kept in some small degree of order; but, being under the direction of pride and self, do not deserve the name of virtue and goodness; because the exercise of them does not spring from a principle of love to God, nor is directed to his glory, or regulated by the rule of his word, till a principle of grace is superadded. You think I will not say, "that God judicially, in punishment of one man's sin, added these corruptions to all his posterity." Let us suppose, that the punishment annexed to eating the forbidden fruit had been the loss of Adam's rational powers, and that he should be degraded to the state and capacity of a brute. In this condition, had he begotten children, after the fall, in his own likeness, his nature being previously changed, they must have been of course brutes like himself; for he could not convey to them those original powers which he had lost. Will this illustrate my meaning? Sin did not deprive him of rationality, but of spirituality. His nature became earthly, sensual, yea devilish; and this fallen nature, this carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be (Rom. viii. 7,) we universally derive from him. Look upon children: they presently show themselves averse from good, but exceedingly propense to evil. This they can learn even without a master; but ten thousand instructors and instructions cannot instil good into them, so as to teach them to love their Creator, unless a divine power co-operates. Just as it is with the earth, which produces weeds spontaneously; but if you see a cabbage, or an apple-tree, you are sure it was planted or sown there, and did not spring from the soil. I know many hard questions may be started upon this subject; but the Lord, in due time, will clear his own cause, and vindicate his own ways. I leave

all difficulties with him. It is sufficient for me that scripture asserts, and experience proves, that it is thus in fact, Rom. iii. 9—51; Job xiv. 4. Thus we have not only forfeited our happiness by transgression, but are, by our depravity, incapable of it, and have no more desire or taste for such a state as the scriptures describe heaven to be, than a man born deaf can have for a concert of music. And therefore our Lord declares, that except a man be born again, he not only shall not, but cannot, see the kingdom of God. Hence a twofold necessity of a Saviour—his blood for the pardon of sins, and his life, spirit, and grace, to quicken our souls, and form us anew for himself, that we may feel his love, and show forth his praise.

St. Paul, before his conversion, was not sincere, in the sense I hope you to be. He thought himself in the right, without doubt, as many have done when they killed God's servants, John xvi. 2. He was blindly and obstinately zealous. I think he did not enter into the merits of the cause, or inquire into facts with that attention which sincerity would have put him upon. You think that his sincerity and zeal were the very things that made him a chosen instrument; he himself speaks of them as the very things that made him peculiarly unworthy of that honour, (1 Cor. xv. 9;) and he tells us, that he was set forth as a pattern of the Lord's long-sufferings and mercy, that the very chief of sinners might be encouraged, 1 Tim. i. 15, 16. Had he been sincerely desirous to know whether Jesus was the Messiah, there was enough in his character, doctrines, miracles, and the prophecies concerning him, to have cleared up the point; but he took it for granted he was right in his opinion, and hurried blindly on, and was, as he said himself, exceedingly mad against them. Such a kind of sincerity is common enough. People believe themselves right, and therefore treat others with scorn or rage, appeal to the scriptures, but first lay down their own preconceived sentiments for truths, and then examine what scriptures they can find to countenance them. Surely a person's thinking himself right, will not give a sanction to all that he does under that persuasion.

Ignorance and obstinacy are in themselves sinful, and no plea of sincerity will exempt from the danger of being under their influence, Isa. xxvii. 11, Luke vi. 39. It appears to me, that, though you will not follow any man implicitly, you are desirous of discovering your mistakes, supposing you are mistaken in any point of importance. You read and examine the word of God, not to find arms wherein to defend your sentiments at all events, but to know whether they are defensible or not. You pray for God's light and teaching, and in this search you are willing to risk what men are commonly much

afraid of hazarding—character, interest, preferment, favour, &c. A sincerity of this kind I too seldom meet with: when I do, I account it a token for good, and am ready to say, "No man can do this, except God be with him." However, sincerity is not conversion; but I believe it is always a forerunner of it.

I would not be uncharitable and censorious, hasty and peremptory in judging my fellow-creatures. But if I acknowledge the word of God, I cannot avoid forming my judgment upon it. It is true, I cannot look into people's hearts; but hearts and principles are delineated to my hand in the scriptures. I read, that no murderer has eternal life in him: I read likewise, "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema;" and therefore I conclude, that there are speculative errors, as heinous in their guilt, as destructive in their effects, as murder; and that the most moral, regular man, as to social life, if he loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, is in the sight of God, the judge of all, as displeasing as a murderer. It has pleased God for the peace and support of society, to put a black mark upon those sins which affect the peace and welfare of our neighbour, such as adultery and murder. But undoubtedly the sins committed immediately against himself must be more heinous than any which offend our fellow-creatures. The second commandment (Matt. xxii. 38,) is like the first; but it depends upon it, and is therefore inferior to it. Men ordinarily judge otherwise. To live regardless of God and the gospel is looked upon as a mere peccadillo in comparison with offences against society. But sooner or later it will appear otherwise to all. A parcel of robbers may pique themselves upon the justice, honour, and truth they observe towards one another; but, because they set up a petty interest, which is inconsistent with the public good, they are deservedly accounted villains, and treated as such, notwithstanding their petty morality among themselves. Now such a company of robbers bears a much greater proportion to a whole nation, than a nation, or all the nations of the earth, bears to the great God. Our dependence upon him is absolute, our obligations to him infinite. In vain shall men plead their moral discharge of relative duties to each other, if they fail in the unspeakably greater relation under which they stand to God; and therefore, when I see people living without God in the world, as all do till they are converted, I cannot but judge them in a dangerous state:—not because I take pleasure in censuring, or think myself authorised to pass sentence upon my fellow-creatures, but because the scriptures decide expressly on the case, and I am bound to take my sentiments from thence.

The jailor was certainly a christian when baptized, as you observe. He trembled; he cried out, "What must I do to be saved!" Paul did not bid him amend his life, but believe in the Lord Jesus. He believed and rejoiced. But the Lord blessed the apostle's words, to produce in him that saving faith which filled him with joy and peace. It was, as I observed before, something more than an assent to the proposition, that Jesus is the Christ; a resting in him for forgiveness and acceptance, and a cleaving to him in love. No other faith will purify the heart, work by love, and overcome the world.

I need not have pleaded want of leisure as an excuse for a short letter, for I have written a long one. I feel myself much interested in your concerns; and your unexpected frank application to me (though you well know the light in which I appear to some people) I consider as a providential call which binds me to your service. I hope our correspondence will be productive of happy effects, and that we shall both one day rejoice in it.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

September 6, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I begin to fear I shall fall under a suspicion of unkindness and forgetfulness towards you, and therefore I am willing to write a line by way of prevention, though I have not leisure to attempt any thing like an answer to the letter you put into my hand the evening before I left O——; I must therefore content myself with a tender of affection and respect, and an inquiry after your welfare.

Your letter will give me an opportunity of saying something farther when time shall admit; but an endeavour to answer all the objections that may be started between us, in a way of reasoning, would require a volume, and would likewise interfere with the leading principle upon which my hope of giving you satisfaction in due time is grounded. You seem to expect that I should remove your difficulties; but it is my part only to throw in a word occasionally, as a witness of what the Lord has been pleased to teach me from the scriptures, and to wait for the rest till he (who alone is able) shall be pleased to communicate the same views to you: for, till we see and judge by the same medium, and are agreed in the fundamental point, that faith is not the effect of reasoning, but a special gift of God, which he bestows when and to whom he pleases, it will not be possible for me to convince you by dint of argument. I believe, as I have observed before, that he has already given you a desire to know his will, and therefore I trust he will not disap-

point your search. At present I think you want one thing, which it is not in my power to impart, I mean, such a sense of the depravity of human nature, and the state of all mankind considered as sinners, as may make you feel the utter impossibility of attaining to the peace and hope of the gospel in any other way, than by renouncing all hope of succeeding by any endeavours of your own, farther than by humbly waiting at the throne of grace, for power to cast yourself, without terms and conditions, upon him who is able to save to the uttermost. We must feel ourselves sick, before we can duly prize the great Physician, and feel a sentence of death in ourselves before we can effectually trust in God, who raiseth the dead.

I have not brought your sermons with me, for I thought I should not have time to read them attentively while in this hurrying place. I purpose to consider them with care, and to give you my thoughts with frankness, when I return. However, if they are upon the plan intimated in your letter, I will venture to say one thing beforehand, that they will not answer your desired end. I am persuaded you wish to be useful—to reclaim sinners from their evil ways—to inspire them with a love to God, and a sincere aim to walk in obedience to his will. May I not venture to appeal to yourself, that you meet with little success,—that the people to whom you preach, though they perhaps give you a patient hearing, yet remain as they were, unchanged, and unholy? It must be so: there is but one sort of preaching which God blesses to these purposes, that which makes all the world guilty before God, and sets forth Jesus Christ, as the brazen serpent was proposed by Moses, that guilty and condemned sinners, by looking to him, and believing on his name, may be healed and saved. The most pressing exhortations to repentance and amendment of life, unless they are enforced in a certain way, which only God can teach, will leave our hearers much as they find them. When we meet, or when I have leisure to write from home, I will trouble you with my thoughts more at large. Till then, permit me to assure you of my sincere regard and best wishes, and that—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

October 21, 1775

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The calls and engagements which I told you engrossed and anticipated my time when I wrote last, have continued without any intermission hitherto, and I am still far behind-hand with my business. I am willing to hope, that the case

has been much the same with you, and that want of leisure has been the only cause of my not having been pleased with so much as a note from you since my return from London.

I am loath, for my own sake, to charge your silence to any unwillingness of continuing that intercourse which I have been, and still find myself, desirous to improve on my part. For though we are not agreed in our views, yet while our preliminary agreement, to allow mutual freedom, and to exercise mutual candour, in expressing our sentiments, subsists, we may, and I hope shall, be glad to hear from each other. It may seem to intimate I have a better opinion of myself than of you, that while I seem confident your freedom will not offend me, I feel now and then a fear, lest mine should prove displeasing to you. But friendship is a little suspicious when exercised with long silence, and a plain declaration of my sentiments has more than once put amiable and respectable persons to the full trial of their patience.

I now return your sermons; I thank you for the perusal; I see much in them that I approve, and nothing in them but what I formerly espoused. But in a course of years, a considerable alteration has taken place in my judgment and experience, I hope, yea, I may boldly say, I am sure, not for the worse. Then I was seeking, and now, through mercy, I have found the pearl of great price. It is both the prayer and the hope of my heart, that a day is coming when you shall make the same acknowledgment. From your letters and sermons, I am encouraged to address you in our Lord's words, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." I am persuaded the views you have received will not suffer you to remain where you are. But fidelity obliges me to add, "Yet one thing thou lackest." That one thing I trust the Lord will both show you, and bestow upon you, in his due time. You speak somewhere of "atoning for disobedience by repentance." Ah! my dear Sir, when we are brought to estimate our disobedience, by comparing it with such a sense of the majesty, holiness, and authority of God, and the spirituality, extent, and sanction of his holy law, as he, and he only, can impress upon the heart of a sinner, we shall be convinced, that nothing but the blood of the Son of God can atone for the smallest instance of disobedience.

I intimated, in my letter from London, one defect of your scheme, which will probably be the first to engage your notice. I am sure you have a desire to be useful to the souls of men, to be an instrument of reclaiming them from that course of open wickedness, or lifeless formality, in which you see them enslaved; and in a word, to prevail with them to live soberly, righteously, and godly, accord-

ing to the just and comprehensive sense you have given of those words, in your sermon on Tit. ii. 11, 12. Now, inward experience, and a pretty extensive observation of what passes abroad, have so perfectly convinced me there is but one mode of preaching which the Holy Spirit owns to the producing of these effects, that I am not afraid to pronounce confidently, you will not have the desires of your heart gratified upon your present plan. The people will give you a hearing, and remain just as they are, till the Lord leads you to speak to them as criminals condemned already, and whose first essential step it is, to seek forgiveness by the blood of Jesus, and a change of heart and state by his grace, before they can bring forth any fruit acceptable to God.

As I have little time for writing, and little hope of succeeding in a way of argumentation, I have substituted, instead of a longer letter, the heads of some sermons I preached nine or ten years ago, on our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. However, when I have heard that you are well, and that you are still disposed to correspond with me, I shall be ready to give a more particular answer to the subjects you pointed out to me in the letter you favoured me with the day before I left London. I pray God to bless you in all your ways, and beg you to believe, that I am, with sincerity, &c.

LETTER VI.

October 28.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It never entered my pericranium, that you expected I should fully and directly answer your letter while I was in London; and yet you reasonably might, as you knew nothing of my engagements: but, indeed, it was impracticable; I could only send you a hasty line, as a token that I remembered you. I informed you, when I returned, that I was just going out again. Since I came home the second time, I have been engrossed by things that would admit of no delay; and, at length, not having so much as a note from you, I thought I would wait till I heard farther. But, from first to last it was my intention, and I think, my promise, to answer in the manner you proposed as soon as I could. And even now I must beg a little longer time. Believe me, that as the wise and good providence of God brought us together, without any expectation of mine, I will do all in my power to preserve the connexion, and particularly by giving my thoughts on such questions as you propose. And though to consider your questions in the manner you wish, and to point out the agreement of detached texts (as they occur) with my views, seems, in

prospect, to require a volume rather than a sheet, yet I am not discouraged; only I beg you to make allowance for other things, and to be assured, that before I had the pleasure of corresponding with you, I had very little spare time. Expect then the best satisfaction I am able to give you, as soon as possible. To prepare the way, I will try hard for a little leisure, to give you a few thoughts upon yours, which came last night.

You complain that I have hitherto disappointed your expectations. If you have preserved my first papers, I believe you will find, that I apprised you this might probably be the event, and certainly must, unless it should please God to make what I should write a means of giving you the same views with myself. I only proposed, as a witness, to bear a simple testimony to what I have seen and known. So far as you believe me sincere and unwilling to impose upon you, I thought you might admit, there was perhaps some weight in what I advanced, though for the present, you could not see things in the same light. And if you allowed a possibility, that my changing the sentiments which I once held in common with yourself, might be upon sufficient grounds, you would, as I trust you do, wait upon the great Teacher for his instruction; otherwise I did not expect to convince you, nor do I yet, only I am glad to put myself in his hands as an instrument.

You quite misunderstood what I spoke of the light and influence of the Spirit of God. He reveals to me no new truths, but has only shown me the meaning of his own written word; nor is this light a particular revelation, it is common to all who are born again. And thus, though you and I cannot fully agree about it, yet I almost daily meet with persons from the east, west, north, and south, whom, though I never saw them before, I find we understand each other at once. This (as you bid me be explicit) is the one thing which I think you at present lack. And I limited my expression, to one thing, because it is our Lord's expression, and because that one thing includes many. As I said before, I cannot give it you; but the Lord can: and from the desire he has raised in your heart, I have a warm hope that he will. You place the whole stress of your inquiries upon reason: I am far from discarding reason, when it is enlightened and sanctified; but spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, and can be received and discerned no other way; for to our natural reason they are foolishness, 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15; Matth. xi. 25. This certain something I can no more describe to those who have not experienced it, than I could describe the taste of a pine-apple to a person who had never seen one. But scriptural proofs might be adduced in abundance, yet

not so as to give a solid conviction of it, till we actually experience it. Thus it was with my friend, whose case I sent you. When God gave him the key, as he expressed it, then the scriptures were unlocked. His wishing himself a deist some time before, was not from any libertine exceptions he made to the precepts of the gospel, but from the perplexing embarrassments he had found, by endeavouring to understand the doctrines by dint of reason, though reason in him was as strong and penetrating as in most men I ever met with. Upon your present plan, how can I hope to satisfy you, though even St. Paul asserts it, that the carnal mind is enmity against God? You will readily agree with me to the proposition as it stands in St. Paul's words; but I think you will not so readily assent to what I have no more doubt than of my own existence, is the sense of it, That the heart of man, of any man, every man, however apparently amiable in his outward conduct, however benevolent to his fellow-creatures, however abundant and zealous in his devotions, is by nature enmity against God; not indeed against the idea he himself forms of God, but against the character which God has revealed of himself in the scriptures. Man is an enemy to the justice, sovereignty, and law of God, and to the alone method of salvation he has appointed in the gospel by faith only: by such a faith, as it is no more in his power to contribute to the production of in himself, than he can contribute to raising the dead, or making a world. Whatever is of the flesh is flesh, and can rise no higher than its principle; but the Lord could convince you of this by a glance of thought.

But I must break off, for want both of room and time. Let me remind you of our agreement, to use and to allow the greatest freedom, and not to be offended with what is meant well on either side. Something in your last letter made me apprehensive you were a little displeased with me. He that knows my heart, knows that I wish you well as my own soul.

The expression, of atoning for disobedience by repentance, was in one of your sermons. I considered it as unguarded; but on my view of things, it were in a manner impossible I could use that expression, though, perhaps, too often unguarded myself.—I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

November 17, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—At length I take up your favour of August 14, with design to give it a more explicit answer. My delaying hitherto has been unavoidable; I am

sorry to have your patience put to so long a trial, and should be more sorry, but that I consider, that in my former papers, sermons, Omicron's letters, &c. you already possess the whole (in substance) of what I have to offer. My present part is but *actum agere*, to repeat what I have elsewhere expressed, only with some variety and enlargement. You yourself will state the situation of our debate, when you say, "Nor in truth do you offer any arguments to convince me, nor does it seem very consistent on your grounds so to do. And if this important change is to be brought about by the intervention of some extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit, and cannot be brought about without it; I do not see any thing farther that I have to do, than to keep my mind as much unbiassed as I can, and to wait and pray for it." I think my letter from London was to the purport of these your own words, though you seemed dissatisfied with it. While we see through a different medium, it will be easy for you to answer every text I might adduce in support of my sentiments, as you have those I have already brought, "That you understand them otherwise." In order to support my sense of one text, I should perhaps quote and argue from twenty more, and still "you would understand them otherwise." The life of man, yea of Methuselah, would hardly suffice to prove, object, and defend, all that might be alledged on both sides in this way; and at last we should leave off as we began, more fully confirmed in our own opinions, unless the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, should be pleased to show the person who maintained the wrong side of the argument where his mistake lay. However, I mean to take some notice of your queries as they offer themselves.

The first which occurs is complicated. The substance I think is, Whether such belief and aims as you possess, will stand you in no stead unless you likewise believe grace irresistible, predestination absolute, faith in supernatural impulses, &c.? You may have observed, I have several times waived speaking about predestination or election, not that I am ashamed of the doctrine; because, if it be indeed absurd, shocking, and unjust, the blame will not deservedly fall upon me, for I did not invent it, but upon the scriptures, where I am sure it is laid down in as plain terms, as that God created the heavens and the earth. I own I cannot but wonder, that persons professing any reverence for the Bible should so openly and strongly declare their abhorrence of what the Bible so expressly teaches; namely, that there is a discrimination of persons by the grace and good pleasure of God, where by nature there is no difference; and that all things respecting the salvation of these persons is infallibly secured by a divine predestination.

I do not offer this as a rational doctrine though it be highly so to me; but it is scriptural, or else the scriptures are a mere mass of wax, and without a determinate meaning. What ingenuity is needful to interpret many passages in a sense more favourable to our natural prejudices against God's sovereignty! Matt. xi. 25, 26, and xiii. 10—17; Mark xiii. 20, 22; John xvii. *passim*; John x. 26; Rom. viii. 28—30, and ix. 13—24, and xi. 7; Eph. i. 4, 5; 1 Pet. i. 2. Were I fond of disputing, as I am not, I think I could put a close reasoner hard to it, to maintain the truth of scripture-prophecies, or the belief of a particular providence, unless he would admit a divine predestination of causes and events as the ground of his arguments. However, as I said, I have chosen to waive the point; because, however true and necessary in itself, the knowledge and comprehension of it is not necessary to the being of a true christian, though I can hardly conceive he can be an established consistent believer without it. This doctrine is not the turning point between you and me; the nature of justification, and the method of a sinner's acceptance with God, are of much more immediate importance; and therefore, if I am to speak plainly, I must say, that I look upon your present sentiments, attainments, and advances, as you describe them, to constitute that kind of gain the apostle speaks of, and concerning which I hope you will one day be of his mind, and be glad to account it all loss, that you may win Christ, and be found in him, "not having your own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phil. iii. 4. 7—10. For, as you tell me, you never remember a time when you were not conscious before God of great unworthiness, and intervals of earnest endeavours to serve him, though not with the same success, yet something in the same way, as at present; this is but saying, in other words, you never remember a time when old things passed away, and all things became new; and yet the apostle insists much upon this, 2 Cor. iv. 6, and v. 17. The convictions of natural conscience, and those which are wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, are different, not only in degree, but in kind; the light of a glow-worm and of the sun do not more essentially differ. The former are partial and superficial, leave us in possession of a supposed power of our own, are pacified by some appearances of an outward change, and make us no farther sensible of the necessity of a Saviour, than to make our doings and duties (if I may so express myself) full weight, which perhaps might otherwise be a little deficient when brought to the balance of the sanctuary. But truly spiritual convictions give us far other views of sin; they lead us to a deep and awful consideration of the root of our total absolute depravity, and

our utter apostasy from God by which we are as incapable of doing good, as a dead man is of performing the functions of life. They lead us to the rule and standard, the strict, holy, inflexible law of God, which reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart; requires perfect, universal, persevering obedience; denounces a curse upon every failure (Gal. iii. 10,) and affords neither place nor strength for repentance. Thus they sweep away every hope and refuge we had before, and fix upon us a sense of guilt and condemnation, from which there is no relief, till we can look to Jesus, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent; which was not to give efficacy to medicines, and plasters of their own application, but to heal them completely of itself by looking at it. John iii. 14, 15, and vi. 40; Isaiah xliii. 22.

You wish me to explain my distinction between faith and rational assent; and though I know no two things in the world more clearly distinct in themselves, or more expressly distinguished in scripture, yet I fear I may not easily make it appear to you. You allow faith, in your sense, to be the gift of God; but in my sense, it is likewise wrought by the operation of God, Col. ii. 12, *το υπερβαλλον μεγαλιος της δυναμεις αυτου—κατα την ενεργειαν του λεγοντος της ισχυος αυτου*;* that same energy of the power of his strength, by which the dead body of Jesus was raised from the dead. Can these strong expressions intend no more than a rational assent, such as we give to a proposition in Euclid? I believe fallen reason is, of itself, utterly incapable even of assenting to the great truths of revelation; it may assent to the terms in which they are proposed, but it must put its own interpretation upon them, or it would despise them. The natural man can neither receive nor discern the things of God; and if any one would be wise, the apostle's first advice to him is, Let him become a fool, that he may be wise; for the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God.

Indeed when the heart is changed, and the mind enlightened, then reason is sanctified, and if I may so say, baptized, renounces its curious disquisitions, and is content humbly to tread in the path of revelation. This is one difference; assent may be the act of our natural reason; faith is the effect of immediate almighty power. Another difference is, faith is always efficacious, "it worketh by love;" whereas assent is often given where it has little or no influence upon the conduct. Thus, for instance, every one will assent to this truth, All men are mortal. Yet the greatest part of mankind, though they readily assent to the proposition, and it would be highly irrational to do otherwise, live as they might

do if the reverse were true. But they who have divine faith feel, as well as say, they are pilgrims and sojourners upon earth. Again, faith gives peace of conscience, access to God, and a sure evidence and subsistence of things not seen (Rom. v. 1, 2; Heb. xi. 1;) whereas, a calm dispassionate reasoner may be compelled to assent to the external arguments in favour of christianity, and yet remain a total stranger to that communion with God, that spirit of adoption, that foretaste of glory, which is the privilege and portion of believers. So likewise faith overcomes the world, which rational assent will not do. Witness the lives and tempers of thousands, who yet would be affronted, if their assent to the gospel should be questioned. To sum up all in a word, "He that believes shall be saved." But surely many who give a rational assent to the gospel live and die in those sins which exclude from the kingdom of God, Gal. v. 19—21. Faith is the effect of a principle of new life implanted in the soul, that was before dead in trespasses and sins; and it qualifies not only for obeying the Saviour's precepts, but chiefly and primarily for receiving from and rejoicing in his fulness, admiring his love, his work, his person, his glory, his advocacy. It makes Christ precious, enthrones him in the heart, presents him as the most delightful object to our meditations; as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and strength; our root, head, life, shepherd, and husband. These are all scriptural expressions and images, setting forth, so far as words can declare, what Jesus is in himself and to his believing people. But how cold is the comment which rational assent puts upon very many passages wherein the apostle Paul endeavours, but in vain, to express the fulness of his heart upon this subject. A most valued friend of mine, a clergyman, now living, had for many years given a rational assent to the gospel. He laboured with much earnestness upon your plan, was very exemplary in his whole conduct, preached almost incessantly (two or three times every day in the week for years,) having a parish in the remote parts of Yorkshire, of great extent, and containing five or six different hamlets at some distance from each other. He succeeded likewise with his people, so far as to break them off from outward irregularities; and was mentioned in a letter to the Society for Propagating the Gospel, which I have seen in print, as the most perfect example of a parish-priest which this nation, or perhaps this age, has produced. Thus he went on for many years teaching his people what he knew, for he could teach them no more. He lived in such retirement and recess, that he was unacquainted with the persons and principles of any who are now branded as enthusiasts and methodists. One day reading Ephes. iii. in his Greek Testament, his thoughts were stopped by

* Ephes. i. 19.

the word *κατανοησας*, in verse 8. He was struck, and led to think with himself, to this purpose:—"The apostle, when speaking of the love and riches of Christ, uses remarkable expressions; he speaks of heights, depths, and lengths, and breadths, and unsearchableness, where I seem to find every thing plain, easy, and rational. He finds mysteries where I can perceive none. Surely, though I use the words gospel, faith, and grace with him, my ideas of them must be different from his." This led him to a close examination of all his epistles, and, by the blessings of God, brought on a total change in his views and preaching. He no longer set his people to keep a law of faith, to trust in their sincerity and endeavours upon some general hope that Christ would help them out where they came short; but he preached Christ himself, as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. He felt himself, and laboured to convince others, that there is no hope for a sinner, but merely in the blood of Jesus, and no possibility of his doing any works acceptable to God, till he himself be first made accepted in the Beloved. Nor did he labour in vain. Now his preaching effected not only an outward reformation, but a real change of heart, in very many of his hearers. The word was received, as Paul expresses it, not with a rational assent only, but with demonstration and power in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; and their endeavours to observe the gospel precepts were abundantly more extensive, uniform, and successful, when they were brought to say, with the apostle, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God."

Such a change of views and sentiments I pray God my friend may experience. These things may appear uncouth to you at present, as they have done to many, who now bless God for showing them what their reason could never have taught them. My divinity is unfashionable enough at present, but it was not so always; you will find few books written from the era of the Reformation till a little before Laud's time, that set forth any other. There were few pulpits till after the Restoration from which any other was heard. A lamentable change has indeed since taken place; but God has not left himself without witnesses. You think, though I disclaim infallibility, I arrogate too much, in speaking with so much certainty. I am fallible, indeed; but I am sure of the main points of doctrine I hold. I am not in the least doubt, whether salvation be of faith or of works; whether faith be of our own power, or of God's operation; whether Christ's obedience or our own be the just ground of our hope; whether a man can truly call Jesus Lord,

but by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. I have no more hesitation about these points than I should have, were I asked, Whether it was God or man that created the heavens and the earth? Besides, as I have more than once observed, your sentiments were once my own; so that I, who have travelled both roads, may have, perhaps, some stronger reason to determine me which is the right, than you can have, who have only travelled one.

Your two sheets may lead me to write as many quires, if I do not check myself. I now come to the two queries you propose, the solution of which, you think, will clearly mark the difference of our sentiments. The substance of them is, 1st, Whether I think any sinner ever perished in his sins (to whom the gospel has been preached,) because God refused to supply him with such a proportion of his assistance as was absolutely necessary to his believing and repenting, or without his having previously rejected the incitements of his Holy Spirit? A full answer to this would require a sheet. But briefly, I believe, that all mankind being corrupt and guilty before God, he might, without impeachment to his justice, have left them all to perish, as we are assured he did the fallen angels. But he was pleased to show mercy, and mercy must be free. If the sinner has any claim to it, so far it is justice not mercy. He who is to be our Judge assures us, that few find the gate that leadeth to life, while many throng the road to destruction. Your question seems to imply, that you think God either did make salvation equally open to all, or that it would have been more becoming his goodness to have done so.

But he is the potter, we are the clay; his ways and thoughts are above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth. The Judge of all the earth will do right. He has appointed a day, when he will manifest, to the conviction of all, that he has done right. Till then, I hold it best to take things upon his word, and not too harshly determine what it becomes Jehovah to do. Instead of saying what I think, let it suffice to remind you of what St. Paul thought, Rom. ix. 15—21. But farther, I say, that unless mercy were afforded to those who are saved, in a way peculiar to themselves, and which is not afforded to those who perish, I believe no one soul could be saved. For I believe fallen man, universally considered as such, is as incapable of doing the least thing towards his salvation, till prevented by the grace of God (as our Article speaks,) as a dead body is of restoring itself to life. Whatever difference takes place between men in this respect is of grace, that is, of God, undeserved. Yea, his first approaches to our hearts are undesired too; for till he seeks us, we cannot, we will not, seek him, Psalm cx. 3. It is in the day of his

power, and not before, his people are made willing. But I believe, where the gospel is preached, they who do perish, do wilfully resist the light, and choose and cleave to darkness, and stifle the convictions which the truths of God, when his true gospel is indeed preached, will, in one degree or other, force upon their minds. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the love of other things, the violence of sinful appetites, their prejudices, pride, and self-righteousness, either prevent the reception, or choke the growth, of the good seed: thus their own sin and obstinacy is the proper cause of their destruction; they will not come to Christ, that they may have life. At the same time, it is true that they cannot, unless they are supernaturally drawn of God, John v. 40, vi. 44. They will not, and they cannot come. Both are equally true, and they are consistent. For a man's *cannot* is not a natural, but a moral inability: not an impossibility in the nature of things, as it is for me to walk upon the water, or to fly in the air; but such an inability as, instead of extenuating, does exceedingly enhance and aggravate his guilt. He is so blinded by Satan, so alienated from God by nature and wicked works, so given up to sin, so averse from that way of salvation, which is contrary to his pride and natural wisdom, that he will not embrace it, or seek after it; and therefore he cannot, till the grace of God powerfully enlightens his mind, and overcomes his obstacles. But this brings me to your second query:

2. Do I think that God, in the ordinary course of his providence, grants this assistance in an irresistible manner, or effects faith and conversion without the sinner's own hearty consent and concurrence? I rather choose to term grace invincible than irresistible: for it is too often resisted even by those who believe; but because it is invincible, it triumphs over all resistance when He is pleased to bestow it. For the rest, I believe no sinner is converted without his own hearty will and concurrence. But he is not willing till he is made so. Why does he at all refuse! Because he is insensible of his state; because he knows not the evil of sin, the strictness of the law, the majesty of God whom he has offended, nor the total apostacy of his heart; because he is blind to eternity, and ignorant of the excellency of Christ; because he is comparatively whole, and sees not his need of this great physician; because he relies upon his own wisdom, power, and supposed righteousness. Now, in this state of things, when God comes with a purpose of mercy, he begins by convincing the person of sin, judgment, and righteousness, causes him to feel and know that he is a lost, condemned, helpless creature, and then discovers to him the necessity, suffici-

ency, and willingness, of Christ to save them that are ready to perish, without money or price, without doings or deservings. Then he sees faith to be very different from a rational assent, finds that nothing but the power of God can produce a well grounded hope in the heart of a convinced sinner; therefore looks to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of faith, to enable him to believe. For this he waits in what we call the means of grace; he prays, he reads the word, he thirsts for God, as the heart pants for the water brooks; and though, perhaps, for a while he is distressed with many doubts and fears, he is encouraged to wait on, because Jesus has said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." The obstinacy of the will remains while the understanding is dark, and ceases when that is enlightened. Suppose a man walking in the dark, where there are pits and precipices of which he is not aware. You are sensible of his danger, and call after him: but he thinks he knows better than you, refuses your advice, and is perhaps angry with you for your importunity. He sees no danger, therefore will not be persuaded there is any; but if you go with a light, get before him, and show him plainly that if he takes another step he falls beyond the power of recovery; then he will stop of his own accord, blame himself for not minding you before, and be ready to comply with your farther directions. In either case man's will acts with equal freedom; the difference of his conduct arises from conviction. Something like this is the case of our spiritual concerns. Sinners are called and warned by the word; but they are wise in their own eyes, and take but little notice till the Lord gives them light, which he is not bound to give to any, and therefore cannot be bound to give to all. They who have it have reason to be thankful, and subscribe to the apostle's words, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

I have not yet half done with the first sheet: I shall consider the rest at leisure, but send this as a specimen of my willingness to clear my sentiments to you as far as I can. Unless it should please God to make what I offer satisfactory, I well know beforehand what objections and answers will occur to you, for these points have been often debated; and, after a course of twenty-seven years, in which religion has been the chief object of my thoughts and inquiries, I am not entirely a stranger to what can be offered on either side. What I write, I write simply and in love, beseeching him who alone can set a seal to his own truth to guide you and bless you. This letter has been more than a week in hand: I have been called from it, I suppose, ten times, frequently in the middle of a period or a line. My leisure, which before

was small, is now reduced almost to a nothing. But I am desirous to keep up my correspondence with you, because I feel an affectionate interest in you, and because it pleased God to put it into your heart to apply to me. You cannot think how your first letter struck me: it was so unexpected, and seemed so improbable that you should open your mind to me, I immediately conceived a hope it would prove for good. Nor am I yet discouraged.

When you have leisure and inclination, write; I shall always be glad to hear from you, and I will proceed in answering what I have already by me as fast as I can. But I have many letters now waiting for answers, which must be attended to.

I recommend you to the blessing and care of the great Shepherd, and remain, &c.

LETTER VIII.

December 8, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Are you willing I should still call you so, or are you quite weary of me? Your silence makes me suspect the latter. However, it is my part to fulfil my promise, and then leave the event to God. As I have but an imperfect remembrance of what I have already written, I may be liable to some repetitions. I cannot stay to comment upon every line in your letter, but I proceed to notice such passages as seem most to affect the subject in debate. When you speak of the scriptures maintaining one consistent sense, which, if the word of God, it certainly must do, you say you read and understand it in this one consistent sense; nay, you cannot remember the time when you did not. It is otherwise with me and with multitudes; we remember when it was a sealed book, and we are sure it would have been so still, had not the Holy Spirit opened our understandings. But when you add, though I pretend not to understand the whole, yet what I do understand appears perfectly consistent, I know not how far this exception may extend, for perhaps the reason why you allow you do not understand some parts, is because you cannot make them consistent with the sense you put upon other parts. You quote my words, "That when we are conscious of our depravity, reasoning stands us in no stead." Undoubtedly reason always will stand rational creatures in some stead; but my meaning is, that when we are deeply convinced of sin, all our former reasonings upon the ways of God, while we made our conceptions the standard by which we judge what is befitting him to do, as if he were altogether such an one as ourselves,—all those cobweb reasonings are swept away, and we submit to his

ing, though not without reason. For we have the strongest reason imaginable to acknowledge ourselves vile and lost without righteousness and strength, when we actually feel ourselves to be so. You speak of the gospel terms of justification. This term is *faith*. Mark xvi. 16, Acts xiii. 39. The gospel propounds, admits no other term. But this faith, as I endeavoured to show in my former letter, is very different from rational assent. You speak likewise of the law of faith, by which, if you mean what some call the remedial law, which we are to obey as well as we can, and such obedience, together with our faith, will entitle us to acceptance with God, I am persuaded the scriptures speak of no such thing. Grace and works of any kind, in the point of acceptance with God, are mentioned by the apostle not only as opposites or contraries, but as absolutely contradictory to each other, like fire and water, light and darkness; so that the affirmation of one is the denial of the other. Rom. iv. 5, and xi. 6. God justifies freely, justifies the ungodly, and him that worketh not. Though justifying faith be indeed an active principle, it worketh by love, yet not for acceptance. Those whom the apostle exhorts "to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling," he considers as justified already; for he considers them as believers, in whom he supposed God had already begun a good work; and if so, was confident he would accomplish it, Phil. i. 6. To them, the consideration that God, who dwells in the heart of believers, wrought in them to will and to do, was a powerful motive and encouragement to them to work, that is, to give all diligence in his appointed means, as a right sense of the sin that dwelleth in us, and the snares and temptations around us, will teach us still to work with fear and trembling. You suppose a difference between christians (so called) who are devoted to God in baptism, and those who in the first ages were converted from abominable superstitions and idolatrous vices. It is true in christian countries we do not worship heathen divinities *eo nomine*; and this is the principal difference I can find. Neither reason nor observation will allow me to think, that human nature is a whit better now than it was in the apostle's time. I know no kinds or degrees of wickedness which prevailed among heathens which are not prevalent among nominal christians, who have perhaps been baptized in their infancy; and therefore, as the streams in the life are equally worldly, sensual, devilish, I doubt not but the fountain of the heart is equally polluted and poisonous; and that is as true, as in the days of Christ and his apostles, that unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. You sent me a sermon upon the new

birth, or regeneration, and you have several of mine on the same subject. I wish you to compare them with each other, and with scripture; and I pray God to show you wherein the difference consists, and on which side the truth lies.

When you desire me to reconcile God's being the author of sin with his justice, you show that you misunderstand the whole strain of my sentiments; for I am persuaded you would not misrepresent them. It is easy to charge harsh consequences, which I neither allow, nor indeed do they follow from my sentiments. God cannot be the author of sin in that sense you would fix upon me; but is it possible that upon your plan you find no difficulty in what the scriptures teach us upon this subject! I conceive that those who were concerned in the death of Christ were very great sinners, and that in nailing him to the cross they committed atrocious wickedness; yet if the apostle may be believed, all this was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Acts ii. 23; and they did no more than what his hand and purpose had determined should be done, chap. iv. 28. And you will observe that this wicked act (wicked with respect to the perpetrators) was not only permitted, but fore-ordained in the strongest and most absolute sense of the word. The glory of God and the salvation of men depended upon its being done, and just in that manner, and with all those circumstances which actually took place, and yet Judas and the rest acted freely, and their wickedness was probably their own. Now, my friend, the arguments which satisfy you that the scriptures do not represent God as the author of this sin in this appointment, will plead for me at the same time; and when you think you easily overcome me by asking, "Can God be the author of sin?" your imputation falls so directly upon the word of God himself. God is no more the author of sin than the sun is the cause of ice; but it is in the nature of water to congeal into ice when the sun's influence is suspended to a certain degree. So there is sin enough in the hearts of men to make the earth the very image of hell, and to prove that men are no better than incarnate devils, were he to suspend his influence and restraint. Sometimes, and in some instances, he is pleased to suspend it considerably; and, so far as he does, human nature quickly appears in its true colours. Objections of this kind have been repeated and refuted before either you or I were born; and the apostle evidently supposes they would be urged against the doctrine, when he obviates the question, "Why doth he yet find fault; who hath resisted his will?" To which he gives no other answer than by referring it to God's sovereignty, and the power which a potter has over the clay. I

think I have in a former letter made some reply to the charge of positiveness in my own opinion. I acknowledge that I am fallible, yet I must again lay claim to a certainty about the way of salvation. I am as sure of some things as of my own existence: I should be so if there was no human creature upon earth but myself. However, my sentiments are confirmed by the suffrages of thousands who have lived before me, of many with whom I have personally conversed in different places and circumstances, unknown to each other; yet all have received the same views, because taught by the same Spirit. And I have likewise been greatly confirmed by the testimony of many with whom I have conversed in their dying hours. I have seen them rejoicing in the prospect of death, free from fears, breathing the air of immortality; heartily disclaiming their duties and performances; acknowledging that their best actions were attended with evil sufficient to condemn them; renouncing every shadow of hope, but what they derived from the blood of Christ, as the sole cause of their acceptance; yet triumphing in him over every enemy and fear, and as sure of heaven as if they were already there. And such were the apostle's hopes, wholly founded on knowing whom he had believed, and his persuasion of his ability to keep that which he had committed unto him. This is faith, a renouncing of every thing we are apt to call our own, and relying wholly upon the blood, righteousness, and intercession of Jesus. However, I cannot communicate this my certainty to you; I only tell you there is such a thing, in hopes, if you do not think I wilfully lie both to God and man, you will be earnest to seek it from him who bestowed it on me, and who will bestow it upon all who will sincerely apply to him, and patiently wait upon him for it.

I cannot but wonder, that while you profess to believe the depravity of human nature, you should speak of good qualities inherent in it. The word of God, describes it as evil, only evil, and that continually. That there are such qualities as Stoics and infidels call virtue, I allow. God has not left man destitute of such dispositions as are necessary to the peace of society; but I deny there is any moral goodness in them, unless they are founded in a supreme love to God, have his glory for their aim, and are produced by faith in Jesus Christ. A man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, in zeal for the truth, and yet be a mere nothing, a tinkling cymbal, in the sight of him who seeth not as man seeth, but judgeth the heart. Many infidels and avowed enemies to the grace and gospel of Christ, have made a fair show of what the world call virtue; but christian virtue is grace, the effect of a new nature and new

life; and works thus wrought in God are as different from the faint, partial imitations of them which fallen nature is capable of producing, as a living man is from a statue. A statue may express the features and lineaments of the person whom it represents, but there is no life.

Your comment on the seventh to the Romans, latter part, contradicts my feelings. You are either of a different make and nature from me, or else you are not rightly apprised of your own state, if you do not find the apostle's complaint very suitable to yourself. I believe it applicable to the most holy christian upon earth. But controversies of this kind are worn thread-bare. When you speak of the spiritual part of a natural man, it sounds to me like the living part of a dead man, or the seeing part of a blind man. Paul tells me, that the natural man, whatever his spiritual part may be, can neither receive nor discern the things of God. What the apostle speaks of himself (Rom. vii.) is no more, when rightly understood, than what he affirms of all who are partakers of a spiritual life, or who are true believers, Gal. v. 17. The carnal natural mind is enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. When you subjoin, "Till it be set at liberty from the law of sin," you do not comment upon the text, but make an addition of your own, which the text will by no means bear. The carnal mind is enmity. An enemy may be reconciled, but enmity itself is incurable. This carnal mind, natural man, old man, flesh (for the expressions are all equivalent, and denote and include the heart of man as he is by nature,) may be crucified, must be mortified, but cannot be sanctified. All that is good and gracious, is the effect of a new creation, a supernatural principle, wrought in the heart by the gospel of Christ, and the agency of his Spirit; and, till that is effected, the *το υψιστος*, the highest attainment, the finest qualifications in man, however they may exalt him in his own eyes, or recommend him to the notice of his fellow-worms, are but abomination in the sight of God, Luke xvi. 15. The gospel is calculated and designed to stain the pride of human glory. It is provided, not for the wise and the righteous, for those who think they have good dispositions and good works to plead, but for the guilty, the helpless, the wretched, for those who are ready to perish; it fills the hungry with good things, but it sends the rich empty away. See Rev. iii. 17, 18.

You ask, If man can do nothing without an extraordinary impulse from on high, is he to sit still and careless? By no means—I am far from saying man can do nothing, though I believe he cannot open his own eyes, or give himself faith. I wish every man to abstain carefully from sinful company,

and sinful actions, to read the Bible, to pray to God for his heavenly teaching. For this waiting upon God he has a moral ability; and if he persevere thus in seeking, the promise is sure, that he shall not seek in vain. But I would not have him mistake the means for the end; think himself good because he is preserved from gross vices and follies, or trust to his religious course of duties for acceptance, nor be satisfied till Christ be revealed in him, formed within him, dwell in his heart by faith, and till he can say upon good grounds, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." I need not tell you, these are scriptural expressions; I am persuaded, if they were not, they would be exploded by many as unintelligible jargon. True faith, my dear Sir, unites the soul to Christ, and thereby gives access to God, and fills it with a peace passing understanding, a hope, a joy unspeakable and full of glory; teaches us that we are weak in ourselves, but enables us to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. To those who thus believe, Christ is precious, their beloved; they hear and know his voice: the very sound of his name gladdens their hearts, and he manifests himself to them as he does not to the world. Thus the scriptures speak, thus the first christians experienced; and this is precisely the language, which, in our days, is despised as enthusiasm and folly. For it is now as it was then, though these things are revealed to babes, and they are as sure of them as that they see the noon-day sun, they are hidden from the wise and prudent, till the Lord makes them willing to renounce their own wisdom, and to become fools, that they may be truly wise, 1 Cor. i. 18, 19; iii. 8; viii. 2. Attention to the education of children is an undoubted duty; and it is a mercy when it so far succeeds as to preserve them from gross wickedness; but it will not change the heart. They who receive Christ are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, John i. 13.

If a man professes to love the Lord Jesus, I am willing to believe him, if he does not give me proof to the contrary; but I am sure, at the same time, no one can love him in the scriptural sense, who does not know the need and the worth of a Saviour; in other words, who is not brought, as a ruined, helpless sinner, to live upon him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. They who love him thus will speak highly of him, and acknowledge that he is their all in all. And they who thus love him, and speak of him, will get little thanks for their pains in such a world as this: "All that live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution;" the world that hated him, will hate them. And though it is possible, by his grace to put to

silence, in some measure, the ignorance of foolish men; and though his providence can protect his people, so that not a hair of their heads can be hurt without his permission: yet the world will show their teeth, if they are not suffered to bite. The apostles were accounted babblers, *ως περικαυόμενα τῶν λόγων καὶ πῶς περὶ ψήφου*. I need not point out to you the force of these expressions. We are no better than the apostles; nor have we reason to expect much better treatment, so far as we walk in their steps. On the other hand, there is a sober, decent way of speaking of God, and goodness, and benevolence, and sobriety, which the world will bear well enough; nay, we may say a little about Jesus Christ, as ready to make up the deficiencies of our honest and good endeavours, and this will not displease them. But if we preach him as the only foundation, lay open the horrid evils of the human heart, tell our hearers that they are dead in trespasses and sins, and have no better ground of hope in themselves than the vilest malefactors, in order to exalt the glory of Jesus, as saving those who are saved wholly and freely for his own name's sake; if we tell the virtuous and decent, as well as the profligate, that unless they are born again, and made partakers of living faith, and count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, they cannot be saved: this the world cannot bear. We shall be called knaves or fools, uncharitable bigots, and twenty hard names. If you have met with nothing like this, I wish it may lead you to suspect whether you have yet received the right key to the doctrines of Christ: for depend upon it, the offence of the cross is not ceased.

I am grieved and surprised that you seem to take little notice of any thing in the account of my deceased friend, but his wishing himself to be a deist, and his having play-books about him in his illness. As to the plays, they were Shakespeare's, which, as a man of taste, it is no great wonder he should sometimes look in. Your remark on the other point shows that you are not much acquainted with the exercises of the human mind under certain circumstances. I believe I observed formerly, that it was not a libertine wish. Had you known him, you would have known one of the most amiable and unblemished characters. Few were more beloved and admired for an uniform course of integrity, moderation, and benevolence; but he was discouraged. He studied the Bible, believed it in general to be the word of God; but his wisdom, his strong turn for reasoning, stood so in his way, that he could get no solid comfort from it. He felt the vanity of the schemes proposed by many men admired in the world as teachers of divinity; and he felt the vanity likewise of his own. He was also a minister, and had a sincere design of doing good. H.

wished to reform the profligate, and comfort the afflicted by his preaching; but as he was not acquainted with that one kind of preaching which God owns to the edification of the hearers, he found he could do neither. A sense of disappointments of this kind distressed him. Finding in himself none of that peace which the scriptures speak of, and none of the influence he hoped for attending his ministry, he was led sometimes to question the truth of the scriptures. We have a spiritual enemy always near, to press upon a mind in this desponding situation: nor am I surprised that he should then wish himself a deist; since, if there were any hope for a sinner but by faith in the blood of Jesus, he had as much of his own goodness to depend upon as most I have known. As for the rest, if you could see nothing admirable and wonderful in the clearness, the dignity, the spirituality of his expressions, after the Lord revealed the gospel to him, I can only say, I am sorry for it. This I know, that some persons of sense, taste, learning, and reason, and far enough from my sentiments, have been greatly struck with them. You say, a death-bed repentance is what you would be sorry to give any hope of. My dear friend, it is well for poor sinners that God's thoughts and ways are as much above men's, as the heavens are higher than the earth. We agree to communicate our sentiments freely, and promised not to be offended with each other's freedom, if we could help it. I am afraid of offending you by a thought just now upon my mind, and yet I dare not in conscience suppress it. I must therefore venture to say, that I hope they who depend upon such a repentance as your scheme points out, will repent of their repentance itself upon their death-bed at least, if not sooner. You and I perhaps, should have encouraged the fair spoken young man who said he had kept all the commandments from his youth, and rather have left the thief upon the cross to perish like a villain, as he lived. But Jesus thought differently. I do not encourage sinners to defer their repentance to their death-beds. I press the necessity of a repentance this moment. But then I take care to tell them, that repentance is the gift of God; that Jesus is exalted to bestow it; and that all their endeavours that way, unless they seek to him for grace, will be vain as washing a blackmoor, and transient as washing a sow which will soon return to the mire again. I know the evil heart will abuse the grace of God; the apostle knew this likewise, Rom. iii. 8, and vi. 3. But this did not tempt him to suppress the glorious grace of the gospel, the power of Jesus to save to the uttermost, and his merciful promise, that whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast him out. The repentance of a natural heart proceeding wholly from fear, like that of some malefactors, who are sorry,

not that they have committed robbery or murder, but that they must be hanged for it; this undoubtedly is nothing worth, whether in time of health, or in a dying hour. But that *miraculous*, that gracious change of heart, views, and dispositions, which always takes place when Jesus is made known to the soul as having died, that the sinner might live, and been wounded, that he might be healed; this, at whatever period God is pleased to afford and effect it by his Spirit, brings a sure and everlasting salvation with it.

Still I find I have not done: you ask my exposition of the parables of the talents and pounds; but at present I can write no more. I have only just time to tell you, that when I begged your acceptance of Omicron, nothing was farther from my expectation than a correspondence with you. The frank and kind manner in which you wrote presently won upon my heart. In the course of our letters upon subscription, I observed an integrity and disinterestedness in you, which endeared you to me still more. Since that our debates have taken a much more interesting turn; I have considered it as a call, and an opportunity put in my hand, by the special providence of him who ruleth over all. I have embraced the occasion, to lay before you simply, and rather in a way of testimony than argumentation, what, in the main, I am sure is truth. I have done enough to discharge my conscience, but shall never think I do enough to answer the affection I bear you. I have done enough likewise to make you weary of my correspondence, unless it should

please God to fix the subject deeply upon your mind, and make you attentive to the possibility and vast importance of a mistake in matters of everlasting concernment. I pray that the good Spirit of God may guide you into all truths. He only is the effectual teacher. I still retain a cheerful hope, that some things you cannot at present receive, will hereafter be the joy and comfort of your heart: but I know it cannot be till the Lord's own time. I cannot promise to give such long answers as your letters require, to clear up every text that may be proposed, and to answer every objection that may be started; yet I shall be glad to change a letter now and then. At present, it remains with you whether our correspondence continues or not, as this is the third letter I have written since I heard from you, and therefore must be the last till I do. I should think what remains might be better settled *viva voce*; for which purpose I shall be glad to see you, or ready to wait on you when leisure will permit, and when I know it will be agreeable: but if (as life and all its affairs are precarious) we should never meet in this world, I pray God we may meet at the right hand of Jesus, in the great day when he shall come to gather up his jewels, and to judge the world. There is an endless diversity of opinions in matters of religion; which of them are right and safe, and will lead to eternal glory, *dies iste indicabit*. I am still in a manner lost amidst more engagements than I have time to comply with; but I feel and know that I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MR. B——, &c.

LETTER I.

September 28, 1774.

MY DEAREST SIR,—I see the necessity of having, if possible, my principles at my fingers' ends, that I may apply them as occasions arise every hour. Certainly if my ability was equal to my inclination, I would remove your tumour with a word or a touch; I would exempt you instantly and constantly from every inconvenience and pain: but you are in the hands of one who could do all this and more, and who loves you infinitely better than I can do, and yet he is pleased to permit you to suffer. What is the plain inference? Certainly that at the present juncture, he to whom all the concatenations and consequences of events are present in one view, sees it better for you to have this tumour than to be without it; for I have no more idea of a tumour rising, or any other incidental trial befalling you, without a cause, without a need-be, without a designed advantage to result from it, than I have of a mountain or pyramid rising up of its own accord in the middle of Salisbury Plain. The promise is express, and literally true, that all things, universally and without exception, shall work together for good to them that love God. But they work together; the smallest as well as the greatest events have their place and use,—like the several stones in the arch of a bridge, where no one would singly be useful, but every one in its place is necessary to the structure and support of the arch; or rather like the movement of a watch, where though there is an evident subordination of parts, and some pieces have a greater comparative importance than others, yet the smallest pieces have their place and use, and are so far equally important, that the whole design of the machine would be obstructed for want of them. Some dispensations and turns of divine providence may be compared to the main spring or capital wheels which have a more visible, sensible, and determining influence upon the whole tenor of our lives: but the more ordinary occurrences of every day are at least pins and

pivots, adjusted, timed, and suited with equal accuracy, by the hand of the same great Artist who planned and executes the whole; and we are sometimes surprised to see how much more depends and turns upon them than we were aware of. Then we admire his skill, and say he has done all things well. Indeed, with respect to his works of providence, as well as of creation, he well deserves the title of *Maximus in minimis*. Such thoughts as these, when I am enabled to realize them, in some measure reconcile me to what he allots for myself or my friends, and convince me of the propriety of that expostulation, which speaks the language of love as well as of authority, "Be still, and know that I am God." I sympathize with you in your trial, and pray and trust that your Shepherd will be your Physician; will superintend and bless the use of means; will give you in his good time health and cure, and at all times reveal unto you abundance of peace. His promises and power are necessary for our preservation in the smoother scenes he has allotted for us, and they are likewise sufficient for the roughest. We are always equally in danger in ourselves, and always equally safe under the shadow of his wings. No storms, assaults, sieges, or pestilences can hurt us, till we have filled up his appointed measure of service; and when our work is done, and he has ripened us for glory, it is no great matter by what means he is pleased to call us home to himself.

I have only room to present our joint and sincerest respects. The Lord bless you all.—
I am, &c.

LETTER II.

October 15, 1774.

MY DEAREST SIR,—I think the greatness of trials is to be estimated, rather by the impression they make upon our spirits, than by their outward appearance. The smallest will be too heavy for us if we are left to grapple with it in our own strength, or rather, weakness; and if the Lord is pleased

to put forth his power in us, he can make the heaviest light. A lively impression of his love, or of his sufferings for us, or of the glories within the veil, accompanied with a due sense of the misery from which we are redeemed; these thoughts will enable us to be not only submissive, but even joyful in tribulations. When faith is in exercise, though the flesh will have its feelings, the spirit will triumph over them. But it is needful we should know that we have no sufficiency in ourselves, and in order to know it, we must feel it; and therefore, the Lord sometimes withdraws his sensible influence, and then the buzzing of a fly will be an overmatch for our patience; at other times, he will show us what he can do in us and for us; then we can adopt the apostle's words, and say, I can do and suffer all things through Christ strengthening me. He has said, My grace is sufficient for thee. It is observable, that the children of God seldom disappoint our expectations under great trials; if they show a wrongness of spirit, it is usually in such little incidents, that we are ready to wonder at them: for which, two reasons may be principally assigned. When great trials are in view, we run simply and immediately to our all-sufficient friend, feel our dependence, and cry in good earnest for help; but if the occasion seems small, we are too apt secretly to lean to our own wisdom and strength, as if in such slight matters we could make shift without him. Therefore, in these we often fail. Again, the Lord deals with us as we sometimes see mothers with their children. When a child begins to walk, he is often very self-important; he thinks he needs no help, and can hardly bear to be supported by the finger of another. Now, in such a case, if there is no danger of harm from a fall, as if he is on a plain carpet, the mother will let him alone to try how he can walk. He is pleased at first, but presently down he comes; and a few experiments of this kind convince him he is not so strong and able as he thought, and make him willing to be led. But was he upon the brink of a river or a precipice, from whence a fall might be fatal, the tender mother would not trust him to himself, no not for a moment. I have not room to make the application, nor is it needful. It requires the same grace to bear with a right spirit a cross word, as a cross injury; or the breaking of a china-plate, as the death of an only son.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

November 23, 1774.

MY DEAR SIR,—I hope to be informed in due time, that the Lord has given you full

health and cure. He has preserved me hitherto from the hands of surgeons; but I feel as if my flesh would prove, as you say, a very coward, were it needful to submit to a painful operation. Yet I observe, when such operations are necessary, if people are satisfied of a surgeon's skill and prudence, they will not only yield to be cut at his pleasure, without pretending to direct him where, or how long he shall make the incision, but will thank and pay him for putting them to pain, because they believe it for their advantage. I wish I could be more like them in my concerns. My body, as I said, is, through mercy, free from considerable ailments, but I have a soul that requires surgeon's work continually; there is some tumour to be discussed or laid open, some dislocation to be reduced, some fracture to be healed, almost daily. It is my great mercy, that one who is infallible in skill, who exercises incessant care, and boundless compassion towards all his patients, has undertaken my case; and complicated as it is, I dare not doubt his making a perfect cure. Yet alas! I too often discover such impatience, distrust, and complaining, when under his hand, am so apt to find fault with the instruments he is pleased to make use of, so ready to think the salutary wounds he makes, unnecessary or too large; in a word, I show such a promptness to control, were I able, or to direct his operations, that, were not his patience beyond expression, he would before now have given me up. I am persuaded, no money would induce Mr. —— to attend upon a patient who should act towards him as I have done towards my best Physician. Sometimes I indulge a hope that I am growing wiser, and think surely, after such innumerable proofs as I have had, that he does all things well, I shall now be satisfied to leave myself quietly and without reserve to his disposal. A thousand such surrenders I have made, and a thousand times I have interpretatively retracted them. Yet still he is gracious. O, how shall I praise him at last!

I thank you for your letter; I never receive one from you without pleasure, and, I believe, seldom without profit, at least for the time. I believe, with you, that there is much of the proper and defined efficacy of the gospel-ministry which I have not yet experienced. And I suppose they who are advanced far beyond me in the divine life, judge the same of their utmost present attainments. Yet I have no idea of any permanent state in this life, that shall make my experience cease to be a state of warfare and humiliation. At my first setting out, indeed, I thought to be better, and to feel myself better from year to year; I expected by degrees to attain every thing which I then comprised in my idea of a saint. I thought my grain of grace,

by much diligence and careful improvement, would in time amount to a pound, that pound in a farther space of time to a talent, and then I hoped to increase from one talent to many; so that supposing the Lord should spare me a competent number of years, I pleased myself with the thoughts of dying rich. But, alas! these my golden expectations have been like South Sea dreams; I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one. Have I then gained nothing by waiting upon the Lord? Yes, I have gained that, which I once would rather have been without, such accumulated proofs of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart; as I hope, by the Lord's blessing, has in some measure taught me to know what I mean, when I say, Behold I am vile! And in connexion with this, I have gained such experience of the wisdom, power, and compassion of my Redeemer, the need, the worth of his blood, righteousness, attention, and intercession—the glory that he displays in pardoning iniquity and sin, and passing by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage, that my soul cannot but cry out, Who is a God like unto thee! Thus, if I have any meaner thoughts of myself (Ezek. xvi. 63.) and any higher thoughts of him than I had twenty years ago, I have reason to be thankful; every grain of this experience is worth mountains of gold. And if, by his mercy, I shall yet sink more in my own esteem, and he will be pleased to rise still more glorious to my eyes, and more precious to my heart; I expect it will be much in the same way. I was ashamed when I began to seek him, I am more ashamed now; and I expect to be most of all ashamed when he shall appear to destroy my last enemy. But, O! I may rejoice in him, to think that he will not be ashamed of me.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

May 19, 1775.

MY DEAR SIR,—I hope you find the Lord present at all times, and in all places. When it is so, we are at home everywhere; when it is otherwise, home is a prison, and abroad a wilderness. I know what I ought to desire, and what I do desire. I point him out to others as the all in all; I esteem him as such in my own judgment; but, alas! my experience abounds with complaints. He is my sun; but clouds, and sometimes walls, intercept him from my view. He is my strength; yet I am prone to lean upon reeds. He is my friend; but on my part there is such coldness and ingratitude as no other friend could bear. But still he is gracious, and shames me with his repeated multiplied goodness. O for a warmer heart, a
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more simple dependance, a more active zeal, a more sensible deliverance from the effects of this body of sin and death! He helps me in my endeavours to keep the vineyards of others; but, alas! my own does not seem to flourish as some do around me. However, though I cannot say I labour more abundantly than they all, I have reason to say with thankfulness, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." My poor story would soon be much worse, did not he support, restrain, and watch over me every minute. Let me intreat your praises and prayers on the behalf of me and mine, and may the Lord bless you and yours with an increase in every good.—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

September 2, 1776.

MY DEAR SIR,—The young woman I spoke of is still living, and not much weaker than when I left her. The Lord was pleased to relieve her on Tuesday evening, and she was comfortable the remainder of the week. But yesterday her conflicts returned, and she was in great distress. The enemy who always fights against the peace of the Lord's children, finds great advantage against them when their spirits are weakened and worn down by long illness, and is often permitted to assault them. The reasons are hidden from us, but they are doubtless worthy of his wisdom and love, and they terminate in victory to the praise of his glorious grace, which is more signally manifested by his leading them safely through fire and water, than if their path was always smooth. He is sovereign in his dispensations, and appoints some of his people to trials and exercises to which others, perhaps, are strangers all their days. Believers are soldiers: all soldiers, by their profession, are engaged to fight if called upon, but who shall be called to sustain the hottest service, and be most frequently exposed upon the field of battle, depends upon the will of the general or king. Some of our soldiers are now upon hard service in America, while others are stationed round the palace, see the King's face daily, and have no dangers or hardships to encounter. These, however, are as liable to a call as the others; but if not called upon, they may enjoy with thankfulness the more easy post assigned them. Thus the Captain of our salvation allots to his soldiers such stations as he thinks proper. He has a right to employ whom he will, and where he will. Some are comparatively at ease; they are not exposed to the fiercest onsets, but live near his presence: others are, to appearance, pressed above measure, beyond strength, so that they despair even of life; yet they are supported.

and in the end made more than conquerors, through him that hath loved them. Long observation convinces me, that the temptations which some endure are not chastisements brought upon them by unfaithfulness, or for any thing remarkably wrong in their spirit or walk; I often rather consider that in this warfare, as in worldly wars, the post of danger and difficulty is the post of honour, and as such assigned to those whom he has favoured with a peculiar measure of his grace. This young woman, in particular, was always from her first awakening remarkably humble and spiritual, and possessed of a broken and contrite spirit. I never saw her in a wrong spirit, or heard her speak an unadvised word; yet I believe it is impossible to express the agonies she has endured. The effect of them is visible. Her animal frame was unable to sustain the burden. I believe they were the immediate cause of that illness which is now bringing her down to the grave. I doubt not but these cases depend in a great measure upon constitution; but then the temperament of our bodies depends upon his pleasure, for, if the very hairs of our head are numbered, it is impossible that those circumstances of our frame which, by the near connexion between body and soul, have a powerful influence upon the state of our minds, can escape his notice. He could cure such bodily disorders as effect the peace of his people in a moment, yet he does not, though he loves them. There must be therefore wise reasons why he does not; and, though we know them not now, we shall know them hereafter. Possibly some suffer for the instruction of the rest, that we may learn to be more thankful to him for the peace we enjoy, and to be more humbly dependant upon him for the continuance of it. The Lord's way is in the deep, and his path in the great waters, untraceable by our feeble reasonings, but faith brings in a good report. We need not doubt but he does all things well, and in due time we shall see it. In the meanwhile he checks our vain inquiries, and calls upon us to be still, and know that he is God.

I brought home with me a thankful sense of the kindness and friendship I am favoured with from you and all yours. I account this connexion one of the great comforts of my life, and I hope it has been, and will be, not only pleasant but profitable to me. Though I am but an unapt scholar, I hope I am not unwilling to learn, and the Lord, in his merciful providence, appoints me many teachers. This is little praise due to us, if we either communicate or receive benefit in our intercourse with our fellow-disciples. In both we are but instruments under the influence of a higher hand. Were christians to meet together without their Lord, they would either *trifle* or quarrel their time away. But as *he has said*, where two or three are met,

there am I in the midst of them, we may well be glad of opportunities of coming together. And though, for my own part, I am so poor an improver of such seasons, that the recollection of them, when past, is generally accompanied with shame and regret, yet he is gracious and merciful, and seldom leaves me to complain that they were wholly in vain.—I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

July 22, 1777.

MY DEAR SIR,—

The complaints you make of what passes within, encourage me under what I feel myself. Indeed, if those whom I have reason to believe are more spiritual and humble than I am, did not give some testimony that they find their hearts made of the same materials as mine is, I should be sometimes hard put to it to believe that I have any part or lot in the matter, or any real knowledge of the life of faith. But this concurrent testimony of many witnesses confirms me in what I think the scriptures plainly teach, that the soil of human nature, though many spots are certainly better weeded, planted, and manured than others, is everywhere the same, universally bad; so bad that it cannot be worse, and of itself is only capable of producing noxious weeds, and nourishing venomous creatures. We often see the effects of culture, skill, and expense will make a garden where all was desert before. When Jesus, the good husbandman, incloses a soil, and separates it from the waste of the world, to make it a residence for himself, a change presently takes place; it is planted and watered from above, and visited with beams infinitely more cheering and fertilizing than those of the material sun. But its natural propensity to bring forth weeds still continues, and one half of his dispensations may be compared to a company of weeders, whom he sends forth into his garden to pluck up all which he has not planted with his own hand, and which, if left to grow, would quickly overpower and overtop the rest. But, alas! the ground is so impregnated with evil seeds, and they shoot in such quick succession, that if this weeding work were not constantly repeated, all former labour would be lost. *Hinc illa lachrymæ!* hence arises the necessity of daily crosses and disappointments, daily changes of frame, and such multiplied convictions that we are nothing and can do nothing of ourselves; all are needful, and barely sufficient to prevent our hearts from being over-run with pride, self-dependance, and security.—Yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

November 6, 1777.

MY DEAR SIR,—You say you are more disposed to cry *miserere* than *hallelujah*. Why not both together? When the treble is praise, and heart-humiliation for the bass, the melody is pleasant, and the harmony good. However, if not both together, we must have them alternately; not all singing, not all sighing, but an interchange and balance, that we may be neither lifted too high, nor cast down too low, which would be the case if we were very comfortable or very sorrowful for a long continuance. But though we change, the Saviour changes not. All our concerns are in his hands, and therefore safe. His path is in the deep waters, his thoughts and methods of conduct are as high above ours as the heavens are high above the earth; and he often takes a course for accomplishing his purposes directly contrary to what our narrow views would prescribe. He wounds in order to heal, kills that he may make alive, casts down when he designs to raise, brings a death upon our feelings, wishes, and prospects, when he is about to give us the desire of our hearts. These things he does to prove us; but he himself knows, and has determined beforehand, what he will do. The proof indeed usually turns out to our shame. Impatience and unbelief show their heads, and prompt us to suppose this and the other thing, yea perhaps all things are against us, to question whether he be with us and for us, or not. But it issues likewise in the praise of his goodness, when we find that, maugre all our unkind complaints and suspicions, he is still working wonderfully for us, causing light to shine out of darkness, and doing us good in defiance of ourselves.—I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

TO MR. B——, JUN.

August 24, 1774.

DEAR SIR,—The lowness of your voice, and a blameable absence of mind on my part, prevented me from understanding what you said when you took your leave of me; nor did I just at that instant recollect that you were so soon going away. I could not otherwise have parted with you, without a particular expression of my warmest wishes for your welfare, and commending you with an emotion which my heart always feels for you to our God and the word of his grace. Permit me, therefore, by writing, to assure you, so far as I can answer for myself, that the request you were pleased to make for my remembrance will not be forgotten by me.

You are going abroad: you will carry with you, I doubt not, the best advice, strengthened by the authority and affection of parents, whom you greatly love and greatly reverence. This may seem to make anything a stranger can offer unnecessary, if not impertinent; yet, confiding in your candour and in your good opinion of my intention, I shall venture to let my pen run on a little longer. Not only my wishes, but my hopes are strong in your behalf. Perhaps there is hardly a young man in the kingdom, born to a fortune, who is setting out in life upon equal advantages with yourself. How many, at your years, who have been brought up in affluence, are unprincipled, uninstructed, and have already entered upon a course of dissipation and folly, in which it is impossible they themselves can find satisfaction, and which, unless they are reclaimed from it by an almighty arm, will infallibly preclude them from usefulness and esteem; whereas your early years have been successfully employed in the pursuit of knowledge, and your education formed under the most animating and endearing influence; and the Lord has furnished you with every natural ability of body and mind, which may qualify you to serve him in that situation of life which his providence has allotted you.

What may I not, then, farther hope from these beginnings, especially as it is easy to observe, that he has given you an amiable and promising disposition of spirit, and has not only preserved you from being hurried down the stream of a giddy world, but enabled you to account the tender restraint under which you have been educated, not a yoke, but a privilege.

I sympathize with you at what you will feel when you are first separated from your happy family. But the Lord God, who is the sun and shield of those who fear him, will be always near you! His favour is the one thing needful, which no outward advantages can compensate the want of; and the right knowledge of him is the one thing needful, which no human teaching can communicate.

Were I more intimate with you, I could have asked the question, and perhaps received the satisfaction to know, that you have already begun to consider him in this light; that you feel a vanity in science, an emptiness in creatures, and find that you have desires, which only He who gave them can satisfy. I trust it either is, or will be thus. As to learning, though it is useful when we know how to make a right use of it, yet, considered as in our own power, and to those who trust in it, without seeking a superior guidance, it is usually the source of perplexity, strife, scepticism, and infidelity. It is indeed like a sword in a madman's hands, which gives him the more opportunity of hurting himself and others. As to what

the world calls pleasure, there is so little in it, that even the philosophers of old, or many of them, though they had little of value to substitute in its room, could despise it. You will perhaps meet with some, who will talk another language, who will pretend to be too wise to submit to the Bible, and too happy in worldly things, to expect or desire any happiness besides; but I trust you have seen enough to enable you to treat such persons with pity, and such pretensions with the contempt they deserve.

Should we set our concerns with an eternal world aside for a moment, it would be easy to demonstrate that religion is necessary, in order to make the most of this life, and to enjoy temporal good with the highest relish. In such a world as this, where we are every moment liable to so many unforeseen and unavoidable contingencies, a man without religion may be compared to a ship in a storm, without either rudder, anchor, or pilot. But then, the religion which only deserves the name, must come from above: it must be suited to the state and wants of a sinner, it must be capable of comforting the heart, it must take away the sting and dread of death, and fix our confidence upon one who is always able to help us. Such is the religion of Jesus, such are its effects, and such are the criteria whereby we are to judge of the various forms and schemes under which it is proposed to us. But I forbear; I am only reminding you of what you know, and what you have known to be verified by living and dying examples. This happiness, my dear Sir, is open to you, to all who seek. He is enthroned in heaven, but prayer will bring him down to the heart. Indeed, he is always beforehand with us; and if we feel one desire towards him, we may accept it as a token that he gave it us to encourage us to ask for more.

May he be your guide and guard, be with you at all times, and in all places, and bring you back to your father's house in peace. Should I live to see that day, you have few friends whose congratulations would be warmer or more sincere than mine; and if, when you are settled and at leisure, you will afford me a letter, it will be both a pleasure and a favour to, dear Sir,—Yours, &c.

LETTER IX.

TO MISS M— B—.

November 11, 1775.

MY DEAR MISS M—,—Our late visit to — was very pleasant to myself; if any thing passed that was of service to you, we know to whom the thanks are due; for we can neither communicate nor receive any

thing, but so far as he is pleased to enable us. One reason why he often disappoints us is, that we may learn to depend on him alone. We are prone, as you observe, to rest too much upon sensible comforts, yet they are very desirable; only as to the measure and seasons, it is well to be submissive to his will, to be thankful for them when we have them, and humbly waiting for them when we have them not. They are not however, the proper ground of our hope; a good hope springs from such a sense of our wants, and such a persuasion of his power and grace, as engages the heart to venture, upon the warrant of his promises, to trust in him for salvation. In a sense, we are often hindering him by our impatience and unbelief; but, strictly speaking, when he really begins the good work, and gives us a desire which will be satisfied with nothing short of himself, he will not be hindered from carrying it on; for he has said, I will work, and none shall let it. Ah! had it depended upon myself, upon my wisdom or faithfulness, I should have hindered him to purpose, and ruined myself long ago. How often have I grieved and resisted his Spirit! but hereby I have learned more of his patience and tenderness than I could otherwise have known. He knows our frame, and what effects our evil nature, fomented by the artifices of Satan, will have; he sees us from first to last. A thousand evils arise in our hearts. A thousand wrongnesses in our conduct, which, as they do arise, are new to ourselves, and perhaps, at some times, we were ready to think we were incapable of such things; but none of them are new to him, to whom past, present, and future are the same. The foresight of them did not prevent his calling us by his grace. Though he knew we were vile, and should prove ungrateful and unfaithful, yet he would be found of us; he would knock at the door of our hearts, and gain himself an entrance. Nor shall they prevent his accomplishing his gracious purpose. It is our part to be abased before him, and quietly to hope and wait for his salvation, in the use of his appointed means. The power, success, and blessing, are wholly from himself. To make us more sensible of this, he often withdraws from our perceptions; and as, in the absence of the sun, the wild beasts of the forest roam abroad; so when Jesus hides himself, we presently perceive what is in our hearts, and what a poor shift we can make without him; when he returns, his light chases the evils away, and we are well again. However, they are not dead when most controlled by his presence.

It is your great and singular mercy, my dear Miss, that he has taught you to seek him so early in life. You are entered in the way of salvation, but you must not expect all at once. The work of grace is compared to the

corn, and to a building; the growth of the one, and the carrying forward of the other, are gradual. In a building, for instance, if it be large, there is much to be done in preparing and laying the foundation, before the walls appear above ground; much is doing within, when the work does not seem, perhaps, to advance without; and when it is considerably forward, yet being encumbered with scaffolds and rubbish, a bystander sees it at a great disadvantage, and can form but an imperfect judgment of it. But all this while the architect himself, even from the laying of the first stone, conceives of it according to the plan and design he has formed; he prepares and adjusts the materials, disposing each in its proper time and place, and views it in idea as already finished. In due season it is completed, but not in a day. The top-stone is fixed, and then, the scaffolds and rubbish being removed, it appears to others as he intended it should be. Men indeed often plan what, for want of skill or ability, or from unforeseen disappointments, they are unable to execute. But nothing can disappoint the heavenly Builder; nor will he ever be reproached with forsaking the work of his own hands, or beginning that which he could not or would not accomplish, Phil. i. 6. Let us therefore be thankful for beginnings, and patiently wait the event. His enemies strive to retard the work, as they did when the Jews, by his order, set about rebuilding the temple, yet it was finished in defiance of them all.—Believe me to be, &c.

LETTER X.

April 29, 1776.

MY DEAR MISS M—,—I thank you for your last; and I rejoice in the Lord's goodness to you. To be drawn by love, exempted from those distressing terrors and temptations which some are beset with; to be favoured with the ordinances and means of grace, and connected with those, and with those only, who are disposed and qualified to assist and encourage you in seeking the Saviour; these are peculiar privileges, which all concur in your case; he loves you, he deals gently with you, he provides well for you, and accompanies every outward privilege with his special blessing; and I trust he will lead you on from strength to strength, and show you still greater things than you have yet seen. They whom he teaches are always increasing in knowledge, both of themselves and of him. The heart is deep, and like Ezekiel's vision, presents so many chambers of imagery, one within another, that it requires time to get a considerable acquaintance with it, and we shall never know it thoroughly. It is now more than twenty-eight

years since the Lord began to open mine to my own view; and from that time to this, almost every day has discovered to me, something which till then was unobserved; and the farther I go, the more I seem convinced that I have entered but a little way. A person that travels in some parts of Derbyshire may easily be satisfied that the country is cavernous; but how large, how deep, how numerous, the caverns may be, which are hidden from us by the surface of the ground, and what is contained in them, are questions which our nicest inquiries cannot fully answer. Thus I judge of my heart, that it is very deep and dark, and full of evil; but as to particulars, I know not one of a thousand.

And if our own hearts are beyond our comprehension, how much more incomprehensible is the heart of Jesus! If sin abounds in us, grace and love superabound in him; his ways and thoughts are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth; his love has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, that passeth all knowledge; and his riches of grace are unsearchable riches, Eph. iii. 8, 18, 19. All that we have received or can receive from him, or know of him in this life, compared with what he is in himself, or what he has done for us, is but as the drop of a bucket compared with the ocean, or a single ray of light in respect of the sun. The waters of the sanctuary flow to us at first almost upon a level, ankle deep, so graciously does the Lord condescend to our weakness: but they rise as we advance, and constrain us to cry out with the apostle, O the depth! We find before us, as Dr. Watts beautifully expresses it,

A sea of love and grace unknown
Without a bottom or a shore.

O the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. It will be growing upon us through time, yea, I believe through eternity. What an astonishing and what a cheering thought, that this high and lofty One should unite himself to our nature, that so, in a way worthy of his adorable perfections, he might by his Spirit, unite us to himself! Could such a thought have arisen in our hearts, without the warrant of his word (but it is a thought which no created mind was capable of conceiving till he revealed it,) it would have been presumption and blasphemy; but now he has made it known, it is the foundation of our hope, and an exhaustible spring of life and joy. Well may we say, Lord, what is man that thou shouldst thus visit him!—I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

September 3, 1776.

MY DEAR MISS M—,—We saw no danger upon the road homeward: but my judg-

ment tells me we are always upon the brink of danger, though we see it not; and that, without the immediate protection and care of him who preserveth the stars in their courses, there could be no travelling safely a few miles, nor even sitting in safety by the fire-side. But with him we are safe in all places and circumstances, till our race is done, and his gracious purposes concerning us, in the present life, are completely answered; then he will call us home, that we may see his face, and be with him for ever, and then it will not much signify what messenger he shall be pleased to send for us.

While he took care of us abroad, he watched over our concerns at home likewise; so that we found all well upon our return, and met with nothing to grieve us. Many go out and return home no more, and many find distressing things have happened in their absence, but we have to set up our Ebenezer, and to say, Hitherto he has helped us. Assist me to praise him. The Lord is leading you in the good old way, in which you may perceive the footsteps of his flock who have gone before you. They had in their day the same difficulties, fears, and complaints, as we have, and through mercy we partake of the same consolation which supported and refreshed them; and the promises which they trusted and found faithful, are equally sure to us. It is still true, that they who believe shall never be confounded. If left to ourselves, we should have built upon sand; but he has provided and revealed a sure foundation, removed our natural prejudices against it; and now, though rains, and floods, and storms assault our building, it cannot fall, for it is founded upon a rock. The suspicions and fears which arise in an awakened mind, proceed, in a good measure, from remaining unbelief; but not wholly so, for there is a jealousy and diffidence of ourselves, a wariness owing to a sense of the deceitfulness of our hearts, which is a grace and a gift of the Lord. Some people who have much zeal, but are destitute of this jealous fear, may be compared to a ship that spreads a great deal of sail, but is not properly ballasted, and is therefore in danger of being upset whenever a storm comes. A sincere person has many reasons for distrusting his own judgment; is sensible of the vast importance of the case, and afraid of too hastily concluding in his own favour, and therefore not easily satisfied. However, this fear, though useful, especially to young beginners, is not comfortable; and they who simply wait upon Jesus, are gradually freed from it, in proportion as their knowledge of him, and their experience of his goodness, increases. He has a time for settling and establishing them in himself, and his time is best. We are hasty, and would be satisfied at once, but his word is, Tarry thou the Lord's leisure. The work

of grace is not like Jonah's gourd, which sprang up and flourished in a night, and as quickly withered, but rather like the oak, which, from a little acorn and a tender plant, advances with an almost imperceptible growth from year to year, till it becomes a broad spreading and deep-rooted tree, and then it stands for ages. The christian oak shall grow and flourish for ever. When I see any soon after they appear to be awakened, making a speedy profession of great joy, before they have a due acquaintance with their own hearts, I am in pain for them. I am not sorry to hear them afterwards complain that their joys are gone, and they are almost at their wits end; for without some such check, to make them feel their weakness and dependence, I seldom find them turn out well; either their fervour insensibly abates till they become quite cold, and sink into the world again, (of which I have seen many instances,) or if they do not give up all, their walk is uneven, and their spirit has not that savour of brokenness and true humility, which is a chief ornament of our holy profession. If they do not feel the plague of their hearts at first, they find it out afterwards, and too often manifest it to others. Therefore though I know the Spirit of the Lord is free, and will not be confined to our rules, and there may be excepted cases; yet, in general, I believe the old proverb, "Soft and fair goes far," will hold good in christian experience. Let us be thankful for the beginnings of grace, and wait upon our Saviour patiently for the increase. And as we have chosen him for our physician, let us commit ourselves to his management, and not prescribe to him what he shall prescribe for us. He knows us and he loves us better than we do ourselves, and will do all things well.

You say, "It never came with power and life to my soul, that he died for me." If you mean you never had any extraordinary sudden manifestation, something like a vision or a voice from heaven, confirming it to you. I can say the same. But I know he died for sinners; I know I am a sinner: I know he invites them that are ready to perish; I am such a one: I know, upon his own invitation, I have committed myself to him; and I know, by the effects, that he has been with me hitherto, otherwise I should have been an apostate long ago; and therefore I know that he died for me; for had he been pleased to kill me (as he justly might have done,) he would not have shown me such things as these.

If I must perish, would the Lord
Have taught my heart to love his word?
Would he have given me eyes to see
My danger and my remedy?
Reveal'd his name, and bid me pray,
Had he resolv'd to say me nay?

I know that I am a child, because he

teaches me to say, Abba, Father. I know that I am his, because he has enabled me to choose him for mine. For such a choice and desire could never have taken place in my heart, if he had not placed it there himself. By nature I was too blind to know him, too proud to trust him, too obstinate to serve him, too base-minded to love him; the enmity I was filled with against his government,

righteousness, and grace, was too strong to be subdued by any power but his own. The love I bear to him is but a faint and feeble spark, but it is an emanation from himself. He kindled it, and he keeps it alive; and because it is his work, I trust many waters shall not quench it.

I have only room to assure you, that I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. R——

LETTER I.

April 15, 1776.

MY DEAR SIR,—

I often rejoice on your behalf. Your call out of the world was a singular and comfortable instance of the power of grace. And when I consider the difficulties and snares of your situation, and that you have been kept in the middle path, preserved from undue compliances on the one hand, and unnecessary singularities on the other, I cannot doubt but the Lord has hitherto helped and guided you. Indeed, you have need of his guidance. At your years, and with your expectations in life, your health firm, and your natural spirits lively, you are exposed to many snares; yet, if the Lord keeps you sensible of your danger, and dependent upon him, you will walk safely. Your security, success, and comfort, depend upon him; and in the way of means, chiefly upon your being preserved in an humble sense of your own weakness. It is written, "Fear not, I am with thee." It is written again, "Blessed is the man who feareth always." There is a perfect harmony in those seemingly different texts. May the wisdom that cometh from above teach you and me to keep them both united in our view. If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, his arm over us, his ear open to our prayer; his grace sufficient, his promise unchangeable. Under his protection, though the path of duty should lie through fire and water, we may cheerfully and confidently pursue it. On the other hand, our hearts are so deceitful, fallible, and frail; our spiritual enemies so subtle, watchful, and powerful; and they derive so many advantages from the occasions of every day, in which we are unavoidably and unexpectedly concerned; there is so much combustible within, and so many temptations arising from without, capable of setting all in a flame; that we cannot be too jealous of ourselves and our circum-

stances. The duke of Devonshire's motto, if I mistake not, well suits the christian, *Cavendo tutus*. When we can say, in the psalmist's spirit, "Hold thou me up," we may warrantably draw his conclusion, "and I shall be safe;" but the moment we lean to our own understanding, we are in imminent danger of falling. The enemy who wars against our souls is a consummate master in his way, fertile in stratagema, and equally skilful in carrying on his assaults by sap or by storm. He studies us, if I may so say, all around, to discover our weak sides; and he is a very Proteus for changing his appearances, and can appear as a sly serpent, a roaring lion, or an angel of light, as best suits his purpose. It is a great mercy to be in some measure acquainted with his devices, and aware of them. They who wait humbly upon the Lord, and consult carefully at his word and throne of grace, are made wiser than their enemy, and enabled to escape and withstand his wiles. I know you will not expect me to apologise for putting you in mind of these things, though you know them. I have a double warrant; the love I bear you, and the Lord's command, Heb. iii. 13. Use the like freedom with me; I need it, and hope to be thankful for it, and accept it as one of the best proofs of friendship.

The Lord bless and keep you. Pray for us, and believe me to be sincerely yours.

LETTER II.

July 13, 1776.

MY DEAR SIR,—The Lord, who mercifully called you out of a state of thoughtless dissipation, and has hitherto been with you, will, I trust, sweeten all your trials, and cause his light to shine upon your paths. It seems probable, that if you pay a just regard to your father's negative, which I really think he has a right to expect from you, and, at the same time, make a steady and conscien-

tious use of that negative, which he generously allows you to put upon his proposals, to which I think you have an equal right; I say, while things remain in this situation, and you continue to think differently, it seems probable that the hour of your exchanging a single for the marriage state is yet at some distance. But let not this grieve you. The Lord is all-sufficient. A lively sense of his love, a deep impression of eternity, a heart filled with zeal for his cause, and a thirst for the good of souls, will, I hope, enable you to make a cheerful sacrifice of whatever has no necessary connexion with your peace and his service. And you may rest assured, that whenever he, who loves you better than you do yourself, sees it best for you, upon the whole to change your condition, he will bring it about, he will point out the person, prepare the means, and secure the success, by his providence, and the power he has over every heart. And you shall see that all previous difficulties were either gracious preventions, which he threw in the way to prevent you taking a wrong step, or temporary bars, which by his removing them afterwards, should give you opportunity of more clearly perceiving his care and interposition in your favour. In the mean time, remember your high calling. You are a minister and an ambassador of Christ; you are entrusted with the most honourable and important employment that can engage and animate the heart of man.

ΤΑΥΤΑ ΠΡΟΚΑΤΑ, ΙΝ ΤΟΥΤΟΙΣ ΙΠΣΙ, ΙΣΤΑΙΝΕ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ.*

Filled and fired with a constraining sense of the love of Jesus, and the worth of souls; impressed with an ardour to carry war into Satan's kingdom, to storm his strongholds, and rescue his captives; you will have little leisure to think of any thing else. How does the love of glory stimulate the soldier, make him forget and forego a thousand personal tendernesses, and prompt him to cross oceans, to traverse deserts, to scale mountains, and plunge into the greatest hardships and the thickest dangers! He does it for a corruptible crown, a puff of breath, an empty fame; his highest prospect is the applause and favour of his prince. We likewise are soldiers; we have a Prince and Captain who deserves our all. They who know him, and have hearts to conceive of his excellence, and to feel their obligations to him, cannot indeed seek their own glory, but his glory is dearer to them than a thousand lives. They owe him their souls, for he redeemed them with blood, his own blood; and by his grace he subdued and pardoned them when they were rebels, and in arms against him. Therefore they are not their own, they would not be their own. When his standard is raised, when his enemies are in mo-

tion, when his people are to be rescued; they go forth clothed with his panoply, they fight under his eye, they are sure of his support, and he shows them the conqueror's crown. O, when they think of that *εὐτοκία* *γὰρ ἐστὶν*,* with which he has promised to welcome them home, when the campaign is over, hard things seem easy, and bitter things sweet; they count nothing, not even their own lives, dear, so that they may finish their course with joy. May the Lord make us thus minded; give us a hearty concern for his business, and he has engaged to take care of ours; and nothing that can conduce to our real comfort and usefulness shall be withheld.— Believe me to be sincerely yours.

LETTER III.

December 21, 1776.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter brought me tidings of joy, and then furnished me with materials for a bonfire upon the occasion. It was an act of passive obedience to burn it, but I did not obey. I congratulate you upon the happy issue to which the Lord has brought your affairs. I see that his good Spirit and good providence have been and are with you. I doubt not but your union with Miss — will be a mutual blessing, and, on your part, heightened by being connected with such a family. I could enlarge upon this head, if my letter likewise was to be burnt as soon as you have read it. I look upon the friendship the Lord has given me there as one of my prime privileges, and I hope I shall always be thankful that it proved a means of introducing you into it.

I congratulate you likewise upon your accession to —, not because it is a good living, in a genteel neighbourhood, and a fine country, but because I believe the Lord sends you there for fulfilling the desires he has given you of being useful to souls. Church-preferment, in any other view, is dreadful; and I would as soon congratulate a man upon seeing a millstone tied about his neck, to sink him into the depths of the sea, as upon his obtaining what is called a good living, except I thought him determined to spend and be spent in the cause of the gospel. A parish is an awful millstone indeed to those who see nothing valuable in the flock but the fleece; but the Lord has impressed your heart with a sense of the glory and importance of his truth and the worth of souls, and animated your zeal by the most powerful motive, the knowledge of his constraining love. Your case is extraordinary. Perhaps, when you review in your mind the circle of your former gay acquaintance, you may say, with Job's servant,

* 1 Tim. iv. 15, 16.

† Well done, good servant.

"I only am escaped alive." The rest are either removed into an eternal state, or are still hurrying down the stream of dissipation, and living without God in the world. Yet there was a time when there seemed no more probability, on your side than on theirs, that you should obtain mercy, and be called to the honour of preaching the glorious gospel. You are setting out with every possible advantage. In early life, with a cheerful flow of spirits, affluent circumstances, and now, to crown all, the Lord gives you the very choice of your heart in a partner; one who, besides deserving and meeting your affection, will, I am persuaded, be a real helpmeet to you in your spiritual walk. How much is here to be thankful for!

I trust the Lord has given you, and will maintain in you, a right spirit, so as not to rest in his gifts, but to hold them in connexion with the love and favour of the giver. It is a low time with us, when the greatest assemblage of earthly blessings can seem to satisfy us without real communion with him. His grace is sufficient for you; but undoubtedly such a scene of prosperity as seems to lie before you, is full of snares, and calls for a double effort of watchfulness and prayer. Your situation will fix many eyes upon you, and Satan will doubtless watch you, and examine every corner of the hedge around you, to see if he can find a gap by which to enter. We have but few rich gospel-ministers; but it is too evident that he has found a way to damp the zeal and hurt the spirits of some of those few, who for a time acted nobly, and seemed to walk out of the reach of the allurements of the world. I am not jealous of you; I feel a comfortable persuasion, that the Lord has taken a fast hold of your heart, and given you a fast hold of his almighty arm; yet I believe you will not be displeased with me for dropping a hint of this kind, and at this time.

You have heard of the trial with which the Lord has been pleased to visit us: it still continues, though considerably alleviated. It is tempered with many mercies, and I hope he disposes us in a measure to submission. I trust it will be for good. My dear friend, you are now coming into my school, where you will learn, as occasions offer, to feel more in the person of another than in your own. But be not discouraged, the Lord only afflicts for our good. It is necessary that our sharpest trials should sometimes spring from our dearest comforts, else we should be in danger of forgetting ourselves, and setting up our rest here. In such a world, and with such hearts as we have, we shall often need something to prevent our cleaving to the dust, to quicken us to prayer, and to make us feel that our dependence for one hour's peace is upon the Lord alone. I am ready to think I have known as much of the good and happiness

which this world can afford, as most people who live in it. I never saw the person with whom I wished to exchange in temporals. And for many years past I have thought my trials have been light and few, compared with what many, or most of the Lord's people have endured. And yet, though in the main possessed of my own wishes, when I look back upon the twenty-seven years past, I am ready to style them, with Jacob, few and evil; and to give the sum-total of their contents in Solomon's words,—all is vanity. If I take these years to pieces, I see a great part of them was filled up with sin, sorrows, and inquietudes. The pleasures too are gone, and have no more real existence than the baseless fabric of a dream. The shadows of the evening will soon begin to come over us; and if our lives are prolonged, a thousand pains and infirmities, from which the Lord has in a remarkable measure exempted us hitherto, will probably overtake us, and at last we must feel the parting pang. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* Sin has so envenomed the soil of this earth, that the amaranth will not grow upon it. But we are hastening to a better world, and to bright unclouded skies, where our sun will no more go down, and where all tears shall be wiped from our eyes.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

September 27, 1777.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Mr. —— called upon us on Thursday evening, and from that hour my thoughts, when awake, have seldom been absent from —— . Few people are better qualified to feel for you, yourself and the family excepted; perhaps there is no person living more nearly interested in what concerns Mrs. —— than myself. I could not therefore, at such a time as this, refrain from writing; and glad should I be, if the Lord may help me to drop a suitable word, and accompany it with a blessing to you in the reading.

I am glad to be assured, though I expected no less, that Mrs. —— happily feels herself safe in the Lord's hand, and under the care of the Good Shepherd and Saviour, to whom she has often committed herself; and finds him faithful to his promise, giving her strength in her soul according to her day, and enabling her quietly to submit to his holy, wise, and gracious will. And it is my prayer, that he may strengthen you likewise, and reveal his own all-sufficiency so clearly and powerfully to your heart, that you may not be afraid of any event, but cheerfully rely upon him, to be all that to you, in every circumstance and change, which his promise warrants you to expect.

I am willing to hope, that this is but a short season of anxiety, appointed for the exercise of your faith and patience, and to give you, in his good time, a signal proof of his power and goodness in answering prayer. He sometimes brings us into such a situation that the help of creatures is utterly unavailing, that we may afterwards be more clearly sensible of his interposition. Then we experimentally learn the vanity of all things here below, and are brought to a more immediate and absolute dependence upon himself. We have need of having these lessons frequently inculcated upon us; but when his aid is answered, how often, after he has caused grief, does he show his great compassion, and save us from our fears by an outstretched arm, and such a seasonable and almost unexpected relief, as constrains us to cry out, What has God wrought? and who is a God like unto thee? Such, I hope, will be the issue of your present trial, and that he who gave her to you at first will restore her to you again. I see you in the furnace; but the Lord is sitting by it as a refiner of silver, to moderate the fire, and manage the process, so that you shall lose nothing but dross, and be brought forth refined as gold, to praise his name. Apparent difficulties, however great, are nothing to him. If he speaks it is done; for to God the Lord belong the issues from death. Should his pleasure be otherwise, and should he call your dear partner to a state of glory before you, still I know he is able to support you. What he does, however painful to the flesh, must be right, because he does it. Having bought us with his blood, and saved our souls from hell, he has every kind of right to dispose of

us and ours as he pleases; and this we are sure of, he will not lay so much upon us as he freely endured for us, and he can make us amends for all we suffer, and for all we lose, by the light of his countenance. A few years will set all to rights; and they who love him and are beloved by him, though they may suffer as others, shall not sorrow as others, for the Lord will be with them here, and he will soon have them with him; there all tears shall be wiped from their eyes.

Perhaps I know as well how to calculate the pain of such a separation as any one who has not actually experienced it. Many a time the desire of my eyes has been threatened, many a time my heart has been brought low; but from what I have known at such seasons, I have reason to hope, that had it been his pleasure to bring upon me the thing that I feared, his everlasting arm would have upheld me from sinking under the stroke. As ministers, we are called to comfort the Lord's afflicted people, and to tell them, the knowledge of his love is a cordial able to keep the soul alive under the sharpest trials. We must not wonder that he sometimes puts us in a way of showing that we do not deal in unfelt truths, but that we find ourselves that solid consolation in the gospel which we encourage others to expect from it. You have now such an occasion of glorifying the Lord, I pray he may enable you to improve it, and that all around you may see that he is with you, and that his good word is the support and anchor of your soul. Then I am sure, if it upon the whole is best for you, he will give you the desire of your heart, and you shall yet live to praise him together.—I am, &c.

LETTER

TO

THE REVEREND MR. O——.

April 3, 1759.

DEAR SIR,—You see I have prevented you in your promise of writing first; and, having found a pretext for troubling Mr. ——, I was willing to venture upon you without any, unless you will let me plead a desire of showing you how welcome your correspondence would be to me. I know not if my heart was ever more united to any person, in so short a space of time, than to you; and what engaged me so much was, the spirit of meekness and of love (that particular and inimitable mark of true christianity) which I observed in you. I mean it not to your praise. May all the praise be to him, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh, who alone maketh the best to differ from the worst; but I think I may well mention, to your encouragement, that all who conversed with you greatly regret your speedy departure; and I am persuaded the same temper, the same candour, will make you acceptable, honourable, and useful, wherever you go. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the peace-makers; they shall obtain the mercy they want, and possess the peace they love. They shall inherit the earth. The earth, sinful and miserable as it is, shall be worthy to be called an inheritance to them, for they shall enjoy a comparative heaven in it. They shall be called the children of God, though dignified with no title among men. Alas, how much are these overlooked even by many who, I would hope, are real believers! Methinks a very different spirit from that of the church of Laodicea, is to be seen amongst us, though perhaps it is not easy to say which is the best of the two. That was neither cold nor hot, this (*mirabile dictu*) is both cold and hot at once, and both to the extreme. Hot, hasty, and arbitrary in those few things where mediocrity is a virtue; but cool and remiss in those great points, where the application of the whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, is so absolutely necessary, and so positively enjoined. Surely there is too much room

for this observation, and I perhaps stand self-condemned in making it.

I hope you will take opportunity to improve your interest in Mr. —— by letter. He expressed much satisfaction in the hour he spent with you before you sailed, and a great regard for you; therefore would, I doubt not, give you a fair hearing; and the phrase *littera scripta manet* is true in more senses than one. He makes such large concessions sometimes, that I am apt to think he is conscious of the weakness of his own argument; and then he is as soon angry with himself for complying so far, and flies off to the other extreme. Yet, for the most part, when he speaks plain, and is not restrained by complaisance for particular persons, he appears not only a stranger to experimental religion, but averse to the notion, and generally inclined to treat it with levity. His obstacles are very many and very great; his reputation as a learned man, his years, his regular life, and perhaps, above all, his performances in print, especially his last book, are so many barriers that must be broke through before conviction can reach him. But the grace of God can do all this and more; and indeed, when I think of the many truly valuable parts of his character, and the indefatigable pains he has taken in his researches after truth, I am willing to hope, that the Lord will at length teach him the true wisdom, and enable him, however hard it may seem, to give up his own attainments, and sit down like a little child at the feet of Jesus.

I hope to hear soon and often from you. I number my christian correspondents among my principal blessings, a few judicious pious friends, to whom, when I can get leisure to write, I send my heart by turns. I can trust them with my inmost sentiments, and can write with no more disguise than I think. I shall rejoice to add you to the number, if you can agree to take me as I am, as I think you will, and suffer me to commit my whole self to paper, without respect to names, parties,

and sentiments. I endeavour to observe my Lord's commands, to call no man master upon earth; yet I desire to own and honour the image of God wherever I find it. I dare not say I have no bigotry, for I know not myself; and remember, to my shame, that formerly, when I ignorantly professed myself free from it, I was indeed over-run with it; but this I can say, I allow it not: I strive and pray against it; and thus far, by the grace of God, I have attained, that I find my heart as much united to many who differ from me in some points, as to any who agree with me in all. I set no value upon any doctrinal truth, farther than it has a tendency to promote practical holiness. If others would think those things hinderances which judge to be helps in this respect, I am content they should go on in their own way, according to the light God has given them, provided they will agree with me in the necessary things? I answer, Those in which the spiritual worshippers of all ages and countries have been agreed. Those, on the contrary, are mere subordinate matters, in which the best men, those who have been the most eminent for faith, prayer, humility, and nearness to God, always have been, and still are, divided in their judgments. Upon this plan I should think it no hard matter to draw up a form of sound words (whether dignified with the name of a creed or no, I care not,) to which true believers of all sorts and sizes would unanimously subscribe. I suppose it ran something in the following manner:—I believe that sin is the most hateful thing in the world; that I and all men are by nature in a state of wrath and depra-

vity, utterly unable to sustain the penalty, or to fulfil the commands of God's holy law; and that we have no sufficiency of ourselves to think a good thought. I believe that Jesus Christ is the chief among ten thousands; that he came into the world to save the chief of sinners, by making a propitiation for sin by his death, by paying a perfect obedience to the law in our behalf; and that he is now exalted on high, to give repentance and remission of sins to all that believe; and that he ever liveth to make intercession for us. I believe that the Holy Spirit (the gift of God through Jesus Christ) is the sure and only guide into all truth, and the common privilege of all believers; and under his influence, I believe the holy scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, and to furnish us thoroughly for every good work. I believe that love to God, and to man, for God's sake, is the essence of religion, and the fulfilling of the law; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; that those who, by a patient course in well-doing, seek glory, honour, and immortality, shall receive eternal life; and I believe that this reward is not of debt, but of grace, even to the praise and glory of that grace whereby he has made us accepted in the Beloved. Amen.

I pretend not to accuracy in this hasty draught; they are only outlines, which, if you please to retouch, and fill up at your leisure, I hope you will favour me with a sight of it. I fear I have tired you, and shall only add my prayers, that the Lord may be with you, and crown your labours of love with success, that you may hereafter shine among those who have been instrumental in turning many to righteousness.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. P——.

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,—The account which I received by Mr. C——, and by the letter which he brought from you, of your welfare and the welfare of your people, was very pleasing, though indeed no more than I expected. I believed, from the first of your going to S——, that you would like the people, and I believed the Lord had given you that frame of spirit which he has promised to bless. What reason have we to praise him for the knowledge of his gospel, and for the honour of being called to preach it to others! and likewise that he has been pleased to cast your lot and mine amongst a people who value it, and to crown our poor labours with some measure of acceptance and usefulness. How little did we think, in the unawakened part of our life, to what it was his good pleasure to reserve us!

The Lord is pleased, in a measure, to show me the suitableness and necessity of an humble dependent frame of heart, a ceasing from self, and a reliance upon him in the due use of appointed means; I am far from having attained, but I hope I am pressing, at least seeking after it. I wish to speak the word simply and experimentally, and to be so engaged with the importance of the subject, the worth of souls, and the thought that I am speaking in the name and presence of the Most High God, as that I might, if possible, forget every thing else. This would be an attainment indeed! More good might be expected from a broken discourse, delivered in such a frame, than from the most advantageous display of knowledge and gifts without it. Not that I would undervalue propriety and pertinence of expression; it is our duty to study to find out acceptable words, and to endeavour to appear as workmen that need not be ashamed; but those who have most ability in this way, have need of a double guard of grace and wisdom, lest they be

tempted to trust in it, or to value themselves upon it. They that trust in the Lord shall never be moved; and they that abase themselves before him, he will exalt. I am well persuaded that your conduct and views have been agreeable to these sentiments; and therefore the Lord has supported, encouraged, and owned you; and I trust he will still bless you, and make you a blessing to many. He that walketh humbly walketh surely.— Believe me to be, &c.

LETTER II.

August 14, 1770.

MY DEAR SIR,—Your letter did me good when I received it, at least gave me much pleasure; and I think it has given me a lift while I have been just now reading it. I know not that I ever had those awful views of sin which you speak of; and though I believe I should be better for them, I dare not seriously wish for them. There is a petition which I have heard in public prayer, "Lord, show us the evil of our hearts." To this petition I cannot venture to set my Amen, at least not without a qualification. Show me enough of thyself to balance the view, and then show me what thou pleasest. I think I have a very clear and strong conviction in my judgment, that I am vile and worthless, that my heart is full of evil, only evil, and that continually. I know something of it too experimentally; and therefore, judging of the whole by the sample, though I am not suitably affected with what I do see, I tremble at the thought of seeing more. A man may look with some pleasure upon the sea in a storm, provided he stands safe upon the land himself; but to be upon the sea in a storm, is quite another thing. And yet surely the coldness, worldliness, pride, and twenty other evils under which I groan,

owe much of their strength to the want of that feeling sense of my own abominations with which you have been favoured:—I say favoured; for I doubt not but the Lord gave it you in mercy, and that it has proved, and will prove, a mercy to you, to make you more humble, spiritual, and dependent, as well as to increase your ability for preaching the gospel of his grace. Upon these accounts, I can assure you, that upon a first reading, and till I stopped a moment to count the cost, I was ready to envy you all that you had felt. I often seem to know what the scriptures teach, both of sin and grace, as if I knew them not; so faint and languid are my perceptions, I often seem to think and talk of sin without any sorrow, and of grace without any joy.

I have had some people awakened by dreams as you had by streamers; but, for ought I know, we are no less instrumental to the good of these, than to any other person, upon whom, when we look, our hearts are ready to exult and say, See what the Lord has done by me. I do not think that, strictly speaking, all the streamers of the north are able to awaken a dead soul. I suppose people may be terrified by them, and made thoughtful, but awakened only by the word. The streamers either sent them to hear the gospel, or roused them to attend to it; but it was the knowledge of the truth brought home to the heart, that did the business. Perhaps the streamers reminded them of what they had heard from you before. Two persons here, who lived like heathens, and never came to church, were alarmed by some terrifying dreams, and came out to hearing forthwith. There the Lord was pleased to meet with them. One of them died triumphing; the other, I hope, will do so when her time comes. Whatever means, instruments, or occasions he is pleased to employ, the work is all his own; and I trust you and I are made willing to give him all the glory, and to sink into the dust at the thought that he should ever permit us to take his holy name in our polluted lips.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

June 13, 1772.

MY DEAR SIR,—You say that your experience agrees with mine. It must be so, because our hearts are alike. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, destitute of good, and prone to evil. This is the character of mankind universally, and those who are made partakers of grace are renewed but in part; the evil nature still cleaves to them, and the root of sin, though mortified, is far from being dead. While the cause remains it will have its effects, and while we are burdened with the body of this death, we

must groan under it. But we need not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, since we have in Jesus, a Saviour, a righteousness, an advocate, a shepherd. "He knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust." If sin abounds in us, grace abounds much more in him; nor would he suffer sin to remain in his people, if he did not know how to over-rule it, and make it an occasion of endearing his love and grace so much the more to their souls. The Lord forbid that we should plead his goodness as an encouragement to sloth and indifference. Humiliation, godly sorrow, and self-abasement become us; but at the same time, we may rejoice in the Lord. Though sin remains, it shall not have dominion over us; though it wars in us, it shall not prevail against us. We have a mercy-seat sprinkled with blood, we have an advocate with the Father, we are called to this warfare, and we fight under the eye of the captain of our salvation, who is always near to renew our strength, to heal our wounds, and to cover our heads in the heat of battle. As ministers, we preach to those who have like passions and infirmities with ourselves, and by our own feelings, fears, and changes, we learn to speak a word in season to them that are weary, to warn those who stand, and to stretch out a hand of compassion towards them that are fallen; and to commend it to others, from our own experience, as a faithful saying, that Jesus came to save the chief of sinners. Besides, if the Lord is pleased to give us some liberty, acceptance, and success in preaching the gospel, we should be in great danger of running mad with spiritual pride, if the Lord did not permit us to feel the depravity and vileness of our hearts, and thereby keep us from forgetting what we are in ourselves.

With regard to your young people, you must expect to meet with some disappointment. Perhaps not every one of whom you have conceived hopes will stand, and some who do belong to the Lord are permitted to make sad mistakes for their future humiliation. It is our part to watch, warn, and admonish, and we ought likewise to be concerned for those slips and miscarriages which we cannot prevent. A minister, if faithful, and of a right spirit, can have no greater joy than to see his people walking honourably and steadily in the truth; and hardly any thing will give him more sensible grief, than to see any of them taken in Satan's wiles. Yet still the gospel brings relief here. He is wiser than we are, and knows how to make those things subservient to promote his work, which we ought to guard against as evils and hinderances. We are to use the means. He is to rule the whole. If the faults of some are made warnings to others, and prove in the end occasions of illustrating the riches

of divine grace, this should reconcile us to what we cannot help, though such considerations should not slacken our diligence in sounding an alarm, and reminding our hearers of their continual danger.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

Jan. 26, 1775.

DEAR SIR,—I lately read in the fifth volume of the Morning Exercises, a sermon of Mr. Baxter's, on Matt. v. 16. My mind is something impressed with the subject, and with his manner of treating it. Some of Mr. Baxter's sentiments in divinity are rather cloudy, and he sometimes, upon that account, met with but poor quarter from the staunch Calvinists of his day. But, by what I have read of him, where he is quiet and not ruffled by controversy, he appears to me, notwithstanding some mistakes, to have been one of the greatest men of his age, and perhaps in fervour, spirituality, and success, more than equal, both as a minister and a christian, to some twenty taken together, of those who affect to undervalue him in this present day. There is a spirit in some passages of his "Saints Rest," his "Dying Thoughts," and other of his practical treatises, compared with which, many modern compositions, though well written and well meant, appear to me to great disadvantage. But I was speaking of his sermon. He points out the way at which we should aim to let our light shine in the world, for the glory of God, and the conviction and edification of men. I have mentioned where it is to be found, that, if you have the Morning Exercises, or if they should come in your way, you may look at it. I think you would like it. The perusal suggested to me some instruction, and much reproof. Alas! my friend, are we not too often chargeable with a sad, shameful selfishness and narrowness of spirit, far, very far different from that activity, enlargement, and generosity of soul, which such a gospel as we have received might be expected to produce? For myself, I must plead guilty. It seems as if my heart was always awake, and keenly sensible to my own concerns, while those of my Lord and Master affect me much less forcibly, at least only by intervals. Were a stranger to judge of me by what I sometimes say in the pulpit, he might think that, like the angels, I had but two things in view—to do the will of God, and to behold his face. But, alas! would he not be almost as much mistaken, as if, seeing Mr. G—— in the character of a tragedy-hero, he should suppose him to be the very person whom he only represents? I hope Satan will never be able to persuade me that I am a mere hypo-

critic and stage-player; but sure I am, that there is so much hypocrisy in me, so many littlenesses and self-seekings insinuating into my plan of conduct, that I have humbling cause to account myself unworthy and unprofitable, and to say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." I have some tolerable idea of what a christian ought to be, and it is, I hope, what I desire to be. A christian should be conformable to Christ in his spirit and in his practice; that is, he should be spiritually minded, dead to the world, filled with zeal for the glory of God, the spread of the gospel, and the good of souls. He should be humble, patient, meek, cheerful, thankful under all events and changes. He should account it the business and honour of his life to imitate him, who pleased not himself, who went about doing good, and has expressed to us the very feelings of his heart, in that divine aphorism, which surpasses all the fine admirable sayings of the philosophers, as much as the sun outshines a candle, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The whole deportment of a christian should show that the knowledge of Jesus, which he has received from the gospel, affords him all he could expect from it,—a balm for every grief, an amend for every loss, a motive for every duty, a restraint from every evil, a pattern for every thing which he is called to do or suffer, and a principle sufficient to constitute the actions of every day, even in common life, acts of religion. He should (as the children of this world are wise to do in their generation) make every occurrence through which he passes subservient and subordinate to his main design. Gold is the worldly man's god, and his worship and service are uniform and consistent, and consist, not by fits and starts, but from morning to night, from the beginning to the end of the year, he is the same man. He will not slip an opportunity of adding to his pelf to-day, because he may have another to-morrow, but he heartily and eagerly embraces both; and so far as he carries his point, though his perseverance may expose him to the ridicule or reproach of his neighbours, he thinks himself well paid, and says,

Populus me sibilat; at mihi plaudo
Ipse domi, simul nummus contemtor in aera

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Jan. — 1776.

DEAR SIR,—I may learn, only I am a sad dunce, by small and common incidents, as well as by some more striking and important turns in life, that it is not in man that walk-

eth to direct his steps. It is not for me to say, To-day or to-morrow I will do this or that. I cannot write a letter to a friend without leave or without help, for neither opportunity nor ability are at my own disposal. It is not needful that the Lord should raise a mountain in my way to stop my purpose; if he only withdraw a certain kind of imperceptible support, which in general I have, and use without duly considering whose it is, then, in a moment, I feel myself unstrung and disabled, like a ship that has lost her masts, and cannot proceed till he is pleased to refit me and renew my strength. My pride and propensity to self-dependence render frequent changes of this kind necessary to me, or I should soon forget what I am, and sacrifice to my own drag. Therefore, upon the whole, I am satisfied, and see it best, that I should be absolutely poor and penniless in myself, and forced to depend upon the Lord for the smallest things as well as the greatest. And if, by his blessing, my experience should at length tally with my judgment in this point, that without him I can do nothing, then I know I shall find it easy, through him, to do all things, for the door of his mercy is always open, and it is but ask and have. But alas! a secret persuasion (though contrary to repeated convictions) that I have something at home, too often prevents me from going to him for it, and then no wonder I am disappointed. The life of faith seems so simple and easy in theory, that I can point it out to others in few words; but in practice it is very difficult, and my advances are so slow that I hardly dare say I get forward at all. It is a great thing indeed to have the spirit of a little child, so as to be habitually afraid of taking a single step without leading.

I have heard of you more than once since I heard from you, and am glad to know the Lord is still with you; I trust he has not withdrawn wholly from us. We have much call for thankfulness and much for humiliation. Some have been removed, some are evidently ripening for glory, and now and then we have a new inquirer. But the progress of wickedness amongst the unconverted here is awful. Convictions, repeatedly stifled in many, have issued in a hardness and boldness in sinning which I believe is seldom found but in those places where the light of the gospel has been long resisted and abused. If my eyes suitably affected my heart, I should weep day and night upon this account, but alas! I am too indifferent. I feel a woful defect in my zeal for God and compassion for souls; and when Satan and conscience charge me with cowardice, treachery, and stupidity; I know not what to reply. I am generally carried through my public work with some liberty; and, because I am not put to shame before the people, I seem

content and satisfied. I wish to be more thankful for what the Lord is pleased to do amongst us, but, at the same time, to be more earnest with him for a farther out-pouring of his Spirit. Assist me herein with your prayers.

As to my own private experience, the enemy is not suffered to touch the foundation of my faith and hope: thus far I have peace. But my conflicts and exercises with the effects of indwelling sin are very distressing. I cannot doubt of my state and acceptance, and yet it seems no one can have more cause for doubts and fears than myself, if such doubtings were at all encouraged by the gospel: but I see they are not; I see that what I want and hope for, the Lord promises to do, for his own name's sake, and with a *non obstante* to all my vileness and perversion; and I cannot question but he has given me (for how else could I have it!) a thirst for that communion with him, in love and conformity to his image, of which, as yet, I have experienced but very faint and imperfect beginnings. But if he has begun, I venture, upon his word, that he will not forsake the work of his own hands.

On public affairs I say but little. Many are censuring men and measures, but I would lay all the blame upon sin. It appears plain to me that the Lord has a controversy with us, and therefore I fear what we have yet seen is but the beginning of sorrows. I am ready to dread the event of this summer; but I remember the Lord reigns. He has his own glory and the good of his church in view, and will not be disappointed. He knows how likewise to take care of those who fear him. I wish there was more sighing and mourning amongst professors, for the sins of the nation and the churches. But I must conclude, and am, &c.

LETTER VI.

DEAR SIR,—No very considerable alteration has taken place since I wrote, except the death of Mrs. L——, who was removed to a better world in September last. The latter part of her course was very painful; but the Lord made her more than conqueror, and she had good cause to apply the apostle's words, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. She repeated that passage in her last illness, and chose it for her funeral text. She was a christian indeed. Her faith was great, and so were her trials. Now she is above them all, now she is before the throne. The good Lord help us to be followers of those who, through faith and patience, have attained to the hope set before them.

The number of professors still increase with us, and a greater number of persons affords a greater variety of cases, and gives

greater scope to observe the workings of the heart and Satan. For seven years I had to say, that I had not seen a person of whom I had conceived a good hope go back, but I have met with a few disappointments since. However, upon the whole, I trust the Lord is still with us. The enemy tries to disturb and defile us, and if the Lord did not keep the city, the poor watchmen would walk in vain. But the eye that never slumbereth nor sleepeth has been upon us for good; and, though we have cause of humiliation and complaint, we have likewise much cause of thankfulness. My health is still preserved; and I hope that the Lord does not suffer my desires of personal communion with him, and of usefulness in the ministry, to decline. He supplies me with fresh strength and matter in my public work: I hear now and then of one brought to enquire the way; and his presence is at times made known to many in the ordinances.

To combine zeal with prudence is indeed difficult. There is often too much self in our zeal, and too much of the fear of man in our prudence. However, what we cannot attain by any skill or resolution of our own, we may hope in measure to receive from him who giveth liberally to those who seek him, and desire to serve him. Prudence is a word much abused, but there is a heavenly wisdom which the Lord has promised to give to those who humbly wait upon him for it. It does not consist in forming a bundle of rules and maxims, but in a spiritual taste and discernment, derived from an experimental knowledge of the truth, and of the heart of man as described in the word of God; and its exercise consists much in a simple dependence upon the Lord, to guide and prompt us in every action. We seldom act wrong when we truly depend upon him, and can cease from leaning to our own understanding. When the heart is thus in a right tune and frame, and his word dwells richly in us, there is a kind of immediate perception of what is proper for us to do in present circumstances, without much painful inquiry: a light shines before us upon the path of duty; and, if he permits us in such a spirit to make some mistakes, he will likewise teach us to profit by them, and our reflections upon what was wrong one day will make us to act more wisely the next. At the best we must always expect to meet with new proofs of our own weakness and insufficiency, otherwise how should we be kept humble, or know how to prize the liberty he allows us of coming to the throne of grace for fresh forgiveness and direction every day! But if he enables us to walk before him with a single eye, he will graciously accept our desire of serving him better if we could, and his blessing will make our feeble endeavours in some degree successful, at the same time that we

see defects and evils attending our best services, sufficient to make us ashamed of them.—I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

January 11, 1777.

DEAR SIR,—We all need, and at the seasons the Lord sees best we all receive chastisement. I hope you likewise have reason to praise him, for supporting, sanctifying, and delivering mercy. The coward flesh presently shrinks under the rod, but faith need not fear it, for it is in the hand of one who loves us better than we do ourselves, and who knows our frame, that we are but dust, and therefore will not suffer us to be overdone and overwhelmed.

I feel as a friend should feel for Mr. B—; were I able I would soon send him health. If the Lord, who is able to remove his illness in a minute, permits it to continue, we may be sure, upon the whole, it will be better for him. It is, however, very lawful to pray that his health may be restored and his usefulness prolonged. I beg you to give my love to him, and tell him that my heart bears him an affectionate remembrance; and I know the God whom he serves will make every dispensation supportable and profitable to him.

If, as you observe, the Song of Solomon describes the experience of his church, it shows the dark as well as the bright side. No one part of it is the experience of every individual at any particular time. Some are in his banqueting-house, others upon their beds. Some sit under his banner, supported by his arm, while others have a faint perception of him at a distance, with many a hill and mountain between. In one thing, however, they all agree, that he is the leading object of their desires, and that they have had such a discovery of his person, work, and love, as makes him precious to their hearts. Their judgment of him is always the same, but their sensibility varies. The love they bear him, though rooted and grounded in their hearts, is not always equal in exercise, nor can it be so. We are like trees, which, though alive, cannot put forth their leaves and fruit without the influence of the sun. They are alive in winter as well as in summer; but how different is their appearance in these different seasons! Were we always alike, could we always believe, love, and rejoice, we should think the power inherent, and our own; but it is more for the Lord's glory, and more suited to form us to a temper becoming the gospel, that we should be made deeply sensible of our own inability and dependence, than that we should be always in a lively frame. I am persuaded

a broken and a contrite spirit, a conviction of our vileness and nothingness, connected with a cordial acceptance of Jesus as revealed in the gospel, is the highest attainment we can reach in this life. Sensible comforts are desirable, and we must be sadly declined when they do not appear so to us; but I believe there may be a real exercise of faith and growth in grace, when our sensible feelings are faint and low. A soul may be in as thriving a state, when thirsting, seeking, and mourning after the Lord, as when actually rejoicing in him, as much in earnest when fighting in the valley as when singing upon the mount; nay, dark seasons afford the surest and strongest manifestations of the power of faith. To hold fast the word of promise, to maintain a hatred of sin, to go on steadfastly in the path of duty, in defiance both of the frowns and the smiles of the world, when we have but little comfort, is a more certain evidence of grace than a thousand things which we may do or forbear when our spirits are warm and lively. I have seen many who have been upon the whole but uneven walkers, though at times they seem to enjoy, at least have talked of great comforts. I have seen others, for the most part, complain of much darkness and coldness, who have been remarkably humble, tender, and exemplary in their spirit and conduct. Surely, were I to choose my lot, it should be with the latter.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MRS. G——

LETTER I.

June 20, 1776.

MADAM,—It would be both unkind and ungrateful in me, to avail myself of any plea of business, for delaying the acknowledgment I owe you for your acceptable favour from ——, which, though dated the 6th instant, I did not receive till the 10th.

Could I have known in time that you were at Mr. ——'s, I should have endeavoured to have called upon you while there; and very glad should I have been to have seen you with us. But they who fear the Lord may be sure, that whatever is not practicable is not necessary. He could have over-ruled every difficulty in your way, had he seen it expedient; but he is pleased to show you, that you depend not upon men, but upon himself; and that, notwithstanding your connexions may exclude you from some advantages in point of outward means, he who has begun a good work in you, is able to carry it on, in defiance of all seeming hinderances, and make all things (even those which have the most unfavourable appearances) work together for your good.

A sure effect of his grace, is a desire and longing for gospel-ordinances; and when they are afforded, they cannot be neglected without loss. But the Lord sees many souls who are dear to him, and whom he is training up in a growing meetness for his kingdom, who are by his providence so situated, that it is not in their power to attend upon gospel preaching; and perhaps they have seldom either christian minister or christian friend to assist or comfort them. Such a situation is a state of trial; but Jesus is all-sufficient, and he is always near. They cannot be debarred from his word of grace, which is every where at hand, nor from his throne of grace; for they who feel their need of him, and whose hearts are drawn towards him, are always at the foot of it. Every room in the house, yea, every spot they stand on, fields, lanes, and hedge-rows, all is holy ground to them; for the Lord is there. The chief difference between us, and the disciples when our Saviour was upon earth, is in this:

They then walked by sight, and we are called to walk by faith. They could see him with their bodily eyes, we cannot; but he said before he left them, "It is expedient for you that I go away." How could this be, unless that spiritual communion which he promised to maintain with his people after his ascension, were preferable to that intercourse he allowed them whilst he was visibly with them? But we are sure it is preferable, and they who had tried both were well satisfied he had made good his promise; so that though they had known him after the flesh, they were content not to know him so any more. Yes, madam, though we cannot see him, he sees us; he is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. In a natural state, we have very dark and indeed dishonourable thoughts of God: we conceive of him as at a distance; but when the heart is awakened, we begin to make Jacob's reflection, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." And when we receive faith, we begin to know that this ever present God is in Christ: that the government of heaven and earth, the dispensations of the kingdom of nature, providence, and grace, are in the hands of Jesus, that it is he with whom we have to do, who once suffered agony and death for our redemption, and whose compassion and tenderness are the same, now he reigns over all blessed for ever, as when he conversed amongst men in the days of his humiliation. Thus God is made known to us by the gospel, in the endearing views of a Saviour, a Shepherd, a Husband, a Friend; and a way of access is opened for us through the veil, that is, the human nature, of our Redeemer, to enter, with humble confidence, into the holiest of all, and to repose all our cares and concerns upon the strength of that everlasting arm which upholds heaven and earth, and upon that infinite love which submitted to the shame, pain, and death of the cross, to redeem sinners from wrath and misery.

Though there is a height, a breadth, a length, and a depth, in this mystery of redeeming love, exceeding the comprehension of all finite minds; yet the great and leading principles which are necessary for the

support and comfort of our souls, may be summed up in a very few words. Such a summary we are favoured with in Titus ii. 11—14, where the whole of salvation, all that is needful to be known, experienced, practised, and hoped for, is comprised within the compass of four verses. If many books, much study, and great discernment, were necessary in order to be happy, what must the poor and simple do? Yet for them especially is the gospel designed; and few but such as these attain the knowledge and comfort of it. The Bible is a sealed book till the heart be awakened, and then he that runs may read. The propositions are few: I am a sinner, therefore I need a Saviour, one who is able and willing to save to the uttermost: such a one is Jesus; he is all that I want, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But will he receive me? Can I answer a previous question? Am I willing to receive him? If so, and if his word may be taken, if he meant what he said, and promised no more than he can perform, I may be sure of a welcome. He knew long before, the doubts, fears, and suspicions, which would arise in my mind, when I should come to know what I am, what I have done, and what I have deserved; and therefore he declared, before he left the earth, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." I have no money or price in my hand, no worthiness to recommend me; and I need none, for he saveth freely for his own name's sake. I have only to be thankful for what he has already shown me, and to wait upon him for more. It is my part to commit myself to him as the physician of sin-sick souls, not to prescribe to him how he shall treat me. To begin, carry on, and perfect the cure, is his part.

The doubts and fears you speak of, are, in a greater or less degree, the common experience of all the Lord's people, at least for a time. Whilst any unbelief remains in the heart, and Satan is permitted to tempt, we shall feel these things. In themselves they are groundless and evil; yet the Lord permits and over-rules them for good. They tend to make us know more of the plagues of our own hearts, and feel more sensibly the need of a Saviour, and make his rest (when we attain it) doubly sweet and sure. And they likewise qualify us for pitying and comforting others. Fear not; only believe, wait, and pray. Expect not all at once. A christian is not of hasty growth, like a mushroom, but rather like the oak, the progress of which is hardly perceptible, but which in time becomes a great deep-rooted tree. If my writings have been useful to you, may the Lord have the praise. To administer any comfort to his children is the greatest honour and pleasure I can receive in this life. I cannot promise to be a very

punctual correspondent, having many engagements; but I hope to do all in my power to show myself, madam,—Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

August 20, 1776.

MADAM,—Though in general I think myself tolerably punctual when I can answer a letter in six or seven weeks after the receipt, yet I feel some pain for not having acknowledged yours sooner. A case like that which you have favoured me with an account of, deserved an immediate attention, and when I read it, I proposed writing within a post or two, and I can hardly allow any plea of business to be a sufficient excuse for delaying it so long; but our times are in the Lord's hands. May he now enable me to send you what may prove a word in season.

Your exercises have been by no means singular, though they may appear so to yourself; because, in your retired situation, you have not (as you observe) had much opportunity of knowing the experience of other christians; nor has the guilt with which your mind has been so greatly burdened been properly your own. It was a temptation forced upon you by the enemy, and he shall answer for it. Undoubtedly it is a mournful proof of the depravity of our nature, that there is that within us which renders us so easily susceptible of his suggestions; a proof of our extreme weakness, that after the clearest and most satisfying evidences of the truth, we are not able to hold fast our confidence, if the Lord permits Satan to sift and shake us. But I can assure you these changes are not uncommon. I have known persons, who, after walking with God comfortably in the main for forty years, have been at their wits end from such assaults as you mention, and been brought to doubt, not only of the reality of their own hopes, but of the very ground and foundation upon which their hopes were built. Had you remained, as it seems you once were, attached to the vanities of a gay and dissipated life, or could you have been content with a form of godliness, destitute of the power, it is probable you would have remained a stranger to these troubles. Satan would have employed his arts in a different and less perceptible way, to have soothed you into a false peace, and prevented any thought or suspicion of danger from arising in your mind. But when he could no longer detain you in his bondage, or seduce you back again into the world, then of course he would change his method, and declare open war against you. A specimen of his power and malice you have experienced; and the Lord

whom you loved, because he first loved you, permitted it, not to gratify Satan, but for your benefit—to humble and prove you, to show you what is in your heart, and to do you good in the issue. These things for the present are not joyous but grievous; yet, in the end, they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. In the mean time his eye is upon you: he has appointed bounds both to the degree and duration of the trial; and he does and will afford you such supports, that you shall not be tried beyond what you are able to bear. I doubt not but your conflicts and sorrows, will, in due time, terminate in praise and victory, and be sanctified to your fuller establishment in the truth.

I greatly rejoice in the Lord's goodness to your dying parent. How wisely timed, and how exactly suited, was that affecting dispensation, to break the force of those suggestions with which the enemy was aiming to overwhelm your spirit! He could not stand against such an illustrious demonstrative attestation, that the doctrines you had embraced were not cunningly devised fables. He could proceed no farther in that way; but he is fruitful in resources. His next attempt, of course, was to fix guilt upon your conscience, as if you had yourself formed and willingly entertained those thoughts, which, indeed, you suffered with extreme reluctance and pain. Here likewise I find he succeeded for a time; but he who broke the former snare, will deliver you from this likewise.

The dark and dishonourable thoughts of God, which I hinted at as belonging to a natural state, are very different from the thoughts of your heart concerning him. You do not conceive of him as a hard master, or think you could be more happy in the breach than in the observance of his precepts. You do not prefer the world to his favour, or think you can please him, and make amends for your sins, by an obedience of your own. These, and such as these, are the thoughts of the natural heart,—the very reverse of yours. One thought, however, I confess you have indulged, which is no less dishonourable to the Lord than uncomfortable to yourself. You say, "I dare not believe that God will not impute to me as sin, the admission of thoughts which my soul ever abhorred, and to which my will never consented." Nay, you fear lest they should not only be imputed, but unpardonable. But how can this be possible! Indeed, I will not call it your thought, it is your temptation. You tell me you have children. Then you will easily feel a plain illustration, which just now occurs to me. Let me suppose a case which has sometimes happened; a child, three or four years of age we will say, while playing incautiously at a little distance from home, should

be suddenly seized and carried away by a gipsy. Poor thing! how terrified, how distressed must it be! Methinks I hear its cries. The sight and violence of the stranger, the recollection of its dear parents, the loss of its pleasing home, the dread and uncertainty of what is yet to befall it. Is it not a wonder that it does not die in agonies! But see, help is at hand! the gipsy is pursued, and the child recovered. Now, my dear madam, permit me to ask you, if this were your child, how would you receive it? Perhaps, when the first transports of your joy for its safety would permit you, you might gently chide it for leaving your door. But would you disinherit it? Would you disown it? Would you deliver it up again to the gipsy with your own hands, because it had suffered a violence which it could not withstand, which it abhorred and to which its will never consented? And yet what is the tenderness of a mother, of ten thousand mothers, to that which our compassionate Saviour bears to every poor soul that has been enabled to flee to him for salvation! Let us be far from charging that to him, of which we think we are utterly incapable ourselves. Take courage, madam; resist the devil and he will flee from you. If he were to tempt you to any thing criminal, you would start at the thought, and renounce it with abhorrence. Do the same when he tempts you to question the Lord's compassion and goodness. But there he imposes upon us with a show of humility, and persuades us that we do well to oppose our unworthiness as a sufficient exception to the many express promises of the word. It is said, the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin: that all manner of sin shall be forgiven for his sake; that whosoever cometh to him he will in no wise cast him out; and that he is able to save to the uttermost. Believe his word, and Satan shall be found a liar. If the child had deliberately gone away with the gipsy, had preferred that wretched way of life, and had refused to return, though frequently and tenderly invited home; perhaps a parent's love might, in time, be too weak to plead for the pardon of such continued obstinacy. But, indeed, in this manner we have all dealt with the Lord; and yet, whenever we are willing to return, he is willing to receive us with open arms, and without an upbraiding word, Luke xv. 20. 22. Though our sins have been deep-dyed like scarlet and crimson, enormous as mountains, and countless as the sands, the sum total is only this, Sin has abounded: but where sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. After all, I know the Lord keeps the key of comfort in his own hands, yet he has commanded us to attempt comforting one another. I should rejoice to be his instrument of administering

comfort to you. I shall hope to hear from you soon; and that you will then be able to inform me he has restored to you the joys of his salvation. But if not, yet wait for him, and you shall not wait in vain.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

June — 1777.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Temptations may be compared to the wind, which, when it has ceased raging from one point, after a short calm, frequently renews its violence from another quarter. The Lord silenced Satan's former assaults against you, but he is permitted to try you again in another way. Be of good courage, madam, wait upon the Lord and the present storm shall likewise subside in good time. You have an infallible pilot, and are embarked in a bottom against which the winds and waves cannot prevail. You may be tossed about, and think yourself in apparent jeopardy; but sink you shall not, except the promises and faithfulness of God can fail. Upon an attentive consideration of your complaint, it seems to me to amount only to this, that though the Lord has done great things for you, he has not yet brought you to a state of independence on himself, nor released you from that impossibility which all his people feel, of doing any thing without him. And is this indeed a matter of complaint! Is it not every way better, more for his glory, and more suited to keep us mindful of our obligations to him, and in the event, more for our safety, that we should be reduced to a happy necessity of receiving daily out of his fulness (as the Israelites received the manna,) than to be set up with something of a stock of wisdom, power, and goodness of our own? Adam was thus furnished at the beginning with strength to stand; yet, mutability being essential to a creature, he quickly fell and lost all. We, who are by nature sinners, are not left to so hazardous an experiment. He has himself engaged to keep us, and treasured up all fulness of grace for our support in a Head who cannot fail. Our gracious Saviour will communicate all needful supplies to his members, yet in such a manner, that they shall feel their need and weakness, and have nothing to boast of from first to last, but his wisdom, compassion, and care. We are in no worse circumstances than the apostle Paul, who though eminent and exemplary in the christian life, found and freely confessed, that he had no sufficiency in himself to think a good thought. Nor did he wish it otherwise; he even gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Unbelief, and a thousand evils, are still in our hearts;

though their reign and dominion is at an end, they are not slain or eradicated; their effects will be felt more or less sensibly, as the Lord is pleased more or less to afford or abate his gracious influence. When they are kept down, we are no better in ourselves, for they are not kept down by us; but we are very prone to think better of ourselves at such a time, and therefore, he is pleased to permit us at seasons to feel a difference, that we may never forget how weak and how vile we are. We cannot absolutely conquer these evils, but it becomes us to be humbled for them; and we are to fight, and strive, and pray against them. Our great duty is to be at his footstool, and to cry to him who has promised to perform all things for us. Why are we called soldiers, but because we are called to a warfare! And how could we fight, if there were no enemies to resist! The Lord's soldiers are not merely for show, to make an empty parade in a uniform, and to brandish their arms when none but friends and spectators are around them. No, we must stand upon the field of battle; we must face the fiery darts; we must wrestle (which is the closest and most arduous kind of fighting) with our foes: nor can we well expect wholly to escape wounds; but the leaves of the tree of life are provided for our healing. The Captain of our salvation is at hand, and leads us on with an assurance, which might make even a coward bold,—that in the end we shall be more than conquerors through him who has loved us.

I am ready to think, that some of the sentiments in your letters are not properly yours, such as you yourself have derived from the scriptures, but rather borrowed from authors or preachers, whose judgment your humility has led you to prefer to your own. At least, I am sure the scriptures do not authorise the conclusion which distresses you, that if you were a child of God, you should not feel such changes and oppositions. Were I to define a christian, or rather to describe him at large, I know no text I would choose sooner, as a ground for the subject, than Gal. v. 17. A christian has noble aims, which distinguish him from the bulk of mankind. His leading principles, motives, and desires, are all supernatural and divine. Could he do as he would, there is not a spirit before the throne should excel him in holiness, love, and obedience. He would tread in the very footsteps of his Saviour, fill up every moment in his service, and employ every breath in his praise. This he would do, but alas! he cannot. Against this desire of the spirit, there is a contrary desire and working of a corrupt nature, which meets him at every turn. He has a beautiful copy set before him; he is enamoured with it; and though he does not expect to equal it, he writes carefully after it, and longs to attain to the

nearest possible imitation. But indwelling sin and Satan continually jog his hand, and spoil his strokes. You cannot, madam, form a right judgment of yourself, except you make due allowance for those things which are not peculiar to yourself, but common to all who have spiritual perception, and are indeed the inseparable appendages of this mortal state. If it were not so, why should the most spiritual and gracious people be so ready to confess themselves vile and worthless? One eminent branch of our holiness, is a sense of shame and humiliation for those evils which are only known to ourselves, and to him who searches our hearts, joined with an acquiescence in Jesus, who is appointed of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I will venture to assure you, that though you will possess a more stable peace, in proportion as the Lord enables you to live more simply upon the blood, righteousness, and grace of the Mediator, you will never grow into a better opinion of yourself than you have at present. The nearer you are brought to him, the quicker sense you will have of your continual need of him, and thereby your admiration of his power, love, and compassion, will increase likewise from year to year.

I would observe farther, that our spiritual exercises are not a little influenced by our constitutional temperament. As you are only an ideal correspondent, I can but conjecture about you upon this head. If your frame is delicate, and your nervous system very sensible and tender, I should probably ascribe some of your apprehensions to this cause. It is an abstruse subject, and I will not enter into it; but, according to the observations I

have made, persons of this habit seem to live more upon the confines of the invisible world, if I may so speak, and to be more susceptible of impressions from it, than others. That complaint, which, for want of a better name, we call lowness of spirits, may probably afford the enemy some peculiar advantages and occasions of distressing you. The mind then perceives objects as through a tintured medium, which gives them a dark and discouraging appearance; and I believe Satan has more influence and address than we are aware of in managing the glass. And when this is not the case at all times, it may be so occasionally, from sickness, or other circumstances. You tell me that you have lately been ill, which, together with your present situation, and the prospect of your approaching hour, may probably have such an effect as I have hinted. You may be charging yourself with guilt, for what springs from indisposition, in which you are merely passive, and which may be no more properly sinful than the head-ach, or any of the thousand natural shocks the flesh is heir to. The enemy can take no advantage but what the Lord permits him; and he will permit him none but what he designs to over-rule for your greater advantage in the end. He delights in your prosperity; and you should not be in heaviness for an hour, were there not a need-be for it. Notwithstanding your fears, I have a good hope, that he who you say has helped you in six troubles, will appear for you in the seventh; that you will not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord, and come forth to testify to his praise, that he has turned your mourning into joy.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MISS F——.

LETTER I.

October 3, 1778.

MADAM,—You would have me tell you what are the best means to be used by a person, to prevent the world, with all its luring and ensnaring scenes, from drawing his heart aside from God. It is an impossible question; but I apprehend your own heart will tell you, that you are already possessed of all the information concerning it you can well expect from me. I only attempt to answer it from the Bible, which lies open to you likewise. If your heart is like mine, it must confess, that it turns aside from God, it is seldom free from ignorance of the proper means or ways which should have kept us near him, but which from an evil principle within, prevails against our better judgment, and renders us unfaithful to light already revealed.

I could offer you rules, cautions, and admonitions in abundance; for I find it comparatively easy to preach to others. But if you farther ask me, How you shall effectually reduce them to practice? I feel that I am deficient, and so much at a loss in matter myself, that I know not well what to say to you. Yet something must be

observed in the first place, then, I would observe, that though it be our bounden duty, and the greatest privilege we can propose to ourselves, to keep our hearts kept close to the Lord; we must not expect it absolutely or perfectly much less all at once; we shall keep near to him, in proportion as we are solidly convinced of the infinite disparity between us and the things which would presume to enter into competition with him, and the folly, as well as ingratitude, of departing from him. These points are only to be learned by experience, and by smarting under a series of painful disappointments in our expectations of creatures. Our judgments may be daily satisfied, that his favour is better

than life, while yet it is in the power of a mere trifle to turn us aside. The Lord permits us to feel our weakness, that we may be sensible of it; for though we are ready, in words, to confess that we are weak, we do not so properly know it, till that secret, though unallowed dependence we have upon some strength in ourselves, is brought to the trial, and fails us. To be humble, and like a little child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and dangers around us, as to cry to him continually to hold us up, that we may be safe, is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with him.

But how shall we attain this humble frame of spirit? It must be, as I said, from a real and sensible conviction of our weakness and vile nature, which we cannot learn (at least I have not been able to learn it) merely from books or preachers. The providence of God concurs with his Holy Spirit in his merciful design of making us acquainted with ourselves. It is indeed a great mercy to be preserved from such declensions as might fall under the notice of our fellow-creatures; but when they can observe nothing of consequence to object to us, things may be far from right with us in the sight of him who judges not only actions, but the thoughts and first motions of the heart. And indeed, could we for a season so cleave to God, as to find little or nothing in ourselves to be ashamed of, we are such poor creatures, that we should presently grow vain and self-sufficient, and expose ourselves to the greatest danger of falling.

There are, however, means to be observed on our part; and though you know them, I will repeat the principal, because you desire me. The first is Prayer; and here, above all things, we should pray for humility. It may be called both the guard of all other graces, and the soil in which they grow. The second, Attention to the scriptures. Your question is directly answered in Psalm cxix. 9. The precepts are our rule and de-

light, the promises our strength and encouragement: the good recorded of the saints is proposed for our encouragement; their miscarriages are as land-marks set up to warn us of the rocks and shoals which lie in the way of our passage. The study of the whole scheme of gospel-salvation, respecting the person, life, doctrine, death and glory of our Redeemer, is appointed to form our souls to a spiritual and divine taste; and so far as this prevails and grows in us, the trifles that would draw us from the Lord will lose their influence, and appear, divested of the glare with which they strike the senses, mere vanity and nothing. The third grand means is, Consideration or Recollection; a careful regard to those temptations and snares, to which, from our tempers, situations, or connections, we are more immediately exposed, and by which we have been formerly hindered. It may be well in the morning, ere we leave our chambers, to forecast, as far as we are able, the probable circumstances of the day before us. Yet the observance of this as well as of every rule that can be offered, may dwindle into a mere form. However, I trust the Lord, who has given you a desire to live to him, will be your guard and teacher. There is none teacheth like him.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

March — 1779.

DEAR MADAM,—Our experiences pretty much tally; they may be drawn out into sheets and quires, but the sum total may be comprised in a short sentence, "Our life is a warfare." For our encouragement, the apostle calls it a good warfare. We are engaged in a good cause, fight under a good Captain, the victory is sure beforehand, and the prize is a crown, a crown of life. Such considerations might make even a coward bold. But then we must be content to fight; and considering the nature, number, situation, and subtilty of our enemies, we may expect sometimes to receive a wound; but there is a medicinal tree, the leaves of which are always at hand to heal us. We cannot be too attentive to the evil which is always working in us, or to the stratagems which are employed against us; yet our attention should not be wholly confined to these things. We are to look upwards likewise to him, who is our head, our life, our strength. One glance of Jesus will convey more effectual assistance than poring upon our own hearts for a month. The one is to be done; but the other should upon no account be omitted. It

was not by counting their wounds, but by beholding the brazen serpent, the Lord's instituted means of cure, that the Israelites were healed. That was an emblem for our instruction. One great cause of our frequent conflicts is, that we have a secret desire to be rich, and it is the Lord's design to make us poor; we want to gain an ability of doing something; and he suits his dispensations, to convince us that we can do nothing: we want a stock in ourselves, and he would have us absolutely dependent upon him. So far as we are content to be weak, that his power may be magnified in us, so far we shall make our enemies know that we are strong, though we ourselves shall never be directly sensible that we are so; only by comparing what we are with the opposition we stand against, we may come to a comfortable conclusion, that the Lord worketh mightily in us, Psal. xli. 11.

If our views are simple, and our desires towards the Lord, it may be of use to consider some of your faults and mine, not as the faults of you and me in particular, but as the fault of that depraved nature which is common with us to all the Lord's people, and which made Paul groan as feelingly and as heartily as we can do. But this consideration, though true and scriptural, can only be safely applied when the mind is sincerely and in good earnest devoted to the Lord. There are too many unsound and half professors, who eagerly catch at it as an excuse for those evils they are unwilling to part with. But I trust I may safely recommend it to you. This evil nature, this indwelling sin, is a living principle, an active, powerful cause; and a cause that is active will necessarily produce an effect. Sin is the same thing in believers as in the unregenerate: they have indeed a contrary principle of grace, which counteracts and resists it, which can prevent its outbreakings, but will not suppress its risings. As grace resists sin, so sin resists grace, Gal. v. 17. The proper tendency of each is mutually weakened on both sides; and, between the two, the poor believer, however blameless and exemplary in the sight of men, appears in his own view the most inconsistent character under the sun. He can hardly think it is so with others; and, judging of them by what he sees, and of himself by what he feels, in lowliness of heart he esteems others better than himself. This proves him to be right, for it is the will of God concerning him, Phil. ii. 3. This is the warfare. But it shall not always be so. Grace shall prevail. The evil nature is already enervated, and ere long it will die the death. Jesus will make us more than conquerors.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND DR. ———

LETTER I.

April 17, 1776.

DEAR SIR,—By this time I hope you are both returned in peace, and happy together in your stated favoured tract; rejoicing in the name of Jesus yourselves, and rejoicing to see the savour of it spreading like a precious perfume among the people. Every day I hope you find prejudices wearing off, and more disposed to hear the words of life. The Lord has given you a fine first-fruits, which I trust will prove the earnest of a plentiful harvest. In the mean time he will enable you to sow the seed in patience, leaving the event in his hands. Though it does not spring up visibly at once, it will not be lost. I think he would not have sent you if he had not a people there to call; but they can only come forth to view as he is pleased to bring them. Satan will try to hinder and disturb you, but he is in a chain which he cannot break, nor go a step farther than he is permitted. And if you have been instrumental to the conversion of but a few, in those few you have an ample reward already for all the difficulties you have or can meet with. It is more honourable and important to be an instrument of saving one soul than to rescue a whole kingdom from temporal ruin. Let us therefore, while we earnestly desire to be more useful, not forget to be thankful for what the Lord has been pleased already to do for us; and let us expect, knowing whose servants we are, and what a gospel we preach, to see some new miracles wrought from day to day, for indeed every real conversion may be accounted miraculous, being no less than an immediate exertion of that power which made the heavens, and commanded the light to shine out of darkness. Your little telescope is safe. I wish I had more of that clear air and sunshine you speak of; that with you I might have more distinct views

of the land of promise. I cannot say my prospect is greatly clouded by doubts of my reaching it at last; but then there is such a languor and deadness hanging upon my mind, that it is almost amazing to me how I can entertain any hopes at all. It seems, if doubting could ever be reasonable, there is no one who has greater reason for doubting than myself. But I know not how to doubt, when I consider the faithfulness, grace, and compassion of him who has promised. If it could be proved that Christ had not died, or that he did not speak the words which are ascribed to him in the gospel, or that he is not able to make them good, or that his word cannot safely be taken; in any of these cases I should doubt to purpose, and lie down in despair.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

July 15, 1776.

MY DEAR SIR,—I begin with congratulations first to you and Mrs. ———, on your safe journey and good passage over the formidable Humber. Mrs. ——— has another river to cross (may it be many years before she approaches the bank) over which there is no bridge. Perhaps at seasons she may think of it with that reluctance which she felt before she saw the Humber; but as her fears were then agreeably disappointed, and she found the experiment, when called to make it neither terrifying nor dangerous, so I trust she will find it in the other case. Did not she think, the Lord knows where I shall be, and he will meet me there with a storm, because I am such a sinner? Then how the billows will foam and rage at me, and what a long passage I shall have, and perhaps I shall sink in the middle, and never set my foot in Hull. It is true, I am not

so much afraid of the journey I go by land, though I know that every step of the way the horses or the chaise may fall, and I be killed; but how do I know but he may preserve me on the road on purpose to drown me in the river! But behold, when she came to it all was calm, or what was better, a gentle, fair breeze, to waft her pleasantly over before she was aware. Thus we are apt perversely to reason; he guides and guards me through life; he gives me new mercies, and new proofs of his power and care every day; and therefore, when I come to die, he will forsake me and let me be the sport of winds and waves. Indeed the Lord does not deserve such hard thoughts at our hands as we are prone to form of him. But notwithstanding we make such returns, he is and will be gracious and shame us out of our unkind, ungrateful, unbelieving fears at last. If, after my repeated kind reception at your house, I should always be teasing Mrs. — with suspicions of her goodwill, and should tell every body I saw, that I verily believed the next time I went to see her she would shut the door in my face, and refuse me admittance, would she not be grieved, offended, and affronted? Would she not think, What reason can he assign for this treatment? He knows I did every thing in my power to assure him of a welcome, and told him so over and over again. Does he count me a deceiver? Yes, he does: I see his friendship is not worth preserving; so farewell. I will seek friends among such as believe my words and actions. Well, my dear madam, I am clear, I always believed you; I make no doubt but you will treat me kindly next time, as you did the last. But pray, is not the Lord as worthy of being trusted as yourself, and are not his invitations and promises as hearty and as honest as yours? Let us therefore beware of giving way to such thoughts of him as we could hardly forgive in our dearest friends, if they should harbour the like of us.

I have heard of nothing of Mr. P—— yet, but that he is in town, very busy about that precious peace of furniture called a wife. May the Lord direct and bless his choice. In Captain Cook's voyage to the South Sea, some fish were caught which looked as well as others, but those who ate of them were poisoned: alas for the poor man who catches a poisonous wife! There are such to be met with in the matrimonial seas, that look passing well to the eye, but a connexion with them proves baneful to domestic peace, and hurtful to the life of grace. I know two or three people, perhaps a few more, who have great reason to be thankful to him who sent the fish, with the money in its mouth, to Peter's hook. He secretly instructed and guided us where to angle, and,

if we have caught prizes, we owe it not to our own skill, much less to our deserts, but to his goodness.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

September 4, 1776.

MY DEAR SIR,— Poor little boy, it is a mercy indeed that he recovered from such a formidable hurt. The Lord wounded and the Lord healed. I ascribe, with you, what the world calls accident to him, and believe that without his permission for wise and good ends, a child can no more pull a bowl of boiling water on itself than it could pull the moon out of her orbit. And why does he permit such things? One reason or two is sufficient for us; it is to remind us of the uncertainty of life and all creature-comforts; to make us afraid of cleaving too close to pretty toys, which are so precarious, that often while we look at them they vanish, and to lead us to a more entire dependence upon himself; that we might never judge ourselves or our concerns safe from outward appearances only, but that the Lord is our keeper, and were not his eye upon us, a thousand dangers and painful changes, which we can neither foresee nor prevent, are lurking about us every step, ready to break in upon us every hour. Men are but children of a larger growth. How many are labouring and planning in the pursuit of things, the event of which, if they obtain them will be but like pulling scalding water upon their own heads. They must have the bowl by all means, but they are not aware what is in it till they feel it.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

July 7, 1777.

SIR,—I have had a letter from your minister since his arrival at ——. I hope he will be restored to you again before long, and that he and many of your place will rejoice long in each other. Those are favoured places which are blessed with a sound and faithful gospel-ministry, if the people know and consider the value of their privileges, and are really desirous of profiting by them; but the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. I hope those who profess the gospel with you will wrestle in prayer for grace to walk worthy of it. A minister's hands are strengthened, when he can point to his people, as so many living proofs, that the doctrines he preaches are doctrines according to godliness; when they walk in

mutual love; when each one, in their several places, manifests an humble, spiritual, and upright conduct; when they are christians, not only at church, but in the family, the shop, and the field; when they fill up their relations in life, as husbands or wives, masters or servants, parents or children, according to the rule of the word; when they are evidently a people separated from the world while conversant in it, and are careful to let their light shine before men, not only by talking, but by acting as the disciples of Christ; when they go on steadily, not by fits and starts, prizing the means of grace, without resting in them: when it is thus, we can say, Now we live, if you stand fast in the

Lord. Then we come forth with pleasure, and our service is our delight, and we are encouraged to hope for an increasing blessing. But if the people in whom we have rejoiced sink into formality or a worldly spirit; if they have dissensions and jealousies among themselves, if they act improperly, and give the enemies occasion to say, There, there, so would we have it: then our hearts are wounded and our zeal damped, and we know not how to speak with liberty. It is my heart's desire and prayer for you, that whether I see you, or else be absent from you, I may know that you stand fast in one spirit and one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MRS. _____.

LETTER I.

Nov. — 1775.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Too much of that impatience which you speak of, towards those who differ from us in some religious sentiments, is observable on all sides. I do not consider it as the fault of a few individuals, or of this or that party, so much as the effect of that inherent imperfection which is common to our whole race. Anger and scorn are equally unbecoming in those who profess to be followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, and who acknowledge themselves to be both sinful and fallible; but too often something of this leaven will be found cleaving to the best characters, and mixed with honest endeavours to serve the best cause. But thus it was from the beginning; and we have reason to confess that we are no better than the apostles were, who, though they meant well, manifested once and again a wrong spirit in their zeal, Luke ix. 54. Observation and experience contribute, by the grace of God, gradually to soften and sweeten our spirits; but then there will always be ground for mutual forbearance and mutual forgiveness on his head. However, so far as I may judge of myself, I think this hastiness is not my most easily besetting sin. I am not indeed an advocate for that indifference and lukewarmness to the truths of God, which seem to constitute the candour many plead for in the present day. But while I desire to hold fast the sound doctrines of the gospel, towards the persons of my fellow-creatures, I wish to exercise all moderation and benevolence. Protestants or Papists, Socinians or Deists, Jews, Samaritans, or Mahometans, all are my neighbours, they have all a claim upon me for the common offices of humanity. As to religion, they cannot all be right; nor may I compliment them by allowing the differences between us are but trivial, when I believe and know they are important; but I am not to expect them to see with my eyes. I am deeply convinced of the truth of John Baptist's aphorism, John iii. 27. "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." I well know, that the little measure of knowledge I have obtained in the things of God, has not been owing to my own wisdom and docility, but to his goodness. Nor did I get it all at once; he has been pleased to exercise much patience and long-suffering towards me, for about twenty-seven years past, since he first gave me a desire of learning from himself. He has graciously accommodated himself to my weakness, borne with mistakes, and helped me through innumerable prejudices, which, but for his mercy, would have been insuperable hinderances: I have therefore no right to be angry, impatient, or censorious, especially as I have still much to learn, and am so poorly influenced by what I seem to know. I am weary of controversies and disputes, and desire to choose for myself, and to point out to others, Mary's part, to sit at Jesus' feet, and to hear his words. And, blessed be his name! so far as I have learned from him, I am favoured with a comfortable certainty: I know whom I have believed, and am no longer tossed about by the various winds and tides of opinions, by which I see many are dashed one against the other. But I cannot, I must not, I dare not contend; only, as a witness for God, I am ready to bear my simple testimony to what I have known of his truth, whenever I am properly called to it.

I agree with you, that some accounted evangelical teachers have too much confined themselves to a few leading and favourite topics. I think this a fault; and believe, when it is constantly so, the auditors are deprived of much edification and pleasure, which they might receive from a more judicious and comprehensive plan. The whole scripture, as it consists of histories, prophecies, doctrines, precepts, promises, exhortations, admonitions, encouragements, and reproofs, is the proper subject of the gospel-ministry; and every part should in its place and course be attended to; yet, so as that, in

every compartment we exhibit, Jesus should be the capital figure; in whom the prophecies are fulfilled, the promises established; to whom, in a way of type and emblem, the most important parts of scripture history have an express reference; and from whom alone we can receive that life, strength, and encouragement, which are necessary to make obedience either pleasing or practicable. And where there is true spiritual faith in the heart, and in exercise, I believe a person will not so much need a detail of what he is to practice, as to be often greatly at a loss without it. Our Saviour's commandments are plain and clear in themselves; and that love which springs from faith, is the best casuist and commentator to apply and enforce them.

You are pleased to say, "Forgive me if I transgress; I know the place whereon I stand is holy ground." Permit me to assure you, my dear madam, that were I, which I am not, a person of some importance, you would run no hazard of offending me by controverting any of my sentiments: I hold none (knowingly) which I am not willing to submit to examination; nor am I afraid of offending you by speaking freely, when you point out my way. I should wrong you, if I thought to please you by palliating or disguising the sentiments of my heart; and if I attempt to do so, you would soon see through the design, and despise it. There may perhaps be an improper manner of chiming upon the name of Jesus, and I am not for vindicating any impropriety; yet, could I feel what I ought to mean when I pronounce that name, I should not fear mentioning it too often. I am afraid of no excess in thinking highly of it, because I read it is the will of God that all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father. Laboured explications of the Trinity I always avoid. I am afraid of darkening counsel by words without knowledge. Scripture, and even reason, assures me, there is but one God, whose name alone is Jehovah. Scripture likewise assures me that Christ is God, that Jesus is Jehovah. I cannot say that reason assents with equal readiness to this proposition as to the former. But, admitting what the scriptures teach concerning the evil of sin, the depravity of human nature, the method of salvation, and the office of the Saviour; admitting that God has purposed to glorify, not his mercy only, but his justice, in the work of redemption; that the blood shed upon the cross is a proper, adequate satisfaction for sin; and that the Redeemer is at present the Shepherd of those who believe in him, and will hereafter be the Judge of the world; that, in order to give the effectual help which we need, it is necessary that he be always intimately with those who depend upon him, in every age, in every place; must know the

thoughts and intents of every heart; must have his eye always upon them, his ear always open to them, his arm ever stretched out for their relief; that they can receive nothing but what he bestows, can do nothing but as he enables them, nor stand a moment but as he upholds them: admitting these and the like promises, with which the word of God abounds, reason must allow, whatever difficulties may attend the thought, that only he who is God over all, blessed for ever, is able or worthy to execute this complicated plan, every part of which requires the exertion of infinite wisdom and almighty power; nor am I able to form any clear, satisfactory, or comfortable thoughts of God, suited to awaken my love or engage my trust, but as he has been pleased to reveal himself in the person of Jesus Christ. I believe, with the apostle, that God was once manifested in the flesh upon earth, and that he is now manifested in the flesh in heaven; and that the worship, not only of redeemed sinners, but of the holy angels, is addressed to the Lamb that was slain, and who, in that nature in which he suffered, now exercises universal dominion, and has the government of heaven, earth, and hell upon his shoulders. This truth is the foundation upon which my hope is built, the fountain from whence I derive all my strength and consolation, and my only encouragement for venturing to the throne of grace, for grace to help in time of need.

Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.
But if Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins.

I am, however, free to confess to you, that, through the pride and unbelief remaining in my heart, and the power of Satan's temptations, there are seasons when I find no small perplexity and evil reasonings upon this high point; but it is so absolutely essential to my peace that I cannot part with it, for I cannot give it up without giving up all hope of salvation on the one hand, and giving up the Bible, as an unmeaning, contradictory fable, on the other; and, through mercy, for the most part, when I am in my right mind, I am as fully persuaded of this truth as I am of my own existence; but, from the exercises I have had about it, I have learned to subscribe to the apostle's declaration, that "no man can say that Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." I am well satisfied it will not be a burden to me at the hour of death, nor be laid to my charge at the day of judgment, that I have thought too highly of Jesus, expected too much from him myself, or laboured too much in commending and setting him forth to others as the Alpha and

Omega, the true God and eternal life. On the contrary, alas! alas! my guilt and grief are, that my thoughts of him are so faint, so infrequent, and my commendations of him so lamentably cold and disproportionate to what they ought to be.

I know not whose letters are rapturous, but I wish mine were more so; not that I am a friend to ungrounded sallies of imagination, flights of animal passions, or heat without light. But it would be amazing to me, were I not aware of human depravity, of which I consider this as one of the most striking proofs, that they who have any good hope of an interest in the gospel salvation do not find their hearts (as Dr. Watts expresses it) all on fire, and that their very looks do not express a transport of admiration, gratitude, and love, when they consider from what misery they are redeemed, to what happiness they are called, and what a price was paid for their souls. I wish to be more like the apostle Paul in this respect, who, though he often forms and compounds new words, seems at a loss for any that could suitably describe the emotions of his heart. But I am persuaded you would not object to the just fervour of scriptural devotion. But this holy flame can seldom be found unsullied in the present life. The temper, constitution, and infirmities of individuals will mix more or less with what they say or do. Allowances must be made for such things in the present state of infirmity, for who can hope to be perfectly free from them? If the heart is right with God, and sincerely affected with the wonders of redeeming love, our gracious High-priest, who knows our weakness, pities and pardons what is amiss, accepts our poor efforts, and gradually teaches us to discern and avoid what is blameable. The work of grace, in its first stages, I sometimes compare to the lighting of a fire, where for a while there is abundance of smoke, but by and by it burns clearer and clearer. There is often, both in letters and books, what might be very well omitted; but if a love to God and souls be the leading principle, I pass as gentle censure upon the rest as I can, and apply to some eccentric expressions, what Mr. Prior somewhere says of our civil dissensions in this land of liberty,

A bad effect, but from a noble cause.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

February 16, 1776.

MY DEAR MADAM,—It gave me great comfort to find, that what I wrote concerning the divine character of Jesus, as God manifest

in the flesh, met with your approbation. This doctrine is, in my view, the great foundation-stone upon which all true religion is built; but, alas! in the present day, it is the stumbling-stone and rock of offence, upon which too many, fondly presuming upon their own wisdom, fall and are broken. I am so far from wondering that any should doubt of it, that I am firmly persuaded none can truly believe it, however plainly set forth in scripture, unless it be revealed to them from heaven, or, in the apostle's words, that "no one can call Jesus Christ Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." I believe there are many who think they believe it, because they have taken it for granted, and never attentively considered the difficulties with which it is attended in the eye of fallen reason. Judging by natural light, it seems impossible to believe that the title of the true God and eternal life should properly belong to that despised man who hung dead upon the cross, exposed to the insults of his cruel enemies. I know nothing that can obviate the objections the reasoning mind is ready to form against it, but a real conviction of the sinfulness of sin, and the state of a sinner as exposed to the curse of the holy law, and destitute of every plea and hope in himself. Then the necessity of a Redeemer, and the necessity of this Redeemer's being almighty, is seen and felt, with an evidence which bears down all opposition; for neither the efficacy of his atonement and intercession, nor his sufficiency to guide, save, protect, and feed those who trust in him, can be conceived of without it. When the eyes of the understanding are opened, the soul made acquainted with and attentive to its own state and wants, he that runs may read this truth, not in a few detached texts of a dubious import, and liable to be twisted and tortured by the arts of criticism, but as interwoven in the very frame and texture of the Bible, and written, as with a sun-beam, throughout the principal parts both of the Old and New Testament. If Christ be the shepherd and the husband of his people under the gospel, and if his coming into the world did not abridge those who feared God of the privileges they were entitled to before his appearance, it follows, by undeniable consequence, "that he is God over all, blessed for ever." For David tells us, that his shepherd was Jehovah; and the husband of the Old Testament church was the Maker and God of the whole earth, the Holy One of Israel, whose name is the Lord of Hosts, Psalm xxiii. 1; Is. liv. 8, with xlvii. 4. I agree with you, madam, that among the many attempts which have been made to prove and illustrate the scripture doctrine, that the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, are one God, there have been many injudicious, unwarrantable things advanced, which have

perplexed, instead of instructing, and of which the enemies of the truth have known how to make their advantage. However, there have been tracts upon these sublime subjects, which have been written with judgment and an unction, and, I believe, attended with a blessing. I seem to prefer Mr. Jones's book on the Trinity to any I have seen, because he does little more than state some of the scripture evidence for it, and draws his inferences briefly and plainly; though even he has admitted a few texts, which may, perhaps, be thought not quite full to the point; and he has certainly omitted several of the most express and strongest testimonies. The best and happiest proof of all, that this doctrine is true in itself, and true to us, is the experience of its effects. They who know his name will put their trust in him: they who are rightly impressed with his astonishing condescension and love, in emptying himself, and submitting to the death of the cross for our sakes, will find themselves under a sweet constraint to love him again, and will feel a little of that emotion of heart which the apostle expresses in that lively passage, Gal. vi. 14. The knowledge of Christ crucified, like Ithuriel's spear, removes the false appearance by which we have been too long cheated, and shows us the men and the things, the spirit, customs, and maxims of the world, in their just light. Were I perfectly master of myself and my subject, I would never adduce any text in proof of a doctrine or assertion from the pulpit, which was not direct and conclusive; because, if a text is pressed into an argument to which it has no proper relation, it rather encumbers than supports it, and raises a suspicion that the cause is weak, and better testimonies in its favour cannot be obtained. Some misapplications of this kind have been so long in use, that they pass pretty current, though, if brought to the assay, they would be found not quite sterling: but I endeavour to avoid them to the best of my judgment. Thus, for instance, I have often heard (Rom. xiv. 23,) "Whatever is not of faith is sin," quoted to prove, that without a principle of saving faith, we can perform nothing acceptable to God: whereas it seems clear from the context, that faith is there used in another sense, and signifies a firm persuasion of mind respecting the lawfulness of the action. However, I doubt not but the proposition in itself is strictly true in the other sense, if considered detached from the connexion in which it stands; but I should rather choose to prove it from other passages, where it is directly affirmed, as Heb. xi. 6; Matth. xii. 33. In such cases, I think hearers should be careful not to be prejudiced against a doctrine, merely because it is not well supported; for perhaps it is capable of solid proof, though the preacher was not so happy as to

hit upon that which was most suitable; and extempore preachers may sometimes hope for a little allowance upon this head from the more candid part of their auditory, and not be made offenders for an inadvertence, which they cannot perhaps always avoid in the hurry of speaking. With respect to the application of some passages in the Old Testament to our Lord and Saviour, I hold it safest to keep close to the specimens the apostles have given us, and I would venture with caution, if I go beyond their line; yet it is probable they have only given us a specimen; and that there are a great number of passages which have a direct reference to gospel-truths, though we may run some hazard in making out the allusion. If St. Paul had not gone before me, I should have hesitated to assert, that the prohibition, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn," was given, not upon the account of oxen, but altogether for our sakes; nor should I, without his assistance, have found out that the history of Sarah and Hagar was a designed allegory, to set forth the difference between the law and gospel covenants. Therefore, when I hear ministers tracing some other allusions, I cannot be always sure that they push them too far, though perhaps they are not quite satisfactory to my judgment; for it may be, they have a farther insight into the meaning of these places than myself. And I think scriptures may be sometimes used to advantage, by way of accommodation, in popular discourses, and in something of a different sense from what they bear in the place where they stand, provided they are not alleged as proofs, but only to illustrate a truth already proved or acknowledged. Though Job's friends and Job himself were mistaken, there are many great truths in their speeches, which, as such, may, I think, stand as the foundation of a discourse. Nay, I either have, or have often intended, to borrow a truth even from the mouth of Satan, "Hast thou not set a hedge about him?" Such a confession extorted from our grand adversary, placing the safety of the Lord's people, under his providential care, in a very striking light.

I perfectly agree with you, madam, that our religious sensations and exercises are much influenced and tinged by natural constitution; and that, therefore, tears and warm emotions on the one hand, or a comparative dryness of spirit on the other, are no sure indications of the real state of the heart. Appearances may agree in different persons, or vary in the same person, from causes merely natural: even a change of weather may have some influence in raising or depressing the spirits, where the nerves are very delicate; and I think such persons are more susceptible of impressions from the agency of invisible powers, both good and

evil; an agency which, though we cannot explain, experience will not permit us to deny. However, though circumstantials rise and fall, the real difference between nature and grace remains unalterable. That work of God upon the heart, which is sometimes called a new birth, at others a new creation, is as distant from the highest effects of natural principles, or the most specious imitations which education or resolutions can produce, as light is from darkness, or life from death. Only he who made the world can either make a christian, or support and carry on his own work. A thirst after God as our portion, a delight in Jesus, as the only way and door; a renunciation of self and of the world, so far as it is opposite to the spirit of the gospel; these, and the like fruits of that grace, which bringeth salvation, are not only beyond the power of our fallen nature, but contrary to its tendency; so that we can have no desires of this kind till they are given us from above, and can for a season hardly bear to hear them spoken of, either as excellent or necessary.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

September 17, 1776.

MY DEAR MADAM,—We are much indebted to you for your kind thoughts of us. Hitherto I feel no uneasiness about what is before me; but I am afraid my tranquillity does not wholly spring from trust in the Lord, and submission to his will, but that a part of it at least is derived from the assurances Mr. W. gave me, that the operation would be neither difficult nor dangerous. I have not much of the hero in my constitution: if in great pains or sharp trials I should ever show a becoming fortitude, it must be given me from above. I desire to leave all with him, in whose hands my ways are, and who has promised me strength according to my day.

I rejoice that the Lord has not only made you desirous of being useful to others in their spiritual concerns, but has given you in some instances, to see that your desires and attempts have not been in vain. I shall thankfully accept of the commission you are pleased to offer me, and take a pleasure in perusing any papers you may think proper to put into my hands, and offer you my sentiments with that simplicity which I am persuaded will be much more agreeable to you than compliments. Though I know there is in general a delicacy and difficulty in services of this kind, yet, with respect to yourself, I seem to have nothing to fear.

I have often wished we had more female pens employed in the service of the sanctuary. Though few ladies encumber themselves

with the apparatus of Latin or Greek, or engage in voluminous performances, yet, in the article of essay-writing, I think many are qualified to succeed better than most men, having a peculiar easiness of style, which few of us can imitate. I remember you once showed me a paper, together with the corrections and alterations proposed by a gentleman whose opinion you had asked. I thought his corrections had injured it, and given it an air of stiffness, which is often observable when learned men write in English. Grammatical rules, as they are called, are wholly derived from the mode of speaking or writing which obtains amongst those who best understand the language, for the language must be supposed established before any grammar can be made for it; and therefore women, who, from the course of their education and life, have had an opportunity of reading the best-written books, and conversing with those who speak well, though they do not burden themselves with the formality of grammar, have often more skill in the English language than the men who can call every figure of speech by a Latin or Greek name. You may be sure, madam, I shall not wish your papers suppressed, merely because they were not written by a learned man. Language and style, however, are but the dress. Trifles, however adorned, are trifles still. A person of spiritual discernment would rather be the author of one page written in the humble garb of Bunyan, upon a serious subject, than to be able to rival the sprightliness and elegance of Lady M. W. Montague, unless it could be with a view to edification. The subjects you propose are important; and, with respect to sacramental meditations, and all devotional exercises so called, I perfectly agree with you, that to be affecting and useful, they must be dictated rather by the heart than by the head, and are most likely to influence others when they are the fruits and transcripts of our own experience. So far as I know, we are but scantily provided with specimens of this sort in print, and therefore I shall be glad to see an accession to the public stock. Your other thought of helps to recollection on Saturday evenings is, I think, an attempt in which none have been beforehand with you. So that, according to the general appearance, I feel myself disposed to encourage you to do as you have purposed. On the other hand, if I meet with any thing, on the perusal of the papers, which in my view may seem to need alteration, I will freely and faithfully point it out.

I can almost smile now, to think you once classed me amongst the Stoics. If I dare speak with confidence of myself in any thing, I think I may lay claim to a little of that pleasing, painful thing, sensibility. I need not boast of it, for it has too often been my

snare, my sin, and my punishment. Yet I would be thankful for a spice of it, as the Lord's gift, and when rightly exercised, it is valuable; and I think I should make but an awkward minister without it, especially here. Where there is this sensibility in the natural temper, it will give a tincture or cast to our religious expression. Indeed I often find this sensibility weakest where it should be strongest, and have reason to reproach myself that I am not more affected by the character, love, and sufferings of my Lord and Saviour, and my own peculiar personal obligations to him. However, my views of religion have been such for many years, as I supposed more likely to make me be deemed an enthusiast than a stoic. A moonlight head-knowledge derived from a system of sentiments, however true in themselves, is in my judgment a poor thing; nor, on the other hand, am I an admirer of those rapturous sallies, which are more owing to a warm imagination than to a just perception of the power and importance of gospel-truth. The gospel addresses both head and heart; and, where it has its proper effect, where it is received as the word of God, and is clothed with the authority and energy of the Holy Spirit, the understanding is enlightened, the affections awakened and engaged, the will brought into subjection, and the whole soul delivered to its impression, as wax to the seal. When this is the case, when the affections do not take the lead, and push forward with a blind impulse, but arise from the principles of scripture, and are governed by them, the more warmth the better. Yet in this state of infirmity nothing is perfect, and our natural temperament and disposition will have more influence upon our religious sensations than we are ordinarily aware. It is well to know how to make proper allowances and abatements upon this head, in the judgment we form both of ourselves and of others. Many good people are distressed and alternately elated by frames and feelings, which perhaps are more constitutional than properly religious experiences. I dare not tell you, madam, what I am, but I can tell you what I wish to be. The love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, is what I would wish to be the abiding object of my contemplation; not merely to speculate upon it as a doctrine, but so feel it, and my own interest in it, as to have my heart filled with its effects, and transformed into its resemblance; that with this glorious exemplar in my view, I may be animated to a spirit of benevolence, love, and compassion to all around me; that my love may be primarily fixed upon him who has so loved me, and then, for his sake, diffused to all his children, and to all his creatures. Then, knowing that much is forgiven to me, I should be prompted to the ready exercise of forgiveness, if I have aught against

any. Then I should be humble, patient, and submissive under all his dispensations, meek, gentle, forbearing, and kind to my fellow-worms. Then I should be active and diligent in improving all my talents and powers in his service, and for his glory, and live not to myself, but to him who loved me, and gave himself for me.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

November 29, 1776.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I am persuaded you need not be told, that though there are perhaps supposable extremities, in which self would prevail over all considerations, yet in general it is more easy to suffer in our own persons than in the persons of those whom we dearly love; for through such a medium our apprehensions possibly receive the idea of the trouble enlarged beyond its just dimensions, and it would sit lighter upon us if it were properly our own case, for then we should feel it all, and there would be no room for imagination to exaggerate.

But though I feel grief, I trust the Lord has mercifully preserved me from impatience and murmuring, and that, in the midst of all the pleadings of flesh and blood, there is a something within me that aims to say, without reserve or exception, "Not my will, but thine be done."

It is a comfortable consideration, that he with whom we have to do, our great High-priest, who once put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself, and now for ever appears in the presence of God for us, is not only possessed of sovereign authority and infinite power, but wears our very nature, and feels and exercises in the highest degree those tendernesses and commiserations which I conceive are essential to humanity in its perfect state. The whole history of his wonderful life is full of inimitable instances of this kind. His bowels were moved before his arm was exerted: he condescended to mingle tears with mourners, and wept over distresses which he intended to relieve. He is still the same in his exalted state: compassions dwell within his heart. In a way inconceivable to us, but consistent with his supreme dignity and perfection of happiness and glory, he still feels for his people. When Saul persecuted the members upon earth, the Head complained from heaven; and sooner shall the most tender mother sit insensible and inattentive to the cries and wants of her infant, than the Lord Jesus be an unconcerned spectator of his suffering children. No! with the eye, and the ear, and the heart of a friend, he attends to their sorrows; he counts their sighs, puts their tears in his bottle; and, when our spirits, are

overwhelmed within us, he knows our path, and adjusts the time, the measure of our trials, and every thing that is necessary for our present support and seasonable deliverance, with the same unerring wisdom and accuracy as he weighed the mountains in scales, and hills in a balance, and meted out the heavens with a span. Still more, besides his benevolent, he has an experimental sympathy. He knows our sorrows, not merely as he knows all things, but as one who has been in our situation, and who though without sin himself, endured, when upon earth, inexpressibly more for us than he will ever lay upon us. He has sanctified poverty, pain, disgrace, temptation, and death, by passing through these states; and, in whatever states his people are, they may by faith have fellowship with him in their sufferings, and he will, by sympathy and love, have fellowship and interest with them in theirs. What, then, shall we fear, or of what shall we complain, when all our concerns are written upon his heart, and their management, to the very hairs of our head, are under his care and providence: when he pities us more than we can do ourselves, and has engaged his almighty power to sustain and relieve us. However, as he is tender, he is wise also; he loves us, but especially with regard to our best interests. If there were not something in our hearts and our situation that required discipline and medicine, he so delights in our prosperity that we should never be in heaviness. The innumerable comforts and mercies with which he enriches even those we call our darker days, are sufficient proofs that he does not willingly grieve us; but when he sees a need-be for chastisement, he will not withhold it because he loves us; on the contrary, that is the very reason why he afflicts. He will put his silver into the fire to purify it; but he sits by the furnace as a refiner, to direct the process, and to secure the end he has in view, that we may neither suffer too much, nor suffer in vain.— I am, &c.

LETTER V.

December — 1776.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I have often preached to others of the benefit of affliction, but my own path for many years has been so smooth, and my trials, though I have not been without trials comparatively so light and few, that I have seemed to myself to speak by rote upon a subject of which I had not a proper feeling. Yet the many exercises of my poor afflicted people, and the sympathy the Lord has given me with them in their troubles, has made this a frequent and favourite topic of my ministry among them. The advantages of

afflictions, when the Lord is pleased to employ them for the good of his people, are many and great. Permit me to mention a few of them, and the Lord grant that we may all find those blessed ends answered to ourselves, by the trials he is pleased to appoint us.

Afflictions quicken us to prayer. It is a pity it should be so. Experience, however, testifies that a long course of ease and prosperity, without painful changes, has an unhappy tendency to make us cold and formal in our secret worship, but troubles rouse our spirits, and constrain us to call upon the Lord in good earnest, when we feel a need of that help which we only can have from him.

They are useful, and in a degree necessary, to keep alive in us a conviction of the vanity and unsatisfying nature of the present world and all its enjoyments, to remind us that this is not our rest, and to call our thoughts upwards, where our true treasure is, and where our conversation ought to be. When things go on much to our wish, our hearts are too prone to say, "It is good to be here." It is probable, that had Moses, when he came to invite Israel to Canaan found them in prosperity, as in the days of Joseph, they would have been very unwilling to remove; but the afflictions they were previously brought into made his message welcome. Thus the Lord, by pain, sickness, and disappointments, by breaking our cisterns, and withering our gourds, weakens our attachment to this world, and makes the thought of quitting it more familiar and more desirable.

A child of God cannot but greatly desire a more enlarged and experimental acquaintance with his holy word, and this attainment is greatly promoted by our trials. The far greater part of the promises in scripture are made and suited to a state of affliction; and though we may believe they are true, we cannot so well know their sweetness, power, and suitableness, unless we ourselves are in a state to which they refer. The Lord says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver." Now till the day of trouble comes, such a promise is like a city of refuge to an Israelite, who, not having slain a man, was in no danger of the avenger of blood. He had a privilege near him, of which he knew not the use and value, because he was not in the case for which it was provided. But some can say, I not only believe this promise upon the authority of the speaker, but I can set my seal to it; I have been in trouble; I took this course for relief, and I was not disappointed. The Lord verily heard and delivered me. Thus afflictions likewise give occasion of our knowing and noticing more of the Lord's wisdom, power, and goodness, in supporting and relieving, than we should otherwise have known.

I have not time to take another sheet, and

must therefore contract my homily. Afflictions evidence to ourselves, and manifest to others, the reality of grace. And when we suffer as christians, exercise some measure of that patience and submission, and receive some measure of these supports and supplies which the gospel requires and promises to believers, we are more confirmed that we have not taken up with mere notions; and others may be convinced, that we do not follow cunningly devised fables. They likewise strengthen by exercise our graces. As our limbs and natural powers would be feeble if not called to daily exertion; so the graces of the Spirit would languish, unless something was provided to draw them out to use. And, to say no more, they are honourable as they advance our conformity to Jesus our Lord, who was a man of sorrows for our sakes. Methinks, if we might go to heaven without suffering, we should be unwilling to desire it. Why should we ever wish to go by any other path than that which he has consecrated and endeared by his own example! especially as his people's sufferings are not penal; there is no wrath in them; the cup he puts in their hands is very different from that which he drank for their sakes, and is only medicinal to promote their chief good. Here I must stop; but the subject is fruitful, and might be pursued through a quire of paper.—I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

August — 1778.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Your obliging favour of the 22d from B——, which I received last night, demands an immediate acknowledgment. Many things which would have offered by way of answer, must for the present be postponed; for the same post brought an information which turns my thoughts to one subject. What shall I say! Topics of consolation are at hand in abundance; they are familiar to your mind; and were I to fill the sheet with them I could suggest nothing but what you already know. Then are they consolatory indeed, when the Lord himself is pleased to apply them to the heart. This he has promised, and therefore, we are encouraged to expect it. This is my prayer for you: I sincerely sympathize with you; I cannot comfort you; but he can; and I trust he will. How impertinent would it be to advise you to forget or suspend the feelings which such a stroke must excite! Who can help feeling! nor is sensibility in itself sinful. Christian resignation is very different from that stoical stubbornness, which is most easily practised by those unamiable characters whose regards centre wholly in self; nor could we in a proper manner exercise submission to the

will of God under our trials, if we did not feel them. He who knows our frame is pleased to allow, that afflictions for the present are not joyous, but grievous. But to them that fear him he is near at hand, to support their spirits, to moderate their grief, and in the issue to sanctify it; so that they shall come out of the furnace refined, more humble, and more spiritual. There is, however, a part assigned us; we are to pray for the help in need; and we are not wilfully to give way to the impression of overwhelming sorrow. We are to endeavour to turn our thoughts to such considerations as are suited to alleviate it; our deserts as sinners, the many mercies we are still indulged with, the still greater afflictions which many of our fellow-creatures endure, and above all, the sufferings of Jesus, that man of sorrows, who made himself intimately acquainted with grief for our sakes.

When the will of the Lord is manifested to us by the event, we are to look to him for grace and strength, and to be still and know that he is God, that he has a right to dispose of us and ours as he pleases, and that in the exercise of this right he is most certainly good and wise. We often complain of losses; but the expression is rather improper. Strictly speaking, we can lose nothing, because we have no real property in any thing. Our earthly comforts are lent us, and when recalled, we ought to return and resign them with thankfulness to him who has let them remain so long in our hands. But, as I said above, I do not mean to enlarge in this strain; I hope the Lord, the only Comforter will bring such thoughts with warmth and efficacy upon your mind. Your wound, while fresh, is painful; but faith, prayer, and time will, I trust, gradually render it tolerable. There is something fascinating in grief: painful as it is, we are prone to indulge it, and to brood over the thoughts and circumstances which are suited (like fuel to fire) to heighten and prolong it. When the Lord afflicts, it is his design that we should grieve; but in this, as in all other things there is a certain moderation which becomes a christian, and which only grace can teach; and grace teaches us, not by books or by hearsay, but by experimental lessons: all beyond this should be avoided and guarded against as sinful and hurtful. Grief, when indulged and excessive, preys upon the spirits, injures health, indisposes us for duty, and causes us to shed tears which deserve more tears. This is a weeping world. Sin has filled it with thorns and briars, with crosses and calamities. It is a great hospital, resounding with groans in every quarter. It is as a field of battle, where many are falling around us continually; and it is more wonderful that we escape so well, than that we are sometimes wounded. We must have some share; it is the unavoidable lot of our nature and state. It is like-

wise needful in point of discipline: the Lord will certainly chasten those whom he loves, though others may seem to pass for a time with impunity. That is a sweet, instructive, and important passage, Heb. xii. 5. 11. It is so plain, that it needs no comment; so full that a comment would but weaken it. May the Lord inscribe it upon your heart, my dear madam, and upon mine.—I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

November — 1778.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Your obliging favour raised in me a variety of emotions when I first received it, and has revived them this morning while perusing it again. I have mourned and rejoiced with you, and felt pain and pleasure in succession, as you diversified the subject. However, the weight of your grief I was willing to consider as a thing that is past; and the thought that you had been mercifully supported under it, and brought through it, that you were restored home in safety, and that the time of writing you were tolerably well and composed, made joy upon the whole preponderate, and I am more disposed to congratulate you, and join you in praising the Lord for the mercies you enumerate, than to prolong my condolence upon the mournful parts of your letter. Repeated trying occasions have made me well acquainted with the anxious inquiries with which the busy poring mind is apt to pursue departed friends. It can hardly be otherwise under some circumstances. I have found prayer the best relief. I have thought it very allowable to avail myself to the utmost of every favourable consideration; but I have had the most comfort, when I have been enabled to resign the whole concern into his hands, whose thoughts and ways, whose power and goodness, are infinitely superior to our conceptions. I consider, in such cases, that the great Redeemer can save to the uttermost, and the great teacher can communicate light, and impress truth, when and how he pleases. I trust the power of his grace and compassion will hereafter triumphantly appear, in many instances, of persons, who, on their dying beds, and in their last moments, have been, by his mercy, constrained to feel the importance and reality of truths, which they did not properly understand and attend to in the hour of health and prosperity. Such a salutary change I have frequently, or at least more than once, twice or thrice, been an eye-witness to, accompanied with such evidence as, I think, has been quite satisfactory. And who can say such a change may not often take place, when the person who is the subject of it is too much enfeebled to give an account to by-standers

of what is transacting in his mind! Thus I have encouraged my hope. But the best satisfaction of all, is to be duly impressed with the voice that says, "Be still, and know that I am God." These words direct us, not only to his sovereignty, his undoubted right to do what he will with his own, but to all his adorable and amiable perfections, by which he has manifested himself to us in the Son of his love.

As I am not a Sadducee; the account you give of the music which entertained you on the road does not put my dependence either upon your veracity or your judgment to any trial. We live upon the confines of the invisible world, or rather perhaps in the midst of it. That unseen agents have a power of operating upon our minds, at least upon that mysterious faculty we call the imagination, is with me not merely a point of opinion, or even of faith, but of experience. That evil spirits, can, when permitted, disturb, distress, and defile us, I know, as well as I know that the fire can burn me. And though their interposition is perhaps more easily and certainly distinguishable, yet, from analogy, I conclude that good spirits are equally willing, and equally able, to employ their kind offices for our relief and comfort. I have formed in my mind a kind of system upon this subject, which for the most part I keep pretty much to myself; but I can entrust my thoughts to you as they occasionally offer. I apprehend that some persons (those particularly who rank under the class of nervous) are more open and accessible to these impressions than others, and probably the same person more so at some times than others. And though we frequently distinguish between imaginary and real (which is one reason why nervous people are so seldom pitied,) yet an impression upon the imagination may, as to the agent that produces it, and to the person that receives it, be as much a reality as any of the sensible objects around him; though a by-stander, not being able to share in the perception, may account it a mere whim, and suppose it might be avoided or removed by an act of the will. Nor have any a right to withhold their assent to what the scriptures teach, and many sober persons declare, of this invisible agency, merely because we cannot answer the questions, How? or Why? The thing may be certain, though we cannot easily explain it; and there may be just and important reasons for it, though we should not be able to assign them. If what you heard, or which, in my view, is much the same, what you thought you heard, had a tendency to compose your spirit, and to encourage your application to the Lord for help, at the time when you were about to stand in need of especial assistance, then there is a sufficient and suitable reason assigned for it at once, without looking any farther. It

would be dangerous to make impressions a rule of duty; but if they strengthen us, and assist us in the performance of what we know to be our duty, we may be thankful for them.

You have taken leave of your favourite trees, and the scenes of your younger life, but a few years sooner than you must have done, if the late dispensation had not taken place. All must be left soon; for all below is polluted, and, in its best state, is too scanty to afford us happiness. If we are believers in Jesus, all we can quit is a mere nothing,

compared with what we shall obtain. To exchange a dungeon for a palace, earth for heaven, will call for no self-denial when we stand upon the threshold of eternity, and shall have a clearer view than we have now of the vanity of what is passing from us, and the glory of what is before us. The partial changes we meet with in our way through life are designed to remind us of, and prepare us for, the great change which awaits us at the end of it. The Lord grant that we may find mercy of the Lord in that solemn hour.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MRS. T——.

LETTER I.

March 12, 1774.

MY DEAR MADAM,—My heart is full, yet I must restrain it. Many thoughts which crowd my mind, and would have vent, were I writing to another person, would to you be unseasonable. I write, not to remind you of what you have lost, but of what you have, which you cannot lose. May the Lord put a word into my heart that may be acceptable, and may his good Spirit accompany the perusal, and enable you to say, with the apostle, that as sufferings abound, consolations also abound by Jesus Christ. Indeed, I can sympathize with you. I remember, too, the delicacy of your frame, and the tenderness of your natural spirits; so that, were you not interested in the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, I should be ready to fear you must sink under your trial. But I have some faint conceptions of the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of the Lord, and may address you in the king's words to Daniel, "Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." Motives for resignation to his will abound in his word; but it is an additional and crowning mercy, that he has promised to apply and enforce them in time of need. He has said, "My grace shall be sufficient for thee;" and "as thy day is, so shall thy strength be." This, I trust you have already experienced. The Lord is so rich and so good, that he can, by a glance of thought, compensate his children for whatever his wisdom sees fit to deprive them of. If he gives them a lively sense of what he has delivered them from, and prepared for them, or of what he himself submitted to endure for their sakes, they find at once light springing up out of darkness, hard things become easy, and bitter sweet. I remember to have read of a good man in the last century (probably you may have met with the story,) who when his beloved and only son lay ill, was for some time greatly anxious about the event. One morning he staid longer than usual in his closet; while he was there, his son died. When he came out, his family were afraid to tell him, but, like

David, he perceived it by their looks, and when, upon inquiry, they said it was so, he received the news with a composure that surprised them. But he soon explained the reason, by telling them, that for such discoveries of the Lord's goodness as he had been favoured with that morning, he could be content to lose a son every day. Yes, madam, though every stream must fail, the fountain is still full, and still flowing. All the comfort you ever received in your dear friend was from the Lord, who is abundantly able to comfort you still; and he is gone but a little before you. May your faith anticipate the joyful and glorious meeting you will shortly have in a better world. Then your worship and converse together will be to unspeakable advantage, without imperfection, interruption, abatement, or end. Then all tears shall be wiped away, and every cloud removed; and then you will see, that all your concernments here below (the late afflicting dispensation not excepted,) were appointed and adjusted by infinite wisdom and infinite love.

The Lord, who knows our frame, does not expect or require that we should aim at a stoical indifference under his visitations. He allows, that afflictions are at present not joyous, but grievous; yea, he was pleased, when upon earth, to weep with his mourning friends when Lazarus died. But he has graciously provided for the prevention of that anguish and bitterness of sorrow, which is, upon such occasions, the portion of such as live without God in the world; and has engaged that all shall work together for good, and yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. May he bless you with a sweet serenity of spirit, and a cheerful hope of the glory that shall shortly be revealed.

I intimated that I would not trouble you with my own sense and share of this loss. If you remember the great kindness I always received from Mr. T—— and yourself, as often as opportunity afforded, and if you will believe me possessed of any sensibility or gratitude, you will conclude that my concern is not small. I feel likewise for the public. Will it be a consolation to you, madam, to

know that you do not mourn alone? A character so exemplary as a friend, a counsellor, a christian, and a minister, will be long and deeply regretted; and many will join with me in praying, that you, who are most nearly interested, may be signally supported, and feel the propriety of Mrs. Rowe's acknowledgment,

Thou dost but take the dying lamp away,
To bless me with thine own unclouded day.

We join in most affectionate respects and condolence. May the Lord bless you and keep you, lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

April 3, 1775.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I have long and often purposed waiting upon you with a second letter, though one thing or other still caused delay; for though I could not but wish to hear from you, I was far from making that a condition of my writing. If you have leisure and spirits to favour me with a line now and then, it will give us much pleasure; but if not, it will be a sufficient inducement with me to write, to know that you give me liberty, and that you will receive my letters in good part. At the same time, I must add, that my various engagements will not permit me to break in upon you so often as my sincere affection would otherwise prompt me to do.

I heartily thank you for yours, and hope my soul desires to praise the Lord on your behalf. I am persuaded that his goodness to you, in supporting you under a trial so sharp in itself, and in the circumstances that attended it, has been an encouragement and comfort to many. It is in such apparently severe times that the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of the Lord, and the power and proper effects of his precious gospel, are most eminently displayed. I would hope, and I do believe, that the knowledge of your case has animated some of the Lord's people against those anxious fears, which they sometimes feel when they look upon their earthly comforts with too careful an eye, and their hearts are ready to sink at the thought. What should I do, and how should I behave, were the Lord pleased to take away my desire with a stroke? But we see he can supply their absence, and afford us superior comforts without them. The gospel reveals one thing needful, the pearl of great price; and supposes that they who possess this are provided for against all events, and have ground of unshaken hope, and a source of never-failing consolation under every change they can meet with during their pilgrimage state. When his people are enabled to set

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their seal to this, not only in theory, when all things go smooth, but practically, when called upon to pass through the fire and water, then his grace is glorified in them and by them: then it appears both to themselves and to others, that they have neither followed cunningly devised fables, nor amused themselves with empty notions; then they know in themselves, and it is evidenced to others, that God is with them of a truth. In this view a believer, when in some good measure divested from that narrow selfish disposition which cleaves so close to us by nature, will not only submit to trials, but rejoice in them, notwithstanding the feelings and reluctance of the flesh. For if I am redeemed from misery by the blood of Jesus, and if he is now preparing me a mansion near himself, that I may drink of the rivers of pleasure at his right hand for evermore; the question is not (at least ought not to be,) How may I pass through life with the least inconvenience! but, How may my little span of life be made most subservient to the praise and glory of him who loved me, and gave himself for me? Where the Lord gives this desire, he will gratify it; and as afflictions for the most part afford the fairest opportunities of this kind, therefore it is, that those whom he is pleased eminently to honour are usually called, at one time or another, to the heaviest trials; not because he loves to grieve them, but because he hears their prayers, and accepts their desires of doing him service in the world. The post of honour in wars is so called because attended with difficulties and dangers which but few are supposed equal to; yet generals usually allot these hard services to their favourites and friends, who, on their parts, eagerly accept them as tokens of favour and marks of confidence. Should we, therefore, not account it an honour and a privilege, when the Captain of our salvation assigns us a difficult post? since he can and does (which no earthly commander can) inspire his soldiers with wisdom, courage, and strength, suitable to their situation, 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. I am acquainted with a few who have been led thus into the forefront of the battle; they suffered much; but I have never heard them say they suffered too much; for the Lord stood by them and strengthened them. Go on, my dear madam; yet a little while, Jesus will wipe away all tears from your eyes; you will see your beloved friend again, and he and you will rejoice together for ever.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

October 24, 1775.

MY DEAR MADAM,—The manner in which you mention Omicron's letters, I hope, wd. rather humble me than puff me up. Your

favourable acceptance of them, if alone, might have the latter effect; but alas! I feel myself so very defective in those things, the importance of which I endeavoured to point out to others, that I almost appear to myself to be one of those who say, but do not. I find it much easier to speak to the hearts of others than to my own. Yet I have cause beyond many to bless God, that he has given me some idea of what a christian ought to be, and I hope a real desire of being one myself; but verily I have attained but a very little way. A friend hinted to me, that the character I have given of C, or Grace in the full ear, must be from my own experience, or I could not have written it. To myself, however, it appears otherwise; but I am well convinced, that the state of C is attainable, and more to be desired than mountains of gold and silver. But I find you complain likewise; though it appears to me, and I believe to all who know you, that the Lord has been peculiarly gracious to you, in giving you much of the spirit in which he delights, and by which his name and the power of his gospel are glorified. It seems, therefore, that we are not competent judges either of ourselves or of others. I take it for granted, that they are the most excellent christians who are most abased in their own eyes: but lest you think upon this ground that I am something, because I can say so many humiliating things of myself, I must prevent your over-rating me, by assuring you, that my confessions rather express what I know I ought to think of myself, than what I actually do. Naturalists suppose, that if the matter of which the earth is formed were condensed as much as it is capable of, it would occupy but a very small space; in proof of which they observe, that a cubical pane of glass, which appears smooth and impervious to us, must be exceedingly porous in itself; since in every assignable point it receives and transmits the rays of light; and yet gold, which is the most solid substance we are acquainted with, is but about eight times heavier than glass which is made up (if I may say so) of nothing but pores. In like manner, I conceive, that inherent grace, when it is dilated, and appears to the greatest advantage in a sinner, would be found to be very small and inconsiderable, if it were condensed, and absolutely separated from every mixture. The highest attainments in this life are very inconsiderable, compared with what should properly result from our relation and obligations to a God of infinite holiness. The nearer we approach to him, the more we are sensible of this. While we only hear of God as it were by the ear, we seem to be something; but when, as in the case of Job, he discovers himself more sensibly to us, Job's language becomes ours, and the height of our attainment is, to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes.

I hope I do not write too late to meet you at Bath. I pray that your health may be benefited by the waters, and your soul comforted by the Lord's blessing upon the ordinances, and the converse of his children. If any of the friends you expected to see are still there, to whom we are known, and my name should be mentioned, I beg you to say, we desire to be respectfully remembered to them. Had I wings, I would fly to Bath while you are there. As it is, I endeavour to be with you in spirit. There certainly is a real, though secret, a sweet, though mysterious communion of saints, by virtue of their common union with Jesus. Feeding upon the same bread, drinking of the same fountain, waiting at the same mercy-seat, and aiming at the same ends, they have fellowship one with another, though at a distance. Who can tell how often the Holy Spirit, who is equally present with them all, touches the hearts of two or more of his children at the same instant, so as to excite a sympathy of pleasure, prayer, or praise, on each other's account? It revives me sometimes in a dull and dark hour to reflect, that the Lord has in mercy given me a place in the hearts of many of his people; and perhaps some of them may be speaking to him on my behalf, when I have hardly power to utter a word for myself. For kind services of this sort, I persuade myself I am often indebted to you. O that I were enabled more fervently to repay you in the same way! I can say, that I attempt it; I love and honour you greatly, and your concerns are often upon my mind.

We spent most of a week with Mr. B— since we returned from London, and he has been once here. We have reason to be very thankful for his connexion; I find but few like-minded with him, and his family is filled with the grace and peace of the gospel. I never visit them but I meet with something to humble, quicken, and edify me. Oh! what will heaven be, where there shall be all who love the Lord Jesus, and they only; where all imperfection, and whatever now abates or interrupts their joy in their Lord and in each other, shall cease for ever. There at least I hope to meet you, and spend an eternity with you, in admiring the riches and glory of redeeming love.

We join in a tender of the most affectionate respects.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

October 25, 1777.

MY DEAR MADAM,—What can I say for myself, to let your obliging letter remain so long unanswered, when your kind solicitude for us induced you to write? I am returned

of the delay. You would have heard from me immediately, had I been at home. But I have reason to be thankful that we were providentially called to London a few days before the fire; so that Mrs. —— was mercifully preserved from the alarm and shock she must have felt, had she been upon the spot. Your letter followed me hither, and was in my possession more than a week before my return. I purposed writing every day, but indeed I was much hurried and engaged. Yet I am not excused: I ought to have saved time from my meals or my sleep, rather than appear negligent or ungrateful. I now seize the first post I could write by since I came home. The fire devoured twelve houses; and it was a mercy, and almost a miracle, that the whole town was not destroyed, which must, humanly speaking, have been the case, had not the night been calm, as two thirds of the buildings were thatched. No lives were lost, no person considerably hurt, and I believe the contributions of the benevolent will prevent the loss from being greatly felt. It was at the distance of a quarter of a mile from my house.

Your command limits my attention at present to a part of your letter, and points me out a subject. Yet, at the same time, you lay me under a difficulty. I would not willingly offend you, and I hope the Lord has taught me not to aim at saying handsome things. I deal not in compliments, and religious compliments are the most unseemly of any. But why might I not express my sense of the grace of God manifested in you as well as in another? I believe our hearts are all alike destitute of every good, and prone to every evil. Like money from the same mint, they bear the same impression of total depravity; but grace makes a difference, and grace deserves the praise. Perhaps it ought not greatly to displease you, that others do, and must, and will think better of you than you do of yourself. If I do, how can I help it, when I form my judgment entirely from what you say and write? I cannot consent that you should seriously appoint me to examine and judge of your state. I thought you knew beyond the shadow of a doubt, what your views and desires are; yea, you express them in your letter, in full agreement with what the scriptures declare of the principles, desires, and feelings of a christian. It is true that you feel contrary principles, that you are conscious of defects and defilements; but it is equally true that you could not be right if you did not feel these things. To be conscious of them, and humbled for them, is one of the surest marks of grace; and to be more deeply sensible of them than formerly is the best evidence of grace. *But when the enemy tempt us to doubt and distrust, be-*

cause we are not perfect, then he fights, not only against our peace, but against the honour and faithfulness of our dear Lord. Our righteousness is in him, and our hope depends, not upon the exercise of grace in us, but upon the fulness of grace and love in him, and upon his obedience unto death.

There is, my dear madam, a difference between the holiness of a sinner and that of an angel. The angels have never sinned, nor have they tasted of redeeming love; they have no inward conflicts, no law of sin warring in their members; their obedience is perfect; their happiness is complete. Yet if I be found among redeemed sinners, I need not wish to be an angel. Perhaps God is not less glorified by your obedience, and, not to shock you, I will add by mine, than by Gabriel's. It is a mighty manifestation of his grace indeed, when it can live, and act, and conquer in such hearts as ours; when, in defiance of an evil nature and an evil world, and all the force and subtilty of Satan, a weak worm is still upheld, and enabled not only to climb, but to thresh the mountains; when a small spark is preserved through storms and floods. In these circumstances, the work of grace is to be estimated, not merely from its imperfect appearance, but from the difficulties it has to struggle with and overcome; and therefore our holiness does not consist in great attainments, but in spiritual desires, in hungerings, thirstings, and mournings; in humiliation of heart, poverty of spirit, submission, meekness; in cordial admiring thoughts of Jesus, and dependence upon him alone for all we want. Indeed these may be said to be great attainments; but they who have most of them are most sensible that they, in and of themselves, are nothing, have nothing, can do nothing, and see daily cause for abhorring themselves, and repenting in dust and ashes.

Our view of death will not always be alike, but in proportion to the degree in which the Holy Spirit is pleased to communicate his sensible influence. We may anticipate the moment of dissolution with pleasure and desire in the morning, and be ready to shrink from the thought of it before night. But though our frames and perceptions vary, the report of faith concerning it is the same. The Lord usually reserves dying strength for a dying hour. When Israel was to pass Jordan, the ark was in the river; and though the rear of the host could not see it, yet as they successively came forward and approached the banks, they all beheld the ark, and all went safely over. As you are not weary of living, if it be the Lord's pleasure, so I hope, for the sake of your friends and the people whom you love, he will spare you amongst us a little longer; but when the time shall arrive which he has appointed for your dismissal, I make no doubt but he will

overpower all your fears, silence all your enemies, and give you a comfortable, triumphant entrance into his kingdom. You have nothing to fear from death; for Jesus, by dying, has disarmed it of its sting, has perfumed the grave, and opened the gates of glory for his believing people. Satan, so far as he is permitted, will assault our peace, but he is a vanquished enemy; our Lord holds him in a chain, and sets him bounds which he cannot pass. He provides for us likewise the whole armour of God, and has promised to cover

our heads himself in the day of battle, to bring us honourably through every skirmish, and to make us more than conquerors at last. If you think my short unexpected interview with Mr. C—— may justify my wishing he should know that I respect his character, love his person, and rejoice in what the Lord has done and is doing for him and by him, I beg you tell him so; but I leave it entirely to yourself.

We join in most affectionate respects.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MR. ———.

LETTER I.

March 7, 1765.

SIR,—Your favour of the 19th Fe-
came to my hand yesterday. I have
with attention, and very willingly sit
offer you my thoughts. Your case
me of my own: my first desires
the ministry were attended with
uncertainties and difficulties, and the
ity of my own mind was heightened
various and opposite judgments of my
The advice I have to offer is the
painful experience and exercise, and
reason, perhaps, may not be unac-
to you. I pray our gracious Lord
it useful.

As long distressed, as you are, about
as or was not a proper call to the
It now seems to me an easy point
; but, perhaps, it will not be so to
the Lord shall make it clear to
in your own case. I have not
say so much as I could. In brief, I
principally includes three things:
warm and earnest desire to be em-
n this service. I apprehend the man
nce moved by the Spirit of God to
rk, will prefer it, if attainable, to
ds of gold and silver: so that, though
times intimidated by a sense of its
nce and difficulty, compared with his
eat insufficiency (for it is to be pre-
call of this sort, if indeed from God,
accompanied with humility and self-
mt.) yet he cannot give it up. I
good rule to inquire in this point,
the desire to preach is most fervent
most lively and spiritual frames, or
e are most laid in the dust before the
If so, it is a good sign. But if, as is
the case, a person is very earnest
preacher to others, when he finds but
ngerings and thirstings after grace
wn soul, it is then to be feared, his
ings rather from a selfish principle
n the Spirit of God.

2. Besides this affectionate desire and rea-
diness to preach, there must in due season
appear some competent sufficiency as to gifts,
knowledge, and utterance. Surely, if the
Lord sends a man to teach others, he will
furnish him with the means. I believe many
have intended well in setting up for preachers,
who yet went beyond or before their call in
so doing. The main difference between a
minister and a private christian, seems to
consist in these ministerial gifts, which are
imparted to him, not for his own sake, but
for the edification of others. But then I say,
these are to appear in due season; they are
not to be expected instantaneously, but gra-
dually, in the use of proper means. They
are necessary for the discharge of the minis-
try, but not necessary as pre-requisites to
warrant our desires after it. In your case,
you are young, and have time before you;
therefore, I think you need not as yet perplex
yourself with inquiring if you have these
gifts already. It is sufficient if your desire
is fixed, and you are willing, in the way of
prayer and diligence, to wait upon the Lord
for them; as yet you need them not.

3. That which finally evidences a proper
call, is a correspondent opening in providence,
by a gradual train of circumstances pointing
out the means, the time, the place, of actually
entering upon the work. And till this coin-
cidence arrives, you must not expect to be
always clear from hesitation in your own
mind. The principal caution on this head
is, not to be too hasty in catching at first ap-
pearances. If it be the Lord's will to bring
you into his ministry, he has already ap-
pointed your place and service; and though
you know it not at present, you shall at a
proper time. If you had the talents of an
angel, you could do no good with them till his
hour is come, and till he leads you to the
people whom he has determined to bless by
your means. It is very difficult to restrain
ourselves within the bounds of prudence here,
when our zeal is warm: a sense of the love
of Christ upon our hearts, and a tender com-

passion for poor sinners, is ready to prompt us to break out too soon;—but he that believeth, shall not make haste. I was about five years under this constraint: sometimes I thought I must preach, though it was in the streets. I listened to every thing that seemed plausible, and to many things which were not so. But the Lord graciously, and as it were insensibly, hedged up my way with thorns; otherwise, if I had been left to my own spirit, I should have put it quite out of my power to have been brought into such a sphere of usefulness, as he in good time has been pleased to lead me to. And I can now see clearly, that at the time I would first have gone out, though my intention was, I hope, good in the main, yet I overrated myself, and had not that spiritual judgment and experience, which are requisite for so great a service. I wish you therefore to take time; and if you have a desire to enter into the established church, endeavour to keep your zeal within moderate bounds, and avoid every thing that might unnecessarily clog your admission with difficulties. I would not have you hide your profession, or to be backward to speak for God; but avoid what looks like preaching, and be content with being a learner in the school of Christ for some years. The delay will not be lost time; you will be so much the more acquainted with the gospel, with your own heart, and with human nature: the last is a necessary branch of a minister's knowledge, and can only be acquired by comparing what passes within us, and around us, with what we read in the word of God.

I am glad to find you have a distaste both for Arminian and Antinomian doctrines; but let not the mistakes of others sit too heavy upon you. Be thankful for the grace that has made you to differ; be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; but beware of engaging in disputes without evident necessity, and some probable hope of usefulness. They tend to eat out the life and savour of religion, and to make the soul lean and dry. Where God has begun a real work of grace, incidental mistakes will be lessened by time and experience; where he has not, it is of little signification what sentiments people hold, or whether they call themselves Arminians or Calvinists.

I agree with you, it is time enough for you to think of Oxford yet; and that if your purpose is fixed, and all circumstances render it prudent and proper to devote yourself to the ministry, you will do well to spend a year or two in private studies. It would be further helpful, in this view, to place yourself where there is gospel-preaching, and a lively people. If your favourable opinion of this place should induce you to come here, I shall be very ready to give you every assistance in

my power. As I have trod exactly the path you seem to be setting out in, I might so far perhaps, be more serviceable than those who are in other respects much better qualified to assist you. I doubt not but in this, and every other step, you will intreat the Lord's direction; and I hope you will not forget to pray for, Sir,—Your affectionate friend, &c.

LETTER II.

January 7, 1767.

DEAR SIR,—I must beg you once for all, to release me from any constraint about the length or frequency of my letters. Believe that I think of you, and pray for you when you do not hear from me. Your correspondence is not quite so large as mine, therefore you may write the oftener. Your letters will be always welcome; and I will write to you when I find a leisure hour, and have any thing upon my mind to offer.

You seem sensible where your most observable failing lies, and to take reproof and admonition concerning it in good part; I therefore hope and believe the Lord will give you a growing victory over it. You must not expect habits and tempers will be eradicated instantaneously; but by perseverance in prayer, and observation upon the experience of every day, much may be done in time. Now and then you will (as is usual in the course of war) lose a battle; but be not discouraged, but rally your forces, and return to the fight. There is a comfortable word, a leaf of the tree of life, for healing the wounds we receive, in 1 John ii. 1. If the enemy surprises you, and your heart smites you, do not stand astonished as if there was no help, nor give way to sorrow, as if there was no hope, nor attempt to heal yourself; but away immediately to the throne of grace, to the great physician, to the compassionate High-priest, and tell him all. Satan knows, that if he can keep us from confession, our wounds will rankle; but do you profit by David's experience, Psalm xxxii. 3—5. When we are simple and open-hearted in abasing ourselves before the Lord, though we have acted foolishly and ungratefully, he will seldom let us remain long, without affording us a sense of his compassion; for he is gracious; he knows our frame, and how to bear with us, though we can hardly bear with ourselves or with one another.

The main thing is to have the heart right with God; this will bring us in the end safely through many mistakes and blunders; but a double mind, a selfish spirit, that would halve things between God and the world, the Lord abhors. Though I have not yet had many opportunities of commending your prudence, I have always had a good opinion of your

sincerity and integrity; if I am not mistaken in this, I make no doubt of your doing well. If the Lord is pleased to bless you, he will undoubtedly make you humble; for you cannot be either happy or safe, or have any probable hope of abiding usefulness, without it. I do not know that I have had any thing so much at heart in my connexions with you, as to impress you with a sense of the necessity and advantages of an humble frame of spirit; I hope it has not been in vain. O, to be little in our own eyes! This is the ground-work of every grace; this leads to a continual dependence upon the Lord Jesus; this is the spirit which he has promised to bless; this conciliates us good will and acceptance amongst men: for he that abaseth himself is sure to be honoured. And that this temper is so hard to attain and preserve, is a striking proof of our depravity. For are we not sinners! Were we not rebels and enemies before we knew the gospel? and have we not been unfaithful, backsliding, and unprofitable ever since? Are we not redeemed by the blood of Jesus? and can we stand a single moment except he upholds us? Have we any thing which we have not received? or have we received any thing which we have not abused? Why then is dust and ashes proud?

I am glad you have found some spiritual acquaintance in your barren land. I hope you will be helpful to them, and they to you. You do well to guard against every appearance of evil. If you are heartily for Jesus, Satan owes you a grudge. One way or other, he will try to cut you out work, and the Lord may suffer him to go to the length of his chain. But though you are to keep your eye upon him, and expect to hear from him at every step, you need not be slavishly afraid of him; for Jesus is stronger and wiser than he, and there is a complete suit of armour provided for all who are engaged on the Lord's side.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

Oct. 20, 1767.

DEAR SIR,—A concern for the perplexity you have met with, from the objections which have been made against some expressions in my printed sermons, and in general, against exhorting sinners to believe in Jesus, engages me to write immediately; otherwise I should have waited a little longer; for we are now upon the point of removing to the vicarage, and I believe this will be the last letter I shall write from the old house. I shall chiefly confine myself at present to the subject you propose.

In the first place, I beg you to be upon your guard against a reasoning spirit. Search the scriptures; and where you can find a plain

rule or warrant for any practice, go boldly on; and be not discouraged because you may not be clearly able to answer or reconcile every difficulty that may either occur to your own mind, or be put in your way by others. Our hearts are very dark and narrow, and the very root of all apostacy, is a proud disposition to question the necessity or propriety of divine appointment. But the child-like simplicity of faith, is to follow God without reasoning; taking it for granted a thing must be right if he directs it, and charging all seeming inconsistencies to the account of our own ignorance.

I suppose the people that trouble you upon this head are those who preach upon Arminian principles, and suppose a free will in man, in a greater or less degree, to turn to God when the gospel is proposed. These, if you speak to sinners at large, though they will approve of your doing so, will take occasion, perhaps, to charge you with acting in contradiction to your own principles. So, it seems, Mr. ——— has said. I love and honour that man greatly, and I beg you will tell him so from me; and tell him farther, that the reason why he is not a Calvinist, is because he misapprehends our principles. If I had a proper call, I would undertake to prove the direct contrary; namely, that to exhort and deal plainly with sinners, to stir them up to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold of eternal life, is an attempt not reconcilable to sober reason, upon any other grounds than those doctrines which we are called Calvinists for holding; and that all the absurdities which are charged upon us, as consequences of what we teach, are indeed truly chargeable upon those who differ from us in these points. I think this unanswerably proved by Mr. Edwards, in his Discourse on the Freedom of the Will, though the chain of reasoning is so close, that few will give attention or take pains to pursue it. As to myself, if I was not a Calvinist, I think I should have no more hope of success in preaching to men than to horses or cows.

But these objections are more frequently urged by Calvinists themselves; many of them I doubt not, good men, but betrayed into a curiosity of spirit, which often makes their ministry (if ministers) dry and inefficacious, and their conversation sour and unsavoury. Such a spirit is too prevalent in many professors, that if a man discovers a warm zeal for the glory of God, and is enabled to bear a faithful testimony to the gospel-truths; yea, though the Lord evidently blesses him, they overlook all, and will undervalue a sermon, which, upon the whole, they cannot but acknowledge to be scriptural, if they meet with a single sentence contrary to the opinion they have taken up. I am sorry to see such a spirit prevailing. But this I observe, that the ministers who give into this way, though good

men and good preachers in other respects, are seldom very useful or very zealous; and those who are in private life, are more ready for dry points of disputation, at least harping upon a string of doctrines, than for experimental and heart-searching converse, whereby one may warm and edify another. Blessed be God, who has kept me and my people from this turn; if it should ever creep in or spread among us, I should be ready to write Ichabod upon our assemblies.

I advise you, therefore, to keep close to the Bible and prayer: bring your difficulties to the Lord, and entreat him to give you, and maintain in you a simple spirit. Search the scriptures. How did Peter deal with Simon Magus? We have no right to think worse of any who can hear us, than the apostle did of him. He seemed almost to think his case desperate, and yet he advised him to repentance and prayer. Examine the same apostle's discourse, Acts iii., and the close of St. Paul's sermon, Acts xiii. The power is all of God; the means are likewise of his appointment; and he always is pleased to work by such means as may show that the power is his. What was Moses's rod in itself, or the trumpets that threw down Jericho? What influence could the pool of Siloam have, that the eyes of the blind man, by washing in it, should be opened? or what could Ezekiel's feeble breath contribute to the making dry bones live? All these means were exceedingly disproportioned to the effect; but he who ordered them to be used, accompanied them with his power. Yet, if Moses had gone without his rod, if Joshua had slighted the rams' horns, if the prophet had thought it foolishness to speak to dry bones, or the blind man refused to wash his eyes, nothing could have been done. The same holds good in the present subject: I do not reason, expostulate, and persuade sinners, because I think I can prevail with them, but because the Lord has commanded it. He directs me to address them as reasonable creatures: to take them by every handle; to speak to their consciences; to tell them of the terrors of the Lord, and of his tender mercies; to argue with them what good they find in sin; whether they do not need a Saviour; to put them in mind of death, judgment, and eternity, &c. When I have done all, I know it is to little purpose, except the Lord speaks to their hearts; and this to his own, and at his own time, I am sure he will, because he has promised it. See Isaiah lv. 10, 11; Matt. xxviii. 20. Indeed, I have heard expressions in the warmth of delivery, which I could not wholly approve, and therefore do not imitate. But in general, I see no preaching made very useful for the gathering of souls, where poor sinners are shut out of the discourse. I think one of the closest and most moving addresses to sinners I ever met with, is in Dr. Owen's

Exposition of the cxxxth Psalm, from p. 243 to 276 (in my edition.) If you get it and examine it, I think you will find it all agreeable to scripture; and he was a steady, deep-sighted Calvinist. I wish you to study it well, and make it your pattern. He handles the same point likewise in other places, and shows the weakness of the exceptions taken, somewhere at large, but I cannot just now find the passage. Many think themselves quite right, because they have not had their thoughts exercised at large, but have confined themselves to one track. There are extremes in every thing. I pray God to show you the golden mean.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

Aug. 30, 1770.

DEAR SIR,—I would steal a few minutes here to write, lest I should not have leisure at home. I have not your letter with me, and therefore can only answer so far as I retain a general remembrance of the contents.

You will, doubtless, find rather perplexity than advantage from the multiplicity of advice you may receive, if you endeavour to reconcile and adopt the very different sentiments of your friends. I think it will be best to make use of them in a full latitude; that is, to correct and qualify them one by another, and to borrow a little from each, without confining yourself entirely to any. You will probably be advised to different extremes: it will then be impossible to follow both; but it may be practicable to find a middle path between them; and I believe this will generally prove the best and safest method. Only consult your own temper, and endeavour to incline rather to that side to which you are the least disposed, by the ordinary strain of your own inclination; for on that side you will be in the least danger of erring. Warm and hasty dispositions will seldom move too slow; and those who are naturally languid and cool are as little liable to over-act their part.

With respect to the particulars you instance, I have generally thought you warm and enterprising enough, and therefore thought it best to restrain you; but I meant only to hold you in, till you had acquired some farther knowledge and observation both of yourself and of others. I have the pleasure to hope (especially of late) that you are become more self-diffident and weary than you were some time ago. And therefore, as your years and time are advancing, and you have been for a tolerable space under a probation of silence, I can make no objection to your attempting sometimes to speak in select societies; but let your attempts be confined to such; I mean where you are ac-

acquainted with the people, or the leading part of them, and be upon your guard against opening yourself too much among strangers. And again, I earnestly desire you would not attempt any thing of this sort in a very public way, which may perhaps bring you under inconveniences and will be inconsistent with the part you ought to act (in my judgment) from the time you receive Episcopal ordination. You may remember a simile I have sometimes used of green fruit; children are impatient to have it while it is green, but persons of more judgment will wait till it is ripe. Therefore I would wish your exhortations to be brief, private, and not very frequent. Rather give yourself to reading, meditation, and prayer.

As to speaking without notes, in order to do it successfully, a fund of knowledge should be first possessed. Indeed, in such societies as I hope you will confine your attempts to, it would not be practicable to use notes; but I mean, that if you design to come out as a preacher without notes from the first, you must use double diligence in study; your reading must not be confined to the scriptures; you should be acquainted with church history, have a general view of divinity as a system, know something of the state of controversies in past times and at present, and indeed of the general history of mankind. I do not mean that you should enter deeply into these things: but you will need to have your mind enlarged, your ideas increased, your style and manner formed; you should read, think, write, compose, and use all diligence to exercise and strengthen your faculties. If you would speak extempore as a clergyman, you must be able to come off roundly, and to fill up your hour with various matter, in tolerable coherence, or else you will not be able to overcome the prejudice which usually prevails among the people. Perhaps it may be as well to use some little scheme in the note-way, especially at the beginning; but a little trial will best inform you what is most expedient.

Let your backwardness to prayer and reading the scriptures be ever so great, you must strive against it. This backwardness, with the doubts you speak of, are partly from your own evil heart, but perhaps chiefly temptations of Satan: he knows, if he can keep you from drawing water out of the wells of salvation, he will have much advantage. My soul goes often mourning under the same complaints, but at times the Lord gives me a little victory. I hope he will over-rule all our trials, to make us more humble, dependent, and to give us tenderness of spirit towards the distressed. The exercised and experienced christian, by the knowledge he has gained of his own heart, and the many difficulties he has had to struggle with, acquires a skill and compassion in dealing with

others; and without such exercise, all our study, diligence, and gifts in other ways, would leave us much at a loss in some of the most important parts of our calling.

You have given yourself to the Lord for the ministry: his providence has thus far favoured your views; therefore harbour not a thought of finching from the battle, because the enemy appears in view, but resolve to endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Lift up your banner in his name; trust in him, and he will support you; but, above all things, be sure not to be either enticed or terrified from the privilege of a throne of grace.

Who your enemies are, or what they say, I know not; for I never conversed with them. Your friends here have thought you at times harsh and hasty in your manner, and rather inclining to self-confidence. These things I have often reminded you of: but I considered them as blemishes usually attendant upon youth, and which experience, temptation, and prayer would correct. I hope and believe you will do well. You will have a share in my prayers and best advice: and when I see occasion to offer a word of reproof, I shall not use any reserve.—Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

July 25, 1772.

DEAR SIR,—I am glad to hear you are accommodated at D—, where I hope your best endeavours will not be wanting to make yourself agreeable, by an humble, inoffensive, and circumspect behaviour.

I greatly approve of your speaking from one of the lessons in the afternoon; you will find it a great help to bring you gradually to that habit and readiness of expression which you desire: and you will perhaps find it make more impression upon your hearers than what you read to them from the pulpit. However, I would not discourage or dissuade you from reading your sermons for a time. The chief inconvenience respecting yourself is that which you mention. A written sermon is something to lean upon; but it is best for a preacher to lean wholly upon the Lord. But set off gradually; the Lord will not despise the day of small things; pray heartily that your spirit may be right with him, and then all the rest will be well. And keep on writing; if you compose one sermon, and should find your heart enlarged to preach another, still your labour of writing will not be lost. If your conscience bears you witness that you desire to serve the Lord, his promise (now he has brought you into the ministry) of a sufficiency and ability for the work, belongs to you as much as to another.

Your borrowing help from others may arise from a diffidence of yourself, which is not blamable; but it may arise in part likewise from a diffidence of the Lord, which is hurtful. I wish you may get encouragement from that word, Exodus iv. 11, 12. It was a great encouragement to me. While I would press you to diligence in every rational means for the improvement of your stock in knowledge, and your ability of utterance, I would have you remember that preaching is a gift. It cannot be learned by industry and imitation only, as a man may learn to make a chair or a table: it comes from above; and if you patiently wait upon God, he will bestow this gift upon you, and increase it in you. It will grow by exercise. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly. And be chiefly solicitous to obtain an unction upon what you do say. Perhaps those sermons in which you feel yourself most deficient, may be made most useful to others. I hope you will endeavour likewise, to be plain and familiar in your language and manner (though not low or vulgar,) so as to suit yourself as much as possible to the apprehensions of the most ignorant people. There are in all congregations some persons exceedingly ignorant; yet they have precious souls, and the Lord often calls such. I pray the Lord to make you wise to win souls. I hope he will. You cannot be too jealous of your own heart: but let not such instances as Mr. M—— discourage you. Cry to him who is able to hold you up, that you may be safe, and you shall not cry in vain. It is, indeed, an alarming thought, that a man may pray and preach, be useful and acceptable for a time, and yet be nothing. But still the foundation of God standeth sure. I have a good hope, that I shall never have cause to repent the part I have taken in your concerns. While you keep in the path of duty, you will find it the path of safety. Be punctual in waiting upon God in secret. This is the life of every thing; the only way, and the sure way of maintaining and renewing your strength.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. ———.

LETTER I.

June 29, 1757.

DEAR SIR,—I endeavour to be mindful of you in my prayers, that you may find both satisfaction and success, and that the Lord himself may be your light, to discover to you every part of your duty. I would earnestly press you and myself to be followers of those who have been followers of Christ; to aim at a life of self-denial; to renounce self-will, and to guard against self-wisdom. The less we have to do with the world the better; and, even in conversing with our brethren, we have been, and unless we watch and pray, shall often be ensnared. Time is precious, and opportunities once gone, are gone for ever. Even by reading, and what we call studying, we may be comparatively losers. The shorter way is to be closely waiting upon God in humble, secret, fervent prayer. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in his hands; and he gives bountifully, without upbraiding. On the other hand, whatever we may undertake with a sincere desire to promote his glory, we may comfortably pursue; nothing is trivial that is done for him. In this view, I would have you, at proper intervals, pursue your studies, especially at those times when you are unfit for better work. Pray for me, that I may be enabled to break through the snares of vanity that lie in my way; that I may be crucified with Christ, and live a hidden life by faith in him who loved me and gave himself for me.—Adieu.

LETTER II.

August 31, 1757.

DEAR SIR,—I wish you much of that spirit which was in the apostle, which made him content to become all things to all men, that he might gain some. I am persuaded that

love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ, and the brightest evidences that he is indeed our master. If any should seem inclined to treat you with less regard, because you are or have been a Methodist teacher, you will find forbearance, meekness, and long-suffering, the most prevailing means to conquer their prejudices. Our Lord has not only taught us to expect persecution from the world, though this alone is a trial too hard for flesh and blood; but we must look for what is much more grievous to a renewed mind; to be in some respects slighted, censured, and misunderstood, even by our christian brethren, and that, perhaps, in cases where we are really striving to promote the glory of God and the good of souls, and cannot, without the reproach of our consciences, alter our conduct, however glad we should be to have their approbation. Therefore, we are required, not only to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil, but likewise to bear one another's burdens: which plainly intimates there will be something to be borne with on all hands; and happy indeed is he that is not offended. You may observe what unjust reports and surmises were received, even at Jerusalem, concerning the apostle Paul: and it seems he was condemned unheard, and that by many thousands too, Acts xxi. 20, 21: but we do not find that he was at all ruffled, or that he sought to retort any thing upon them, though doubtless, had he been so disposed, he might have found something to have charged them with in his turn; but he calmly and willingly complied with every thing in his power to soften and convince them. Let us be followers of this pattern, so far as he was a follower of Christ; for even Christ pleased not himself. How did he bear with the mistakes, weakness, intemperate zeal, and imprudent proposals of his disciples, while on earth; and how does he bear with the same things from you and me, and every one of his followers now?

and do we, can we, think much to bear with each other for his sake! Have we all a full remission of ten thousand talents, which we owed him, and were utterly unable to pay, and do we wrangle amongst ourselves for a few pence! God forbid!

If you should be numbered among the regular Independents, I advise you not to offend any of them by unnecessary singularities. I wish you not to part with any truth, or with any thing really expedient; but if the omitting any thing of an indifferent nature will obviate prejudices, and increase a mutual confidence, why should not so easy a sacrifice be made! Above all, my dear friend, let us keep close to the Lord in a way of prayer: he giveth wisdom that is profitable to direct; he is the Wonderful Counsellor; there is no teacher like him. Why do the living seek to the dead! Why do we weary our friends and ourselves in running up and down, and turning over books for advice! If we shut our eyes upon the world and worldly things, and raise our thoughts upwards in humility and silence, should we not often hear the secret voice of the Spirit of God whispering to our hearts, and pointing out to us the way of truth and peace! Have we not often gone astray, and hurt either ourselves or our brethren, for want of attending to this divine instruction! Have we not sometimes mocked God, by pretending to ask direction from him, when we had fixed our determination beforehand! It is a great blessing to know that we are sincere; and next to this, to be convinced of our insincerity, and to pray against it.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

November 21, 1757.

DEAR SIR,—Can you forgive so negligent a correspondent? I am indeed ashamed; but (if that is any good excuse) I use you no worse than my other friends. Whenever I write, I am obliged to begin with an apology; for, what with business and the incidental duties of every day, my time is always mortgaged before it comes into my hands, especially as I have so little skill in redeeming and improving it. I long to hear from you, and I long to see you; and indeed, from the terms of yours, I expected you here before this; which has been partly a cause of my delay. I have mislaid your letter, and cannot remember the particulars; in general, I remember you were well, and going on comfortably in your work; which was matter of joy to me; and my poor prayers are for you, that the Lord may own and prosper you more and more. The two great points we are called to pursue in this sinful divided world, are peace and holiness; I hope you are much

in the study of them. These are the peculiar characteristics of a disciple of Jesus; they are the richest part of the enjoyments of heaven; and so far as they are received into the heart, they bring down heaven upon earth; and they are more inseparably connected between themselves than some of us are aware of. The longer I live, the more I see of the vanity and the sinfulness of our unchristian disputes; they eat up the very vitals of religion. I grieve to think how often I have lost my time and my temper that way, in presuming to regulate the vineyards of others, when I have neglected my own; when the beam in my own eye has so contracted my sight, that I could discern nothing but the mote in my neighbour's. I am now desirous to choose a better part. Could I speak the publican's word with a proper feeling, I wish not for the tongue of men or angels to fight about notions or sentiments. I allow that every branch of gospel-truth is precious, that errors are abounding, and that it is our duty to bear an honest testimony to what the Lord has enabled us to find comfort in, and to instruct with meekness such as are willing to be instructed; but I cannot see it my duty, nay, I believe it would be my sin, to attempt to beat my notions into other people's heads. Too often I have attempted it in time past; but now I judge, that both my zeal and my weapons were carnal. When our dear Lord questioned Peter, after his fall and recovery, he said not, Art thou wise, learned, and eloquent! Nay, he said not, Art thou clear, and sound, and orthodox? But this only, "Lovest thou me?" An answer to this was sufficient then; why not now! Any other answer, we may believe, would have been insufficient then. If Peter had made the most pompous confession of his faith and sentiments, still the first question would have recurred, "Lovest thou me?" This is a scripture precedent. Happy the preacher, whoever he be, my heart and my prayers are with him, who can honestly and steadily appropriate Peter's answer. Such a man I say, I am ready to hear, though he should be as much mistaken in some points as Peter afterwards appears to have been in others. What a pity is it, that christians in succeeding ages should think the constraining force of the love of Christ too weak, and suppose the end better answered by forms, subscriptions, and questions of their own devising! I cannot acquit even those churches who judge themselves nearest the primitive rule in this respect: alas! will-worship and presumption may creep into the best external forms. But the misfortune both in churches and private christians is, that we are too prone rather to compare ourselves with others, than to judge by the scriptures; and while each can see that they give not into the errors and mistakes of the

opposite party, both are ready to conclude that they are right: and thus it happens, that an attachment to a supposed gospel-order will recommend a man sooner and farther to some churches, than an eminency of gospel-practice. I hope you will beware of such a spirit, whenever you publicly assume the Independent character; this, like a worm at the root, has nipt the graces, and hindered the usefulness of many a valuable man; and those who change sides and opinions are the most liable to it. For the pride of our heart insensibly prompts us to cast about far and near for arguments to justify our own behaviour, and makes us too ready to hold the opinions we have taken up to the very extreme, that those amongst whom we are newly come may not suspect our sincerity. In a word, let us endeavour to keep close to God, to be much in prayer, to watch carefully over our hearts, and leave the busy warm spirits to make the best of their work. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and that wait on him continually; to these he will show his covenant, not notionally, but experimentally. A few minutes of the Spirit's teaching will furnish us with more real useful knowledge, than toiling through whole folios of commentators and expositors. They are useful in their places, and are not to be undervalued by those who can perhaps in general do better without them; but it will be our wisdom to deal less with the streams, and be more close in applying to the fountain head. The scripture itself, and the Spirit of God, are the best and the only sufficient expositors of scripture. Whatever men have valuable in their writings, they got it from hence; and the way is as open to us as to any of them. There is nothing required but a teachable humble spirit; and learning, as it is commonly called, is not necessary in order to this. I commend you to the grace of God, and remain—Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

Jan. 10, 1760.

DEAR SIR,—I have procured Cennick's sermons; they are, in my judgment, sound and sweet. O that you and I had a double portion of that spirit and unction which is in them. Come, let us not despair; the fountain is as full and as free as ever;—precious fountain, ever flowing with blood and water, milk and wine. This is the stream that heals the wounded, refreshes the weary, satisfies the hungry, strengthens the weak, and confirms the strong; it opens the eyes of the blind, softens the heart of stone, teaches the dumb to sing, and enables the lame and paralytic to walk, to leap, to run, to fly, to mount up with eagles' wings: a taste of this

stream raises earth to heaven, and brings down heaven upon earth. Nor is it a fountain only; it is a universal blessing, and assumes a variety of shapes to suit itself to our wants. It is a sun, a shield, a garment, a shade, a banner, a refuge: it is bread, the true bread, the very staff of life: it is life itself, immortal, eternal life!

The cross of Jesus Christ my Lord,
Is food and medicine, shield and sword.

Take that for your motto; wear it in your heart; keep it in your eye; have it often in your mouth till you can find something better. The cross of Christ is the tree of life and the tree of knowledge combined. Blessed be God, there is neither prohibition nor flaming sword to keep us back; but it stands like a tree by the highway-side, which affords its shade to every passenger without distinction. Watch and pray. We live in a sifting time; error gains ground every day. May the name and love of our Saviour Jesus keep us and all his people. Either write or come very soon to,—Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

November 15, 1760.

DEAR SIR,—If your visit should be delayed, let me have a letter. I want either good news or good advice; to hear that your soul prospers, or to receive something that may quicken my own. The apostle says, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ:" alas! we know how to say something about it, but how faint and feeble are our real perceptions of it! Our love to him is the proof and measure of what we know of his love to us. Surely then we are mere children in this kind of knowledge, and every other kind is vain. What should we think of a man who should neglect his business, family, and all the comforts of life, that he might study the Chinese language; though he knows beforehand he should never be able to attain it, nor ever find occasion or opportunity to use it! The pursuit of every branch of knowledge that is not closely connected with the one thing needful, is no less ridiculous.

You know something of our friend Mrs. B——. She has been more than a month confined to her bed, and I believe her next remove will be to her coffin. The Lord has done great things for her. Though she has been a serious exemplary person all her life, when the prospect of death presented, she began to cry out earnestly, "What shall I do to be saved!" But her solicitude is at an end; she has seen the salvation of God, and now for the most part rejoices in something more than hope. This you will account good news, I

am sure. Let it be your encouragement and mine. The Lord's arm is not shortened, nor is his presence removed; he is near us still, though we perceive him not. May he guide you with his eye in all your public and private concerns, and may he in particular bless our communications to our mutual advantage. I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

July 29, 1761.

DEAR SIR,—Are the quarrels made up? Tell those who know what communion with Jesus is worth, that they will never be able to maintain it, if they give way to the workings of pride, jealousy, and anger. This will provoke the Lord to leave them dry, to command the clouds of his grace that they rain no rain upon them. These things are sure signs of a low frame, and a sure way to keep it so. Could they be prevailed upon, from a sense of the pardoning love of God to their own souls, to forgive each other, as the Lord forgives us, freely, fully, without condition and without reserve, they would find this like breaking down a stone wall, which has hitherto shut up their prayers from the Lord's ears, and shut out his blessing from filling their hearts. Tell them, I hope to hear that all animosities, little and big, are buried by mutual consent, in the Redeemer's grave. Alas! the people of God have enemies enough: Why, then, will they weaken their own hands? Why will they help their enemies to pull down the Lord's work? Why will they grieve those that wish them well, cause the weak to stumble, the wicked to rejoice, and bring a reproach upon their holy profession? Indeed, this is no light matter; I wish it may not lead them to something worse; I wish they may be wise in time, lest Satan gains further advantage over them, and draw them to something that shall make them (as David did) roar under the pains of broken bones. But I must break off. May God give you wisdom, faithfulness, and patience. Take care that you do not catch an angry spirit yourself, while you aim to suppress it in others; this will spoil all, and you will exhort, advise, and weep in vain. May you rather be an example and pattern to the flock; and in this view, be not surprised if you yourself meet some hard usage; rather rejoice that you will thereby have an opportunity to exemplify your own rules, and to convince your people, that what you recommend to them you do not speak by rote, but from the experience of your heart. One end why our Lord was tempted, was for the encouragement of his poor followers, that they might know him to be a High-Priest suited to them, having had a fellow-

feeling in their distresses. For the like reason, he appoints his ministers to be sorely exercised both from without and within, that they may sympathize with their flock, and know in their own hearts the deceitfulness of sin, the infirmities of the flesh, and the way in which the Lord supports and bears with all that trust him. Therefore be not discouraged; usefulness and trials, comforts and crosses, strength and exercise, go together. But remember he has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." When you get to heaven, you will not complain of the way by which the Lord brought you. Farewell. Pray for us.—Yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

Dec. 14, 1761.

DEAR SIR,—I pray the Lord to accompany you; but cannot help fearing you go on too fast. If you have not (as I am sure you ought not) made an absolute promise, but only conditional, you need not be so solicitous; depend upon it, when the Lord is pleased to remove you, he will send one to supply your place. I am grieved that your mind is so set upon a step, which, I fear, will occasion many inconveniences to a people who have deserved your best regard. Others may speak you fairer, but none wishes you better than myself; therefore I hope you allow me to speak my mind plainly, and believe that it is no pleasure to me to oppose your inclinations. As to your saying they will take no denial, it has no weight with me. Had they asked what you were exceedingly averse to, you would soon have expressed yourself so as to convince them it was to no purpose to urge you; but they saw something in your manner or language that encouraged them; they saw the proposal was agreeable to you, that you were not at all unwilling to exchange your old friends for new ones; and this is the reason they would take no denial. If you should live to see those who are most forward in pressing you become the first to discourage you, you will think seriously of my words.

If I thought my advice would prevail, it should be this: call the people together, and desire them, if possible, to forget you ever intended to depart from them: and promise not to think of a removal, till the Lord shall make your way so clear, that even they shall have nothing reasonable to object against it. You may keep your word with your other friends too; for when a proper person shall offer, as likely to please and satisfy the people as yourself, I will give my hearty consent to your removal.

Consider what it is you would have in your office, but maintenance, acceptance, and success. Have you not these where you are? Are you sure of having them where you are going? Are you sure the Spirit of God (without which you will do nothing) will be with you there, as he has been with you hitherto? Perhaps, if you act in your own spirit you may find as great a change as Samson. I am ready to weep when I think what difficulties were surmounted to accomplish your ordination; and now, when the people thought themselves fixed, that you should so soon disappoint them.—Yours, &c.

LETTER VIII.

February 15, 1762.

DEAR SIR,—I have been often thinking of you since your removal, and was glad to receive your letter to-day. I hope you will still go on to find more and more encouragement to believe, that the Lord has disposed and led you to the step you have taken. For though I wrote with the greatest plainness and earnestness, and would, if in my power, have prevented it while under deliberation, yet, now it is done and past recall, I would rather help than dishearten you. Indeed, I cannot say that my view of the affair is yet altered. The best way not to be cast down hereafter, is not to be too sanguine at first. You know there is something pleasing in novelty; as yet you are new to them, and they to you: I pray God, that you may find as cordial a regard from them as at present, when you have been with them as many years as in the place you came from. And if you have grace to be watchful and prayerful, all will be well; for we serve a gracious Master, who knows how to overrule even our mistakes to his glory and our own advantage. Yet I observe, that when we do wrong, sooner or later we smart for our indiscretion, perhaps many years afterwards. After we have seen and confessed our fault, and received repeated proofs of pardoning love, as to the guilt, yet chastisement, to remind us more sensibly of our having done amiss, will generally find us out. So it was with David in the matter of Uriah; the Lord put away his sin, healed his broken bones, and restored unto him the light of his countenance; yet many troubles, in consequence of this affair, followed one upon another, till at length (many years afterwards) he was driven from Jerusalem by his own son. So it was with Jacob: he dealt deceitfully with his brother Esau; notwithstanding this the Lord appeared to him and blessed him, gave him comfortable promises, and revealed himself to him from time to time; yet after an interval of twenty years, his fault was brought

afresh to his remembrance, and his heart trembled within him, when he heard his brother was coming with armed men to meet him. And thus I have found it in my own experience; things which I had forgotten a long while have been brought to my mind by providential dispensations which I little expected; but the first rise of which I have been able to trace far back, and forced to confess, that the Lord is indeed He that judgeth the heart and trieth the reins. I hint this for your caution; you know best upon what grounds you have proceeded; but if (though I do not affirm it, I hope otherwise,) I say, if you have acted too much in your own spirit, been too hasty and precipitate; if you have not been sufficiently tender of your people, nor thoughtful of the consequences which your departure will probably involve them in; if you were impatient under the Lord's hand, and, instead of waiting his time and way of removing the trials and difficulties you found, you have ventured upon an attempt to free and mend yourself; I say, if any of these things have mixed with your determinations, something will fall out to show you your fault: either you will not find the success you hope for, or friends will grow cold, or enemies and difficulties you dream not of, will present themselves; or your own mind will alter, so as what seems now most pleasant will afford you little pleasure. Yet, though I write thus, I do not mean, as I said before, to discourage you, but that you may be forewarned, humble, and watchful. If you should at any time have a different view of things, you may take comfort from the instances I have mentioned. The trials of David and Jacob were sharp, but they were short; and they proved to their advantage, put them upon acts of humiliation and prayer, and ended in a double blessing. Nothing can harm us that quickens our earnestness and frequency in applying to a throne of grace: only trust the Lord, and keep close to him, and all that befalls you shall be for good. Temptations end in victory; troubles prove an increase of consolation; yea, our very falls and failings tend to increase our spiritual wisdom, to give us a greater knowledge of Satan's devices, and make us more habitually upon our guard against them. Happy case of the believer in Jesus! when bitten by the fiery serpent he needs not go far for a remedy; he has only to look to a bleeding Saviour, and be healed.

I think one great advantage that attends a removal into a new place is, that it gives an easy opportunity of forming a new plan, and breaking off any little habits which we have found inconvenient, and yet, perhaps, could not so readily lay aside, where our customs and acquaintance had been long formed. I earnestly recommend to you to reflect, if you cannot recollect some things which you

have hitherto omitted, which may properly be now taken up; some things formerly allowed, which may now with ease and convenience be laid aside. I only give the hint in general; for I have nothing in particular to charge you with. I recommend to you to be very choice of your time, especially the fore part of the day. Let your morning hours be devoted to prayer, reading, and study; and suffer not the importunity of friends to rob you of the hours before noon, without a just necessity: and if you accustom yourself to rise early in the morning, you will find a great advantage. Be careful to avoid losing your thoughts, whether in books or otherwise, upon any subject which are not of a direct subserviency to your great design, till towards dinner-time. The afternoon is not so favourable to study: this is a proper time for paying and receiving visits, conversing among your friends, or unbending with a book of instructive entertainment, such as history, &c. which may increase your general knowledge, without a great confinement of your attention; but let the morning hours be sacred. I think you would likewise find advantage in using your pen more. Write short notes upon the scriptures you read, or transcribe the labours of others; make extracts from your favourite authors, especially those who, besides a fund of spiritual and evangelical matter, have a happy talent of expressing their thoughts in a clear and lively, or pathetic manner. You would find a continued exercise in this way would be greatly useful to form your own style, and help your delivery and memory; you would become insensibly master of their thoughts, and find it more easy to express yourself justly and clearly: what we read we easily lose, but what we commit to paper is not so soon forgot. Especially remember (what you well know, but we cannot too often remind each other,) that frequent secret prayer is the life of all we do. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given; but all our diligence will fail, if we are remiss in this particular. I am glad it is not thought necessary for you to go to London on this occasion. I hope you will not think it necessary upon any other account. Rather keep close to the work you have undertaken, and endeavour to avoid any thing that looks like ostentation, or a desire to be taken notice of. You see I advise you with the freedom of a friend who loves you, and longs to see your work and your soul prosper.

You will, I doubt not, endeavour to promote the practice of frequent prayer in the houses that receive you. I look upon prayer-meetings as the most profitable exercises (excepting the public preaching) in which christians can engage: they have a direct tendency to kill a worldly, trifling spirit, to

draw down a divine blessing upon all our concerns, compose differences, and enkindle (at least to maintain) the flame of divine love amongst brethren. But I need not tell you the advantages; you know them; I only would exhort you, and the rather as I find in my own case the principal cause of my leanness and unfruitfulness is owing to an unaccountable backwardness to pray. I can write, or read, or converse, or hear, with a ready will; but prayer is more spiritual and inward than any of these, and the more spiritual any duty is, the more my carnal heart is apt to start from it. May the Lord pour forth his precious spirit of prayer and supplication in both our hearts!

I am not well pleased with the account you give of so many dry bones. It increases my wonder, that you could so readily exchange so much plump flesh and blood as you had about you for a parcel of skeletons. I wish they may not haunt you and disturb your peace. I wish these same dry bones do not prove thorns in your sides and in your eyes. You say, now you have to pray, and prophecy, and wait for the four winds to come and put life into these bones. God grant that your prayers may be answered; but if I knew a man who possessed a field in a tolerable soil, which had afforded him some increase every year, and if this man, after having bestowed seven years' labour in cultivating, weeding, manuring, fencing, &c., just when he has brought his ground (in his neighbour's judgment) into good order, and might reasonably hope for larger crops than he had ever yet seen, should suddenly forego all his advantages, leave his good seed for the birds to eat, pull up the young fences which cost him so much pains to plant, and all this for the sake of making a new experiment upon the top of a mountain; though I might heartily wish him great success I could not honestly give him great encouragement. You have parted with that for a trifle which in my eyes seems an inestimable jewel, I mean the hearts and affections of an enlightened people. This appears to me one of the greatest honours and greatest pleasures a faithful minister can possess, and which many faithful and eminent ministers have never been able to obtain. This gave you a vast advantage; your gift was more acceptable there than that of any other person, and more than you will probably find elsewhere. For I cannot make a comparison between the hasty approbation of a few whose eyes are but beginning to open, and their affections and passions warm, so that they must, if possible, have the man that first catches their attention: I say, I cannot think this worthy to be compared to the regard of a people who understood the gospel, were able to judge of men and doctrines, and had trial of you for so many years. It is, indeed,



to your honour (it proves that you faithful, diligent, and exemplary,) that people proved so attached to you; but you should force yourself from them, they so dearly loved you, and so much for you, this has made all your friends see parts to wonder, and your enemies vice; and I, alas! know not what to do in your behalf to either. Say not of this Micaiah, for he prophesied not for me, but evil," but allow me the privilege of a friend. My heart is full when I think what has happened, and what will probably be the consequence. In a few words,

I am strongly persuaded you have taken an unadvised step, and would therefore prepare you for the inconvenience and uneasiness you may probably meet with. And if I am (as I desire I may prove) mistaken, my advice will do no harm; you will want something to balance the caresses and success you meet with.

We should be very glad to see you, and hope you will take your measures, when you do come, to lengthen your usual stay, in proportion to the difference of the distance. Pray for us.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MRS. P——

LETTER I.

May —, 1774.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I have had sudden notice that I may send you a hasty line, to express our satisfaction in hearing that you had a safe though perilous journey. I hope I shall be always mindful to pray that the Lord may guide, bless, and comfort you, and give you such a manifestation of his person, power, and grace, as may set you at liberty from all fear, and fill you with abiding peace and joy in believing. Remember that Jesus has all power, the fulness of compassion, and embraces with open arms all that come to him for life and salvation.

I know not whether Mrs. ——'s illness was before or since my last. Through mercy she is better again; and I remain so, though death and illness are still walking about the town. O for grace to take warning by the suffering of others, to sit loose to the world, and so to number our days, as to incline our hearts to the one thing needful! Indeed that one thing includes many things sufficient to engage the best of our thoughts and the most of our time, if we were duly sensible of their importance; but I may adopt the psalmist's expression, "My soul cleaveth to the dust." How is it that the truths of which I have the most undoubted conviction, and which are of all others the most weighty, should make so little impression upon me! O I know the cause! it is deeply rooted. An evil nature cleaves to me; so that when I would do good evil is present with me. It is, however, a mercy to be made sensible of it, and in any measure humbled for it. Ere long it will be dropped in the grave; then all compliments shall cease. That thought gives relief. I shall not always live this poor dying life: I hope one day to be all ear, all heart, all tongue; when I shall see the Redeemer as he is, I shall be like him. This will be a heaven indeed, to behold his glory without a vail, to rejoice in his love without a cloud, and to sing his praises, without one jarring or wandering note, for ever. In the mean time, may he enable us to serve him with our best

O that every power, faculty, and talent, were devoted to him! he deserves all we have, and ten thousand times more if we had it; for he has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. He gave himself for us. In one sense we are well suited to answer his purpose; for if we were not vile and worthless, beyond expression, the exceeding riches of his grace would not have been so gloriously displayed. His glory shines more in redeeming one sinner, than in preserving a thousand angels. Poor Mr. —— is still in the dark valley; but we trust prayer shall yet bring him out. Mighty things have been done in answer to prayer; and the Lord's arm is not shortened, neither is his ear heavy. It is our part to wait till we have an answer. One of his own hymns says,

The promise may be long deferr'd,
But never comes too late.

I suppose you have heard of the death of Mr. T—— of R——. This is apparently a heavy blow. He was an amiable, judicious, candid man, and an excellent preacher in a great sphere of usefulness; and his age and constitution gave hopes that he might have been eminently serviceable for many years. How often does the Lord write Vanity upon all our expectations from men. He visited a person ill of a putrid fever, and carried the seeds of infection with him to London, where he died. Mrs. —— is a very excellent and accomplished woman, but exceedingly delicate in her frame and spirits. How can she bear so sudden and severe a stroke! But yet I hope she will afford a proof of the Lord's all-sufficiency and faithfulness. O madam, the Lord our God is a great God! If he frowns, the smiles of the whole creation can afford no comfort; and if he is pleased to smile, he can enable the soul under the darkest dispensations to say, All is well. Yet the flesh will feel, and it ought: otherwise the exercise of faith, patience, and resignation, would be impracticable. I have lost in him one of my most valued and valuable friends; but what is my loss to that of his people?

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord increase you more and more, you and your children. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you his peace. I thank him for leading you to us, but especially for making your visit there in any measure agreeable and profitable to yourself. If I have been an instrument in his hand for your comfort, I have reason to remember it among the greatest favours he has conferred upon me. And now, dear Madam, once more farewell. If the Lord spares our lives, I hope we shall see each other again upon earth. But, above all, let us rejoice in the blessed gospel, by which immortality is brought to light, and a glorious prospect opened beyond the grave.

*There sits our Saviour thron'd in light,
Cloth'd with a body like our own.*

There at least, after all the changes and trials of this state, we shall meet to part no more.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

— 1775.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I should have been more uneasy at being prevented writing immediately, had I any reason to apprehend my advice necessary upon the point you propose, which, by this time, I suppose is settled as it should be without me. I smiled at Miss M——'s disappointment. However, if the Lord favours her with a taste for the library of my proposing, she will be like the merchantman seeking goodly pearls, and will count all other books but pebbles in comparison of those four volumes, which present us with something new and important whenever we look into them. I shall be much obliged to her if she will commit the third chapter of Proverbs to her memory, and I shall pray the Lord to write it in her heart.

You surprise me when you tell me, the incident of my birth-day was noticed by those I never saw. Be so good as to return my thanks to my unknown friends, and tell them, that I pray our common Lord and Saviour to bless them abundantly. His people while here are scattered abroad, separated by hills and rivers, and too often by names and prejudices; but by and by we shall all meet, where we shall all know and acknowledge each other, and rejoice together for evermore. I have lately read with much pleasure, and I hope with some profit, the history of the Greenland Mission. Upon the whole, it is a glorious work. None who love the Lord will refuse to say, it is the finger of God indeed. For my own part, my soul rejoices in it: and I honour the instruments, as men who have hazarded their lives in an extra-

ordinary manner for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Sure I am that none could have sustained such discouragements at first, or have obtained such success afterwards, unless the Lord had sent, supported, and owned them.

I hope we shall have an interest in your prayers. I trust the Lord is yet with us. We have some ripe for the sickle, and some just springing up; some tokens of his gracious presence among us; but sin and Satan cut us out abundance of work as individuals, though, through mercy, as a society, we walk in peace.

The toad and spider is an exhibition of my daily experience. I am often wounded, but the Lord is my health; still I am a living monument of mercy; and I trust that word, "Because I live, you shall live also," will carry me to the end. I am poor, weak, and foolish; but Jesus is wise, strong, and abounding in grace. He has given me a desire to trust my all in his hands, and he will not disappoint the expectation which he himself has raised. At present I have but little to say, and but little time to say it in. When you think of this place, I hope you will think and believe, that you have friends here most cordially interested in your welfare, and often remembering you in prayer. May the Lord be your guide and shield, and give you the best desires of your heart. I pray him to establish and settle you in the great truths of his word. I trust he will. We learn more, and more effectually, by one minute's communication with him through the medium of his written word, than we could from an assembly of divines, or a library of books.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

August — 1775.

MY DEAR MADAM,—It is not owing to forgetfulness that your letter has been thus long unanswered. It has lain within my view this fortnight, demanding my first leisure hour; but affairs of daily occurrence have been so many and so pressing, that I have been constrained to put it off till now. I trust the Lord, by his Spirit and providence, will direct and prosper the settlement of your children. I desire my love to Miss M——. My idea of her enlarges. Methinks I see her aspiring to be as tall as her mamma. I hope likewise that she increases in grace and wisdom as in years and stature; and that hearing our Lord's flock is a little flock, she feels an earnest thirst to be one of the happy number which constitutes his fold.

There the Lord dwells amongst them upon his own hill,

*With the flocks all around him, awaiting his will.
If she has such a desire, I can tell who gave*

it her, for I am persuaded it was not born with her: and where the good husbandman sows, there will he also reap. Therefore, dear Miss M——, press forward: knock and it shall be opened unto you, for yet there is room. O what a fold! O what a pasture! O what a shepherd! Let us love, and sing, and wonder.

I hope the good people at Bristol, and every where else, are praying for our sinful, distracted land, in this dark day. The Lord is angry, the sword is drawn, and I am afraid nothing but the spirit of wrestling prayer can prevail for the returning it into the scabbard. Could things have proceeded to these extremities, except the Lord had withdrawn his salutary blessing from both sides! It is a time of prayer. We see the beginning of trouble, but who can foresee the possible consequences! The fire is kindled, but how far it may spread, those who are above may perhaps know better than we. I meddle not with the disputes of party, nor concern myself about any political maxims, but such as are laid down in scripture. There I read, that righteousness exalteth a nation, and that sin is the reproach, and if persisted in, the ruin of any people. Some people are startled at the enormous sum of our national debt: they who understand spiritual arithmetic, may well be startled if they sit down and compute the debt of national sin. *Imprimis*, Infidelity; *Item*, Contempt of the gospel; *Item*, The profligacy of manners; *Item*, Perjury; *Item*, The cry of blood, the blood of thousands, perhaps millions, from the East Indies. It would take sheets, yea quires, to draw out the particulars under each of these heads, and then much would remain untold. What can we answer, when the Lord saith, "Shall not I visit for these things! shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Since we received the news of the first hostilities in America, we have had an additional prayer-meeting. Could I hear that professors in general, instead of wasting their breath in censuring men and measures, were plying the throne of grace, I should still hope for a respite. Poor New England! once the glory of the earth, now likely to be visited with fire and sword! They have left their first love, and the Lord is sorely contending with them. Yet surely their sins as a people are not to be compared with ours. I am just so much affected with these things, as to know that I am not affected enough. Oh! my spirit is sadly cold and insensible, or I should lay them to heart in a different manner; yet I endeavour to give the alarm as far as I can. There is one political maxim which comforts me, "The Lord reigns." His hand guides the storm; and he knows them that are his, how to protect, support, and deliver them. He will take care of his own cause, yea, he will extend his kingdom, even by these formidable

methods. Men have one thing in view, he has another, and his counsel shall stand.

The chief piece of news since my last is concerning B. A. She has finished her course, and is now with the great multitude who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of his testimony. Tuesday, the 1st of February, she was in our assembly, was taken ill the next day, and died while we were assembled the Tuesday following. She had an easy dissolution, retained her senses and her speech to the last minute, and went without a struggle or a sigh. She was not in raptures during her illness, but was composed, and maintained a strong and lively faith. She had a numerous levee about her bed daily, who were all witnesses to the power of faith, and to the faithfulness of the Lord, enabling her to triumph over the approaches of death; for she was well known and well respected. She will be much missed; but I hope he will answer the many prayers she put up for us, and raise up others in her room. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." Blessed are they who know whom they have believed, and when death comes, can cheerfully rest their hopes on him who died that we might live. B—— had been long a precious and honourable woman; but her hope in the trying hour rested not in what she had done for the Lord, but upon what he had done for her; not upon the change his grace had wrought in her, but upon the righteousness he had wrought out for her by his obedience unto death. This supported her, for she saw nothing in herself but what she was ashamed of. She saw reason to renounce her own goodness, as well as her own sins, as to the point of acceptance with God, and died, as St. Paul lived, determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

The time when Mr. and Mrs. C—— remove to Scotland drawing near, Mrs. —— is gone to spend a week or two with them, and take her leave. She feels something at parting with a sister, who is indeed a valuable person; and from children they have always lived in the most tender intimacy and uninterrupted friendship. But all beneath the moon (like the moon itself) is subject to incessant change. Alterations and separations are graciously appointed of the Lord, to remind us that this is not our rest, and to prepare our thoughts for that approaching change which shall fix us for ever in an unchangeable state. O Madam! what shall we poor worms render to him who has brought life and immortality to life by the gospel, taken away the sting of death, revealed a glorious prospect beyond the grave, and given us eyes to see it! Now the reflection, that we must ere long take a final farewell of what is most capable of pleasing us upon earth, is not only tolerable, but pleasant. For we know we cannot fully possess our best friend, our chief

re, till we have done with all below; we cannot till then properly see each

We are cased up in vehicles of clay, converse together as if we were in differ-

ences, with the blinds close drawn. We see the carriage, and the voice as that we have a friend within; but all know each other better, when death open the coach doors, and hand out the souls successively, and lead them into the various apartments which the Lord has appointed to be the common residence of them before him. What an assembly will there be! What a constellation of glory, when every individual shall shine like the sun in the bosom of their Father! No sins, sorrows, afflictions; no veils, clouds, or prejudices, interrupt us then. All names of idleness (the fruits of present remaining ignorance, the channels of bigotry, and the ling-block of the world) will be at an

end. The description you give of your present situation pleases me much, and chiefly because it describes and manifests to me something still more interesting, I mean the present situation of your mind. Had he not led you in an Eden some months ago, it would hardly have awakened your descriptive powers. But he whom the wind and seas obey, has calmed your mind, and I trust will go on to fill you with all joy and peace in belief. It is no great matter where we are, provided we see that the Lord has placed us there, and that he is with us.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

1776.

My dear madam, I hope we have found out, and that this letter will reach you in time to welcome you in our names to London. We are ready to take it for granted that you will now most certainly make us a

visit. Do come as soon, and stay as long, as possibly can. Methinks you will be glad to get out of the smell and noise as soon as possible. If we did not go to London now, when we should perhaps forget how people there. Especially I pity professors; they are exposed to as many dangers as people who live in mines; chilling damps, scorching heats, epidemical disorders, owing to the stagnant air. Such are the winds of false doctrine, the explosions of controversy, the contagion of worldly conversation, the contagion of custom. In short, a person had need of a good constitution of grace, and like to be well supplied with antidotes, to procure a tolerable share of spiritual health in such a situation.

And now, how shall I fill up the rest of the letter? It is a shame for a christian and a

minister to say he has no subject at hand, when the inexhaustible theme of redeeming love is ever pressing upon our attention. I will tell you, then, though you know it, that the Lord reigns. He who once bore our sins, and carried our sorrows, is seated upon a throne of glory, and exercises all power in heaven and on earth. Thrones, principalities, and powers, bow before him. Every event in the kingdoms of providence and of grace are under his rule. His providence pervades and manages the whole, and is as minutely attentive to every part, as if there were only that single object in his view. From the highest archangel to the meanest ant or fly, all depend on him for their being, their preservation, and their powers. He directs the sparrows where to build their nests, and to find their food. He over-rules the rise and fall of nations, and bends, with an invincible energy and unerring wisdom, all events; so that, while many intend nothing less, in the issue their designs all concur and coincide in the accomplishment of his holy will. He restrains with a mighty hand the still more formidable efforts of the powers of darkness; and Satan, with all his hosts, cannot exert their malice a hair's breadth beyond the limits of his permission. This is he who is the head and husband of his believing people. How happy are they whom it is his good pleasure to bless! How safe are they whom he has engaged to protect! How honoured and privileged are they to whom he is pleased to manifest himself, and whom he enables and warrants to claim him as their friend and their portion! Having redeemed them by his own blood, he sets a high value upon them: he esteems them his treasure, his jewels, and keeps them as the pupil of his eye. They shall not want; they need not fear; his eye is upon them in every situation, his ear is open to their prayers, and his everlasting arms are under them for their sure support. On earth he guides their steps, controls their enemies, and directs all his dispensations for their good; while in heaven, he is pleading their cause, preparing them a place, and communicating down to them the reviving foretastes of the glory that shall be shortly revealed. O how is this mystery hidden from an unbelieving world! Who can believe it, till it is made known by experience, what an intercourse is maintained in this land of shadows between the Lord of glory and sinful worms! How should we praise him, that he has visited us; for we were once blind to his beauty, and insensible to his love, and should have remained so to the last, had he not prevented us with his goodness, and been found of us when we sought him not.

Mrs. — presents her love. The bite of the leech which I mentioned to you has confined her to the house ever since; but I hope she will be able to go out to-morrow. We

were for a while apprehensive of worse consequences; but the Lord is gracious: he shows us, in a variety of instances, what dependent creatures we are, how blind to events, and how easily the methods which we take to relieve ourselves from a small inconvenience may plunge us into a greater. Thus we learn (happy, indeed, if we can effectually learn it,) that there is no safety but in his protection, and that nothing can do us good but by his blessing. As for myself, I see so many reasons why he might contend with me, that I

am amazed he affords me and mine so much peace, and appoints us so few trials. We live as upon a field of battle; many are hourly suffering and falling around us, and I can give no reason why we are preserved, but that he is God, and not man. What a mercy that we are only truly known to him, who is alone able to bear us!

May the Lord bless you and yours; may he comfort you, guide you, and guard you. Come quickly to,—Yours, &c.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. B——.

LETTER I.

September 14, 1765.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,—When I was at London, in June last, your name first reached me, and from that time I have been desirous to wish you success in the name of the Lord. A few weeks ago, I received a farther account from Mrs. ——, with a volume of your sermons: she likewise gave me a direction where to write, and an encouragement that a letter would not be unacceptable. The latter, indeed, I did not much need, when I had read your book. Though we have no acquaintance, we are already united in the strictest ties of friendship, partakers of the same hope, servants of the same Lord, and in the same part of his vineyard: I therefore hold all apologies needless. I rejoice in the Lord's goodness to you; I pray for his abundant blessing upon your labours; I need an interest in your prayers; I have an affectionate desire to know more concerning you: these are my motives for writing.

Mrs. —— tells me that you have read my Narrative: I need not tell you, therefore, that I am one of the most astonishing instances of the forbearance and mercy of God upon the face of the earth. In the close of it, I mention a warm desire I had to the ministry: this the Lord was pleased to keep alive for several years, through a succession of views and disappointments. At length his hour came, and my way was made easy. I have been here about fifteen months. The Lord has led me, by a way that I little expected, to a pleasant lot, where the gospel has been many years known, and is highly valued by many. We have a large church and congregation, and a considerable number of lively thriving believers, and in general go on with great comfort and harmony. I meet with less opposition from the world than is usual where the gospel is preached. This burden was borne by Mr. B—— for ten years, and in that course of time, some of the fiercest opposers were re-

moved, some wearied, and some softened; so that we are now remarkably quiet in that respect. May the Lord teach us to improve the privilege, and preserve us from indifference. How unspeakable are our obligations to the grace of God! What a privilege is it to be a believer! They are comparatively few, and we by nature were no nearer than others; it was grace, free grace, that made the difference. What an honour to be a minister of the everlasting gospel! These, upon comparison, are perhaps fewer still. How wonderful that one of these few should be sought for among the wilds of Africa, reclaimed from the lowest state of impiety and misery, and brought to assure other sinners, from his own experience, that "there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared." And you, sir, though not left to give such flagrant proofs of the wickedness of the heart and the power of Satan, yet owe your present views to the same almighty grace. If the Lord had not distinguished you from your brethren, you would have been now in the character of a minister misleading the people, and opposing those precious truths you are now labouring to establish. Not unto us, O Lord! but unto thy name be the glory. I shall be thankful to hear from you at your leisure. Be pleased to inform me, whether you received the knowledge of the truth before or since you were in orders; how long you have preached the joyful sound of salvation by Jesus, and what is the state of things in your parts.

We are called to an honourable service, but it is arduous. What wisdom does it require to keep the middle path in doctrines, avoiding the equally dangerous errors on the right hand and the left! What steadiness, to speak the truth boldly and faithfully in the midst of a gainsaying world! What humility, to stand against the tide of popularity! What meekness, to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may be saved! "Who is sufficient for these things!" We are not in ourselves, but there is an all-sufficiency in Jesus.

Our enemy watches us close; he challenges and desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat; he knows he can easily shake us, if we are left to ourselves; but we have a Shepherd, a Keeper, who never slumbers nor sleeps. If he permits us to be exercised, it is for our good; he is at hand to direct, moderate, and sanctify every dispensation; he has prayed for us, that our faith may not fail, and he has promised to maintain his fear in our hearts, that we may not depart from him. When we are prone to wander, he calls us back; when we say, My feet slip, his mercy holds us up; when we are wounded, he heals; when we are ready to faint, he revives. The people of God are sure to meet with enemies, but especially the ministers: Satan bears them a double grudge: the world watches for their halting, and the Lord will suffer them to be afflicted, that they may be kept humble, that they may acquire a sympathy with the sufferings of others, that they may be experimentally qualified to advise and help them, and to comfort them with the comforts with which they themselves have been comforted of God. But the Captain of our salvation is with us; his eye is upon us, his everlasting arms beneath us; in his name, therefore, we may go on, lift up our banners, and say, "If God be for us, who can be against us? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." The time is short: yet a little while, and he will wipe all tears from our eyes, and put a crown of life upon our head with his own gracious hand. In this sense, how beautiful are those lines:

—Temporis illius
Me consolor imagine;
Festis quam populus me reducem choris,
Faustisque excipiet vocibus, et Dei
Pompa cum celebri, me comitabitur
Augusta ad penetralia.
Buch. in Paul. zlii.

If any occasions should call you into these parts, my house and pulpit will be glad to receive you. Pray for us, dear sir, and believe me to be,—Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

November 2, 1765.

VERY DEAR SIR,—Your letter of the 4th ult. gave me great pleasure. I thank you for the particular account you have favoured me with. I rejoice with you, sympathize with you, and find my heart opened to correspond with unreserved freedom. May the Lord direct our pens, and help us to help each other. The work you are engaged in is great, and your difficulties many; but faithful is he that hath called you, who also will do it. The weapons which he has now put

in your hands are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. Men may fight, but they shall not prevail against us, if we are but enabled to put our cause simply into the Lord's hands, and keep steadily on in the path of duty. He will plead our cause, and fight our battles; he will pardon our mistakes, and teach us to do better. My experience as a minister is but small, having been but about eighteen months in the vineyard; but for about twelve years I have been favoured with an increasing acquaintance among the people of God, of various ranks and denominations, which, together with the painful exercises of my own heart, gave me opportunity of making observations which were of great use to me when I entered upon the work myself; and ever since, I have found the Lord graciously supplying new lights and new strength, as new occurrences arise. So, I trust it will be with you. I endeavour to avail myself of the examples, advice, and sentiments of my brethren, yet at the same time to guard against calling any man master. This is the peculiar of Christ. The best are but men: the wisest may be mistaken; and that which may be right in another, may be wrong in me, through a difference of circumstances. The Spirit of God distributes variously, both in gifts and dispensations; and I would no more be tied to act strictly by others' rules, than to walk in shoes of the same size. My shoes must fit my own feet.

I endeavour to guard against extremes; our nature is prone to them; and we are liable likewise, when we have found the inconvenience of one extreme, to revert insensibly (sometimes to fly suddenly) to the other. I pray to be led in the midst of the path. I am what they call a Calvinist; yet there are flights, niceties, and hard sayings, to be found among some of that system, which I do not choose to imitate. I dislike those sentiments against which you have borne your testimony in the note at the end of your preface; but having known many precious souls in that party, I have been taught, that the kingdom of God is not in names and sentiments, but in righteousness, faith, love, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. I should, however, upon some occasions, oppose those tenets, if they had any prevalence in my neighbourhood; but they have not; and in general, I believe, the surest way to refute or prevent error, is to preach the truth. I am glad to find you are aware of that spirit of enthusiasm which has so often broken loose and blemished hopeful beginnings, and that the foundation you build upon is solid and scriptural: this will, I hope, save you much trouble, and prevent many offences. Let us endeavour to make our people acquainted with the scriptures, and to impress them with a high sense of its authority, excellence, and sufficiency. Satan

seldom remarkably imposes on ministers or people, except where the word of God is too little consulted or regarded. Another point in which I aim at a medium, is in what is called prudence. There is certainly such a thing as christian prudence, and a remarkable deficiency of it is highly inconvenient. But caution too often degenerates into cowardice; and if the fear of man, under the name of prudence, gets within our guard, like a chilling frost, it nips every thing in the bud. Those who trust the Lord, and act openly with an honest freedom and consistence, I observe, he generally bears them out, smoothes their way, and makes their enemies their friends, or at least restrains their rage; while such as halve things, temporise, and aim to please God and man together, meet with double disappointment, and are neither useful nor respected. If we trust to him, he will stand by us; if we regard men, he will leave us to make the best we can of them.

I have set down hastily what occurred to my pen, not to dictate to you, but to tell you how I have been led, and because some expressions in your letter seemed to imply that you would not be displeas'd with me for so doing. As to books, I think there is a medium here likewise. I have read too much in time past; yet I do not wholly join with some of our brethren, who would restrain us entirely to the word of God. Undoubtedly this is the fountain; here we should dwell: but a moderate and judicious perusal of other authors may have its use; and I am glad to be beholden to such helps, either to explain what I do not understand, or to confirm me in what I do. Of these, the writings of the last age afford an immense variety.

But above all, may we, dear sir, live and feed upon the precious promises, John xiv. 16, 17. 26, and xvi. 13—15. There is no teacher like Jesus, who, by his Holy Spirit, reveals himself in his word to the understanding and affections of his children. When we thus behold his glory in the gospel-glass, we are changed into the same image. Then our hearts melt, our eyes flow, our stammering tongues are unloosed. That this may be your increasing experience is the prayer of, dear sir,—Yours, &c.

LETTER III.

January 21, 1766.

DEAR SIR,—Your letters give me the sincerest pleasure. Let us believe that we are daily thinking of and praying for each other, and write when opportunity offers without apologies. I praise the Lord he has led you so soon to a settled judgment in the leading truths of the gospel. For want of this, many

have been necessitated with their own hands to pull down what, in the first warm emotions of their zeal, they had laboured hard to build. It is a mercy likewise to be enabled to acknowledge what is excellent in the writings or conduct of others, without adopting their singularities, or discarding the whole on account of a few blemishes. We should be glad to receive instruction from all, and avoid being led by the *ipse dixit* of any. *Nullius in verbum*, is a fit motto for those who have one master, even Christ. We may grow wise apace in opinions, by books and men; but vital, experimental knowledge, can only be received from the Holy Spirit, the great instructor, and comforter of his people. And there are two things observable in his teaching: 1. That he honours the means of his own appointment, so that we cannot expect to make any great progress without diligence on our parts.

2. That he does not teach all at once, but by degrees. Experience is his school; and by this I mean the observation and improvement of what passes within us and around us in the course of every day. The word of God affords a history in miniature of the heart of man, the devices of Satan, the state of the world, and the method of grace. And the most instructing and affecting commentary on it to an enlightened mind, may be gathered from what we see, feel, and hear from day to day. *Res, ætas, usus, semper aliquid apportent novi*; and no knowledge in spiritual things but what we acquire in this way is properly our own, or will abide the time of trial. This is not always sufficiently considered: we are ready to expect that others should receive upon our word, in half an hour's time, those views of things which have cost us years to attain. But none can be brought forward faster than the Lord is pleased to communicate inward light. Upon this ground controversies have been multiplied among christians to little purpose, for plants of different standings will be (*ceteris paribus*) in different degrees of forwardness. A young christian is like a green fruit; it has perhaps a disagreeable austerity, which cannot be corrected out of its proper course; it wants time and growth: wait a while, and by the nourishment it receives from the root, together with the action of the sun, wind, and rain, in succession from without, it will insensibly acquire that flavour and maturity, for the want of which an unskilful judge would be ready to reject it as nothing worth. We are favoured with many excellent books in our tongue; but I, with you, agree in assigning one of the first places, as a teacher, to Dr. Owen. I have just finished his discourse on the Holy Spirit, which is an epitome, if not the master-piece, of his writings. I should be glad to see the re-publication you speak of: but I question if the booksellers will ven-

ture upon it. I shall perhaps mention it to my London friends. As to archbishop Leighton, besides his select works, there are two octavo volumes published at Edinburgh, in the year 1743, and since reprinted at London. They contain a valuable commentary on St. Peter's First Epistle, and lectures on Isa. vi; Psal. xxxix, cxxx; Rom. iv, and a part of chap. xii. I have likewise a small quarto in Latin, of his Divinity Lectures, when professor at Edinburgh; the short title, is, *Praelectionis Theologiae*. Mine was printed in London, 1698. I believe this book is scarce; I set the highest value upon it. He has wonderfully united the simplicity of the gospel, with all the captivating beauties of style and language. Bishop Burnet says, he was the greatest master of the Latin tongue he ever knew, of which, together with his compass of learning, he has given proof in his lectures; yet in his gayer dress, his eminent humility and spirituality appear to no less advantage than when clad in plain English. I think it may be said to be a diamond set in gold. I could wish it translated, if it was possible (which I almost question) to preserve the beauty and spirit of the original.

Edwards on Free-will I have read with pleasure, as a good answer to the proud reasoners in their own way; but a book of that sort cannot be generally read: where the subject-matter is unpleasing, and the method of treating it requires more attention than the Athenian spirit of the times will bear, I wonder not if it is uncalled for, and am afraid we shall not see him upon Original Sin, if it depends upon the sale of the other. His answer to Dr. Taylor, which you speak of, is not a MS. but has been already printed at Boston.

You send us good news indeed, that two more of your brethren are declaring on the gospel side. The Lord confirm and strengthen them, add yet to your numbers, and make you helps and comforts to each other. Surely he is about to spread his work. Happy those whom he honours to be fellow-workers with him. Let us account the disgrace we suffer for his name's sake to be our great honour. Many will be against us, but there are more for us. All the praying souls on earth, all the glorified saints in heaven, all the angels of God, yea the God of angels himself, all are on our side. Satan may rage, but he is a chained enemy. Men may contradict and fight, but they cannot prevail. Two things we shall especially need, courage and patience, that we neither faint before them, nor upon any provocation act in their spirit. If we can pity and pray for them, return good for evil, make them sensible that we bear them a hearty good-will, and act as the disciples of him who wept for his enemies and prayed for his murderers; in this way we shall find the Lord will plead our cause, soften opposers, and by degrees, give us a measure of outward

peace. Warmth and imprudence have often added to the necessary burden of the cross. I rejoice that the Lord has led you in a different way, and I hope your doctrine and example will make your path smoother every day: you find it so in part already. As the Lord brings you out a people witness for you to the truth of his word, you will find advantage in bringing them often together. The interval from Sabbath to Sabbath is a good while, and affords time for the world and Satan to creep in. Intermediate meetings for prayer, &c. when properly conducted, are greatly useful. I could wish for larger sheets and longer leisure, but I am constrained to say adieu, in our dear Lord and Saviour.—Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

December 12, 1767.

DEAR SIR,—This is not intended as an answer to your last acceptable letter, but an occasional line, in consequence of the account Mr. T—— has given me of your late illness. I trust this dispensation will be useful to you, and I wish the knowledge of it may be so to me. I am favoured with an unusual share of health and an equal flow of spirits. If the blow you have received should be a warning to me, I shall have cause to be thankful. I am glad to hear you are better: I hope the Lord has no design to disable you from service, but rather (as he did Jacob) to strengthen you by wounding you; to maintain and increase in you that conviction which, through grace, you have received, of the vanity and uncertainty of every thing below; to give you a lively sense of the value of health and opportunities, and to add to the treasury of your experience new proofs of his power and goodness in supporting, comforting, and healing you, and likewise to quicken the prayers of your people for you, and to stir them up to use double diligence in the present improvement of the means of grace, while by this late instance they see how soon and suddenly you might have been removed from them.

I understand you did not feel that lively exercise of faith and joy which you would have hoped to have found at such a season; but let not this discourage you from a firm confidence that, when the hour of dismissal shall come, the Lord will be faithful to his gracious promise, and give you strength sufficient to encounter and vanquish your last enemy. You had not this strength lately, because you needed it not; for, though you might think yourself near to death, the Lord intended to restore you, and he permitted you to feel weakness, that you might know your strength does not consist in grace received, but in his fulness, and his promise to commu-

nicate from himself as your occasions require. O, it is a great thing to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus! but it is a hard lesson: it is not easy to understand it in theory, but when the Lord has taught us so far, it is still more difficult to reduce our knowledge to practice. But this is one end he has in view in permitting us to pass through such a variety of inward and outward exercises, that we may cease from trusting in ourselves, or in any creature, or frame, or experiences, and be brought to a state of submission and dependence upon him alone. I was once visited something in the same way, seized with a fit of the apoplectic kind, which held me near an hour, and left a disorder in my head, which quite broke the scheme of life I was then in, and was consequently one of the means the Lord appointed to bring me into the ministry; but I soon perfectly recovered. From the remembrance Mrs. —— has of what she then suffered, she knows how to sympathize with Mrs. B—— in her share of your trial. And I think dear Mr. —— some years since had a sudden stroke on a Christmas day, which disabled him from duty for a time. To him and to me these turns were only like the caution which Philip of Macedon ordered to be repeated to him every morning, "Remember thou art a man." I hope it will be no more to you, but that you shall live to praise him, and to give many cause to praise him on your behalf. Blessed be God we are in safe hands: the Lord himself is our keeper; nothing befalls us but what is adjusted by his wisdom and love. Health is his gift, and sickness, when sanctified, is a token of love likewise. Here we may meet with many things which are not joyous but grievous to the flesh; but he will, in one way or other, sweeten every bitter cup, and ere long he will wipe away all tears from our eyes. O that joy, that crown, that glory which awaits the believer! Let us keep the prize of our high calling in view, and press forward in the name of Jesus the Redeemer, and he will not disappoint our hopes.

I am but just come off from a journey, am weary, and it grows late; I must therefore break off. When you have leisure and strength to write, oblige me with a confirmation of your recovery, for I shall be something anxious about you.—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

March 14, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thought you long in writing, but am afraid I have been longer. A heavy family affliction called me from home in December, which put me out of my usual course, and threw me behind-hand in my correspondence; yet I did not suspect the date of your last letter was so old by two

months as I find it. Whether I write more frequently or more seldom, the love of my heart to you is the same, and I shall believe the like of you; yet, if it can be helped, I hope the interval will not be so long again on either side. I am glad that the Lord's work still flourishes in your parts, and that you have a more comfortable prospect at home than formerly; and I was pleased with the acceptance you found at S——, which I hope will be an earnest of greater things. I think affairs in general, with respect to this land, have a dark appearance; but it is comfortable to observe, that, amidst the aboundings of iniquity, the Lord is spreading his gospel, and that though many oppose, yet in most places whither the word is sent, great numbers seem disposed to hear. I am going (if the Lord please) into Leicestershire on Friday. This was lately such a dark place as you describe your country to be, and much of it is so still; but the Lord has visited three of the principal towns with gospel-light. I have a desire of visiting these brethren in the vineyard, to bear my poor testimony to the truths they preach, and to catch, if I may, a little fire and fervour among them. I do not often go abroad; but I have found a little excursion now and then (when the way is made plain) has its advantages, to quicken the spirits and enlarge the sphere of observation. On these accounts the recollection of my N—— journey gives me pleasure to this day; and very glad should I be to repeat it, but the distance is so great that I consider it rather as desirable than practicable.

My experiences vary as well as yours: but possibly your sensations, both of the sweet and of the bitter, may be stronger than mine. The enemy assaults me more by sap than storm, and I am ready to think I suffer more by languor than some of my friends do by the sharper conflicts to which they are called. So likewise in these seasons, which comparatively I call my best hours, my sensible comforts are far from lively. But I am in general enabled to hold fast my confidence, and to venture myself upon the power, faithfulness, and compassion of that adorable Saviour, to whom my soul has been directed and encouraged to flee for refuge.* I am a poor, changeable, inconsistent creature; but he deals graciously with me; he does not leave me wholly to myself; but I have such daily proofs of the malignity and efficacy of the sin that dwelleth in me, as ought to cover me with shame and confusion of face, and make me thankful if I am permitted to rank with the meanest of those who sit at his feet. That I was ever called to the knowledge of his salvation, was a singular instance of his sovereign grace; and that I am still preserved in the way, in defiance of all that has arisen from within and from without to turn me aside, must be wholly ascribed to the same

sovereignty: and if, as I trust, he shall be pleased to make me a conqueror at last, I shall have peculiar reason to say, Not unto me, not unto me, but unto thy name, O Lord, be the glory and the praise!

How oft have sin and Satan strove
To rend my soul from thee, my God!
But everlasting is thy love,
And Jesus seals it with his blood.

The Lord leads me in the course of my preaching to insist much on a life of communion with himself, and of the great design of the gospel to render us conformable to him in love; and as by his mercy nothing appears in my outward conduct remarkably to contradict what I say, many who only can judge by what they see, suppose I live a very happy life. But, alas! if they knew what passes in my heart, how dull my spirit is in secret, and how little I am myself affected by the glorious truths I propose to others, they would form a different judgment. Could I be myself what I recommend to them, I should be happy indeed. Pray for me, my dear friend, that now the Lord is bringing forward the pleasing spring, he may favour me with a spring-season in my soul; for indeed I mourn under a long winter.—I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

April 16, 1772.

MY DEAR FRIEND.—I hope the Lord has contracted my desires and aims almost to the one point of study, the knowledge of his truth. All other acquisitions are transient and comparatively vain. And yet, alas! I am a slow scholar; nor can I see in what respect I get forward, unless that every day I am more confirmed in the conviction of my own emptiness and inability to all spiritual good. And as, notwithstanding this, I am still enabled to stand my ground, I would hope since no effect can be without an adequate cause, that I have made some advance, though in a manner imperceptible to myself, towards a more simple dependence upon Jesus as my all in all. It is given me to thirst and to taste, if it is not given me to drink abundantly; and I would be thankful for the desire. I see and approve the wisdom, grace, suitability, and sufficiency of the gospel-salvation; and since it is for sinners, and I am a sinner, and the promises are open, I do not hesitate to call it mine. I am a weary, laden soul; Jesus has invited me to come, and has enabled me to put my trust in him. I seldom have an uneasy doubt, at least not of any continuance, respecting my pardon, acceptance, and interest in all the blessings of the New Testament. And, amidst a thousand infirmities and evils under which I groan, I have the testimony of my conscience when under the trial of his word,

that my desire is sincerely towards him, that I choose no other portion, that I allowedly serve no other master. When I told our friend — lately to this purpose, he wondered and asked, "How is it possible that if you can say these things, you should not be always rejoicing?" Undoubtedly I derive from the gospel a peace at bottom which is worth more than a thousand worlds; but so it is, I can only speak for myself, though I rest and live upon the truths of the gospel, they seldom impress me with a warm and lively joy. In public, indeed, I sometimes seem in earnest and much affected, but even then it appears to me rather as a part of the gift intrusted to me for the edification of others, than as a sensation which is properly my own. For when I am in private, I am usually dull and stupid to a strange degree, or the prey to a wild and ungoverned imagination; so that I may truly say, when I would do good, evil, horrid evil, is present with me. Ah, how different is this from sensible comfort! and if I was to compare myself with others, to make their experience my standard, and was not helped to retreat to the sure word of God as my refuge, how hard should I find it to maintain a hope that I had either part or lot in the matter. What I call my good times are, when I can find my attention in some little measure fixed to what I am about, which, indeed, is not always nor frequently my case in prayer, and still seldomer in reading the scriptures. My judgment embraces these means as blessed privileges, and Satan has not prevailed to drive me from them; but in the performance, I too often find them tasks, feel a reluctance when the seasons return, and am glad when they are finished. O what a mystery is the heart of man! What a warfare is the life of faith, at least in the path the Lord is pleased to lead me! What reason have I to lie in the dust as the chief of sinners! and what cause for thankfulness that salvation is wholly of grace. Notwithstanding all my complaints, it is still true that Jesus died and rose again, that he ever liveth to make intercession, and is able to save to the uttermost. But, on the other hand, to think of that joy of heart in which some of his people live, and to compare it with that apparent deadness and want of spirituality which I feel, this makes me mourn. However, I think there is a scriptural distinction between faith and feeling, grace and comfort; they are not inseparable, and perhaps when together, the degree of the one is not often the just measure of the other. But though I pray that I may be ever longing and panting for the light of his countenance, yet I would be so far satisfied, as to believe the Lord has wise and merciful reasons for keeping me so short of the comforts which he has taught me to desire and value more than the light of the sun.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. R——.

LETTER I.

January 16, 1772.

DEAR SIR,—It is true, I was apprehensive from your silence that I had offended you; but when your letter came, it made me full amends; and now I am glad I wrote as I did, though I am persuaded I shall never write to you again in the same strain. I am pleased with the spirit you discover; and your bearing so well to be told of the mistakes I pointed out to you, endears you more to me than if you had not made them. Henceforward I can converse freely with you, and shall be glad when I have the opportunity.

As to your view of justification, I did not oppose it; I judge for myself, and I am willing others should have the same liberty. If we hold the Head, and love the Lord, we agree in him, and I should think my time ill employed in disputing the point with you. I only meant to except against the positive manner in which you had expressed yourself. My end is answered, and I am satisfied. Indeed, I believe the difference between a *judicious* Supra-lapsarian, and a *sound* Sub-lapsarian, lies more in a different way of expressing their sentiments than is generally thought. At the close of Halyburton's *In-sufficiency of Natural Religion*, he has an *Inquiry into the Nature of Regeneration and Justification*, wherein he promises a scheme, in which, if I mistake not, the moderate of both parties might safely unite. I have used the epithets *judicious* and *sound*, because, as I acknowledge, some of the one side are not quite *sound*, so I think some on the other side are not so *judicious* as I could wish; that is, I think they do not sufficiently advert to the present state of human nature, and the danger which may arise from leading those who are weak in faith and judgment, into inquiries and distinctions, evidently beyond the line of their experience, and which may be hurtful: because, admitting them to be

true when properly explained, they are very liable to be misunderstood. To say nothing of Mr. Hussey (in whose provisions I have frequently found more bones than meat, and seasoned with much of an angry and self-important spirit,) I have observed passages in other writers, for whom I have a higher esteem, which, to say the least, appear to me paradoxical, and hard to be understood; though, perhaps, I can give my consent to them, if I had such restrictions and limitations as the authors would not refuse. But plain people are easily puzzled. And though I know several in the Supra-lapsarian scheme, at whose feet I am willing to sit and learn, and have found their preaching and conversation savoury and edifying; yet I must say, I have met with many, who have appeared to be rather wise than warm, rather positive than humble, rather captious than lively, and more disposed to talk of speculations than experience. However, let us give ourselves to the study of the word and to prayer: and may the great Teacher make every scriptural truth food to our souls. I desire to grow in knowledge, but I want nothing which bears that name, that has not a direct tendency to make sin more hateful, Jesus more precious to my soul; and at the same time to animate me to a diligent use of every appointed means, and an unreserved regard to every branch of duty. I think the Lord has shown me in a measure, there is a consistent sense running through the whole scriptures, and I desire to be governed and influenced by it all: doctrines, precepts, promises, warnings, all have their proper place and use; and I think many of the inconveniences which obtain in the present day, spring from separating those things which God hath joined together, and insisting on some parts of the word of God, almost to the exclusion of the rest.

I have filled my paper with what I did not intend to say a word of when I began, and I

must leave other things which were more upon my mind for another season. I thank you for saying you pray for me. Continue that kindness; I both need it and prize it.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

July 31, 1773.

DEAR SIR,—I received your sorrowful epistle yesterday, and in order to encourage you to write, I answer it to-day.

The ship was safe when Christ was in her, though he was really asleep. At present I can tell you good news, though you know it; he is wide awake, and his eyes are in every place. You and I, if we could be pounded together, might perhaps make two tolerable ones. You are too anxious, and I am too easy in some respects. Indeed, I cannot be too easy, when I have a right thought that all is safe in his hands; but if your anxiety makes you pray, and my composure makes me careless, you have certainly the best of it. However, the ark is fixed upon an immovable foundation; and if we think we see it totter, it is owing to a swimming in our heads. Seriously, the times look dark and stormy, and call for much circumspection and prayer; but let us not forget that we have an infallible pilot, and that the power, and wisdom, and honour of God, are embarked with us. At Venice they have a fine vessel, called the Bucentaur, in which, on a certain day of the year, the Doge and nobles embark, and go a little way to sea, to repeat the foolish ceremony of marriage between the Republic and the Adriatic (in consequence of some lying, antiquated Pope's bull, by which the bans of matrimony between Venice and the Gulf were published in the dark ages,) when, they say, a gold ring is very gravely thrown overboard. Upon this occasion, I have been told, when the honour and government of Venice are shipped on board the Bucentaur, the pilot is obliged by his office to take an oath, that he will bring the vessel safely back again, in defiance of wind and weather. Vain mortals! If this be true, what an instance of God's long-suffering is it, that they have never yet sunk as lead in the mighty waters! But my story will probably remind you, that Jesus has actually entered into such an engagement in behalf of his church. And well he may, for both wind and weather are at his command; and he can turn the storm into a calm in a moment. We may therefore safely and confidently leave the government upon his shoulders. Duty is our part, the care is his.

A revival is wanted with us as well as with you, and I trust some of us are longing for it. We are praying and singing for one; and I send you, on the other side, a hymn, that

you (if you like it) may sing with us. Let us take courage; though it may seem marvellous in our eyes, it is not so in the Lord's. He changes the desert into a fruitful field, and bids dry bones live. And if he prepare our hearts to pray, he will surely incline his ear to hear.

The miscarriages of professors are grievous; yet such things must be; how else could the scriptures be fulfilled? But there is one who is able to keep us from falling. Some who have distressed us, perhaps never were truly changed; how then could they stand? We see only the outside. Others who are sincere are permitted to fall for our instruction, that we may not be high-minded, but fear. However, he that walketh humbly, walketh surely.—Believe me, &c.

LETTER III.

February 22, 1774.

DEAR SIR,—Your letter by last post surprised and grieved me. We knew nothing of the subject, though Mrs. —— remembers, when —— was here, a hint or two were dropped which she did not understand, but no name was mentioned.

This instance shows the danger of leaning to impressions. Texts of scripture, brought powerfully to the heart, are very desirable and pleasant, if their tendency is to humble us, to give us a more feeling sense of the preciousness of Christ, or of the doctrines of grace, if they make sin more hateful, enliven our regard to the means, or increase our confidence in the power and faithfulness of God. But if they are understood as intimating our path of duty in particular circumstances, or confirming us in purposes we may have already formed, not otherwise clearly warranted by the general strain of the word, or by the leadings of Providence, they are for the most part ensnaring, and always to be suspected. Nor does their coming into the mind at the time of prayer give them more authority in this respect. When the mind is intent upon any subject the imagination is often watchful to catch at any thing which may seem to countenance the favourite pursuit. It is too common to ask counsel of the Lord when we have already secretly determined for ourselves; and in this disposition we may easily be deceived by the sound of a text of scripture, which detached from the passage in which it stands, may seem remarkably to tally with our wishes. Many have been deceived this way; and sometimes, when the event has shown them they were mistaken, it has opened a door for great distress, and Satan has found occasion to make them doubt even of their most solid experiences.

I have sometimes talked to —— upon this subject, though without the least suspi-

cion of any thing like what has happened. As to the present case, it may remind us all of our weakness. I would recommend prayer, patience, much tenderness towards her, joined with faithful expostulation. Wait a little while, and I trust the Lord who loves her will break the snare. I am persuaded, in her better judgment, she would dread the thoughts of doing wrong; and I hope and believe the good Shepherd, to whom she has often committed her soul and her ways, will interpose to restore and set her to rights. - - -

- - - I am sorry you think any of whom you have hoped well are going back; but be not discouraged. I say again, pray and wait, and hope the best. It is common for young professors to have a slack time; it is almost necessary, that they may be more sensible of the weakness and deceitfulness of their hearts, and be more humbled in future, when the Lord shall have healed their breaches, and restored their souls. We join in love to you and yours. Pray for us.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

February 3, 1775.

DEAR SIR,—[It would be wrong to make you wait long for an answer to the point you propose in your last. It is an important one. I am not a casuist by profession, but I will do my best. Suppose I imitate your laconic manner of stating the question and circumstances.

I doubt not but it is very lawful at your age to think of marriage, and, in the situation you describe, to think of money likewise. I am glad you have no person, as you say, fixedly in view; in that case advice comes a post or two too late. But your expression seems to intimate that there is one transiently in view. If it be so, since you have no settlement, if she has no money, I cannot but wish she may pass on till she is out of sight and out of mind. I see this will not do; I must get into my own grave way about this grave business. I take it for granted that my friend is free from the love of filthy lucre, and that money will never be the turning point with you in the choice of a wife. Methinks I hear you think, if I wanted money, I would either dig or beg for it; but to preach or marry for money, that be far from me. I commend you. However, though the love of money be a great evil, money itself, obtained in a fair and honourable way, is desirable upon many accounts, though not for its own sake. Meat, clothes, fire, and books, cannot easily be had without it; therefore, if these be necessary, money, which procures them, must be a necessary likewise. If things were otherwise than you represent

them, if you were able to provide for a wife yourself, then I would say, Find a gracious girl (if she be not found already,) whose person you like, whose temper you think will suit, and then, with your father and mother's consent (without which I think you would be unwilling to move,) thank the Lord for her, marry her, and account her a valuable portion, though she should not have a shilling. But, while you are without income or settlement, if you have thoughts of marriage, I hope they will be regulated by a due regard to consequences. They who set the least value upon money have in some respects the most need of it. A generous mind will feel a thousand pangs in straitening circumstances, which some unfeeling hearts would not be sensible of. You could perhaps endure hardships alone, yet it might pinch you to the very bone to see the person you love exposed to them. Besides, you might have a John, a Thomas, and a William, and perhaps half a dozen more to feed (for they must all eat;) and how this could be done without a competency on one side or the other, or so much on both sides as will make a competency when united, I see not. Besides, you would be grieved not to find an occasional shilling in your pocket to bestow upon one or other of the Lord's poor, though you should be able to make some sort of a shift for those of your own house.

But is it not written, "The Lord will provide?" It is; but it is written again, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Hastily to plunge ourselves into difficulties upon a persuasion that he will find some way to extricate us, seems to me a species of tempting him.

Therefore I judge, it is so far lawful for you to have a regard to money in looking out for a wife, that it would be wrong, that is, in other words, unlawful for you to omit it, supposing you have a purpose of marrying in your present situation.

Many serious young women have a predilection in favour of a minister of the gospel; and I believe among such one or more may be found as spiritual, as amiable, as suitable to make you a good wife, with a tolerable fortune to boot, as another who has not a penny. If you are not willing to trust your own judgment in the search, entreat the Lord to find her for you. He chose well for Isaac and Jacob; and you, as a believer, have warrant to commit your way to him, and many more express promises than they had for your encouragement. He knows your state, your wants, what you are at present, and what use he designs to make of you. Trust in him, and wait for him; prayer and faith, and patience, are never disappointed. I commend you to his blessing and guidance. Remember us to all in your house.—I am, &c.

they succeed, they of course burn incense to their own drag, and say, This was my doing; but believers meet with rubs and disappointments, which convince them, that if they obtain any thing, it is the Lord must do it for them. For this reason, I observe, that he usually brings a death upon our prospects, even when it is his purpose to give us success on the issue. Thus we become more assured that we did not act in our own spirits, and have a more satisfactory view, that his providence has been concerned in filling up the rivers and removing the mountains that were in our way. Then, when he has given us our desire, how pleasant is it to look at it, and say, This I got not by my own sword, and my own bow, but I wrestled for it in prayer, I waited for it in faith, I put it into the Lord's hand, and from his hand I received it!

You have met with the story of one of our kings (if I mistake not,) who wanted to send a nobleman abroad as his ambassador, and he desired to be excused on account of some affairs which required his presence at home: the king answered, "Do you take care of my business, and I will take care of yours." I would have you think the Lord says thus to you. You were sent into the world for a nobler end than to be pinned to a girl's apron-string; and yet, if the Lord sees it not good for you to be alone, he will provide you a help-mate. I say, if he sees the marriage-state best for you, he has the proper person already in his eye, and though she were in Peru or Nova Zembla, he knows how to bring you together. In the mean time, go thou and preach the gospel. Watch in all things; endure afflictions: do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of your ministry: and when other thoughts rise in your mind (for you have no door to shut them quite out,) run with them to the throne of grace, and commit them to the Lord. Satan will perhaps try to force them upon you unseasonably and inordinately; but if he sees they drive you to prayer, he will probably desist, rather than be the occasion of doing you so much good. Believe, likewise, that as the Lord has the appointment of the person, so he fixes the time. His time is like the time of the tide; all the art and power of man can neither hasten nor retard it a moment: it must be waited for; nothing can be done without it, and when it comes, nothing can resist it. It is unbelief that talks of delays: faith knows that properly there can be no such thing. The only reason why the Lord seems to delay what he afterwards grants, is, that the best hour is not yet come. I know you have been enabled to commit and resign your all to his disposal. You did well. May he help you to stand to surrender. Sometimes he will put us to trial, whether we mean what we say. He — his course in a way we did not expect; and then, alas! how often does the trial

put us to shame! Presently there is an outcry raised in the soul against his management; this is wrong, that unnecessary, the other has spoiled the whole plan: in short, all these things are against us. And then we go into the pulpit, and gravely tell the people how wise and how good he is; and preach submission to his will, not only as a duty, but a privilege. Alas! how deceitful is the heart! Yet, since it is, and will be so, it is necessary we should know it by experience. We have reason, however, to say, He is good and wise; for he bears with our perverseness, and in the event shows us, that if he had listened to our murmurings, and taken the methods we would have prescribed to him, we should have been ruined indeed, and that he has been all the while doing us good in spite of ourselves.

If I judge right, you will find your way providentially opened more and more; and yet it is possible, that when you begin to think yourself sure, something may happen to put you in a panic again. But a believer, like a sailor, is not to be surprised if the wind changes, but to learn the art of suiting himself to all winds for the time; and though many a poor sailor is shipwrecked, the poor believer shall gain his port. O, it is good sailing with an infallible pilot at the helm, who has the wind and weather at his command!

I have been much abroad, which of course puts things at sixes and sevens at home. If I did not love you well, I could not have spared so much of the only day I have had to myself for this fortnight past. But I was willing you should know that I think of you, and feel for you, if I cannot help you.

I have read Mr. ——'s book. Some things I think strongly argued; in some he has laid himself open to a blow, and I doubt not but he will have it. I expect answers, replies, rejoinders, &c. &c. and say, with Leah, Gad, a troop cometh. How the wolf will grin to see the sheep and the shepherds biting and worrying one another! And well he may. He knows that contentions are a surer way to weaken the spirit of love, and stop the progress of the gospel, than his old stale method of fire and sword. Well, I trust we shall be of one heart and one mind when we get to heaven at last.

Let who will fight, I trust neither water nor fire shall set you and me at variance. We unite in love to you. The Lord is gracious to us, &c.—I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

— 1776.

DEAR SIR,—I do not often serve your letters so, but this last I burnt, believing you would

like to have it out of danger of falling into improper hands. When I saw how eagerly the flames devoured the paper, how quickly and entirely every trace of the writing was consumed, I wished that the fire of the love of Jesus might as completely obliterate from your heart every uneasy impression which your disappointment has given you - - -
- - - - - Surely when he crosses our wishes, it is always in mercy, and because we short-sighted creatures often know not what we ask nor what would be the consequences if our desires were granted.

Your pride, it seems, has received a fall, by meeting a repulse. I know self does not like to be mortified in these affairs; but if you are made successful in wooing souls for Christ, I hope that will console you for meeting a rebuff when only wooing for yourself. Besides, I would have you pluck up your spirits. I have two good old proverbs at your service: "There is as good fish in the sea as any that are brought out of it." and, "If one won't, another will, or wherefore serves the market?" Perhaps all your difficulties have arisen from this, that you have not yet seen the right person; if so, you have reason to be thankful that the Lord would not let you take the wrong, though you unwittingly would have done it if you could. Where the right one lies hid I know not; but upon a supposition that it will be good for you to marry, I may venture to say,

Ubi ubi est, diu celari non potest.

The Lord in his providence will disclose her, put her in your way, and give you to understand, This is she. Then you will find your business go forward with wheels and wings, and have cause to say, His choice and time were better than your own.

Did I not tell you formerly, that if you would take care of his business, he will take care of yours! I am of the same mind still. He will not suffer them who fear him and depend upon him to want any thing that is truly good for them. In the mean while, I advise you to take a lodging as near as you can to Gethsemane, and to walk daily to mount Golgotha, and borrow (which may be had for asking) that telescope which gives a prospect into the unseen world. A view of what is passing within the veil has a marvellous effect to compose our spirits, with regard to the little things that are daily passing here. Praise the Lord, who has enabled you to fix your supreme affection upon him, who is alone the proper and suitable object of it, and from whom you cannot meet a denial, or fear a change. He loved you first, and he will love you for ever; and if he be pleased to arise and smile upon you, you are in no more necessity of begging for happiness to the

prettiest creature upon earth, than of the light of a candle on midsummer noon.

Upon the whole, I pray and hope the Lord will sweeten your cross, and either in kind or in kindness make you good amends. Wait, pray, and believe, and all shall be well. A cross we must have somewhere; and they who are favoured with health, plenty, peace, and a conscience sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, must have more causes for thankfulness than grief. Look round you, and take notice of the very severe afflictions which many of the Lord's own people are groaning under, and your trials will appear comparatively light. Our love to all friends.—I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

June 3, 1777.

DEAR SIR,—It seems I must write something about the small-pox, but I know not well what; having had it myself, I cannot judge how I should feel if I were actually exposed to it. I am not a professed advocate for inoculation; but if a person who fears the Lord should tell me, "I think I can do it in faith, looking upon it as a salutary expedient, which he in his providence has discovered, and which, therefore, appears my duty to have recourse to, so that my mind does not hesitate with respect to the lawfulness, nor am I anxious about the event; being satisfied, that whether I live or die, I am in that path in which I can cheerfully expect his blessing," I do not know that I could offer a word by way of dissuasion.

If another person should say, "My times are in the Lord's hands; I am now in health, and am not willing to bring upon myself a disorder, the consequences of which I cannot possibly foresee: if I am to have the small-pox, I believe he is the best judge of the season and manner in which I shall be visited, so as may be most for his glory and my own good: and therefore I choose to wait his appointment, and not to rush upon even the possibility of danger without a call. If the very hairs of my head are numbered, I have no reason to fear, that, supposing I receive the small-pox in a natural way, I shall have a single pimple more than he sees expedient; and why should I wish to have one less? Nay, admitting, which, however, is not always the case, that inoculation might exempt me from some pain and inconvenience, and lessen the apparent danger, might it not likewise, upon that very account, prevent my receiving some of those sweet consolations, which I humbly hope my gracious Lord would afford me, if it were his pleasure to call me to a sharp trial. Perhaps the chief design of this trying hour if it comes, may

be to show me more of his wisdom, power, and love, than I have ever yet experienced. If I could devise a mean to avoid the trouble, I know not how great a loser I may be in point of grace and comfort. Nor am I afraid of my face; it is now as the Lord has made it, and it will be so after the small-pox. If it pleases him, I hope it will please me. In short, though I do not censure others, yet, as to myself, inoculation is what I dare not venture upon. If I did venture, and the issue should not be favourable, I should blame myself for having attempted to take the management out of the Lord's hand into my own, which I never did yet in other matters, without finding I am no more able than I am worthy to choose for myself. Besides, at the best, inoculation would only secure me from one of the innumerable natural evils the flesh is heir to; I should still be as liable as I am at present to a putrid fever, a bilious colic, an inflammation in the bowels or in the brain, and a thousand formidable diseases which are hovering round me, and only wait his permission to cut me off in a few days or hours: and therefore I am determined, by his grace, to resign myself to his disposal. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord (for his mercies are great,) and not into the hands of men."

If a person should talk to me in this strain, most certainly I could not say, Notwithstanding all this, your safest way is to be inoculated.

We preach and hear, and I hope we know something of faith, as enabling us to intrust the Lord with our souls: I wish we had all more faith to intrust him with our bodies, our health, our provision, and our temporal comforts likewise. The former should seem to require the strongest faith of the two. How strange is it, that when we think we can do the greater, we should be so awkward and unskilful when we aim at the less! Give my love to your friend. I dare not advise: but if she can quietly return at the usual time, and neither run intentionally into the way of the small-pox, nor run out of the way, but leave it simply with the Lord, I shall not blame her. And if you will mind your praying and preaching, and believe that the Lord can take care of her without any of your contrivances, I shall not blame you: nay, I shall praise him for you both. My prescription is, to read Dr. Watts' cxxi. st Psalm every morning before breakfast, and pray it over till the cure is effected. *Probatum est.*

Haast thou not given thy word,
To save my soul from death?
And I can trust my Lord
To keep my mortal breath.
I'll go and come,
Nor fear to die,
Till from on high
Thou call me home.

Adieu. Pray for your's.

LETTERS

TO MISS TH——.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Let what has been said on the subject of acquaintance, &c. suffice. It was well meant on my side and well taken on yours. You may, perhaps, see that my hints were not wholly unnecessary, and I ought to be satisfied with your apology, and am so. The circumstance of your being seen at the play house has nothing at all mysterious in it: as you say you have not been there this six or seven years, it was neither more nor less than a mistake. I heard you had been there within these two years: I am glad to find I was misinformed. I think there is no harm in your supposing, that of the many thousands who frequent public diversions some may in other respects be better than yourself; but I hope your humble and charitable construction of their mistake will not lead you to extenuate the evil of those diversions in themselves. For though I am persuaded, that a few, who know better what to do with themselves, are for want of consideration, drawn in to expose themselves in such places; yet I am well satisfied that, if there is any practice in this land sinful, attendance on the playhouse is properly and eminently so. The theatres are fountains and means of vice; I had almost said, in the same manner and degree as the ordinances of the gospel are the means of grace: and I can hardly think there is a christian upon earth who would dare to be seen there, if the nature and effects of the theatre were properly set before them. Dr. Wither-
spoon of Scotland, has written an excellent piece upon the stage, or rather against it, which I wish every person who makes the least pretence to fear God had an opportunity of perusing. I cannot judge much more favourably of Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and all the innumerable train of dissipation by which the god of this world blinds the eyes of multitudes, lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine in upon them. What an awful aspect upon the present times have such

texts as Isa. xxii. 12—14, iii. 12, Amos vi. 3, 6, James iv. 4. I wish you, therefore, not to plead for any of them, but use all your influence to make them shunned as pest-houses, and dangerous nuisances to precious souls; especially, if you know any who, you hope, in the main are seriously disposed, who yet venture themselves in those purlieus of Satan, endeavour earnestly and faithfully to undeceive them.

The time is short, eternity at the door: and was there no other evil in these vain amusements than the loss of precious time (but, alas! their name is legion,) we have not leisure, in our circumstances, to regard them. But, blessed be God! we need them not. The gospel opens a source of purer, sweeter, and more substantial pleasures: we are invited to communion with God; we are called to share in the theme of angels; the songs of heaven, and the wonders of redeeming love are laid open to our view. The Lord himself is waiting to be gracious, waiting with promises and pardons in his hands. Well, then, may we bid adieu to the perishing pleasures of sin; well may we pity those who can find pleasure in those places and parties where he is shut out; where his name is only mentioned to be profaned; where his commandments are not only broken but insulted; where sinners proclaim their shame as in Sodom, and attempt not to hide it; where at best wickedness is wrapt up in a disguise of delicacy, to make it more insinuating, and nothing is offensive that is not grossly and unpolitely indecent.

I sympathize with all your complaints; but if the Lord is pleased to make them subservient to the increase of your sanctification, to wean you more and more from this world, and to draw you nearer to himself, you will one day see cause to be thankful for them, and to number them amongst your choicest mercies. A hundred years hence it will signify little to you whether you were sick or well the day I wrote this letter.

We thank you for your kind condolence. There is a pleasure in the pity of a friend; but the Lord alone can give true comfort. I hope he will sanctify the breach, and do us good. Mrs. — exchanges forgiveness with you about your not meeting in London; that is, you forgive her not coming to you, and she forgives you entertaining a suspicious thought of her friendship (though but for a minute) on account of what she was really unable to do.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

September 1, 1767.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I shall not study for expressions to tell my dear friend how much we were affected by the news that came last post. We had, however, the pleasure to hear that your family was safe. I hope this will find you recovered from the hurry of spirits you must have been thrown into, and that both you and your papa are composed under the appointment of him who has a right to dispose of his own as he pleases; for we know, that whatever may be the second causes and occasions, nothing can happen to us but according to the will of our heavenly Father. Since what is past cannot be recalled, my part is now to pray, that this, and every other dispensation you meet with, may be sanctified to your soul's good, that you may be more devoted to the God of your life, and have a clearer sense of your interest in that kingdom which cannot be shaken, that treasure which neither thieves nor flames can touch, that better and more enduring substance which is laid up for believers, where Jesus their Head and Saviour is. With this view you may take joyfully the spoiling of your goods.

I think I can feel for my friends; but for such as I hope have a right to that promise, that all things shall work together for their good, I soon check my solicitude, and ask myself, Do I love them better, or could I manage more wisely for them, than the Lord does? Can I wish them to be in safer or more compassionate hands than in his? Will he who delights in the prosperity of his servants, afflict them with sickness, losses, and alarms, except he sees there is need of these things? Such thoughts calm the emotions of my mind. I sincerely condole you; but the command is, to rejoice always in the Lord. The visitation was accompanied with mercy. Not such a case as that of the late Lady Molesworth's, which made every one's ears to tingle that heard it. Nor is yours such a case as of some, who, in almost every great fire lose their all, and perhaps have no knowledge of God to support them.

Though our first apprehensions were for

you, we almost forgot you for a moment, when we thought of your next-door neighbour, and the circumstance she was in, so unfit to bear either a fright or a removal. We shall be in much suspense till we hear from you. God grant that you may be able to send us good news, that you are all well, at least as well as can be expected after such a distressing scene. If what has happened should give you more leisure, or more inclination to spend a little time with us, I think I need not say we shall rejoice to receive you.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

September 17, 1767.

MY DEAR MADAM,—The vanity of all things below is confirmed to us by daily experience. Amongst other proofs, one is, the precariousness of our intimacies, and what little things, or rather what nothings will sometimes produce a coolness, or at least a strangeness between the dearest friends. How is it that our correspondence has been dropt, and that, after having written two letters since the fire, which removed you from your former residence, I should be still disappointed in my hopes of an answer? On our parts I hope there has been no abatement of regard; nor can I charge you with any thing but remissness. Therefore, waving the past, and all apologies on either side, let me beg you to write soon, to tell us how it is with you, and how you have been supported under the various changes you have met with since we saw you last. I doubt not but you have met with many exercises. I pray that they may have been sanctified to lead you nearer to the Lord, the foundation of all consolation, who is the only refuge in time of troubles, and whose gracious presence is abundantly able to make up every deficiency and every loss. Perhaps the reading of this may recal to your mind our past conversations, and the subjects of the many letters we have exchanged. I know not in what manner to write after so long an interval. I would hope your silence to us has not been owing to any change of sentiments, which might make such letters as mine less welcome to you. Yet when you had a friend, who, I think you believed very nearly interested himself in your welfare, it seems strange that in a course of two years you should have nothing to communicate. I cannot suppose you have forgotten me; I am sure I have not forgotten you; and therefore I long to hear from you soon, that I may know how to write; and should this likewise pass unanswered, I must sit down and mourn over my loss.

As to our affairs, I can tell you the Lord has been and is exceedingly gracious to us;

our lives are preserved, our healths continued, an abundance of mercies and blessings on every side; but especially we have to praise him that he is pleased to crown the means and ordinances of his grace with tokens of his presence. It is my happiness to be fixed amongst an affectionate people, who make an open profession of the truth as it is in Jesus, and are enabled, in some measure, to show forth its power in their lives and conversation. We walk in peace and harmony. I have

reason to say the Lord Jesus is a good master, and that the doctrine of free salvation, by faith in his name, is a doctrine according to godliness; for through mercy I find it daily effectual to the breaking down the strongholds of sin, and turning the hearts of sinners from dead works to serve the living God. May the Lord give my dear friend to live in the power and consolation of his precious truth! —I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO ———.

LETTER I.

March 18, 1767.

I CAN truly say, that I bear you upon my heart and in my prayers. I have rejoiced to see the beginning of a good and gracious work in you; and I have confidence in the Lord Jesus, that he will carry it on and complete it, and that you will be amongst the number of those who shall sing redeeming love to eternity. Therefore, fear none of the things appointed for you to suffer by the way; but gird up the loins of your mind, and hope to the end. Be not impatient, but wait humbly upon the Lord. You have one hard lesson to learn, that is, the evil of your own heart; you know something of it, but it is needful that you should know more; for the more we know of ourselves, the more we shall prize and love Jesus and his salvation. I hope what you find in yourself by daily experience will humble you, but not discourage you; humble you it should, and I believe it does. Are not you amazed sometimes that you should have so much as a hope, that, poor and needy as you are, the Lord thinketh of you? But let not all you feel discourage you; for if our Physician is almighty, our disease cannot be desperate; and if he cast none out that come to him, why should you fear? Our sins are many, but his mercies are more: our sins are great, but his righteousness is greater: we are weak, but he is power. Most of our complaints are owing to unbelief, and the remainder of a legal spirit; and these evils are not removed in a day. Wait on the Lord, and he will enable you to see more and more of the power and grace of our High-Priest. The more you know him, the better you will trust him: the more you trust him, the better you will love him; the more you love him, the better you will serve him. This is God's way: you are not called to buy, but to beg; not be strong in yourself, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He is teaching you these things, and I trust he will teach you to the end. Remember the growth of a believer is not like a mushroom, but like an oak,

which increases slowly indeed, but surely. Many suns, showers, and frosts, pass upon it before it comes to perfection; and in winter, when it seems dead, it is gathering strength at the root. Be humble, watchful, and diligent in the means, and endeavour to look through all, and fix your eye upon Jesus, and all shall be well. I commend you to the care of the good Shepherd, and remain, for his sake,—
Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

May 31, 1769.

I WAS sorry I did not write as you expected, but I hope it will do now. Indeed, I have not forgotten you; you are often in my thoughts, and seldom omitted in my prayers. I hope the Lord will make what you see and hear while abroad profitable to you, to increase your knowledge, to strengthen your faith, and to make you from henceforth well satisfied with your situation. If I am not mistaken, you will be sensible, that though there are some desirable things to be met with in London preferable to any other place, yet upon the whole, a quiet situation in the country, under one stated ministry, and in connexion with one people, has the advantage. It is pleasant now and then to have opportunity of hearing a variety of preachers, but the best and greatest of them are no more than instruments; some can please the ear better than others, but none can reach the heart any farther than the Lord is pleased to open it. This he showed you upon your first going up, and I doubt not but your disappointment did you more good than if you had heard with all the pleasure you expected.

The Lord was pleased to visit me with a slight illness in my late journey. I was far from well on the Tuesday, but supposed it owing to the fatigue of riding, and the heat of the weather; but the next day I was taken with a shivering, to which a fever succeeded. I was then near sixty miles from home. The Lord gave me much peace in my soul, and I

was enabled to hope he would bring me safe home, in which I was not disappointed; and though I had the fever most part of the way, my journey was not unpleasant. He likewise strengthened me to preach twice on Sunday; and at night I found myself well, only very weary, and I have continued well ever since. I have reason to speak much of his goodness, and to kiss the rod, for it was sweetened with abundant mercies. I thought that, had it been his pleasure I should have continued sick at Oxford, or even have died there, I had no objection. Though I had not that joy and sensible comfort which some are favoured with, yet I was quite free from pain, fear, and care, and felt myself sweetly composed to his will, whatever it might be. Thus he fulfils his promise in making our strength equal to our day; and every new trial gives us a new proof how happy it is to be enabled to put our trust in him.

I hope, in the midst of all your engagements, you find a little time to read his good word, and to wait at his mercy-seat. It is good for us to draw nigh to him. It is an honour that he permits us to pray; and we shall surely find he is a prayer-hearing God. Endeavour to be diligent in the means; yet watch and strive against a legal spirit, which is always aiming to represent him as a hard master, watching as it were to take advantage of us. But it is far otherwise. His name is Love; he looks upon us with compassion; he knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust; and when our infirmities prevail, he does not bid us despond, but reminds us that we have an advocate with the Father, who is able to pity, to pardon, and to save to the uttermost. Think of the names and relations he bears. Does he not call himself a Saviour, a shepherd, a friend, and a husband? Has he not made known unto us his love, his blood, his righteousness, his promises, his power, and his grace, and all for our encouragement? Away, then, with all doubting, unbelieving thoughts; they will not only distress your heart, but weaken your hands. Take it for granted, upon the warrant of his word, that you are his and he is yours; that he has loved you with an everlasting love, and therefore in loving-kindness has drawn you to himself; that he will surely accomplish that which he has begun, and that nothing which can be named or thought of shall ever be able to separate you from him. This persuasion will give you strength for the battle; this is the shield which will quench the fiery darts of Satan; this is the helmet which the enemy cannot pierce. Whereas, if we go forth doubting and fearing, and are afraid to trust any farther than we can feel, we are weak as water, and easily overcome. Be strong, therefore, not in yourself, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Pray for me, and believe me to be,—Yours, &c.

LETTER III.

March 14, —

I THINK you would hardly expect me to write if you knew how I am forced to live in London. However, I would have you believe I am as willing to write to you as you are to receive my letters. As a proof, I try to send you a few lines now, though I am writing to you and talking to Mrs. — both at once; and this is the only season I can have to change a few words with her. She is a woman of a sorrowful spirit; she talks and weeps. I believe she would think herself happy to be situated as you are, notwithstanding the many advantages she has at London. I see daily, and I hope you have likewise learned, that places and outward circumstances cannot of themselves either hinder or help us in walking with God. So far as he is pleased to be with us, and teach us by his Spirit, wherever we are we shall get forward; and if he does not bless us and water us every moment, the more we have of our own wishes and wills, the more uneasy we shall make ourselves.

One thing is needful; an humble, dependent spirit, to renounce our own wills, and give up ourselves to his disposal without reserve. This is the path of peace, and it is the path of safety; for he has said, The meek he will teach his way, and those who yield up themselves to him he will guide with his eye. I hope you will fight and pray against every rising of a murmuring spirit, and be thankful for the great things which he has already done for you. It is good to be humbled for sin, but not to be discouraged; for though we are poor creatures, Jesus is a complete Saviour; and we bring more honour to God, by believing in his name, and trusting his word of promise, than we could do by a thousand outward works.

I pray the Lord to shine upon your soul, and to fill you with all joy and peace in believing. Remember to pray for us, that we may be brought home to you in peace.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

London, August 19, 1775.

You see I am mindful of my promise, and glad should I be to write something that the Lord may be pleased to make a word in season. I went yesterday into the pulpit very dry and heartless. I seemed to have fixed upon a text; but when I came to the pinch, it was so shut up that I could not preach from it. I had hardly a minute to choose, and therefore was forced to snatch at that which came first upon my mind, which proved 2 Tim. i. 12. Thus I set off at a venture,

having no resource but in the Lord's mercy and faithfulness; and, indeed, what other can we wish for! Presently my subject opened, and I know not when I have been favoured with more liberty. Why do I tell you this! Only as an instance of his goodness, to encourage you to put your strength in him, and not to be afraid, even when you feel your own weakness and insufficiency most sensibly. We are never more safe, never have more reason to expect the Lord's help, than when we are most sensible that we can do nothing without him. This was the lesson Paul learned, to rejoice in his own poverty and emptiness, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Could Paul have done any thing, Jesus would not have had the honour of doing all. This way of being saved entirely by grace, from first to last, is contrary to our natural wills; it mortifies self, leaving it nothing to boast of, and through the remains of an unbelieving, legal spirit, it often seems discouraging. When we think ourselves so utterly helpless and worthless, we are too ready to fear that the Lord will therefore reject us; whereas, in truth, such a poverty of spirit is the best mark we can have of an interest in his promises and care.

How often have I longed to be an instrument of establishing you in the peace and hope of the gospel! and I have but one way of attempting it, by telling you over and over of the power and grace of Jesus. You want nothing to make you happy, but to have the eyes of your understanding more fixed upon the Redeemer, and more enlightened by the Holy Spirit to behold his glory. O! he is a suitable Saviour! He has power, authority, and compassion, to save to the uttermost. He has given his word of promise to engage our confidence, and he is able and faithful to make good the expectations and desires he has raised in us. Put your trust in him; believe, as we say, through thick and thin, in defiance of all objections from within and without. For this Abraham is recommended as a pattern to us. He overlooked all difficulties, he ventured and hoped even against hope, in a case which, to appearance, was desperate; because he knew that he who had promised was able to perform.

Your sister is much upon my mind; her illness grieves me; were it in my power, I would quickly remove it. The Lord can, and I hope he will, when it has answered the end for which he sent it. I trust he has brought her to us for good, and that she is chastised by him, that she may not be condemned with the world. I hope, though she says little, she lifts up her heart to him for a blessing. I wish you may be enabled to leave her and yourself, and all your concerns, in his hands. He has a sovereign right to do with us as he pleases; and if we consider what we are, surely we shall confess we have no reason to

complain; and to those who seek him, his sovereignty is exercised in a way of grace. All shall work together for good; every thing is needful that he sends; nothing can be needful that he withholds. Be content to bear the cross; others have borne it before you. You have need of patience; and if you ask, the Lord will give it; but there can be no settled peace till our will is in a measure subdued. Hide yourself under the shadow of his wings; rely upon his care and power; look upon him as a physician who has graciously undertaken to heal your soul of the worst of sickness, sin. Yield to his prescriptions, and fight against every thought that would represent it as desirable to be permitted to choose for yourself. When you cannot see your way, be satisfied that he is your leader. When your spirit is overwhelmed within you, he knows your path; he will not leave you to sink. He has appointed seasons of refreshment, and you shall find he does not forget you. Above all, keep close to the throne of grace. If we seem to get no good by attempting to draw near him, we may be sure we shall get none by keeping away from him.—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

I PROMISED you another letter, and now for the performance. If I had said, it may be, or, perhaps I will, you would be in suspense; but if I promise, then you expect that I will not disappoint you, unless something should render it impossible for me to make my word good. I thank you for your good opinion of me, and for thinking I mean what I say; and I pray that you may be enabled more and more to honour the Lord, by believing his promise; for he is not a man that he should fail or change, or be prevented by any thing unforeseen from doing what he has said. And yet we find it easier to trust to worms than to the God of truth. Is it not so with you? And I can assure you it is often so with me. But here is the mercy, that his ways are above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth. Though we are foolish and unbelieving, he remains faithful; he will not deny himself. I recommend to you especially that promise of God, which is so comprehensive, that it takes in all our concerns, I mean, that all things shall work together for good. How hard is it to believe, that not only those things which are grievous to the flesh, but even those things which draw forth our corruptions, and discover to us what is in our hearts, and fill us with guilt and shame, should in the issue work for our good! Yet the Lord has said it. All your pains and trials, all that befalls you in your own person, or that affects you upon the

account of others, shall in the end prove to your advantage. And your peace does not depend upon any change of circumstances which may appear desirable, but in having your will bowed to the Lord's will, and made willing to submit all to his disposal and management. Pray for this, and wait patiently for him, and he will do it. Be not surprised to find yourself poor, helpless, and vile; all whom he favours and teaches will find themselves so. The more grace increases, the more we shall see to abase us in our own eyes; and this will make the Saviour and his salvation more precious to us. He takes his own wise methods to humble you, and to prove you, and I am sure he will do you good in the end.—I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

September 16, 1775.

WHEN you receive this, I hope it will give you pleasure to think, that if the Lord be pleased to favour us with health, we shall all meet again in a few days. I have met with much kindness at London, and many comforts and mercies; however, I shall be glad to return home. There my heart lives, let my body be where it will. I long to see all my dear people, and I shall be glad to see you. I steal a little time to write another line or two, more to satisfy you, than for any thing particular I have to say. I thank you for your letter. I doubt not but the Lord is bringing you forward, and that you have a good right to say to your soul, Why art thou cast down and disquieted? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him. An evil heart, an evil temper, and the many crosses we meet with in passing through an evil world, will cut us out trouble: but the Lord has provided a balm for every wound, a cordial for every care; the fruit of all is to take away sin, and the end of all will be eternal life in glory. Think of these words, put them in the balance of the sanctuary; and then throw all your trials into the opposite scale, and you will find there is no proportion between them. Say then, "Though he slay me, I will trust in him;" for when he has fully tried me, I shall come forth like gold. You would have liked to have been with me last Wednesday. I preached at Westminster bridewell. It is a prison and house of correction. The bulk of my congregation were housebreakers, highwaymen, pickpockets, and poor unhappy women, such as infest the streets of this city, sunk in sin, and lost to shame. I had a hundred or more of these before me. I preached from 1 Tim. i. 15, and began with telling them my own story: this gained their attention more than I

expected. I spoke to them near an hour and a half. I shed many tears myself, and saw some of them shed tears likewise. Ah! had you seen their present condition, and could you hear the history of some of them, it would make you sing,

O to grace how great a debtor!

By nature they were no worse than the most sober and modest people. And there was doubtless a time when many of them little thought what they should live to do and suffer. I might have been, like them, in chains, and one of them have come to preach to me, had the Lord so pleased.—I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

Oct. 10, 1777.

I AM just come from seeing A—— N——. The people told me she is much better than she was, but she is far from being well. She was brought to me into a parlour, which saved me the painful task of going to inquire and seek for her among the patients. My spirits always sink when I am within those mournful walls, and I think no money could prevail on me to spend an hour there every day. Yet surely no sight upon earth is more suited to teach one thankfulness and resignation. Surely I have reason, in my worst times, to be thankful that I am out of hell, out of bedlam, out of Newgate. If my eyes were as bad as yours, and my back worse, still I hope I should set a great value upon this mercy, that my senses are preserved. I hope you will think so too. The Lord afflicts us at times; but it is always a thousand times less than we deserve, and much less than many of our fellow-creatures are suffering around us. Let us, therefore, pray for grace to be humble, thankful, and patient.

This day twelvemonth I was under Mr. W——'s knife; there is another cause for thankfulness, that the Lord inclined me to submit to the operation, and brought me happily through it. In short, I have so many reasons for thankfulness, that I cannot count them. I may truly say, they are more in number than the hairs of my head. And yet, alas! how cold, insensible, and ungrateful! I could make as many complaints as you; but I find no good by complaining, except to him who is able to help me. It is better for you and me to be admiring the compassion and fulness of grace that is in our Saviour, than to dwell and pore too much upon our own poverty and vileness. He is able to help and save to the uttermost: there I desire to cast anchor, and wish you to do so likewise. Hope in God, for you shall yet praise him.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MR. C——.

LETTER I.

January 16, 1775.

DEAR SIR,—The death of a near relative called me from home in December, and a fortnight's absence threw me so far behind-hand in my course, that I deferred acknowledging your letter much longer than I intended. I now thank you for it. I can sympathize with you in your troubles; yet knowing the nature of our calling, that, by an unalterable appointment, the way to the kingdom lies through many tribulations, I ought to rejoice rather than otherwise, that to you it is given, not only to believe, but also to suffer. If you escaped these things, whereof all the Lord's children are partakers, might you not question your adoption into his family! How could the power of grace be manifest, either to you, in you, or by you, without afflictions! How could the corruptions and devastations of the heart be checked without a cross! How could you acquire a tenderness and skill in speaking to them that are weary, without a taste of such trials as they also meet with! You could only be a hearsay witness to the truth, power, and sweetness of the precious promises, unless you have been in such a situation as to need them, and to find their suitableness and sufficiency. The Lord has given you a good desire to serve him in the gospel, and he is now training you for that service. Many things, yea, the most important things belonging to the gospel-ministry, are not to be learned by books and study, but by painful experience. You must expect a variety of exercises; but two things he has promised you, that you shall not be tried above what he will enable you to bear, and that all shall work together for your good. We read somewhere of a conceited orator, who declaimed upon the management of war in the presence of Hannibal, and of the contempt with which Hannibal treated his performance. He deserved it; for how should a man who had never seen a field of battle be a competent judge of such a subject! Just so, were we to acquire no other knowledge of the christian warfare than what we could derive from cool and undisturbed study, instead of coming forth as able ministers of the

New Testament, and competently acquainted with the *τα ψευδετα*, with the devices, the deep-laid counsels and stratagems of Satan, we should prove but mere declaimers. But the Lord will take better care of those whom he loves and designs to honour. He will try, and permit them to be tried in various ways. He will make them feel much in themselves, that they may know how to feel much for others; according to that beautiful and expressive line,

Haud ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco.

And as this previous discipline is necessary to enable us to take the field in a public capacity with courage, wisdom, and success, that we may lead and animate others in the fight, it is equally necessary, for our own sakes, that we may obtain and preserve the grace of humility, which I perceive with pleasure he has taught you to set a high value upon. Indeed we cannot value it too highly; for we can be neither comfortable, safe, nor habitually useful without it. The root of pride lies deep in our fallen nature, and, where the Lord has given natural and acquired abilities, it would grow apace if he did not mercifully watch over us, and suit his dispensations to keep it down. Therefore I trust he will make you willing to endure hardships, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. May he enable you to behold him with faith holding out the prize, and saying to you, Fear none of these things that thou shalt suffer: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

We sail upon a turbulent and tumultuous sea; but we are embarked on a good bottom, and in a good cause, and we have an infallible and almighty pilot, who has the winds and weather at his command, and can silence the storm into a calm with a word whenever he pleases. We may be persecuted, but we shall not be forsaken: we may be cast down, but we cannot be destroyed. Many will thrust sore at us that we may fall, but the Lord will be our stay.

I am sorry to find you are quite alone at Cambridge, for I hoped there would be a succession of serious students to supply the place of those who are transplanted to shine as lights in the world. Yet you are not alone;

for the Lord is with you, the best counsellor and the best friend. There is a strange backwardness in us, at least in me, fully to improve that gracious intimacy to which he invites us. Alas! that we so easily wander from the fountain of life to hew out cisterns for ourselves, and that we seem more attached to a few drops of his grace in our fellow-creatures, than to the fulness of grace that is in himself. I think nothing gives me a more striking sense of my depravity than my perverseness and folly in this respect; yet he bears with me, and does me good continually.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

March —, 1776.

DEAR SIR,—I know not the length of your college-terms, but hope this may come time enough to find you still resident. I shall not apologise for writing no sooner, because I leave other letters of much longer date unanswered that I may write so soon. It gave me particular pleasure to hear that the Lord helped you through your difficulties, and succeeded your desires. And I have sympathized with you in the complaints you make of a dark and mournful frame of spirits afterwards. But is not this upon the whole right and salutary, that if the Lord is pleased at one time to strengthen us remarkably in answer to prayer, he should leave us at another time, so far as to give us a real sensibility that we were supported by his power and not our own? Besides, as you feel a danger of being elated by the respect paid you, was it not a merciful and seasonable dispensation that made you feel your own weakness, to prevent your being exalted above measure? The Lord, by withdrawing his smiles from you, reminded you that the smiles of men are of little value, otherwise perhaps you might have esteemed them too highly. Indeed you scholars that know the Lord are singular instances of the power of his grace; for (like the young men in Dan. iii.) you live in the very midst of the fire. Mathematical studies, in particular, have such a tendency to engross and fix the mind to the contemplation of cold and uninteresting truth, and you are surrounded with so much intoxicating applause if you succeed in your researches, that for a soul to be kept humble and alive in such a situation, is such a proof of the Lord's presence and power as Moses had when he saw the bush unconsumed in the midst of the flames. I believe I had naturally a turn for the mathematics myself, and dabbled in them a little way; and though I did not go far, my head, sleeping and waking, was stuffed with diagrams and calculations. Every thing I looked at, that exhibited either a right line or a curve, set my wits a wool-

gathering. What, then, must have been the case, had I proceeded to the interior arcana of speculative geometry? I bought my namesake's *Principia*, but I have reason to be thankful that I left it as I found it, a sealed book, and that the bent of my mind was drawn to something of more real importance before I understood it. I say not this to discourage you in your pursuits; they lie in your line and path of duty, in mine they did not. As to your academics, I am glad that the Lord enables you to show those among whom you live, that the knowledge of his gospel does not despoil you either of diligence or acumen. However, as I said, you need a double guard of grace, to preserve you from being either puffed up or deadened by those things, which, considered in any other view than *quoad hoc*, to preserve your rank and character in the university while you remain there, are, if taken in the aggregate, little better than a *splendidum nihil*. If my poor people at — could form the least conception of what the learned at Cambridge chiefly admire in each other, and what is the intrinsic reward of all their toil, they would say (supposing they could speak Latin,) *Quam suave istis suavitatibus carere!* How gladly would some of them, if such mathematical and metaphysical lumber could by any means get into their heads, how gladly would they drink at Lethé's stream to get it out again! How many perplexities are they freed from by their happy ignorance, which often pester those to their lives end who have had their natural proneness to vain reasoning sharpened by academic studies.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

May 18, 1776

DEAR SIR,—Though I wished to hear from you sooner, I put a candid interpretation upon your silence, was something apprehensive for your health, but felt no disposition to anger. Let your correspondence be free from fetters. Write when you please, and when you can: I will do the like. Apologies may be spared on both sides. I am not a very punctual correspondent myself, having so many letters to write, and therefore, have no right to stand upon punctilios with you.

I sympathize with you in your sorrow for your friend's death. Such cases are very distressing! But such a case might have been our own. Let us pray for grace to be thankful for ourselves, and submit every thing in humble silence to the sovereign Lord, who has a right to do as he pleases with his own. We feel what happens in our own little connexions; but, O the dreadful mischief of sin! Instances of this kind are as frequent as the hours, the minutes, per-

haps the moments of every day: and though we know but one in a million, the souls of others have an equal capacity for endless happiness or misery. In this situation the Lord has honoured us with a call to warn our fellow-sinners of their danger, and to set before them his free and sure salvation; and if he is pleased to make us instrumental of snatching but one as a brand out of the fire, it is a service of more importance than to be the means of preserving a whole nation from temporal ruin. I congratulate you upon your admission into the ministry, and pray him to favour you with a single eye to his glory, and a fresh anointing of his Holy Spirit, that you may come forth as a scribe well instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, and that his word in your mouth may abundantly prosper.

I truly pity those who rise early and take late rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, with no higher prize and prospect in view than the obtaining of academical honours. Such pursuits will, ere long, appear (as they really are) vain as the sports of children. May the Lord impress them with a noble ambition of living to and for him. If these adventurers, who are labouring for pebbles under the semblance of goodly pearls, had a discovery of the pearl of great price, how quickly and gladly would they lay down their admired attainments, and become fools that they might be truly wise! What a snare have you escaped! You would have been poorly content with the name of a mathematician or a poet, and looked no farther, had not he visited your heart, and enlightened you by his grace. Now I trust you account your former gain but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord. What you have attained in a way of literature will be useful to you if sanctified, and chiefly so by the knowledge you have of its insufficiency to any valuable purpose, in the great concerns of walking with God, and winning souls.

I am pleased with your fears lest you should not be understood in your preaching. Indeed, there is a danger of it. It is not easy for persons of quick parts duly to conceive how amazingly ignorant and slow of apprehension the bulk of our congregations generally are. When our own ideas are clear, and our expressions proper, we are ready to think we have sufficiently explained ourselves; and yet, perhaps, nine out of ten (especially of those who are destitute of spiritual light) know little more of what we say than if we were speaking Greek. A degree of this inconvenience is always inseparable from written discourses. They cast our thoughts into a style which, though familiar to ourselves, is too remote from common conversation to be comprehended by narrow capacities; which is one chief reason of the preference

I give (*cæteris paribus*) to extempore preaching. When we read to the people, they think themselves less concerned in what is offered, than when we speak to them point-blank. It seems a good rule, which I have met with somewhere, and which, perhaps, I have mentioned to you, to fix our eyes upon some one of the auditory whom we judge of the least capacity; if we can make him understand, we may hope to be understood by the rest. Let those who seek to be admired for the exactness of their compositions, enjoy the poor reward they aim at. It is best for gospel-preachers to speak plain language. If we thus singly aim at the glory of our Master and the good of souls, we may hope for the accompanying power of his Spirit, which will give our discourses a weight and energy that Demosthenes had no conception of.

I can give you no information of a curacy in a better situation. But either the Lord will provide you one, or I trust he will give you usefulness, and a competency of health and spirits where you are. He who caused Daniel to thrive upon pulse, can make you strong and cheerful even in the Fens, if he sees that best for you. All things obey him, and you need not fear but he will enable you for whatever service he has appointed you to perform.

This letter has been a week in hand, owing to a variety of interruptions from without, and indispositions within. I seem to while away my life, and shall be glad to be saved upon the footing of the thief upon the cross, without any hope or plea but the power and grace of Jesus, who has said, I will in no wise cast out. Adieu.—Pray for yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

September 10, 1777.

DEAR SIR,—I was glad to hear from you at last, not being willing to think myself forgotten. I supposed you were ill. It seems, by your account, that you are far from being well; but I hope you are as well as you ought to be, that is, as well as the Lord sees it good for you to be. I say, I hope so; for I am not sure that the length and vehemence of your sermons, which you tell me astonish many people, may not be rather improper and imprudent, considering the weakness of your constitution; at least, if this expression of yours be justly expounded by a report which has reached me, that the length of your sermons is frequently two hours, and the vehemence of your voice so great, that you may be heard far beyond the church-walls. Unwilling should I be to damp your zeal; but I feel unwilling likewise, that by excessive, unnecessary exertions, you should wear away at once, and preclude your own

usefulness. This concern is so much upon my mind, that I begin with it, though it makes me skip over the former part of your letter; but when I have relieved myself upon this point, I can easily skip back again. I am perhaps the more ready to credit the report, because I know the spirits of you nervous people are highly volatile. I consider you as mounted upon a fiery steed; and provided you use due management and circumspection, you travel more pleasantly than we plodding folks upon our sober, phlegmatic nags; but then, if, instead of pulling the rein you plunge in the spurs, and add wings to the wind, I cannot but be in pain for the consequences. Permit me to remind you of the Terentian adage, *Ne quid nimis*. The end of speaking is to be heard, and if the person farthest from the preacher can hear, he speaks loud enough. Upon some occasions, a few sentences of a discourse may be enforced with a tone of voice still more elevated; but to be uncommonly loud from beginning to end, is hurtful to the speaker, and, I apprehend, no way useful to the hearer. It is a fault which many inadvertently give into at first, and which many have repented of too late; when practice has rendered it habitual it is not easily corrected. I know some think, that preaching very loudly, and preaching with power, are synonymous expressions, but your judgment is too good to fall in with that prejudice. If I were a good Grecian, I would send you a quotation from Homer, where he describes the eloquence of Nestor, and compares it, if I remember right, not to a thunder-storm or a hurricane, but to a fall of snow, which, though pressing, insinuating, and penetrating, is soft and gentle. You know the passage; I think the simile is beautiful and expressive.

Secondly (as we say,) as to long preaching, there is still in being an old-fashioned instrument, called an hour-glass, which, in days of yore, before clocks and watches abounded, used to be the measure of many a good sermon, and I think it a tolerable stint. I cannot wind up my ends to my own satisfaction in a much shorter time, nor am I pleased with myself if I greatly exceed it. If an angel was to preach for two hours, unless his hearers were angels likewise, I believe the greater part of them would wish he had done. It is a shame it should be so; but so it is, partly through the weakness, and partly through the wickedness of the flesh, we can seldom stretch our attention to spiritual things for two hours together without cracking it, and hurting its spring; and when weariness begins, edification ends. Perhaps it is better to feed our people like chickens, a little and often, than to cram them like turkeys, till they cannot hold one gobbet more. Besides, over-long sermons break in upon family concerns, and often call off the thoughts from the sermon to the pudding at home, which is in danger of being

over-boiled. They leave likewise but little time for secret or family religion, which are both very good in their place, and are entitled to a share in the Lord's day. Upon the preacher they must have a bad effect, and tend to wear him down before his time: and I have known some, by over-acting at first, have been constrained to sit still and do little or nothing for months or years afterwards. I rather recommend to you the advice of your brother Cantab, Hobson the carrier, so to set out as that you may hold out to your journey's end.

Now, if Fame, with her hundred mouths, has brought me a false report of you, and you are not guilty of preaching either too long or too loud, still I am not willing my remonstrance may stand for nothing. I desire you will accept it, and thank me for it, as a proof of my love to you, and likewise of the sincerity of my friendship; for if I had wished to flatter you, I could easily have called another subject.

I have one more report to trouble you with, because it troubles me; and therefore you must bear a part of my burden. Assure me it is false, and I will send you one of the handsomest letters I can devise by way of thanks. It is reported, then, (but I will not believe it till you say I must,) that you stand upon your tiptoes, upon the point of being whirled out of our vortex, and hurried away, comet-like, into the regions of eccentricity; in plain English, that you have a hankering to be an itinerant. If this be true, I will not be the first to tell it in St. John's College, or to publish it on the banks of Cam, lest the mathematicians rejoice, and the poets triumph. But, to be serious, for it is a serious subject, let me beg you to deliberate well, and to pray earnestly before you take this step. Be afraid of acting in your own spirit, or under a wrong impression; however honestly you mean, you may be mistaken. The Lord has given you a little charge; be faithful in it, and in his good time he will advance you to a greater: but let his providence evidently open the door for you, and be afraid of moving one step before the cloud and pillar. I have had my warm fits and desires of this sort in my time; but I have reason to be thankful that I was held in with a strong hand. I wish there were more itinerant preachers. If a man has grace and zeal, and but little fund, let him go and diffuse the substance of a dozen sermons over as many counties; but you have natural and acquired abilities, which qualify you for the more difficult, and, in my judgment, not less important station of a parochial minister. I wish you to be a burning, shining, steady light. You may perhaps have less popularity, that is, you will be less exposed to workings of self and the snares of Satan, if you stay with us; but I think you may live in the full exercise of your gifts and graces, be more con-

sistent with your voluntary engagements, and have more peace of mind, and humble intercourse with God, in watching over a flock which he has committed to you, than, by forsaking them, to wander up and down the earth without a determined scope.

Thus far I have been more attentive to the *utile* than the *dulce*. I should now return to join you in celebrating the praises of poetry, and the other subjects of your letter; but time and paper fail together. Let me hear from you soon, or I shall fear I have displeased you, which, fond as I am of poetry, would give me more pain than I ever found pleasure in reading Alexander's Feast. Indeed I love you; I often measure over the walks we have taken together; and when I come to a favourite stile, or such a favourite spot upon the hill-top, I am reminded of something that passed, and say, or at least think, *Hic stetit C——*—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

DEAR SIR,—By your flying letter from London, as well as by your more particular answer to my last, I judge that what I formerly wrote will answer no other end than to be a testimony of my fidelity and friendship. I am ready to think you were so far determined before you applied to the Bishop, as to be rather pleased than disappointed by a refusal which seemed to afford you liberty to preach at large. As your *testimonium* was not countersigned, the consequence was no other than might have been expected; yet I have been told (how true I know not,) that the Bishop would have passed over the informality, if you had not, unasked by him, avowed yourself a Methodist. I think, if you had been unwilling to throw hinderances in your own way, the most perfect simplicity would have required no more of you than to have given a plain and honest answer to such questions as he might think proper to propose. You might have assisted Mr. —— for a season without being in full orders; and you may still, if you are not resolved at all events to push out. He wrote to me about you, and you may easily judge what answer I gave. I have heard from him a second time, and he laments that he cannot have you. I likewise lament that you cannot be with him. I think you would have loved him; and I hoped his acquaintance might not have proved unuseful to you.

If you have not actually passed the Rubicon; if there be yet room for deliberation, I once more intreat you to pause and consider. In many respects I ought to be willing to learn from you; but in one point I have a little advantage of you: I am some years older, both in life and in profession; and in

this difference of time perhaps I have learned something more of the heart, the world, and the devices of Satan, than you have had an opportunity for. I hope I would not damp your zeal, but I will pray the Lord to direct it into the best channel for permanent usefulness. I say permanent: I doubt not that you would be useful in the itinerant way; but I more and more observe great inconveniences follow in that way. Where you make a gathering of people, others will follow you; and if they all possessed your spirit, and had your disinterested views it might be well. But generally an able preacher only so far awakens people to a desire to hear, as exposes them to the incursions of various winds of doctrine and the attempts of injudicious pretenders, who will resemble you in nothing but your eagerness to post from place to place. From such measures in time proceed errors, parties, contentions, offences, enthusiasm, spiritual pride, and a noisy ostentatious form of godliness, but little of that power and life of faith which shows itself by humility, meekness, and love.

A parochial minister, who lives among his people, who sees and converses with them frequently, and exemplifies his doctrine in their view by his practice, having knowledge of their states, trials, growth, and dangers, suits himself to their various occasions, and, by the blessing of God, builds them up, and brings them forward in faith and holiness. He is instrumental in forming their experience; he leads them to a solid, orderly, and scriptural knowledge of divine things. If his name is not in so many mouths as that of the itinerant, it is upon the hearts of the people of his charge. He lives with them as a father with his children. His steady consistent behaviour silences in some measure the clamours of his enemies; and the Lord opens him doors of occasional usefulness in many places, without provoking our superiors to discountenance other young men who are seeking orders.

I now wish I had taken larger paper, for I have not room for all I would say. I have no end to serve. I am of no party. I wish well to irregulars and itinerants who love and preach the gospel. I am content that they should labour that way, who have not talents nor fund to support the character and fill up the office of a parochial minister. But I think you are qualified for more important service. If you had patient faith to wait a while for the Lord's opening, I doubt not but you might yet obtain Priest's orders. We are hasty like children; but God often appoints us a waiting time. Perhaps it requires as much or more grace to wait than to be active; for it is more trying to self. After all, whatever course you take, I shall love you, pray for you, and be glad to see you.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MRS. _____

LETTER I.

July —, 1764.

MY DEAR MADAM,—The complaints you make are inseparable from a spiritual acquaintance with our own hearts: I would not wish you to be less affected with a sense of indwelling sin. It becomes us to be humbled unto the dust; yet our grief, though it cannot be too great, may be under a wrong direction; and if it leads us to impatience or distrust, it certainly is so.

Sin is the sickness of the soul, in itself mortal and incurable, as to any power in heaven or earth but that of the Lord Jesus only. But he is the great, the infallible Physician. Have we the privilege to know his name? Have we been enabled to put ourselves into his hand? We have then no more to do but to attend to his prescriptions, to be satisfied with his methods, and to wait his time. It is lawful to wish we were well; it is natural to groan, being burdened; but still he must and will take his own course with us; and, however dissatisfied with ourselves, we ought still to be thankful that he has begun his work in us, and to believe that he will also make an end. Therefore, while we mourn, we should likewise rejoice; we should encourage ourselves to expect all that he has promised; and we should limit our expectations by his promises. We are sure that when the Lord delivers us from the guilt and dominion of sin, he could with equal ease free us entirely from sin if he pleased. The doctrine of sinless perfection is not to be rejected, as though it were a thing simply impossible in itself, for nothing is too hard for the Lord, but because it is contrary to that method which he has chosen to proceed by. He has appointed that sanctification should be effected, and sin mortified, not at once completely, but by little and little; and doubtless he has wise reasons for it. Therefore, though we are to desire a growth in grace, we should at the same time acquiesce in his appointment, and not to be discouraged or despond, because we feel that

conflict which his word informs us will only terminate with our lives.

Again, some of the first prayers which the Spirit of God teaches us to put up, are for a clearer sense of the sinfulness of sin, and our vileness on account of it. Now, if the Lord is pleased to answer your prayers in this respect, though it will afford you cause enough for humiliation, yet it should be received likewise with thankfulness, as a token for good. Your heart is not worse than it was formerly, only your spiritual knowledge is increased; and this is no small part of the growth in grace which you are thirsting after, to be truly humbled, and emptied, and made little in your own eyes.

Farther, the examples of the saints recorded in scripture (and indeed of the saints in general) prove, that the greater measure any person has of the grace of God in truth, the more conscientious and lively they have been; and the more they have been favoured with assurances of the divine favour, so much the more deep and sensible their perception of indwelling sin and infirmity has always been; so it was with Job, Isaiah, Daniel, and Paul. It is likewise common to overcharge ourselves. Indeed we cannot think ourselves worse than we really are; yet some things which abate the comfort and alacrity of our christian profession are rather impediments than properly sinful, and will not be imputed to us by him who knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust. Thus, to have an infirm memory, to be subject to disordered, irregular, or low spirits, are faults of the constitution, in which the will has no share, though they are all burdensome and oppressive, and sometimes needlessly so, by our charging ourselves with guilt on their account. The same may be observed of the unspeakable and fierce suggestions of Satan with which some persons are pestered, but which shall be laid to him from whom they proceed, and not to them who are troubled and terrified because they are forced to feel them.

Lastly, it is by the experience of these evils within ourselves, and by feeling our utter insufficiency, either to perform duty, or to withstand our enemies, that the Lord takes occasion to show us the suitableness, the sufficiency, the freeness, the unchangeableness of his power and grace. This is the inference St. Paul draws from his complaints, Rom. vii. 25, and he learned it upon a trying occasion from the Lord's own mouth, 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

Let us, then, dear madam, be thankful and cheerful, and, while we take shame to ourselves, let us glorify God by giving Jesus the honour due to his name. Though we are poor, he is rich; though we are weak, he is strong; though we have nothing, he possesses all things. He suffered for us; he calls us to be conformed to him in sufferings. He conquered in his own person, and he will make each of his members more than conquerors in due season. It is good to have one eye upon ourselves, but the other should ever be fixed on him who stands in the relation of Saviour, Husband, Head, and Shepherd. In him we have righteousness, peace, and power. He can control all that we fear; so that, if our path should be through the fire or through the water, neither the flood shall drown us nor the flame kindle upon us, and ere long he will cut short our conflicts, and say, Come up hither. "Then shall our grateful songs abound, and every tear be wiped away." Having such promises and assurances, let us lift up our banner in his name and press on through every discouragement.

With regard to company, that have not a savour of the best things, as it is not your choice, I would advise you (when necessary) to bear it as a cross. We cannot suffer by being where we ought to be, except through our own impatience; and I have an idea, that when we are providentially called among such (for something is due to friends and relations, whether they walk with us or no,) that the hours need not be wholly lost. Nothing can pass but may be improved: the most trivial conversation may afford us new views of the heart, new confirmations of scripture, and renew a sense of our obligations to distinguishing grace, which has made us in any degree to differ. I would wish, when you go amongst your friends, that you do not confine your views to getting safe away from them without loss, but entertain a hope that you may be sent to do some of them good. You cannot tell what effect a word or a look may have, if the Lord is pleased to bless it. I think we may humbly hope, that while we sincerely desire to please the Lord, and to be guided by him in all things, he will not suffer us to take a journey, or hardly to make a short visit, which shall not answer some good purpose to ourselves or others, or both. While your gay friends affect an air of raillery, the

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Lord may give you a secret witness in their consciences; and something they observe in you, or hear from you, may set them on thinking, perhaps after you are gone, or after the first occasion has entirely slipped your memory, Eccles. xi. 1. For my own part, when I consider the power, the freedom of divine grace, and how sovereign the Lord is in the choice of the instruments and means by which he is pleased to work, I live in hopes from day to day of hearing of wonders of this sort. I despair of nobody; and if I sometimes am ready to think such or such a person seems more unlikely than others to be brought in, I relieve myself by a possibility that that very person, and for that very reason, may be the first instance. The Lord's thoughts are not like ours: in his love and in his ways there are heights which we cannot reach, depths which we cannot fathom, lengths and breadths beyond the ken of our feeble sight. Let us, then, simply depend upon him, and do our little best, leaving the event in his hand.

I cannot tell if you know any thing of Mrs. ———. In a letter I received yesterday, she writes thus:—"I am at present very ill with some disorder in my throat, which seems to threaten my life; but death or life, things present or things to come, all things are mine, and I am Christ's, and Christ is God's. O glorious privilege! precious foundation of soul-rest and peace, when all things about us are most troublous! Soon we shall be at home with Christ, where sin, sorrow, and death have no place; and in the mean time our Beloved will lead us through the wilderness. How safe, how joyous are we, may we be, in the most evil case!" If these should be some of the last notes of this swan, I think them worth preserving. May we not with good reason say, Who would not be a Christian? The Lord grant that you and I, madam, and yours and mine, may be happy in the same assurance, when we shall have death and eternity near in view.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

September —, 1764.

MY DEAR MADAM.—Your welfare I rejoice in; your warfare I understand something of. St. Paul describes his own case in few words, "Without were fightings, within were fears." Does not this comprehend all you would say? And how are you to know experimentally either your own weakness, or the power, wisdom, and grace of God, seasonably and sufficiently afforded, but by frequent and various trials? How are the graces of patience, resignation, meekness, and faith, to be discovered and increased, but by exercise? The Lord has chosen, called, and armed us for the fight:

and shall we wish to be excused? Shall we not rather rejoice that we have the honour to appear in such a cause, under such a captain, such a banner, and in such company? A complete suit of armour is provided, weapons not to be resisted, and precious balm to heal us if haply we receive a wound, and precious ointment to revive us when we are in danger of fainting. Further, we are assured of the victory beforehand; and O what a crown is prepared for every conqueror, which Jesus, the righteous Judge, the gracious Saviour, shall place upon every faithful head with his own hand! Then let us not be weary and faint, for in due season we shall reap. The time is short; yet a little while, and the struggle of indwelling sin, and the contradiction of surrounding sinners, shall be known no more. You are blessed, because you hunger and thirst after righteousness: he whose name is Amen has said you shall be filled. To claim the promise is to make it our own; yet it is becoming us to practise submission and patience, not in temporals only, but also in spirituals. We should be ashamed and grieved at our slow progress, so far as it is properly chargeable to our remissness and miscarriages; yet we must not expect to receive every thing at once, but wait for a gradual increase; nor should we forget to be thankful for what we may account a little in comparison of the much we suppose others have received. A little grace, a spark of true love to God, a grain of living faith, though small as mustard-seed, is worth a thousand worlds. One draught of the water of life gives interest in and earnest of the whole fountain. It becometh the Lord's people to be thankful; and to acknowledge his goodness in what we have received, is the surest as well as the pleasantest method of obtaining more. Nor should the grief arising from what we know and feel of our own hearts, rob us of the honour, comfort, and joy which the word of God designs us, in what is there recorded of the person, offices, and grace of Jesus, and the relations he is pleased to stand in to his people, Psal. xxiii. 1, Isa. liv. 5, Cant. v. 16, John xv. 15, 1 John ii. 1, John xv. 1, Jer. xxiii. 5, 1 Cor. i. 30, Matt. i. 21—23. Give me leave to recommend to your consideration Psal. lxxxix. 15—18. These verses may be called the Believer's Triumph: though they are nothing in themselves, yet having all in Jesus, they may rejoice in his name all the day. The Lord enable us so to do! The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people; whereas unbelief makes our hands hang down, and our knees feeble, dispirits ourselves, and discourages others; and though it steals upon us under a semblance of humility, it is indeed the very essence of pride. By inward and outward exercises the Lord is promoting the best desire of your heart, and answering your

daily prayers. Would you have assurance? The true solid assurance is to be obtained no other way. When young christians are greatly comforted with the Lord's love and presence, their doubts and fears are for that season at an end. But this is not assurance: so soon as the Lord hides his face, they are troubled, and ready to question the very foundation of hope. Assurance grows by repeated conflicts, by our repeated experimental proof of the Lord's power and goodness to save: when we have been brought very low and helped, sorely wounded and healed, cast down and raised again, have given up all hope, and been suddenly snatched from danger, and placed in safety, and when these things have been repeated to us and in us a thousand times over, we begin to learn to trust simply to the word and power of God, beyond and against appearances; and this trust, when habitual and strong, bears the name of assurance, for even assurance has degrees.

You have good reason, madam, to suppose that the love of the best christians to an unseen Saviour is far short of what it ought to be. If your heart be like mine, and you examine your love to Christ by the warmth and frequency of your emotions towards him, you will often be in a sad suspense whether or no you love him at all. The best mark to judge, and which he has given us for that purpose, is to inquire if his word and will have a prevailing, governing influence upon our lives and temper. If we love him, we do endeavour to keep his commandments; and it will hold the other way, if we have a desire to please him we undoubtedly love him. Obedience is the best test; and when, amidst all our imperfections, we can humbly appeal concerning the sincerity of our views, this is a mercy for which we ought to be greatly thankful. He that has brought us to will, will likewise enable us to do according to his good pleasure. I doubt not but the Lord whom you love, and on whom you depend, will lead you in a sure way, and establish and strengthen, and settle you in his love and grace. Indeed he has done great things for you already. The Lord is your Shepherd;—a comprehensive word. The sheep can do nothing for themselves; the shepherd must guide, guard, feed, heal, recover. Well for us that our Shepherd is the Lord Almighty. If his power, care, compassion, fulness, were not infinite, the poor sheep would be forsaken, starved, and worried. But we have a Shepherd full of care, full of kindness, full of power, who has said, I will seek that which is lost, and bind up that which was broken, and bring again that which was driven away, and will strengthen that which was sick. How tender are these expressions, and how well fulfilled! His sheep feed in the midst of wolves, yet are preserved safe; for though they see him not, his eyes and his heart are

upon them. Do we wonder that Daniel was preserved in the lions' den? Why, it is a common case. Which of God's children have not cause to say, "My soul is among lions!" But the Angel of the covenant stops their mouths, or only permits them to gape and roar, to show their teeth, and what they would do if they might; but they may not, they shall not bite and tear us at their own will. Let us trust him, and all shall be well.

As to daily occurrences, it is best to believe that a daily portion of comforts and crosses, each one the most suitable to our case, is adjusted and appointed by the hand which was once nailed to the cross for us; that where the path of duty and prudence leads, there is the best situation we could possibly be in at that juncture. We are not required to afflict ourselves immoderately for what is not in our power to prevent, nor should any thing that affords occasions for mortifying the spirit of self be accounted unnecessary.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

1768.

I HAVE been for some time hoping to hear from you, but Mr. ——— was here last Saturday, and informed me that you were ill, or had been so very lately. This intelligence prompted me to write as soon as I could find leisure. I think the Lord has seen fit to visit you with much indisposition of late; I say he has seen fit, for all our trials are under his immediate direction, and we are never in heaviness without a need be. I trust he does and will give you strength equal to your day, and sweeten what would be otherwise bitter with the essence of his precious love. I hope soon to hear that you are restored to health, and that you have found cause to praise him for the rod.

How happy is the state of a believer, to have a sure promise that all shall work together for good in the end, and in the mean time a sure refuge where to find present relief, support, and protection! How comfortable is it, when trouble is near, to know that the Lord is near likewise, and to commit ourselves and all our cares simply to him, believing that his eye is upon us, and his ear open to our prayers. Under the conduct of such a Shepherd we need not fear; though we are called to pass through fire and water, through the valley of the shadow of death, he will be with us, and will show himself mighty on our behalf. It seems almost needless to say, that we were very happy in the company of ———: the only inconvenience was, that it renewed the pain it always gives me to part with them. Though the visit was full as long as I could possibly expect, it

seemed very short. This must be the case while we are here: our pleasures are short, interrupted, and mixed with troubles: this is not, cannot be our rest. But it will not be always the case: we are travelling to a better world, where every evil and imperfection shall cease; then we shall be for ever with the Lord and with each other. May the prospect of this blessed hope set before us revive our fainting spirits, and make us willing to endure hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Here we must often sow in tears, but there we shall reap in joy, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes for ever. I hope the conversation of friends whom I so greatly love and honour afforded me not only pleasure but profit; it left a savour upon my mind, and stirred up my languid desires after the Lord. I wish I could say the good effect has remained with me to this hour; but alas! I am a poor creature, and have had many causes of humiliation since. But blessed be God, amidst all my changes I find the foundation stands sure, and I am seldom or never left to doubt either of the Lord's love to me or the reality of the desires he has given me towards himself; though, when I measure my love by the degrees of its exercise, or the fruits it produceth, I have reason to sit down ashamed, as the chief of sinners and the least of all saints. But in him I have righteousness and peace, and in him I must and will rejoice.

I would willingly fill up my sheet, but feel a straitness in my spirit, and know not what farther to say. O for a ray of divine light to set me at liberty, that I might write a few lines worth reading, something that might warm my heart, and comfort yours. Then the subject must be Jesus; but of him what can I say that you do not know? Well, though you know him, you are glad to hear of him again and again. Come, then, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. Let us adore him for his love, that love which has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, beyond the grasp of our poor conceptions; a love that moved him to empty himself; to take on him the form of a servant, and to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; a love that pitied us in our lost estate, that found us when we sought him not, that spoke peace to our souls in the day of our distress; a love that bears with all our present weakness, mistakes, backslidings, and shortcomings; a love that is always watchful, always ready to guide, to comfort, and to heal; a love that will not be wearied, cannot be conquered, and is incapable of changes; a love that will, in the end, prevail over all opposition, will perfect that which concerns us, and will not leave us till it has brought us perfect in holiness and happiness, to rejoice in his presence in glory. The love of Christ! it is the wonder,

the joy, the song, of angels, and the sense of it shed abroad in our hearts, makes life pleasant, and death welcome.—Alas! what a heart have I, that I love him no better! But I hope he has given me a desire to make him my all in all, and to account every thing loss and dross that dares to stand in competition with him.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

1769.

I FOUND, this morning, among my unanswered letters, one from you, but I hope I left it among them by mistake. I am willing, however, to be on the sure side, and would rather write twice than be too long silent. I heard of your being laid on the bed of affliction, and of the Lord's goodness to you there, and of his raising you up again. Blessed be his name! he is all-sufficient and faithful; and though he cause grief, he is sure to show compassion in supporting and delivering. Ah! the evil of our nature is deeply rooted and very powerful, or such repeated, continual corrections and chastisements would not be necessary, and were they not necessary we should not have them. But such we are, and therefore such must be our treatment; for though the Lord loves us with a tenderness beyond what the mother feels for her sucking child, yet it is a tenderness directed by infinite wisdom, and very different from that weak indulgence which in parents we call fondness, which leads them to comply with their children's desires and inclinations, rather than to act with a steady view to their true welfare. The Lord loves his children, and is very indulgent to them, so far as they can safely bear it, but he will not spoil them. Their sin-sickness requires medicines, some of which are very unpalatable; but when the case calls for such, no short-sighted entreaties of ours can excuse us from taking what he prepares for our good. But every dose is prepared by his own hand, and not one is administered in vain, nor is it repeated any oftener than is needful to answer the proposed end. Till then, no other end can remove what he lays upon us; but when his merciful design is answered, he will relieve us himself, and in the mean time, he will so moderate the operation, or increase our ability to bear, that we shall not be overpowered. It is true, without a single exception, that all his paths are mercy and truth to them that fear him. His love is the same when he wounds as when he heals, when he takes away as when he gives: we have reason to thank him for all, but most for the severe.

I received a letter from you, which mentions dear Mrs. ———'s case a very trying

one; but in this likewise we see the Lord's faithfulness. Our own experience, and all that we observe of his dealings with others, may convince us that we need not be afraid to entrust ourselves and our dearest concerns in his hands; for he can and will make every thing work for good.

How little does the world know of that intercourse which is carried on between heaven and earth! what petitions are daily presented, and what answers are received, at the throne of grace! O the blessed privilege of prayer! O the wonderful love, care, attention, and power of our great Shepherd! His eye is always upon us; when our spirits are almost overwhelmed within us, he knoweth our path. His ear is always open to us; let who will overlook and disappoint us, he will not. When means and hope fail, when every thing looks dark upon us, when we seem shut up on every side, when we are brought to the lowest ebb, still our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. To him all things are possible; and before the exertion of his power, when he is pleased to arise and work, all hinderances give way, and vanish like a mist before the sun. And he can so manifest himself to the soul, and cause his goodness to pass before it, that the hour of affliction shall be the golden hour of the greatest consolation. He is the fountain of life, strength, grace, and comfort, and of his fulness his children receive according to their occasions: but this is all hidden from the world; they have no guide in prosperity, but hurry on as they are instigated by their blinded passions, and are perpetually multiplying mischiefs and miseries to themselves; and in adversity they have no resource, but must feel all the evil of affliction, without inward support, and without deriving any advantage from it. We have, therefore, cause for continual praise. The Lord has given us to know his name, as a resting-place and a hiding-place, a sun and a shield. Circumstances and creatures may change; but he will be an unchangeable friend. The way is rough, but he trod it before us, and is now with us in every step we take; and every step brings us nearer to our heavenly home. Our inheritance is surely reserved for us, and we shall be kept for it by his power through faith. Our present strength is small, and, without a fresh supply, would be quickly exhausted; but he has engaged to renew it from day to day; and he will soon appear, to wipe all tears from our eyes; and then we shall appear with him in glory.

I am very sorry if our friend Mr. ——— appears to be aiming to reconcile things that are incompatible. I am, indeed, afraid that he has been for some time under a decline; and, as you justly observe, we meet with too many instances to teach us, that they who express the warmest zeal at their first setting out,

do not always prove the most steady and thriving afterwards; yet I am willing to hope in this case, that he will revive and flourish again. Sometimes the Lord permits those whom he loves to wander from him for a season; and when his time comes to heal their backslidings, they walk more humbly, thankfully, and fruitfully afterwards, from a sense of his abounding mercy, and the knowledge they have by experience acquired of the deceitfulness and ingratitude of their hearts. I hope and pray it will be so with him. However, these things for the present are grievous; and usually before the Lord heals such breaches, he makes his people sensible, that it is an evil thing and a bitter, to forsake him when he led them by the way.

Indeed, London is a dangerous and ensnaring place to professors. I account myself happy that my lot is cast at a distance from it. It appears to me like a sea, wherein most are tossed by storms, and many suffer shipwreck. In this retired situation, I seem to stand upon a cliff; and while I pity those whom I cannot help, I hug myself in the thoughts of being safe upon the shore. Not that we are without our trials here; the evil of our own hearts, and the devices of Satan, cut us out work enough; but we are happily screened from many things which must be either burdensome or hurtful to those who live in the way of them; such as, political disputes, winds of doctrine, scandals of false professors, parties for and against particular ministers, and fashionable amusements, in some measure countenanced by the presence of persons in other respects exemplary. In this view, I often think of our dear friend's expression, upon a certain occasion, of the difference between London and country grace. I hold it in a twofold sense. By London grace, when genuine, I understand grace in a very advanced degree. The favoured few who are kept alive to God, simple-hearted, and spiritually-minded (I mean especially in genteel life,) in the midst of such snares and temptations, appear to me to be the first rate christians of the land: I adore the power of the Lord in them, and compare them to the young men who walked unhurt in the midst of the fire. In another sense, the phrase *London grace* conveys no great idea to me. I think there is no place in the kingdom where a person may set up for a professor upon a smaller stock. If people can abstain from open immoralities, if they will fly to all parts of the town to hear sermons, if they can talk about the doctrines of the gospel, if they have something to say upon that useless question, Who is the best preacher! if they can attain to a speaking acquaintance with some of an acknowledged character, then they expect to pass muster. I am afraid there are many who, upon no better evidences than these; deceive both themselves

and others for a course of years. Though I feel not in a writing cue to-day, I have almost filled the sheet somehow; and if a line or a word may be a means of suggesting a seasonable and comfortable thought to you, I have my end. Through mercy we are all pretty well. My soul is kept alive, as it were, by miracle. I feel much inward warfare: the enemy thrusts sore at me, that I may fall; and I have abundant experience of the evil and deceitfulness of my heart; but the Lord is gracious, and, in the midst of all conflicts, I have a peace springing from the knowledge of his power and grace, and a consideration that I have been helped to commit myself to him.—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

1769.

WE are much obliged to you for your late visit; and I am glad to find that the Lord is pleased to give you some tokens of his presence when you are with us, because I hope it will encourage you to come again. I ought to be very thankful that our christian friends in general are not wholly disappointed of a blessing when they visit us.

I hope the Lord will give me an humble sense of what I am, and that broken and contrite frame of heart in which he delights. This is to me the chief thing. I had rather have more of the mind that was in Christ, more of a meek, quiet, resigned, peaceful, and loving disposition, than to enjoy the greatest measure of sensible comforts, if the consequence should be (as perhaps it would) spiritual pride, self-sufficiency, and a want of that tenderness to others which becomes one who has reason to style himself the chief of sinners. I know, indeed, that the proper tendency of sensible consolations is to humble; but I can see, that through the depravity of human nature, they have not always that effect. And I have been sometimes disgusted with an apparent want of humility, an air of self-will and self-importance, in persons of whose sincerity I could not at all doubt. It has kept me from envying them those pleasant frames with which they have sometimes been favoured; for I believe Satan is never nearer us than at some times when we think ourselves nearest the Lord.

What reason have we to charge our souls in David's words, "My soul, wait thou only upon God." A great stress should be laid upon that word only. We dare not entirely shut him out of our regards, but we are too apt to suffer something to share with him. This evil disposition is deeply fixed in our hearts; and the Lord orders all his dispensations towards us with a view to rooting it out; that, being wearied with repeated dis-

appointments, we may at length be compelled to betake ourselves to him alone. Why else do we experience so many changes and crosses? why are we so often in heaviness? We know that he delights in the pleasure and prosperity of his servants; that he does not willingly afflict or grieve his children; but there is a necessity on our parts, in order to teach us that we have no stability in ourselves, and that no creature can do us good but by his appointment. While the people of Israel depended upon him for food, they gathered up the manna every morning in the field; but when they would hoard it up in their houses, that they might have a stock within themselves, they had it without his blessing, and it proved good for nothing; it soon bred worms, and grew offensive. We may often observe something like this occur both in our temporal and spiritual concerns. The Lord gives us a dear friend to our comfort; but ere long we forget that the friend is the only channel of conveyance, and that all the comfort is from himself. To remind us of this, the stream is dried up, the friend torn away by death, or removed far from us, or perhaps the friendship ceases, and a coolness insensibly takes place, we know not how or why: the true reason is, that when we rejoice amiss in our gourd, the Lord, for our good, sends a worm to the root of it. Instances of this kind are innumerable; and the great inference from them all is, Cease from man, cease from creatures, for wherein are they to be accounted of? My soul, wait thou only, only upon the Lord, who is (according to the expressive phrase, Heb. iv. 13.) he with whom we have to do for soul and body, for time and eternity. What thanks do we owe, that though we have not yet attained perfectly this great lesson, yet we are admitted into that school where alone it can be learned! and though we are poor, slow scholars, the great and effectual Teacher to whom we have been encouraged and enabled to apply, can and will bring us forward! He communicates not only instructions, but capacities and powers. There is none like him; he can make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak: and how great is his condescension and patience! how does he accommodate himself to our weakness, and teach us as we are able to bear. Though all are very dunces when he first receives them, not one was ever turned out as incapable, for he makes them what he would have them to be. O that we may set him always before us, and consider every dispensation, person, thing, we meet in the course of every day, as messengers from him, each bringing us some line of instruction for us to copy into that day's experience. Whatever passes within us or around us may be improved (when he teaches us how) as a perpetual commentary upon his good word.

If we converse and observe with this view, we may learn something every moment, wherever the path of duty leads us, in the streets as well as in the closet, and from the conversation of those who knew not God (when we cannot avoid being present at it,) as well as from those who do.

Separation of dear friends, is, as you observed, hard to flesh and blood; but grace can make it tolerable. I have an abiding persuasion, that the Lord can easily give more than ever he will take away. Which part of the alternative must be my lot, or when, he only knows; but in general I can rely on him to appoint the time, the manner; and I trust his promise of strength suited to the day shall be made good. Therefore I can for the most part rejoice, that all things are in the hand and under the direction of Him who knows our frame, and has himself borne our griefs and carried our sorrows in his own body. A time of weeping must come, but the morning of joy will make amends for all. Who can expound the meaning of that one expression, "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory?" The case of unconverted friends is still more burdensome to think of; but we have encouragement and warrant to pray and to hope. He who called us can easily call others; and he seldom lays a desire of this sort very closely and warmly upon the hearts of his people, but when it is his gracious design sooner or later to give an answer of peace. However, it becomes us to be thankful for ourselves, and to bow our anxieties and reasonings before his sovereign will, who doth as he pleases with his own.

Methinks winter is your summer. You have been, like the bee, collecting from many flowers; I hope you will carry good store of honey home with you. May you find the Lord there, and he can easily supply the failure of means and creatures. We cannot be in any place to so much advantage as where the call of duty leads. What we cannot avoid, may we cheerfully submit to, and not indulge a vain thought, that we could choose a better situation for ourselves (all things considered) than he has chosen for us.

When we have opportunity of enjoying many ordinances, it is a mercy to be able to prize and improve them; but when he cuts us short for a season, if we wait upon him, we shall do well without them. Secret prayer, and the good word, are the chief wells from whence we draw the water of salvation. These will keep the soul alive when creature-streams are cut off; but the richest variety of public means, and the closest attendance upon them will leave us lean and pining in the midst of plenty, if we are remiss and formal in the other two. I think David never appears in a more lively frame of mind than when he wrote the 42d, 63d, and 84th Psalms, which were all penned

in a dry land, and at a distance from the public ordinances.—I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

1772.

I HAD been wishing to hear from you, that I might know where to write. I hope I can assure you of a friendly sympathy with you in your trials. I can, in some measure, guess at what you feel, from what I have seen and felt myself in cases where I have been nearly concerned. But my compassion, though sincere, is ineffectual: if I can pity, I cannot relieve. All I can do is, as the Lord enables me, to remember you both before him. But there is one whose compassion is infinite. The love, and tenderness of ten thousand earthly friends, of ten thousand mothers towards their sucklings, if compared with his, are less than a drop of water to the ocean; and his power is infinite too. Why then do our sufferings continue, when he is so compassionate, and could remove them with a word! Surely, if we cannot give the particular reasons (which yet he will acquaint us with hereafter, John xiii. 7.) the general reason is at hand; he afflicts not for his own pleasure, but for our profit; to make us partakers of his holiness, and because he loves us,

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

I wish you much comfort from David's thought, Psal. cxlii. 3. "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, thou knewest my path." The Lord is not withdrawn to a great distance, but his eye is upon you, and he sees you not with the indifference of a mere spectator, but he observes with attention; he knows, he considers your path; yea, he appoints it, and every circumstance about it is under his direction. Your trouble began at the hour he saw best; it could not come before, and he has marked the degree of it to a hair's-breadth and the duration to a minute. He knows likewise how your spirit is affected; and such supplies of grace and strength, and in such seasons as he sees needful, he will afford. So that when things appear darkest, you shall still be able to say, Though chastened, not killed. Therefore hope in God, for you shall yet praise him.

I shall pray that the Bath waters may be beneficial; and that the waters of the sanctuary there may be healing and enlivening to you all. Our all-sufficient God can give seasons of refreshment in the darkest hours, and break through the thickest clouds of outward affliction or distress. To you it is given, not only to believe in Jesus, but to suffer for

his sake: for so we do, not only when we are called to follow him to imprisonment or death, but when he enables us to bear afflictive dispensations with due submission and patience. Then he is glorified; then his grace and power are manifested in us. The world, so far as they know our case, have a proof before them, that our religion is not merely notional, but that there is a power and reality in it. And the Lord's people are encouraged by what they see of his faithfulness to ourselves. And there are more eyes upon us still. We are a spectacle to the universe, to angels as well as to men. Cheer up: the Lord hath put you in your present trying situation, that you may have the fairer opportunity of adorning your profession of the gospel; and though you suffer much, he is able to make you abundant amends. Nor need I remind you, that he has suffered unspeakably more for you; he drank for your sakes a cup of unmixed wrath, and only puts into your hand a cup of affliction mixed with many mercies.

The account you gave of the poor man detained in the inn was very affecting. Such scenes are or should be instructive, to teach us resignation under the trials we must meet with every day. For not only are we visited less than our iniquities have deserved, but much less than many of our fellow-creatures daily meet with. We need not look about for, or long to find, others in a worse situation than ourselves. If a fit of the gout or cholic is so grievous and so hard to bear, what do we owe to him who delivered us from that place of unutterable torment, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth for ever, without hope or respite! And if we cannot help interesting ourselves in the groans of a stranger, how ought the groans of Jesus to be, as it were, continually sounding in our ears! What are all other sufferings compared to his! and yet he endured them freely. He needed not to have borne them, if he would have left us to perish; but such was his love, he died that we might live, and endured the fiercest agonies, that he might open to us the gate of everlasting peace and happiness. How amazingly perverse is my heart, that I can be more affected with a melancholy story in a newspaper concerning persons I never saw, than with all that I read of his bitter passion in the garden and on the cross, though I profess to believe he endured it all for me! O! if we could always behold him by faith as evidently crucified before our eyes, how would it compose our spirits as to all the sweets and bitters of this poor life! What a barrier would it prove against all the snares and temptations whereby Satan would draw us into evil; and what firm ground of confidence would it afford us amidst the conflicts we sustain from the workings of unbelief and indwelling sin! I long for more of

that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, that I may be preserved humble, thankful, watchful, and dependent. To behold the glory and the love of Jesus, is the only effectual way to participate of his image.

We are to set out to-night from the interpreter's house towards the hill Difficulty, and hope to be favoured with a sight of the cross by the way. To stand at the foot of it, with a softened heart and melting eyes; to forget our sins, sorrows, and burdens, while we are wholly swallowed up in the contemplation of him who bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, is certainly the most desirable situation on this side the grave. To speak of it, and to see it by the light of the Spirit, are widely different things; and though we cannot always enjoy this view, yet the remembrance of what we have seen is an excellent means of encouragement to mount the hill, and to face the lions.

I believe I shall hardly find leisure to fill my paper this time. It is now Saturday evening, and growing late. I am just returned from a serious walk, which is my usual manner of closing the week, when the weather is fine. I endeavour to join in heart with the Lord's ministers and people, who are seeking a blessing on to-morrow's ordinances. At such times I especially remember those friends with whom I have gone to the house of the Lord in company, consequently you are not forgot. I can venture to assure you, that if you have a value for our prayers, you have a frequent share in them, yea, are loved and remembered by many here; but as we are forgetful creatures, I hope you will always refresh our memory, and quicken our prayers, by a yearly visit. In the morning I shall think of you again. What a multitude of eyes and hearts will be directed to our Redeemer to-morrow! He has a numerous and necessitous family, but he is rich enough to supply them all, and his tender compassions extend to the meanest and most unworthy. Like the sun, he can cheer and enlighten thousands and millions at once, and give to each as bountifully as if there were no more to partake of his favour. His best blessings are not diminished by being shared among many. The greatest earthly monarch would soon be poor if he was to give a little (though but a little) to all his subjects; but Jesus has unsearchable, inexhaustible riches of grace to bestow. The innumerable assembly before the throne have been all supplied from his fulness, and yet there is enough and to spare for us also, and for all that shall come after us. May he give us an eager appetite, a hunger and thirst that will not be put off with any thing short of the bread of life; and then we may confidently open our mouths wide, for he has promised to fill them.—I am, &c.

LETTER VII

1773.

SINCE I wrote last, the Lord has been gracious to us here. He crowned the last year with his goodness, and renews his benefits to us every day. He has been pleased to bless the preaching of his gospel amongst us, both to consolation and conviction; and several are, I hope, earnestly seeking him, who were lately dead in trespasses and sins. Dear Mr. ——— was released from all his complaints on the 25th of November. A few days before his death he was enabled to speak more intelligibly than usual for about a quarter of an hour, and expressed a comfortable hope, which was a great satisfaction to us; for though we had not the least doubt of his being built upon the Rock, it was to us an answer to prayer that he could again speak the language of faith; and much prayer had been made on this account, especially that very evening. After that night he spoke little, and hardly took any notice, but continued chiefly drowsy till he died. I preached his funeral sermon, from Lam. iii. 31—33. Mrs. L. ———'s complaint grows worse and worse; she suffers much in her body, and has much more perhaps to suffer: but her consolations in the Lord abound. He enables her to maintain faith, patience, and submission, in an exemplary manner, and shows us, in his dealings with her, that he is all-sufficient and faithful to those who put their trust in him. I am glad to hear that you had comfortable seasons while at Bath. It is, indeed, a great mercy that God's ordinances are established in that place of dissipation; and I hope many who go there with no higher view than to drink the Bath waters, will be brought to draw with joy the waters of life from those wells of salvation. He does nothing in vain, and when he affords the means, we may confidently hope he will bestow the blessing. The dissipation of spirit you complain of, when you are in a strange place, is, I suppose, felt by most, if not by all, who can be satisfied in no place without some token of the Lord's presence. I consider it rather as an infirmity than a sin, strictly speaking; though all our infirmities are sinful, being the effects of a depraved nature. In our present circumstances new things excite new ideas, and when our usual course of life is broken in upon, it disjoins and unsettles our thoughts. It is a proof of our weakness; it may, and ought to be, lamented; but I believe we shall not get the better of it, till we leave the mortal body to moulder into dust. Perhaps few suffer more inconveniences from this article than myself, which is one reason why I love home, and seldom leave it without some reluctance; and it is one reason why we should love heaven, and long for the hour when, at liberty from all incumbrance, we

shall see the Lord without a veil, and serve him without distraction. The Lord, by his providence, seconds and confirms the declarations of his word and ministry. Much we read and much we hear concerning the emptiness, vanity, and uncertainty of the present state. When our minds are enlightened by his Holy Spirit, we receive and acknowledge what his word declares to be truth; yet if we remain long without changes, and our path is very smooth, we are for the most part but faintly affected with what we profess to believe. But when some of our dearest friends are taken from us, the lives of others threatened, and we ourselves are brought low with pain and sickness, then we not only say, but feel, that this must not, cannot, be our rest. You have had several exercises of this kind of late in your family, and I trust you will be able to set your seal to that gracious word, That though afflictions in themselves are not joyous, but grievous, yet in due season they yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness. Various and blessed are the fruits they produce. By affliction prayer is quickened, for our prayers are very apt to grow languid and formal in a time of ease. Affliction greatly helps us to understand the scriptures, especially the promises, most of which being made to times of trouble, we cannot so well know their fulness, sweetness, and certainty, as when we have been in the situation to which they are suited, have been enabled to trust and plead them, and found them fulfilled in our own case. We are usually indebted to affliction as the means or occasion of the most signal discoveries we are favoured with of the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of the Lord. These are best observed by the evident proofs we have that he is near to support us under trouble, and that he can, and does, deliver us out of it. Israel would not have seen so much of the Lord's arm outstretched in their behalf, had not Pharaoh opposed, and pursued them. Afflictions are designed likewise for the manifestation of our sincerity to ourselves and to others. When faith endures the fire, we know it to be of the right kind; and others, who see we are brought safe out, and lose nothing but the dross, will confess that God is with us of a truth, Dan. iii. 27, 28. Surely this thought should reconcile us to suffer, not only with patience, but with cheerfulness, if God may be glorified in us. This made the apostle rejoice in tribulation, that the power of Christ might be noticed, as resting upon him, and working mightily in him. Many of our graces, likewise, cannot thrive or show themselves to advantage without trials, such as resignation, patience, meekness, long-suffering. I observe some of the London porters do not appear to be very strong men, yet they will trudge along under a burden which some stouter people could not carry

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so well; the reason is, that they are accustomed to carry burdens, and by continual exercise their shoulders acquire a strength suited to their work. It is so in the christian life; activity and strength of grace is not ordinarily acquired by those who sit still and live at ease, but by those who frequently meet with something which requires a full exertion of what power the Lord has given them. So again, it is by our own sufferings we learn to pity and sympathize with others in their sufferings; such a compassionate disposition, which excites our feelings for the afflicted, is an eminent branch of the mind which was in Christ. But these feelings would be very faint, if we did not in our experience know what sorrows and temptations mean. Afflictions do us good likewise, as they make us more acquainted with what is in our own hearts, and thereby promote humiliation and self-abasement. There are abominations which, like nests of vipers, lie so quietly within, that we hardly suspect they are there, till the rod of affliction rouses them: then they hiss and show their venom. This discovery is, indeed, very distressing; yet, till it is made, we are prone to think ourselves much less vile than we really are, and cannot so heartily abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes.

But I must write a sermon rather than a letter, if I would enumerate all the good fruits which, by the power of sanctifying grace, are produced from this bitter tree. May we, under our several trials, find them all revealed in ourselves, that we may not complain of having suffered in vain. While we have such a depraved nature, and live in such a polluted world; while the roots of pride, vanity, self-dependence, self-seeking, are so strong within us, we need a variety of sharp dispensations to keep us from forgetting ourselves, and from cleaving to the dust.—I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

1774.

THE very painful illness which Mrs. — so long endured, had, doubtless, not only prepared you to expect the news of her dismissal, but made you more willing to resign her. You are bereaved of a valuable friend; but life in her circumstances was burdensome; and who can be sorry to consider her now as freed from all suffering, and possessed of all happiness? But, besides this, I trust the Lord has favoured you with an habitual sense of the wisdom and propriety of all his appointments; so that when his will is manifested by the event, you are enabled to say, "All is well." "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." She is but gone a little before you; and after a few more

changes, you will meet her again to unspeakable advantage, and rejoice together before the throne for ever. There every tear will be wiped away, and you shall weep no more. The Lord could have prevented the cause of her great sufferings; but I doubt not he afflicted her in wisdom and mercy: he could easily have restored her to health; but the time was hastening when he purposed to have her with him where he is, that she might behold his glory, and have all the desires he put into her heart abundantly satisfied. Precious in his sight is the death of his saints, and every circumstance is under the direction of infinite wisdom. His sovereignty forbids us to say, Why hast thou done this? and his love assures us that he does all things well. I have lost a friend likewise. I believe I may say few persons not immediately related to her, could value her more highly than myself; and though of late years I could not have the pleasure of her company, it was a constant satisfaction to me to know I had such a friend.

Mr. T——'s sickness and death followed immediately upon this stroke. I doubt not but you have been much affected with this dispensation likewise. But here again we have the same stronghold to retreat to: the Lord has done it. What a pleasing prospect of increasing usefulness is now interrupted! How many will mourn his loss! Yet we are sure the work which the Lord had appointed him was finished. They who loved his ministry, and were profited by it, are left, apparently destitute; but Jesus, the good Shepherd, is able to take care of his own, and will fulfil his promise to them all. He has said, Verily they shall be fed.

We have had trying and dying times here; half my time almost has been taken up with visiting the sick. I have seen death in a variety of forms, and have had frequent occasion of observing how insignificant many things which are now capable of giving us pain or pleasure, will appear, when the soul is brought near to the borders of eternity. All the concerns which relate solely to this life, will then be found as trivial as the traces of a dream from which we are awakened. Nothing will then comfort us but the knowledge of Jesus and his love; nothing grieve us but the remembrance of our unfaithful carriage to him, and what poor returns we made to his abundant goodness. The Lord forbid that this thought should break our peace! No, faith in

his name may forbid our fear, though we shall see and confess we have been unprofitable servants. There shall be no condemnation to them that are in him; but surely shame and humiliation will accompany us to the very threshold of heaven, and ought to do so. I surely shall then be more affected than I am now with the coolness of my love, the faintness of my zeal, the vanity of my heart, and my undue attachment to the things of time. O these clogs, fetters, vales, and mountains, which obstruct my course, darken my views, slacken my pace, and disable me in service. Well it is for me that I am not under the law, but under grace.

To-morrow is the Sabbath. I am usually glad when it returns, though it seldom finds me in that frame of mind which I would desire. But it is my happiness to live amongst many who count the hours from one ordinance to another. I know they pray that I may be a messenger of peace, and an instrument of good to their souls; and I have cause to hope their prayers are in a measure answered. For their sakes, as much as my own, I am glad to go up to the house of the Lord. O that in watering others, I may be also watered myself! I have been praying that to-morrow may be a day of power with you and with us, and with all that love Jesus in sincerity; that we may see his glory, and taste his love in the sanctuary. When it is thus, the Sabbath is a blessed day indeed, an earnest of heaven. There they keep an everlasting Sabbath, and cease not night or day admiring the riches of redeeming love, and adoring him who washed his people from their sins in his own blood. To have such imperfect communion with them as is in this state attainable in this pleasing exercise is what alone can make life worth the name. For this I sigh and long and cry to the Lord to rend the veil of unbelief, scatter the clouds of ignorance, and break down the walls which sin is daily building up to hide him from my eyes. I hope I can say, my soul is athirst for God, and nothing less than the light of his countenance can satisfy me. Blessed be his name for the desire; it is his own gift, and he never gives it in vain. He will afford us a taste of the water of life by the way; and ere long we shall drink abundantly at the fountain head, and have done with complaint for ever. May we be thankful for what we receive, and still earnestly desirous of more —I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MISS D——.

LETTER I.

August —, 1772.

MY DEAR MISS,—The Lord brought us home in peace. My visit to —— was agreeable, and I shall often think of it with pleasure, though the deadness and dryness of my own spirit a good part of the time I was there proved a considerable abatement. I am eager enough to converse with the Lord's people, when at the same time I am backward and indisposed to communion with the Lord himself. The two evils charged upon Israel of old, a proneness to forsake the fountain of living waters and to trust to broken cisterns (which can do me no good unless he supplies them,) run through the whole of my experience abroad and at home. A few drops of grace in my fellow worms endear them to me exceedingly. If I expect to see any christian friends, I count the hours till we meet, and promise myself great benefit; but if the Lord withdraws his influence, the best of them prove to me but clouds without water. It was not, however, wholly so with me all the time I staid with my friends, but I suffer much in learning to depend upon the Lord alone. I have been at this lesson many a long year, but am so poor and dull a scholar, that I have not yet made any tolerable progress in it. I think I received some instruction and advantage where I little expected it; I mean at Mr. Cox's Museum. The efforts of his ingenuity amazed me, while at the same time I was struck with their insignificance. His fine things were curious beyond all that I had any idea of; and yet, what are they better than toys and amusement, suited to the taste of children! And notwithstanding the variety of their motions they were all destitute of life. There is unspeakably more wisdom and contrivance in the mechanism of a butterfly or a bee, that flies unnoticed in the fields, than in all his apparatus put together. But the works of God are disregarded, while

the feeble imitations of them which men can produce gain universal applause.

If you and I could make self-moving dragons and elephants, what would it profit us! Blessed be God, that he has given us some glimpses of his wisdom and love, by which our hearts, more hard and lifeless by nature than the stones in the streets, are constrained and enabled to move upwards, and to seek after the Lord. He has given us in his word a greater treasure than all that we ever beheld with our eyes, and a hope which shall flourish when the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. What will all the fine things of men's device be worth in that day!

I think the passage you refer to in Mr. —— justly exceptionable. His intention is good, and the mistake he would censure very dangerous, but he might have explained himself more clearly. I apprehend he and you do not mean the same thing by being in the dark. It is not an uncomfortable, but a careless frame which he would censure. They who walk in darkness and see no light, and yet are exhorted to stay themselves upon God (Isa. l. 10,) are said to hearken to the voice of his servant. Though they cannot see the Lord, they are seeking and mourning after him, and waiting in the use of means, and warring against sin. Mr. —— had another set of people in view, who trust in the notions of gospel-truth, or some past convictions and comforts, though at present they give no evidence of spiritual desires, but are worldly in their spirit and conversation; talk of trusting in the Lord; account it a weakness to doubt of their state, and think all is well because they profess to believe the doctrines of grace. In a word, it is the darkness of sin and sloth against which his observation is pointed. Or if, indeed, he meant more than this, we are not obliged to believe him. Remember your privilege; you have the Bible in your hands, and are not bound to follow books or preachers any farther than what

they deliver agrees with the oracles of truth. We have great reason to be thankful for the instructions and writings of spiritual men, but they are all fallible even as ourselves. One is our master, even Christ: what he says we are to receive implicitly; but we do not owe implicit subjection to the best of our fellow-creatures. The Bereans were commended that they would not take even the apostle Paul upon trust, but searched the scriptures to see whether these things were so. May the Lord give us a spirit of humility and discernment in all things!—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

May 4, 1773.

METHINKS it is high time to ask you how you do, to thank you for your last letter, and to let you know, that though necessity makes me slack in writing, yet I can and do often think of you. My silence has sometimes been owing to want of leisure; and sometimes when I could have found leisure, my harp has been out of tune, and I had no heart to write. Perhaps you are ready to infer, by my sitting down to write at last, that my harp is now well-tuned, and I have something extraordinary to offer: beware of thinking so, lest you should be sadly disappointed. Should I make myself the subject, I could give you at present but a mournful ditty. I suppose you have heard I have been ill: through mercy I am now well. But indeed I must farther tell you, that when I was sick I was well; and since the Lord has removed my illness, I have been much worse. My illness was far from violent in itself, and was greatly sweetened by a calm submissive frame the Lord gave me under it. My heart seemed more alive to him than it has done since my cough, fever, and deafness have been removed. Shall I give you another bit of a riddle, that, notwithstanding the many changes I pass through, I am always the same? This is the very truth: "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" so that, if sometimes my spirit is in a measure humble, lively, and dependent, it is not because I am grown better than I was, but the Lord is pleased to put forth his gracious power in my weakness; and when my heart is dry and stupid, when I can find no pleasure in waiting upon God, it is not because I am worse than I was before, but only the Lord sees it best that I should feel as well as say what a poor creature I am. My heart was once like a dungeon, out of the reach of day, and always dark: the Lord, by his grace, has been pleased to make this dungeon a room, by putting windows in it; but I need not tell you, that though windows will trans-

mit the day-light into a room, they cannot supply the want of it. When the day is gone, windows are of little use: when the day returns, the room is enlighten'd by them again. Thus, unless the Lord shines, I cannot retain to-day the light I had yesterday; and though his presence makes a delightful difference, I have no more to boast of in myself at one time than another; yet when it is dark, I am warranted to expect the return of light again. When he is with me, all goes on pleasantly; when he withdraws, I find I can do nothing without him. I need not wonder that I find it so, for it must be so of course, if I am what I confess myself to be, a poor, helpless, sinful creature in myself. Nor need I be over-much discouraged, since the Lord has promised to help those who can do nothing without him, not those who can make a tolerable shift to help themselves. Through mercy he does not so totally withdraw, as to leave me without any power or will to cry for his return. I hope he maintains in me at all times a desire of his presence; yet it becomes me to wait for him with patience, and to live upon his faithfulness, when I can feel nothing but evil in myself.

In your letter, after having complained of your inability, you say, you converse with many who find it otherwise, who can go whenever they will to the Father of mercies with a child-like confidence, and never return without an answer, an answer of peace. If they only mean that they are favoured with an established faith, and can see that the Lord is always the same, and that their right to the blessings of the covenant is not at all affected by their unworthiness, I wish you and I had more experience of the same privilege. In general, the Lord helps me to aim at it, though I find it sometimes difficult to hold fast my confidence. But if they speak absolutely with respect to their frames, that they not only have something to support them under their changes, but meet with no changes that require such support, I must say, it is well that they do not live here; if they did, they would not know how to pity us, and we should not know how to understand them. We have an enemy at —— that fights against our peace, and I know not one amongst us but often groans under the warfare. I advise you not to be troubled by what you hear of other folks' experience, but keep close to the written word, where you will meet with much to encourage you, though you often feel yourself weary and heavy laden. For my own part, I like that path best which is well beaten by the foot-steps of the flock, though it is not always pleasant, and strewed with flowers. In our way, we find some hills, from whence we can cheerfully look about us; but we meet with deep valleys like-

wise, and seldom travel long upon even ground.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

1775.

I AM satisfied with your answer to my question: we are not proper judges of each other's circumstances, and I am in some measure weaned from judging hastily, that what would not be convenient for me, must therefore necessarily be wrong for another. However, my solicitude for your welfare made me venture to drop a hint, as I was persuaded you would take it in good part. Indeed, all situations and circumstances (supposing them not sinful in themselves, and that we are lawfully placed in them) are nearly alike. In London I am in a crowd; in the country I am sure there is a crowd in me. To what purpose do I boast of retirement, when I am pestered by a legion in every place? How often, when I am what I call alone, may my mind be compared to a puppet-show, a fair, a Newgate, or any of those scenes where folly, noise, and wickedness most abound? On the contrary, sometimes I have enjoyed sweet recollection and composure where I could have hardly expected it. But still, though the power be all of the Lord, and we of ourselves can do nothing, it is both our duty and our wisdom to be attentive to the use of appointed means on the one hand, and on the other, watchful against those things which we find, by experience, have a tendency to damp our fervour, or to dissipate our spirits. A comfortable intimacy with a fellow-worm cannot be maintained without a certain delicacy and circumspection, a studiousness in improving opportunities of pleasing, and in avoiding what is known to be offensive. For though love will make large allowances for involuntary mistakes, it cannot easily brook a slight. We act thus as it were by instinct towards those whom we dearly love, and to whom we feel ourselves greatly obliged: and happy are they who are most influenced by this sentiment in their walk before the Lord. But, alas! here we are chargeable with such inconsistencies as we should be greatly ashamed of in common life. And well it is for us that the Lord's thoughts and ways are above ours, and that he is infinite in mercy as well as in power; for surely our dearest friends would have been weary of us, and have renounced us long ago, had we behaved to them as we have too often done to him. He is God, and not man, and therefore he still waits to be gracious, though we have so often trifled with him. Surely we may well say with the prophet, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity!" His tenderness and for-

bearance towards his own people (whose sins being committed against love, and light, and experience, are more aggravated than others) is astonishing indeed. But oh! may the times past suffice to have grieved his Spirit, and may we be enabled from henceforth to serve him with a single eye and a simple heart, to be faithful to every intimation of his will, and to make him our all in all!

Mr. — has been here, and I have been with him at — since his return. We seem glad to be together when we can. When I am with him, I feel quite at home and at ease, and can tell him (so far as I dare tell a creature) all that is in my heart; a plain proof that union of spirit depends no more upon an exact uniformity of sentiment than on a uniformity of prayers; for in some points of doctrine we differ considerably; but I trust I agree with him in the views I have of the excellency, suitableness, and sufficiency of the Saviour, and of his right to reign without a rival in the hearts of his redeemed people. An experimental knowledge of Jesus, as the deliverer from sin and wrath, and the author of eternal life and salvation to all who are enabled to believe, is a sufficient ground for union of heart. In this point all who are taught of God are of one mind. But an eager fighting for or against those points which are usually made the subject of controversy, tends to nourish pride and evil tempers in ourselves, and to alienate our hearts from those we hope to spend an eternity with. In heaven, we shall neither be Dissenters, Moravians, nor Methodists; neither Calvinists nor Arminians; but followers of the Lamb, and children of the kingdom. There we shall hear the voice of war no more.

We are still favoured with health and many temporal blessings. My spiritual walk is not so smooth as my outward path. In public I am mercifully supported; in secret I most sensibly feel my own vileness and weakness; but through all the Lord is gracious.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

January 10, 1775.

THERE is hardly any thing in which the Lord permits me to meet with more disappointment, than in the advantage I am ready to promise myself from creature-converse. When I expect to meet any of my christian friends, my thoughts usually travel much faster than my body; I anticipate the hour of meeting, and my imagination is warmed with the expectation of what I shall say and what I shall hear; and sometimes I have had seasons for which I ought to be more thankful than I am. It is pleasant, indeed, when the Lord favours us with a happy hour.

and is pleased to cause our hearts to burn within us while we are speaking of his goodness. But often it is far otherwise with me: I carry with me a dissipation of spirit, and find that I can neither impart nor receive. Something from within or from without crosses my schemes; and when I retire I seem to have gained nothing but a fresh conviction, that we can neither help nor be helped, unless the Lord himself is pleased to help us. With his presence in our hearts, we might be comfortable and happy though shut up in one of the cells of Newgate: without it, the most select company, the most desirable opportunities, prove but clouds without water.

I have sometimes thought of asking you, whether you find that difference between being abroad and at home that I do! But I take it for granted that you do not: your connexions and intimacies are, I believe, chiefly with those who are highly favoured of the Lord, and if you can break through or be upon your guard against the inconveniencies which attend frequent changes and much company, you must be very happy in them. But, I believe, considering my weakness, the Lord has chosen wisely and well for me, in placing me in a state of retirement, and not putting it in my power, were it ever so much my inclination, to be often abroad. As I stir so seldom, I believe, when I do, it is not upon the whole to my disadvantage; for I meet with more or less upon which my reflections afterwards may, by his blessing, be useful to me, though at the time my visits most frequently convince me, how little wisdom or skill I have in improving time and opportunities. But were I to live in London, I know not what might be the consequence. Indeed, I need not puzzle myself about it, as my call does not lie there; but I pity and pray for those who do live there, and I admire such of them as, in those circumstances which appear so formidable to me, are enabled to walk simply, humbly, and closely with the Lord. They remind me of Daniel, unhurt in the midst of lions, or of the bush which Moses saw surrounded with flames, yet not consumed, because the Lord was there. Some such I do know, and I hope you are one of the number.

This is certain, that if the light of God's countenance, and communion with him in love, afford the greatest happiness we are capable of, then whatever tends to indispose us for this pursuit, or to draw a veil between him and our souls, must be our great loss. If we walk with him, it must be in the path of duty, which lies plain before us when our eye is single, and we are waiting with attention upon his word, Spirit, and providence. Now, wherever the path of duty leads we are *safe*; and it often does lead and place us in *such circumstances as no other consideration*

would make us choose. We were not designed to be mere recluses, but have all a part to act in life. Now, if I find myself in the midst of things disagreeable enough in themselves to the spiritual life, yet—if, when the question occurs, What dost thou here? my heart can answer, I am here by the will of God,—I believe it to be, all things considered, my duty to be here at this time rather than elsewhere. If, I say, I am tolerably satisfied of this, then I would not burden and grieve myself about what I cannot avoid or alter, but endeavour to take all such things up with cheerfulness, as a part of my daily cross; since I am called, not only to do the will of God, but to suffer for it; but if I am doing my own will rather than his, then I have reason to fear, lest I should meet with either a snare or a sting at every step. May the Lord Jesus be with you.—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

April 13, 1776.

DEAR MADAM,—I am rather of the latest to present my congratulations to you and Mr. — on your marriage, but I have not been unmindful of you. My heart has repeatedly wished you all that my pen can express, that the new relation in which the providence of God has placed you may be blessed to you in every respect, may afford you much temporal comfort, promote your spiritual progress, and enlarge your sphere of usefulness in the world and in the church.

By this time I suppose visits and ceremonies are pretty well over, and you are beginning to be settled in your new situation. What an important period is a wedding-day! What an entire change of circumstances does it produce! What an influence it has upon every day of future life! How many cares, inquietudes, and trials, does it expose us to, which we might otherwise have avoided! But they who love the Lord, and are guided by his word and providence, have nothing to fear; for in every state, relation, and circumstance in life, he will be with them, and will surely do them good. His grace, which is needful in a single, is sufficient for a married life. I sincerely wish Mr. — and you much happiness together; that you may be mutually helps meet, and assist each other in walking as fellow-heirs of the hope of eternal life. Your cares and trials, I know, must be increased; may your comforts be increased proportionally! They will be so, if you are enabled heartily and simply to entreat the Lord to keep your heart fixed near to himself. All the temporal blessings and accommodations he provides to sweeten life, and make our passage through this wilderness more agreeable, will

fail and disappoint us, and produce us more thorns than roses, unless we can keep sight of his hand in bestowing them, and hold and use the gifts in some due subserviency to what we owe to the giver. But alas! we are poor creatures, prone to wander, prone to admire our gourds, cleave to our cisterns, and think of building tabernacles, and taking our rest in this polluted world. Hence the Lord often sees it necessary, in mercy to his children, to embitter their sweets, to break their cisterns, to send a worm to their gourds, and to draw a dark cloud over their most pleasing prospects. His word tells us, that all here is vanity, compared with the light of his countenance; and if we cannot, or will not, believe it upon the authority of his word, we must learn it by experience. May he enable you to settle it in your hearts, that creature-comforts are precarious, insufficient, and ensnaring; that all good comes from his hand, and that nothing can do us good, but so far as he is pleased to make it the instrument of communicating, as a stream, that goodness which is in him as a fountain. Even the bread which we eat, without the influence of his promise and blessing, would no more support us than a stone; but his blessing makes every thing good, gives a tenfold value to our comforts, and greatly diminishes the weight of every cross.

The ring upon your finger is of some value as gold, but this is not much; what makes it chiefly valuable to you is, that you consider

it as a pledge and token of the relation you bear to him who gave it you. I know no fitter emblem of the light in which we should consider all those good things which the Lord gives us richly to enjoy. When every thing we receive from him is received and prized as a fruit and a pledge of his covenant-love, then his bounties, instead of being set up as rivals, and idols to draw our hearts from him, awaken us to fresh exercises of gratitude, and furnish us with fresh motives of cheerful obedience every hour.

Time is short, and we live in a dark and cloudy day. When iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold; and we have reason to fear the Lord's hand is lifted up in displeasure at our provocations. May he help us to sit loose to all below, to watch unto prayer for grace to keep our garments clean, and to be faithful witnesses for him in our several places! O, it is my desire for myself and for all my dear friends, that whilst too many seem content with a half profession, a name to live, an outward attachment to ordinances, and sentiments, and parties, we may be ambitious to experience what the glorious gospel is capable of effecting, both as to sanctification and consolation, in this state of infirmity; that we may have our loins girded, and our lamps burning, and by our simplicity and spirituality constrain those who know us to acknowledge that we have been with Jesus, have sat at his feet, and drank of his Spirit.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MRS. H——.

LETTER I.

LONG and often have I thought of writing to you ; now the time is come. May the Lord help me to send a word in season ! I know not how it may be with you, but he does, and to him I look to direct my thoughts accordingly. I suppose you are still in the school of the cross, learning the happy art of extracting real good out of seeming evil, and to grow tall by stooping. The flesh is a sad untoward dunce in this school ; but grace makes the spirit willing to learn by suffering ; yea it cares not what it endures, so sin may be mortified, and a conformity to the image of Jesus be increased. Surely when we see the most and the best of the Lord's children so often in heaviness, and when we consider how much he loves them, and what he has done and prepared for them, we may take it for granted that there is a need-be for their sufferings. For it would be easy to his power, and not a thousandth part of what his love intends to do for them, should he make their whole life here, from the hour of their conversion to their death, a continued course of satisfaction and comfort, without any thing to distress them from within or without. But were it so, should we not miss many advantages ! In the first place, we should not then be very conformable to our Head, nor be able to say, As he was, so are we in this world. Methinks a believer would be ashamed to be so utterly unlike his Lord. What ! the master always a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and the servant always happy and full of comfort ! Jesus despised, reproached, neglected, opposed, and betrayed, and his people admired and caressed : he living in the want of all things, and they filled with abundance ; he sweating blood for anguish, and they strangers to distress : how unsuitable would these things be ! how much better to be called to the honour of filling up the measure of his sufferings ! A cup was put into his hand on our account, and his love engaged him to drink it for us. The wrath which it contained he drank wholly himself, but he left us a little

affliction to taste, that we might pledge him, and remember how he loved us, and how much more he endured for us than he will ever call us to endure for him. Again, how could we, without sufferings, manifest the nature and truth of gospel-grace ! What place should we then have for patience, submission, meekness, forbearance, and a readiness to forgive, if we had nothing to try us either from the hand of the Lord, or from the hand of men. A christian without trials would be like a mill without wind or water ; the contrivance and design of the wheel-work within side would be unnoticed and unknown, without something to put it in motion from without. Nor would our graces grow, unless they were called out to exercise : the difficulties we meet with not only prove but strengthen the graces of the Spirit. If a person was always to sit still, without making use of legs or arms, he would probably wholly lose the power of moving his limbs at last ; but by walking and working he becomes strong and active. So, in a long course of ease, the powers of the new man would certainly languish : the soul would grow soft, indolent, cowardly, and faint ; and therefore the Lord appoints his children such dispensations as make them strive, and struggle, and pant. They must press through a crowd, swim against a stream, endure hardships, run, wrestle, and fight ; and thus their strength grows in the using.

By these things, likewise, they are made more willing to leave the present world, to which we are prone to cleave too closely in our hearts when our path is very smooth. Had Israel enjoyed their former peace and prosperity in Egypt, when Moses came to invite them to Canaan, I think they would hardly have listened to him. But the Lord suffered them to be brought into great trouble and bondage, and then the news of deliverance was more welcome ; yet still they were but half willing, and they carried a love to the flesh-pots of Egypt with them into the wilderness. We are like them : though we say this world is vain and sinful we are too

fond of it; and though we hope for true happiness only in heaven, we are often well content to stay longer here. But the Lord sends afflictions one after another to quicken our desires, and to convince us that this cannot be our rest. Sometimes, if you drive a bird from one branch of a tree, he will hop to another a little higher, and from thence to a third; but if you continue to disturb him, he will at last take wing and fly quite away. Thus we, when forced from one creature-comfort, perch upon another, and so on; but the Lord mercifully follows us with trials, and will not let us rest upon any. By degrees our desires take a nobler flight, and can be satisfied with nothing short of himself; and we say, To depart and be with Jesus is best of all.

I trust you find the name and grace of Jesus more and more precious to you; his promises more sweet, and your hope in them more abiding; your sense of your own weakness and unworthiness daily increasing; and your persuasion of his all-sufficiency to guide, support, and comfort you, more confirmed. You owe your growth in these respects in a great measure to his blessing upon those afflictions which he has prepared for you, and sanctified to you. May you praise him for all that is past, and trust him for all that is to come.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

THOUGH I have the pleasure of hearing of you, and sending a remembrance from time to time, I am willing, by this opportunity, to direct a few lines to you, as a more express testimony of my sincere regard.

I think your experience is generally of the fearful, doubting cast. Such souls, however, the Lord has given particular charge to his ministers to comfort. He knows our infirmities, and what temptations mean, and as a good shepherd, he expresses a peculiar care and tenderness for the weak of the flock, Isaiah xl. 4. But how must I attempt your comfort? Surely not by strengthening a mistake to which we are all too liable, by leading you to look into your own heart for (what you will never find there) something in yourself whereon to ground your hopes, if not wholly, yet at least in part. Rather let me endeavour to lead you out of yourself; let me invite you to look unto Jesus. Should we look for light in our own eyes, or in the sun? Is it indwelling sin distresses you? Then I can tell you (though you know it) that Jesus died for sin and sinners. I can tell you, that his blood and righteousness are of infinite value; that his arm is almighty, and his compassions infinite; yea, you yourself read his promises every day, and why

should you doubt their being fulfilled? If you say you do not question their truth, or that they are accomplished to many, but that you can hardly believe they belong to you; I would ask, what evidence you would require? A voice or an angel from heaven you do not expect. Consider, if many of the promises are not expressly directed to those to whom they belong. When you read your name on the superscription of this letter, you make no scruple to open it: why, then, do you hesitate at embracing the promises of the gospel, where you read that they are addressed to those who mourn, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are poor in spirit, &c. and cannot but be sensible that a gracious God has begun to work these dispositions in your heart? If you say, that though you do at times mourn, hunger, &c. you are afraid you do it not enough, or not aright; consider, that this sort of reasoning is very far from the spirit and language of the gospel; for it is grounded on a secret supposition, that in the forgiveness of sin God has a respect to something more than the atonement and mediation of Jesus; namely, to some previous good qualifications in a sinner's heart, which are to share with the blood of Christ in the honour of salvation. The enemy deceives us in this matter the more easily, because a propensity to the covenant of works is a part of our natural depravity. Depend upon it, you will never have a suitable and sufficient sense of the evil of sin, and of your share in it, so long as you have any sin remaining in you. We must see Jesus as he is, before our apprehensions of any spiritual truth will be complete. But if we know that we must perish without Christ, and that he is able to save to the uttermost, we know enough to warrant us to cast our souls upon him, and we dishonour him by fearing that when we do so he will disappoint our hope. But if you are still perplexed about the high points of election, &c. I would advise you to leave the disposal of others to the great Judge; and as to yourself, I think I need not say much to persuade you, that if ever you are saved at all, it must be in a way of free and absolute grace. Leave disputes to others; wait upon the Lord, and he will teach you all things, in such degree and time as he sees best. Perhaps you have suffered for taking things too much upon trust from men. Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. One is your master, even Christ. Study and pray over the Bible; and you may take it as a sure rule, that whatever sentiment makes any part of the word of God unwelcome to you, is justly to be suspected. Aim at a cheerful spirit. The more you trust God, the better you will serve him. While you indulge unbelief and suspicion, you weaken your own hands, and discourage others. Be thankful for what he has shown

you, and wait upon him for more; you shall find he has not said, "Seek ye my face in vain." I heartily commend you to his grace and care, and am, &c.

LETTER III.

At length, and without farther apology for my silence, I sit down to ask you, how you fare? Afflictions I hear have been your lot; and if I had not heard so, I should have taken it for granted, for I believe the Lord loves you, and as many as he loves he chastens. I think you can say afflictions have been good for you, and I doubt not but you have found strength according to your day; so that though you may have been sharply tried, you have not been overpowered. For the Lord has engaged his faithfulness for this to all their children, that he will support them in all their trials, so that the fire shall not consume them nor the floods drown them, 1 Cor. x. 13; Isa. xliii. 2.

If you can say thus much, cannot you go a little further, and add, in the apostle's words, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear. I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; yea, doubtless, I count all things loss and of no regard, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for when I am weak, then am I strong." Methinks I hear you say, "God, who comforteth those who are cast down, has comforted my soul; and as my troubles have abounded, my consolations in Christ have abounded also. He has delivered, he does deliver, and in him I trust that he will yet deliver me." Surely you can set your seal to these words. The Lord help you, then, to live more and more a life of faith, to feed upon the promises, and to rejoice in the assurance that all things are yours, and shall surely work for your good.

If I guess right at what passes in your

heart, the name of Jesus is precious to you; and this is a sure token of salvation, and that of God. You could not have loved him if he had not loved you first. He spoke to you, and said, "Seek my face," before your heart cried to him "Thy face, O Lord, will I seek." But you complain, "Alas! I love him so little." That very complaint proves that you love him a great deal, for if you loved him but a little you would think you loved him enough. A mother loves her child a great deal, yet does not complain for not loving it more, nay, perhaps, she hardly thinks it possible. But such an infinite object is Jesus, that they who love him better than parents or child, or any earthly relation or comfort, will still think they hardly love him at all, because they see such a vast disproportion between the utmost they can give him and what in himself he deserves from them. But I can give you good advice and good news: love him as well as you can now, and ere long you shall love him better. O, when you see him as he is, then I am sure you will love him indeed! If you want to love him better now while you are here, I believe I can tell you the secret how this is to be attained: trust him. The more you trust him the better you will love him. If you ask farther, How shall I do to trust him? I answer, Try him. The more you make trial of him, the more your trust in him will be strengthened. Venture upon his promises; carry them to him, and see if he will not be as good as his word. But, alas! Satan and unbelief work the contrary way. We are unwilling to try him, and therefore unable to trust him; and what wonder, then, that our love is faint, for who can love at uncertainties?

If you are in some measure thankful for what you have received, and hungering and thirsting for more, you are in the frame I would wish for myself, and I desire to praise the Lord on your behalf. Pray for us. We join in love to you.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO MISS P——.

LETTER I.

August 17, 1776.

It is indeed natural to us to wish and to plan, and it is merciful in the Lord to disappoint our plans, and to cross our wishes. For we cannot be safe, much less happy, but in proportion as we are weaned from our own wills, and made simply desirous of being directed by his guidance. This truth, when we are enlightened by his word, is sufficiently familiar to the judgment, but we seldom learn to reduce it into practice, without being trained a while in the school of disappointment. The schemes we form look so plausible and convenient, that when they are broken we are ready to say, What a pity! We try again, and with no better success; we are grieved, and perhaps angry, and plan out another, and so on: at length, in a course of time, experience and observation begin to convince us that we are not more able than we are worthy to choose aright for ourselves. Then the Lord's invitation to cast our cares upon him, and his promise to take care of us, appear valuable; and when we have done planning, his plan in our favour gradually opens, and he does more and better for us than we could either ask or think. I can hardly recollect a single plan of mine of which I have not since seen reason to be satisfied, that had it taken place in season and circumstance just as I proposed, it would, humanly speaking, have proved my ruin, or at least it would have deprived me of the greater good the Lord had designed for me. We judge of things by their present appearances, but the Lord sees them in their consequences. If we could do so likewise, we should be perfectly of his mind, but as we cannot, it is an unspeakable mercy that he will manage for us, whether we are pleased with his management or not; and it is spoken of as one of his heaviest judgments, when he gives any person or people up to the way of their own hearts, and to walk after their own counsels.

Indeed, we may admire his patience to-

wards us. If we were blind, and reduced to desire a person to lead us, and should yet pretend to dispute with him, and direct him at every step, we should probably soon weary him, and provoke him to leave us to find the way by ourselves if we could. But our gracious Lord is long-suffering and full of compassion: he bears with our frowardness, yet he will take methods both to shame and to humble us, and to bring us to a confession that he is wiser than we. The great and unexpected benefit he intends us, by all the discipline we meet with, is to tread down our wills, and bring them into subjection to his. So far as we attain to this, we are out of the reach of disappointment, for when the will of God can please us, we shall be pleased every day, and from morning to night, I mean with respect to his dispensations. O the happiness of such a life! I have an idea of it: I hope I am aiming at it, but surely I have not attained it. Self is active in my heart, if it does not absolutely reign there. I profess to believe that one thing is needful and sufficient, and yet my thoughts are prone to wander after a hundred more. If it be true that the light of his countenance is better than life, why am I solicitous about any thing else? If he be all-sufficient, and gives me liberty to call him mine, why do I go a-begging to creatures for help? If he be about my path and bed; if the smallest, as well as the greatest events in which I am concerned are under his immediate direction; if the very hairs of my head are numbered; then my care (any farther than a care to walk in the paths of his precepts, and to follow the openings of his providence) must be useless and needless, yea indeed sinful and heathenish, burdensome to myself and dishonourable to my profession. Let us cast down the load we are unable to carry, and if the Lord be our shepherd, refer all and trust all to him. Let us endeavour to live to him and for him to-day, and be glad that to-morrow, with all that is behind it, is in his hands.

It is storied of Pompey, that when his

friends would have dissuaded him from putting to sea in a storm, he answered, It is necessary for me to sail, but it is not necessary for me to live. O pompous speech, in Pompey's sense! He was full of the idea of his own importance, and would rather have died than have taken a step beneath his supposed dignity. But it may be accommodated with propriety to a believer's case. It becomes us to say, it is not necessary for me to be rich, or what the world accounts wise; to be healthy, or admired by my fellow-worms; to pass through life in a state of prosperity and outward comfort;—these things may be, or they may be otherwise, as the Lord in his wisdom shall appoint, but it is necessary for me to be humble and spiritual, to seek communion with God, to adorn my profession of the gospel, and to yield submissively to his disposal, in whatever way, whether of service or suffering, he shall be pleased to call me to glorify him in the world: it is not necessary for me to live long, but highly expedient that whilst I do live I should live to him. Here, then, I would bound my desires, and here, having his word both for my rule and my warrant, I am secured from asking amiss. Let me have his presence and his Spirit, wisdom to know my calling, and opportunities and faithfulness to improve them; and as to the rest, Lord, help me to say, What thou wilt, when thou wilt, and how thou wilt.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

DEAR MADAM,—What a poor, uncertain, dying world is this! What a wilderness in itself! How dark, how desolate, without the light of the gospel and the knowledge of Jesus! It does not appear so to us in a state of nature, because we are then in a state of enchantment, the magical lantern blinding us with a splendid delusion.

Thus in the desert's dreary waste,
By magic power produced in haste,
As old romances say,
Castles and groves, and music sweet,
The senses of the traveller cheat,
And stop him in his way.

But while he gazes with surprise,
The charm dissolves, the vision dies,
'Twas but enchanted ground:
Thus, if the Lord our spirit touch,
The world, which promised us so much,
A wilderness is found.

It is a great mercy to be undeceived in time; and though our gay dreams are at an end, and we awake to every thing that is disgustful and dismaying, yet we see a highway through the wilderness, a powerful guard, an infallible guide at hand to conduct us through; and we can discern, beyond the limits of the wilderness, a better land, where we shall be at rest and at home. What will the difficulties we meet by the way then signify? The remembrance of them will only remain to heighten our sense of the love, care, and power of our Saviour and leader. O how shall we then admire, adore, and praise him, when he shall condescend to unfold to us the beauty, propriety, and harmony of the whole train of his dispensations towards us, and give us a clear retrospect of all the way, and all the turns of our pilgrimage!

In the mean while, the best method of adorning our profession, and of enjoying peace in our souls, is simply to trust him, and absolutely to commit ourselves and our all to his management. By casting our burdens upon him, our spirits become light and cheerful; we are freed from a thousand anxieties and inquietudes, which are wearisome to our minds, and which, with respect to events, are needless for us, yea, useless. But though it may be easy to speak of this trust, and it appears to our judgment perfectly right and reasonable, the actual attainment is a great thing; and especially so to trust the Lord, not by fits and starts, surrendering one day, and retracting the next, but to abide by our surrender, and go habitually trusting through all the changes we meet, knowing that his love, purpose, and promise, are unchangeable. Some little faintings perhaps none are freed from; but I believe a power of trusting the Lord in good measure at all times, and living quietly under the shadow of his wing, is what the promise warrants us to expect, if we seek it by diligent prayer; if not all at once, yet by a gradual increase. May it be your experience and mine.—I am, &c.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. B——.

LETTER I.

January 27, 1778.

DEAR AND REVEREND SIR,—I call you *Dear* because I love you, and I shall continue to style you *Reverend* as long as you dignify me with that title. It is, indeed, a pretty sounding epithet, and forms a striking contrast in the usual application. The inhabitants of the moon (if there be any) have perhaps no idea how many Reverend, Right Reverend, and Most Reverend, sinners we have in Europe. And yet you are *reverend*, and I revere you, because I believe the Lord liveth in you, and has chosen you to be a temple of his presence, and an instrument of his grace.

I hope the two sermons you preached in London were made useful to others, and the medicines you took there were useful to yourself. I am glad to hear you are safe at home, and something better. Cheerful spring is approaching: then I hope the barometer of your spirits will rise. But the presence of the Lord can bring a pleasanter spring than April, and even in the depth of winter.

At present it is January with me, both within and without. The outward sun shines and looks pleasant, but his beams are faint, and too feeble to dissolve the frost. So is it in my heart; I have many bright and pleasant beams of truth in my view, but cold predominates in my frost-bound spirit, and they have but little power to warm me. I could tell a stranger something about Jesus that would perhaps astonish him: such a glorious person! such wonderful love! such humiliation! such a death! and then what he is now himself, and what he is to his people! What a sun! what a shield! what a root! what a life! what a friend! My tongue can run on upon these subjects sometimes; and could my heart keep pace with it I should be the *happiest fellow in the country*. Stupid creature! to know these things so well, and

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yet be no more affected with them! Indeed, I have reason to be upon ill terms with myself! It is strange that pride should ever find any thing in my experience to feed upon; but this completes my character for folly, vileness, and inconsistency, that I am not only poor, but proud; and though I am convinced I am a very wretch, a nothing before the Lord, I am prone to go forth among my fellow-creatures as though I were wise and good.

You wonder what I am doing; and well you may: I am sure you would, if you lived with me. Too much of my time passes in busy idleness, too much in waking dreams. I aim at something; but hinderances from within and without make it difficult for me to accomplish any thing. I dare not say I am absolutely idle, or that I wilfully waste much of my time. I have seldom one hour free from interruption. Letters come that must be answered, visitants that must be received, business that must be attended to. I have a good many sheep and lambs to look after, sick and afflicted souls, dear to the Lord; and, therefore, whatever stands still, these must not be neglected. Amongst these various avocations, night comes before I am ready for noon; and the week closes, when, according to the state of my business, it should not be more than Tuesday. O precious, irrecoverable time! O that I had more wisdom in redeeming and improving thee! Pray for me, that the Lord may teach me to serve him better.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

April 28, 1778.

DEAR SIR,—I was not much disappointed at not meeting you at —: I know how difficult it is to get as if you are seen in the street. The

horse-leech has two daughters, saying, Give, give: the cry there is, Preach, preach. When you have told them all, you must tell them more, or tell it them over again. Whoever will find tongue, they will engage to find ears. Yet I do not blame this importunity, I wish you were teased more with it in your own town; for though, undoubtedly, there are too many, both at N—— and here, whose religion lies too much in hearing, yet in many it proceeds from a love to the truth, and to the ministers who dispense it. And I generally observe, that they who are not willing to hear a stranger (if his character is known,) are indifferent enough about hearing their own minister.

I beg you to pray for me. I am a poor creature, full of wants. I seem to need the wisdom of Solomon, the meekness of Moses, and the zeal of Paul, to enable me to make full proof of my ministry. But, alas! you may guess the rest.

Send me "The way to Christ." I am willing to be a debtor to the wise and unwise, to doctors and shoemakers, if I can get a hint, or a *Nota Bene*, from any one, without respect to parties. When a house is on fire, Churchmen, Dissenters, Methodists, Papists, Moravians, and Mystics, are all welcome to bring water. At such times, nobody asks, Pray, friend, whom do you hear? or, What do you think of the five points! &c. &c.—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

July 7, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I know not that I have any thing to say worth postage, though perhaps, had I seen you before you set off, something might have occurred which will not be found in my letter. Yet I write a line, because you bid me, and are now in a far, foreign country. You will find Mr. —— a man to your tooth, but he is in Mr. W——'s connexion. So I remember venerable Bede, after giving a high character of some contemporary, kicks his full pail of milk down, and reduces him almost to nothing, by adding, in the close, to this purpose: "but, unhappy man, he did not keep Easter our way." A fig for all connexions, say I, and say you, but that which is formed by the bands, joints, and ligaments the apostle speaks of, Eph. iv. 16, *et alibi*. Therefore, I venture to repeat it, that Mr. ——, though he often sees and hears Mr. W——, and I believe loves him well, is a good man; and you will see the invisible mark upon his forehead, if you examine him with your spiritual spectacles.

Now, methinks I do pity you: I see you melted with heat, stifled with smoke, and stunned with noise. Ah! what a change

from the brooks, and bushes, and birds, and green fields, to which you had lately access! Of old they used to retire into the deserts for mortification. If I was to set myself a moderate penance, it might be to spend a fortnight in London in the height of summer. But I forget myself:—I hope the Lord is with you, and then all places are alike. He makes the dungeon and the stocks comfortable (Acts xvi;) yea, a fiery furnace, or a lion's den. A child of God in London seems to be in all these trying situations: but Jesus can preserve his own. I honour the grace of God in those few (comparatively few, I fear) who preserve their garments undefiled in that Sardis. The air is filled with infection, and it is by special power and miraculous preservation they enjoy spiritual health, when so many sicken and fall around them on the right hand and on the left. May the Lord preserve you from the various epidemical soul-diseases which abound where you are, and be your comfort and defence from day to day.

Last week we had a lion in town. I went to see him. He was wonderfully tame; as familiar with his keeper, as docile and obedient as a spaniel. Yet the man told me he had his surly fits, when they durst not touch him. No looking-glass could express my face more justly than this lion did my heart. I could trace every feature: as wild and fierce by nature, yea, much more so; but grace has in some measure tamed me. I know and love my Keeper, and sometimes watch his looks that I may learn his will. But, oh! I have my surly fits too: seasons when I relapse into the savage again, as though I had forgotten all.—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

July 13, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—As we are so soon to meet, and as I have nothing very important to communicate, and many things occur which might demand my time, I have no other plea to offer, either to you or myself, for writing again, but because I love you.

I pity the unknown considerable minister, with whom you smoked your morning-pipe. But we must take men and things as we find them: and when we fall in company with those from whom we can get little other good, it is likely we shall at least find occasion for the exercise of patience and charity towards them, and of thankfulness to Him who hath made us to differ. And these are good things, though, perhaps, his occasion may not be pleasant. Indeed, a christian, if in a right spirit, is always in his Lord's school, and may learn either a new lesson, or how to practise an old one, by every thing

he sees or hears, provided he does not wilfully tread upon forbidden ground. If he were constrained to spend a day with the poor creatures in the common side of Newgate, though he could not talk with them of what God has done for his soul, he might be more sensible of his mercy by the contrast he would observe around him. He might rejoice for himself, and mourn over them, and thus perhaps get as much benefit as from the best sermon he ever heard.

It is necessary, all things taken together, to have connexion more or less with narrow-minded people. If they are, notwithstanding their prejudices, civil to us, they have a right to some civility from us. We may love them, though we cannot admire them, and pick something good from them, notwithstanding we see much to blame. It is, perhaps, the highest triumph we can obtain over bigotry, when we are able to bear with bigots themselves. For they are a set of troublesome folks, whom Mr. Self is often very forward to exclude from the comprehensive candour and tenderness which he professes to exercise towards those who differ from him.

I am glad your present home (a believer should be always at home) is pleasant; the rooms large and airy; your host and hostess kind and spiritual; and, upon the whole, all things as well as you could expect to find them, considering where you are. I could give you much such an account of my usual head-quarters in the city; but still London is London. I do not wish you to live there, for my own sake as well as yours; but if the Lord should so appoint, I believe he can make you easy there, and enable me to make a tolerable shift without you. Yet I certainly should miss you; for I have no person in this neighbourhood with whom my heart so thoroughly unites in spirituals, though there are many whom I love. But conversation with most christians is something like going to court; where, except you are dressed exactly according to a prescribed standard, you will either not be admitted, or must expect to be heartily stared at. But you and I can meet and converse, *sans contrainte*, in an undress, without fear of offending, or being accounted offenders for a word out of place, and not exactly in the pink of the mode.

I know not how it is: I think my sentiments and experience are as orthodox and Calvinistical as need be; and yet I am a sort of speckled bird among my Calvinist brethren. I am a mighty good Churchman, but pass amongst such as a Dissenter in *prunello*. On the other hand, the Dissenters (many of them I mean) think me defective, either in understanding or in conscience, for staying where I am. Well, there is a middle party,

called Methodists, but neither do my dimensions exactly fit with them. I am somehow disqualified for claiming a full brotherhood with any party. But there are a few among all parties who bear with me and love me, and with this I must be content at present. But so far as they love the Lord Jesus, I desire, and by his grace I determine (with or without their leave) to love them all. Party-walls, though stronger than the walls of Babylon, must come down in the general ruin, when the earth and all its works shall be burnt up, if not sooner.—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

July —, 1778.

MY DEAR SIR,—I was glad to hear that you were again within a few miles of me; and I would praise the Lord, who led you out, and brought you home in safety, and preserved all in peace while you were abroad, so that you found nothing very painful to embitter your return. Many go abroad well, but return no more. The affectionate wife, the prattling children, listen for the well-known sound of papa's foot at the door; but they listen in vain: a fall or a fever has intercepted him, and he is gone far, far away. Some leave all well when they go from home; but how changed, how trying the scene when they come back! In their absence, the Lord has taken away the desire of their eyes with a stroke, or perhaps ruffians have plundered and murdered their family in the dead of the night, or the fire devoured their habitation.

Ah! how large and various is the list of evils and calamities with which sin has filled the world! You, and I, and ours escape them: we stand, though in a field of battle, where thousands fall around us, because the Lord is pleased to keep us. May he have the praise, and may we only live to love and serve him.

Mrs. — has been very ill, and my heart often much pained while you have been absent. But the Lord has removed his hand; she is much better, and I hope she will be seen in his house to-morrow. I have few trials in my own person; but when the Lord afflicts her, I feel it. It is a mercy that he has made us one; but it exposes us to many a pain, which we might have missed, if we cared but little for each other. Alas! there is usually an ounce of the golden calf, of idolatry and dependence, in all the warm regard we bear to creatures. *Hinc ille lachrymæ!* For this reason, our sharpest trials usually spring from our most valued comforts.

I cannot come to you: therefore you must

come hither speedily. Be sure to bring Mr. B—— with you. I shall be very glad to see him, and I long to thank him for clothing my book. It looks well on the outside, and I hope to find it sound and savoury. I love the author, and that is a step towards liking the book. For where we love, we are generally tender, and favourably take every thing by the best handle, and are vastly full of candour: but if we are prejudiced against the man, the poor book is half condemned before we open it. It had need be written well, for it will be read with a suspicious eye, as if we wished to find treason in every page. I am glad I diverted and profited you by calling you a speckled bird. I can tell you, such a bird in this day, that wears the full colour of no sect or party, is *rara avis*; if not quite so scarce as the phoenix, yet to be met with but here and there. It is impossible I should be all of a colour, when I have been a debtor to all sorts; and, like the jay in the fable, have been beholden to most of the birds in the air for a feather or two. Church and Meeting, Methodist and Moravian, may all perceive something in my coat taken from them. None of them are angry with me for borrowing from them; but then, why could not I be content with their colour, without going amongst other flocks and coveys, to make myself such a motley figure? Let them be angry; if I have culled the best feathers from all, then surely I am finer than any.—I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

August —, 1778.

DEAR SIR,—If the Lord affords health, if the weather be tolerable, if no unforeseen change takes place, if no company comes in upon me to-night (which sometimes unexpectedly happens,)—with these provisos, Mr. S—— and I have engaged to travel to —— on Monday next, and hope to be with you by or before eleven o'clock.

In such a precarious world, it is needful to form our plans at two days' distance, with precaution and exceptions, James iv. 13. However, if it be the Lord's will to bring us together, and if the purposed interview be for his glory and our good, then I am sure nothing shall prevent it. And who in his right wits would wish either to visit or be visited upon any other terms? O! if we could but be pleased with his will, we might be pleased from morning to night, and every day in the year.

Pray for a blessing upon our coming together. It would be a pity to walk ten miles to pick straws, or to come with our empty vessels upon our heads, saying, we have found no water.—I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

October —, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letters are always welcome; the last doubly so, for being unexpected. If you never heard before of a line of yours being useful, I will tell you for once, that I get some pleasure and instruction whenever you write to me. And I see not but your call to letter-writing is as clear as mine, at least when you are able to put pen to paper.

I must say something to your queries about 2 Sam. xiv. I do not approve of the scholastic distinctions about inspiration, which seem to have a tendency to explain away the authority and certainty of one half of the Bible at least. Though the penmen of the scriptures were ever so well informed of some facts, they would, as you observe, need express, full, and infallible inspiration, to teach them what the Lord would have selected and recorded for the use of the church, amongst many others which to themselves might appear equally important.

However, with respect to historical passages, I dare not pronounce positively that any of them are, even in the literal sense, unworthy of the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, and the dignity of inspiration. Some, yea many of them, have often appeared trivial to me; but I check the thought, and charge it to my own ignorance and temerity. It must have some importance, because I read it in God's book. On the other hand, though I will not deny that they all may have a spiritual and mystical sense (for I am no more qualified to judge of the deep things of the Spirit, than to tell you what is passing this morning at the bottom of the sea;) yet if, with my present modicum of light, I should undertake to expound many passages in a mystical sense, I fear such a judge as you would think my interpretations fanciful, and not well supported. I suppose I should have thought the Bible complete, though it had not informed me of the death of Rebekah's nurse, or where she was buried. But some tell me that Deborah is the law, and that by the oak I am to understand the cross of Christ: and I remember to have heard of a preacher who discovered a type of Christ crucified in Absalom hanging by the hair on another oak. I am quite a mole when compared with these eagle-eyed divines, and must often content myself with plodding upon the lower ground of accommodation and allusion, except when the New-Testament writers assure me what the mind of the Holy Ghost was. I can find the gospel with more confidence in the history of Sarah and Hagar, than in that of Leah and Rachel; though, without Paul's help, I should have considered them both as family-squabbles, recorded chiefly to illustrate the general truth, that vanity and vexation of spirit are incident

to the best men, in the most favoured situations. And I think there is no part of Old-Testament history from which I could not (the Lord helping me) draw observations that might be suitable to the pulpit, and profitable to his people: so I might, perhaps, from Livy or Tacitus. But then with the Bible in my hands, I go upon sure grounds: I am certain of the facts I speak from, that they really did happen. I may likewise depend upon the springs and motives of actions, and not amuse myself and my hearers with speeches which were never spoken, and motives which were never thought of, till the historian rummaged his pericranium for something to embellish his work. I doubt not but, were you to consider Joab's courtly conduct only in a literal sense, how it tallied with David's desire, and how gravely and graciously he granted himself a favour while he professed to oblige Joab: I say, in this view, you would be able to illustrate many important scriptural doctrines, and to show that the passage is important to those who are engaged in studying the anatomy of the human heart.—I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

October 27, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have been witness to a great and important revolution this morning, which took place while the greatest part of the world was asleep. Like many state revolutions, its first beginnings were almost undiscernible; but the progress, though gradual, was steady, and the event decisive. A while ago darkness reigned. Had a man then dropped, for the first time, into our world, he might have thought himself banished into a hopeless dungeon. How could he expect light to rise out of such a state! And when he saw the first glimmering of dawn in the east, how could he promise himself that it was the forerunner of such a glorious sun as has since arisen. With what wonder would such a new corner observe the bounds of his view enlarging, and the distinctness of objects increasing from one minute to another; and how well content would he be to part with the twinklings of the stars, when he had the broad day all around him in exchange! I cannot say this revolution is extraordinary, because it happens every morning; but surely it is astonishing, or rather it would be so, if man was not astonishingly stupid.

Such strangers once were we. Darkness, gross darkness, covered us. How confined were our views! And even the things which were within our reach we could not distinguish. Little did we then think what a glorious day we were appointed to see; what an unbounded prospect would ere long open be-

fore us. We knew not that there was a Sun of righteousness, and that he would dawn, and rise, and shine upon our hearts. And as the idea of what we see now was then hidden from us, so at present we are almost equally at a loss how to form any conception of the stronger light and brighter prospects which we wait and hope for. Comparatively we are in the dark still: at the most, we have but a dim twilight, and see nothing clearly; but it is the dawn of immortality, and a sure presage and earnest of glory.

Thus, at times, it seems, a darkness that may be felt broods over your natural spirits; but when the day-star rises upon your heart, you see and rejoice in his light. You have days as well as nights; and after a few more vicissitudes, you will take your flight to the regions of everlasting light, where your sun will go down no more. Happy you, and happy I, if I shall meet you there, as I trust I shall. How shall we love, and sing, and wonder and praise the Saviour's name.

Last Sunday, a young man died here of extreme old age, at twenty-five. He laboured hard to ruin a good constitution, and unhappily succeeded; yet amused himself with the hopes of recovery almost to the last. We have a sad knot of such poor creatures in this place, who labour to stifle each other's convictions, and to ruin themselves and associates, soul and body. How industriously is Satan served! I was formerly one of his most active under-tempters. Not content with running the broad way myself, I was indefatigable in enticing others; and had my influence been equal to my wishes, I would have carried all the human race with me. And, doubtless, some have perished, to whose destruction I was greatly instrumental, by tempting them to sin, and by poisoning and hardening them with principles of infidelity; and yet I was spared. When I think of the most with whom I spent my unhappy days of ignorance, I am ready to say, I only am escaped alive to tell thee. Surely I have not half the activity and zeal in the service of him who snatched me as a brand out of the burning, as I had in the service of his enemy. Then the whole stream of my endeavours and affections went one way; now my best desires are continually crossed, counteracted, and spoiled, by the sin which dwelleth in me; then the tide of a corrupt nature bore me along, now I have to strive and swim against it. The Lord cut me short of opportunities, and placed me where I could do but little mischief; but had my abilities and occasions been equal to my heart, I should have been a Voltaire and a Tiberius in one character, a monster of profaneness and licentiousness. "O to grace how great a debtor!" A common drunkard or profligate is a petty sinner to what I was. I had the ambition of a Caesar or an Alexander.

der, and wanted to rank in wickedness among the foremost of the human race. When you have read this, praise the Lord for his mercy to the chief of sinners, and pray that I may have grace to be faithful.—But I have rambled. I meant to tell you, that on Sunday afternoon I preached from Ezekiel xxxiii. 10, 11, “Why will ye die!” &c. I endeavoured to show poor sinners, that if they died, it was because they would, and if they would they must. I was much affected for a time: I could hardly speak for weeping, and some wept with me. From some, alas! I can no more draw a tear, or a relenting thought, than from a mill-stone.—I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

November 27, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You are a better expositor of scripture than of my speeches, if you really inferred from my last that I think you shall die soon. I cannot say positively you will not die soon, because life at all times is uncertain; however, according to the doctrine of probabilities, I think, and always thought, you bid fair enough to outlive me. The gloomy tinge of your weak spirits led you to consider yourself much worse in point of health than you appear to me to be.

In the other point I dare be more positive, that die when you will, you will die in the Lord. Of this I have not the least doubt; and I believe you doubt of it less, if possible, than I, except in those darker moments when the atrabilious humour prevails.

I heartily sympathize with you in your complaints; but I see you in safe hands. The Lord loves you, and will take care of you. He who raises the dead, can revive your spirits when you are cast down. He who sets bounds to the sea, and says, “Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further,” can limit and moderate that gloom which sometimes distresses you. He knows why he permits you to be thus exercised. I cannot assign the reasons, but I am sure they are worthy of his wisdom and love, and that you will hereafter see, and say, He has done all things well. If I was as wise as your philosopher, I might say a great deal about a melancholy complexion; but I love not to puzzle myself with second causes, while the first cause is at hand, which sufficiently accounts for every phenomenon in a believer's experience. Your constitution, your situation, your temper, your distemper, all that is either comfortable or painful in your lot, is of his appointment. The hairs of your head are all numbered: the same power which produced the planet Jupiter is necessary to the production of a single hair, nor can one of them fall to the ground without his notice,

any more than the stars can fall from their orbits. In providence, no less than in creation, he is *Maximus in minimis*. Therefore fear not; only believe. Our sea may sometimes be stormy, but we have an infallible pilot, and shall infallibly gain our port.—I am, &c.

LETTER X.

February 23, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—On Saturday, and not before, I heard you had been ill. Had the news reached me sooner, I should have sent you a line sooner. I hope you will be able to inform me that you are now better, and that the Lord continues to do you good by every dispensation he allots you. Healing and wounding are equally from his hand, and equally tokens of his love and care over us. I have but little affliction in my own person, but I have been often chastened of late by proxy. The Lord, for his people's sake, is still pleased to give me health and strength for public service, but when I need the rod he lays it upon Mrs. ———. In this way I have felt much, without being disabled or laid aside. But he has heard prayer for her likewise, and for more than a fortnight past she has been comfortably well. I lay at least one half of her sickness to my own account: she suffers for me, and I through her. It is indeed touching me in a tender part. Perhaps if I could be more wise, watchful, and humble, it might contribute more to the re-establishment of her health than all the medicines she takes.

I somehow neglected to confer with you about the business of the Fast-day. The last of my three sermons, when I had, as I expected, the largest congregation, was a sort of historical discourse, from Deut. xxxii. 15, in which, running over the leading national events from the time of Wickliff, I endeavoured to trace the steps and turns by which the Lord has made us a fat and thriving people, and in the event blessed us beyond his favourite Jeshurun of old, with civil and religious liberty, peace, honour, and prosperity, and gospel-privileges: How fat we were when the war terminated in the year 1763, and how we have kicked, and forsaken the Rock of our salvation of late years. Then followed a sketch of our present state and spirit as a people, both in a religious and political view. I started at the picture while I drew it, though it was a very inadequate representation. We seemed willing to afflict our souls, for one day, as Dr. Lowth reads Isa. lviii. 5. But the next day, things returned into their former channel: the fast and the occasion seemed presently forgotten, except by a few simple souls, who are despised and hated by the rest for their precise-

ness, because they think sin ought to be lamented every day in the year.

Who would envy Cassandra her gift of prophecy upon the terms she had it, that her declarations, however true, should meet with no belief or regard? It is the lot of gospel-ministers, with respect to the bulk of their hearers. But blessed be the grace which makes a few exceptions. Here and there one will hear, believe, and be saved. Every one of these is worth a world, and our success with a few should console us for all our trials.

Come and see us as soon as you can, only not to-morrow, for I am then to go to T——. My Lord, the great Shepherd, has one sheep there, related to the fold under my care. I can seldom see her, and she is very ill. I expect she will be soon removed to the pasture above. Our love to Mrs. B——.— Believe me yours. &c.

LETTER XI.

April 23, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—May I not style myself a friend, when I remember you after an interval of several weeks since I saw you, and through a distance of threescore miles! But the truth is, you have been neither absent nor distant from my heart a day. Your idea has travelled with me: you are a kind of familiar, very often before the eye of my mind. This, I hope, may be admitted as a proof of friendship.

I know the Lord loves you, and you know it likewise: every affliction affords you a fresh proof of it. How wise his management in our trials! How wisely adjusted in season, weight, and continuance, to answer his gracious purposes in sending them! How unspeakably better to be at his disposal than at our own! So you say, so you think, so you find. You trust in him, and shall not be disappointed. Help me with your prayers, that I may trust him too, and be at length enabled to say without reserve, What thou wilt, when thou wilt, how thou wilt. I had rather speak these three sentences from my heart, in my mother-tongue, than be master of all the languages in Europe.—I am yours, &c.

LETTER XII.

August 19, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Among the rest of temporal mercies, I would be thankful for pen, ink, and paper, and the convenience of the post, by which means we can waft a thought to a friend when we cannot get at him. My will has been good to see you, but you must accept the will for the deed. The Lord has not permitted me.

I have been troubled of late with the rheumatism in my left arm. Mine is a sinful,

vile body, and it is a mercy that any part of it is free from pain. It is virtually the seat and subject of all diseases; but the Lord holds them like wild beasts in a chain, under a strong restraint: were that restraint taken off, they would rush upon their prey from every quarter, and seize upon every limb, member, joint, and nerve, at once. Yet, though I am a sinner, and though my whole texture is so frail and exposed, I have enjoyed for a number of years an almost perfect exemption both from pain and sickness. This is wonderful indeed, even in my own eyes.

But my soul is far from being in a healthy state. There I have laboured, and still labour, under a complication of diseases; and, but for the care and skill of an infallible Physician, I must have died the death long ago. At this very moment my soul is feverish, dropsical, paralytic. I feel a loss of appetite, a disinclination both to food and to medicine; so that I am alive by miracle: yet I trust I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. When I faint, he revives me again. I am sure he is able, and I trust he has promised to heal me; but how inveterate must my disease be, that is not yet subdued, even under his management!

Well, my friend, there is a land where the inhabitants shall no more say, I am sick. Then my eyes will not be dim, nor my ear heavy, nor my heart hard.

One sight of Jesus as he is
Will strike all sin for ever dead.

Blessed be his name for this glorious hope! May it cheer us under all our present uneasy feelings, and reconcile us to every cross. The way must be right, however rough, that leads to such a glorious end.

O for more of that gracious influence, which in a moment can make the wilderness-soul rejoice and blossom like the rose! I want something which neither critics nor commentators can help me to. The scripture itself, whether I read it in Hebrew, Greek, French, or English, is a sealed book in all these languages, unless the Spirit of the Lord is present to expound and apply. Pray for me. No prayer seems more suitable to me than that of the psalmist: "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name."—I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

August 28, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I want to hear how you are. I hope your complaint is not worse than when I saw you. I hope you are easier, and will soon find yourself able to move about again. I should be sorry, if to the symptoms of the stone you should have the gout super-added in your right hand, for then you would not be able to write to me.

We go on much as usual, sometimes very poorly, sometimes a little better: the latter is the case to-day. My rheumatism continues, but it is very moderate and tolerable. The Lord deals gently with us, and gives us many proofs that he does not afflict willingly.

The days speed away apace: each one bears away its own burden with it, to return no more. Both pleasures and pains that are past are gone for ever. What is yet future will likewise be soon past. The end is coming. O, to realize the thought, and to judge of things now in some measure suitable to the judgment we shall form of them when we are about to leave them all! Many things which now either elate or depress us, will then appear to be trifles light as air.

One thing is needful: to have our hearts united to the Lord in humble faith; to set him always before us; to rejoice in him as our shepherd and our portion; to submit to all his appointments, not of necessity, because he is stronger than we, but with a cheerful acquiescence, because he is wise and good, and loves us better than we do ourselves; to feed upon his truth; to have our understandings, wills, affections, imaginations, and memory, all filled and impressed with the great mysteries of redeeming love; to do all for him, to receive all from him, to find all in him. I have mentioned many things, but they are all comprised in one, a life of faith in the Son of God. We are empty vessels in ourselves, but we cannot remain empty. Except Jesus dwells in our hearts, and fills them with his power and presence, they will be filled with folly, vanity, and vexation.—I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

Oct. 26, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Being to go out of town to-day, I started up before light to write

to you, and hoped to have sent you a long letter; when, behold! I could not get at any paper. I am now waiting for a peep at Mr. B—— at his lodgings, who came to town last night; and I shall write as fast as I can till I see him.

I feel for you a little in the same way as you feel for yourself. I bear a friendly sympathy in your late sharp and sudden trial. I mourn with that part of you which mourns; but at the same time I rejoice in the proof you have, and which you give, that the Lord is with you of a truth. I rejoice on your account, to see you supported and comforted, and enabled to say, He has done all things well. I rejoice on my own account. Such instances of his faithfulness and all-sufficiency are very encouraging. We must all expect hours of trouble in our turn. We must all feel in our concerns the vanity and uncertainty of creature-comforts. What a mercy it is to know from our own past experience, and to have it confirmed to us by the experience of others, that the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and that he knoweth them that trust in him. Creatures are like candles, they waste while they afford us a little light, and we see them extinguished in their sockets one after another. But the light of the sun makes amends for them all. The Lord is so rich that he easily can, so good that he certainly will give his children more than he ever will take away. When his gracious voice reaches the heart, it is I, be not afraid; be still, and know that I am God; when he gives us an impression of his wisdom, power, love, and care, then the storm which attempts to rise in our natural passions is hushed into a calm; the flesh continues to feel, but the spirit is made willing. And something more than submission takes place,—a sweet resignation and acquiescence, and even a joy that we have any thing which we value, to surrender to his call.—I am yours, &c.

DISCOURSES, OR SERMONS,

AS INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT.

— Στόλος και ιδρυσιμα της αληθειας. Και ολολογουμινας μεγα ιστι το της ιουσιζιας μυστηριου Θεου ιστιζαθη εν σαρκει.—1 TIM. iii. 15, 16.

PREFACE.

THE following Discourses were drawn up about twelve months since, when I expected a speedy opportunity of delivering them from the pulpit. As the views I then had are now over-ruled, I take this method of laying them before the public; that those who have thought proper to foretell the part I would have acted, and the doctrine I would have taught, if my desires had taken place, may be either satisfied or silenced.

Yet I should not have thought it worth my while, to give either myself or others this trouble, merely for my own vindication. Attempts of this kind usually imply too much of a man's importance to himself, to be either acceptable or successful. Or, at best, it can be a point of no great moment to my real happiness, what the few persons to whom my little name is known, are pleased to say or think of me. Nothing but great inattention to our true circumstances, can afford us leisure either to censure others, or to justify ourselves; unless when the interests of religion or morality are evidently concerned. A few years will fix and determine our characters beyond all possibility of mistake; and till then it would be vain to hope for it.

The true reasons, therefore, of this publication are, the importance of the subjects treated of; and the probability that, upon this occasion, many persons who have not yet considered them with the attention they deserve, may be induced (some from a motive of friendship, and others from curiosity) to read what might appear in my name, the rather for being mine.

Had I written with a design to print, I should have chosen to put my sentiments in another form; and perhaps a desire to avoid the censure of severe critics, would have made me more solicitous about expression and method. But as I profess to publish not what I might, but what I really would have spoken, I could not allow myself to deviate from my first draught, except in a few places where I thought the sense entangled, ambiguous, or defective. For the same reason, I am forced to decline the judgment and correction of my friends, the advantages of which, as well as my own great need of them, I have more than once experienced.

If there is found in some places a coincidence of thought or expression, I hope it will be excused; as I had not the least apprehension, at the time of composing, that what I designed for distinct and separate occasions, would ever appear abroad in one view.

In a word, so far as these Essays are mine, I entreat a candid perusal; and that those who read them in order to form their judgment of the author, do not make their estimate from a sentence here and there, but have the patience to read them throughout. So far as what they contain is agreeable to scripture, reason, and experience, any apology would be impertinent. In this case they deserve attention. Every particle of truth is valuable in itself, by whatever means or instruments it may be conveyed to us; and, like a torch, displays itself by its own light, without any relation to the hand that bears it.

Liverpool, January 1, 1760.

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DISCOURSES, &c.

SERMON I.

ON THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.—Jer. xvii. 9, 10.

THE prophet Jeremiah had a hard task. He was appointed to inculcate unwelcome truths upon a vain, insensible people. He had the grief to find all his expostulations and warnings, his prayers and tears, had no other effect than to make them account him their enemy, and to draw reproach and persecution upon himself. He lived to see the accomplishment of his own predictions; to see the land of his nativity desolated, the city destroyed, the people almost extirpated, and the few who remained, transported into a distant country, to end their days in captivity.

Those who have resolved, honestly and steadily, to declare the word of the Lord, have, in all ages, found a part of his trial: the message they have had to deliver has been disagreeable and disregarded. It is no hard matter to frame discourses that shall meet with some degree of general approbation; nor is it difficult to foresee the reception which plain truth must often meet with: but those who undertake a charge must perform it; and ministers are bound to declare to the people every thing that regards their welfare, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. If the watchman sees the danger coming, and does not blow the trumpet, to give the most public notice possible, he is answerable for all the evils that may follow. This is applied as a caution to the prophet Ezekiel; and undoubtedly, every one who administers in holy things is concerned in it. "So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand," *Ezek. xxxiii.* Let this awful passage plead

our excuse, if at any time we seem too urgent, or too plain, in our discourses. Too plain or urgent we cannot be. Our business is most important; opportunities are critical and precious. It is at the hazard of our souls if we speak deceitfully; and at the hazard of yours, if we speak in vain.

In the preceding verses, the prophet gives us a striking image of the opposition between the righteous and the wicked, in their present state, their hopes, and their end. The one is compared to a tree; the other to heath and stubble: the one planted by streams of water; the other, exposed on the salt burning desert: the one, green, flourishing, all full of fruit; the other, parched and withering. The hope of the one is fixed on the Lord, the all-sufficient, the almighty God; the rash dependence of the other, on a frail, feeble arm of flesh. Suitable to this difference is their end: the one, blessed, provided against all evil, so that he shall not be careful in the year of drought; the other, cursed, and cut off from the expectations of any amendment. "He shall not see when good cometh." The immediate design was perhaps to show the Jews, that there was no way to avert the judgments of God, and to avoid the impending evils which threatened them, but by returning to the Lord, who had begun to smite, and who alone was able to heal them. But this they refused. They preferred their own contrivances: they leaned upon an arm of flesh; sometimes upon Egypt, sometimes upon Assyria: one while presuming upon force; another while upon cunning. They were fruitful in expedients, and when one broken cistern failed them, they had recourse to another. But the prophet denounces the curse of God both on them and their supports; subjoining the words of my text, which may be understood, either as a farther proof of what he had

said, or an assigned cause of that obstinacy and perverseness he had complained of; "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it!"

But, without confining the words to the first occasion of their delivery, I shall consider them, as teaching us a doctrine abundantly confirmed by many other passages of scripture, "that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked;" which I shall endeavour to illustrate in a plain familiar way. I shall, secondly, from the next verse, enforce this observation, that the heart (bad as it is) is incessantly under the divine inspection and examination; "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins." I shall, thirdly, consider the issue and design of this inquest; that every man may, in the end, receive according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. And may the Lord enable us so to try and examine ourselves here, that hereafter we may be found unblameable and without rebuke before him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I. The heart is here characterised, first, As deceitful, and that above, or in all things: secondly, As desperately wicked; in so dangerous, so deplorable a state, as is not to be conceived or found out. "Who can know it!" The word in the original [שָׁרָר] which we translate *desperately wicked*, signifies a mortal, incurable disease: a disease which, seizing on the vitals, affects and threatens the whole frame; and which no remedy can reach. This idea leads us to that first transgression, whereby man departing from God, fatally destroyed his soul's health, and sunk into that state so pathetically described by Isaiah, chap. i. "The whole head is sick," all the powers of the understanding disordered; "and the whole heart faint," all the springs of the affections enfeebled. "From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness, but wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores:" the evil growing worse continually, and no help or helper at hand: "they have not been closed nor bound up, nor mollified with ointment." In consequence of this deep-rooted disorder, the heart is deceitful; that is, it deceives and fails us in every instance; it promises more than it can perform; it misleads us with vain desires; and mocks us with unsuccessful efforts; like the faint attempts of a sick man, to perform those actions which require a state of sound health and strength. That this is indeed the case, will (I think) appear from the following particulars; to which I entreat your attention.

Scripture and reason do jointly assure us, that all we see is the work of an Almighty Being.—The heavens and the earth, the sun, moon, and stars, and even the grass and flowers of the field, loudly proclaim the presence, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God: yet behold the extreme insen-

sibility of man! The wisest of our species, in those places where divine revelation was not known, ever mistook the effect for the cause, and ascribed that honour to the creature which is due only to the Creator. This was the very best of the case; for, in general, they sunk still lower to worship stocks and stones: nay, to the eternal reproach of the natural understanding in the things of God, the more civilized any nation was, the more renowned for arts and arms, the farther they were removed from those they termed barbarians, so much the more vile and contemptible the idolatry they established generally proved. The wisdom of the Egyptians paid divine honours to cats, monkeys, and the vilest reptiles. The fine taste of the Greeks consecrated those for gods, who, if they had lived amongst men, would have been deemed the pests of society; gods who were, professedly, both patterns and patrons of the most shameful vices. The prowess of the Romans established altars to fear and paleness. So deeply were they infatuated, so totally lost to common sense, that the apostle Paul's worst enemies could find no more plausible accusation against him, in one of the politest cities then in the world, than that he had ventured to affirm, "they were no gods who were made with hands."

Thus stood the case with heathens: let us now come nearer home. It is to be feared, the greatest difference between them and the generality of us called Christians is, that we do not partake in their gross outward idolatry. In other respects, our insensibility is perhaps as much greater than theirs, as our superior knowledge renders it more inexcusable. We acknowledge a God: that there is but one; that he is the cause of all things; that in him we live and move, and have our being. Had the poor heathens known this, we may judge by their application to their mistaken worship, it would have had some influence on their practice. But what numbers of us live altogether as "without God in the world." I come not here to make invectives; let conscience judge and give evidence accordingly. What do we think of the perpetual presence of God around us, and within us? We know that he is acquainted with all our thoughts, words, and actions; yet are we not more effectually restrained and awed by the presence of our fellow-worms, than by the regard of that eye which is ten thousand times brighter than the sun! How are we affected by the works of God? Has not the appearance of a fine day, or the beauty of an extensive prospect, a force to extort a sense of satisfaction from every one? but how few are there of us that can realize and acknowledge the hand of the glorious author of these things! How seldom, and how faintly, do we adopt the reflection of David! "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,

the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?" Psal. viii. What is our judgment of the word of God, that glorious message of love, in which he has pointed out to us the way of salvation? Is not this book the least read, the least admired, and the least understood of any? We are presently affected, we enter with all our spirit into the moving incidents (as we term them) of a romance or tragedy, though we know they are not founded on truth, nor have any relation to ourselves; but we can read the history of Jesus Christ, his life and doctrines, his death and passion, with indifference, though we say, all he spoke, or did, or suffered, was for our sakes. What are our thoughts of that eternity to which we are posting, and to which, for aught we know, a few hours may introduce us? Is it not in the power of the merest trifle that occurs, to hide this important point from our view? It were easy to multiply particulars: but are not these sufficient to show the deceitfulness, the desperate wickedness of the heart? Let me add one more: the judgments of God are now abroad in the world for these things. We have warnings all around us. We know that many fruitful lands in our neighbourhood are in a manner turned into a wilderness, for the sins of the inhabitants. Every post brings us tidings of some new desolation, and we cannot tell how soon the case may be our own; but we have neither sympathy for our fellow-creatures nor concern for ourselves. We hear, we pity, we forget in the same instant: but these things are remote. Is, then, what we see and feel more laid to heart? Our friends and acquaintance are taken from amongst us daily, some of them suddenly, in the midst of their warmest pursuits, or just upon the accomplishment of their most favourite schemes: we drop an unmeaning tear, and fly to every officious vanity for relief. Perhaps we are visited ourselves, and brought down to the borders of the grave; but even against this we are, for the most part, proof, or, if we feel a slight impression, it gradually wears off with the disease, and we return, as soon as we recover, to our former follies with redoubled ardour.

This is a slight view of the insensibility of the human heart: let us now consider its ingratitude. The Israelites were a sample of all mankind in this respect. God visited them in Egypt in the midst of their affliction. Without any application on their part, he undertook and effected their deliverance: he brought them from among their enemies "with a high hand, and a stretched-out arm;" he led them safely through the wilderness; he screened them with a cloud, from the piercing beams of the sun; he gave them light by night, in a pillar of fire; he fed them with bread

from heaven, and caused streams to flow in the sandy desert; he made a covenant with them, and chose them for his peculiar people; he destroyed all their enemies before them; and, at length, put them in the full and peaceable possession of a land flowing with milk and honey. Interwoven with the history of God's gracious dealings with them, we have an account of their behaviour towards him, which was a continual series of rebellion, perverseness, murmuring, and disobedience. And are we better than they? In no wise. If we had leisure to consider the natural, civil, and religious advantages we enjoy as a nation, it would appear that we likewise have long been a peculiarly favoured people. The eye of the Lord our God has been upon us continually for good, and we have reason to say, "He has not dealt so with any nation." The history of all ages and countries affords us no instance of national prosperity that can be compared, either for degree or continuance, with what we have enjoyed since the Revolution: nor would it be easy, I fear, to find a parallel in any history of our great ingratitude. What I have said in the former article will necessarily infer this; for it is impossible that those who have so little sensibility, either of the value of the gifts of God, or of his hand in bestowing them, can be grateful. The seat of ingratitude is in the heart: the proof appears in words and actions. Now, what are the prevailing subjects of conversation amongst us? Are the great things that God has done for us, the high obligations we are under to him, the comforts of our holy religion, and the nature of that blessed hope set before us by the gospel, in the number? On the contrary, is not the least hint of these things in company, for the most part, received with reserve, if not with contempt and disgust? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." God, and the things of God, have little place there; but levity, detraction, ill-temper, and, not seldom, profaneness and obscenity, in our discourses, too plainly discover the nature of the fountain from whence they flow. And if we look upon the actions of men in general, they are but of a piece with their words; engrossed by business, or enslaved to pleasure; for a season all upon the stretch in amassing treasures, and then perhaps as restless and eager to dissipate them. Whatever passion rules them for the time, or whatever changes they may admit in their schemes, it is too plain, that a principle of gratitude to God, and a conscious desire to please him, have little influence either in forming or executing their plans. If these things are so, we have another instance of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart: it is full of the blackest ingratitude.

Need any thing be added to these two charges? Have we not said enough to con-

firm the prophet's assertion? If not, we can name a third particular, if possible, more absurd and inexcusable than either of the former. Man is not only insensible of the greatest part of those things which most concern him, and ungrateful and disobedient to his maker and preserver, his best and only friend, but he is proud too. Though he has nothing but what he has received, has received nothing but what he has perverted and mismanaged, and must render a strict account of his mismanagement, yet he is proud. We have already seen his blindness and baseness; there wanted only pride to make him a monster indeed. And need we spend time to prove this? No. This at least is a universal evil. Any man may easily perceive it in every man but himself; and every thinking man may perceive it working within himself incessantly. Whether we are alone or in company, whether with friends or enemies, with those above us or those below us, pride will insinuate. Nay, in the immediate presence of God, when we come together to implore his mercy, while the most bumbling confessions are upon our lips, and we are charging ourselves as most miserable, helpless sinners, even here pride will find us out. Those must be great strangers to themselves, who are not sensible of this. Now, why is dust and ashes proud? proud of our failings! proud of our infirmities! Is it not from hence, because the heart is deplorably diseased, desperately wicked, and deeply deceitful?

I shall pursue this point no farther. I shall not attempt to enumerate, at present, those "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, and blasphemies" (Mark vii. 21.) which, our Lord assures us, do perpetually "proceed from the heart." I chose to insist on insensibility, ingratitude, and pride, because these are the vices which, in common life, we most condemn, are willing to think ourselves most free from, and can the least bear to be charged with. And it must be allowed, that between man and man there is often the appearance of much generosity, gratitude, and condescension; but what will it avail us, that we stand upon some tolerable terms towards each other in these respects, if we are guilty before God? "The Lord seeth not as man seeth" (1 Sam. xvi. 7:) he cannot be deceived or put off with a fair appearance; for he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. This is the next point to be considered.

U. That the heart, with all its workings, all its faults, is incessantly under the divine inspection and examination: "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins." The words, search the heart, I try the reins, as distinguished in scripture, signify those different powers of the affections and the thoughts.

They have an emphasis

in the original, which cannot be reached without a paraphrase, if at all.

The Lord searches [חַקֵּךְ] the heart: he traces, investigates the inmost principle of our souls to its first rise, with, if I may so speak, a mathematical accuracy. He tries [כַּחֲ] the reins: he watches every rising thought; he brings it to the test of his most pure law; he examines it with the utmost exactness, as a refiner assays his metals, with a purpose to reject whatever is inferior to the prescribed standard. To form a more just idea of this scrutiny, let us ask ourselves how we could bear to be obliged to declare aloud, in full company, every thought which passes through our minds, every wish and desire of which we are conscious, without the least reserve or exception? I am persuaded there are few people so lost to shame, but, if they were brought to this trial, they would rather choose to die than to comply with it. Some things they would perceive, especially upon such a provocation, which they could hardly, upon any terms, prevail with themselves to express. The Lord has mercifully kept us from the knowledge of each other's hearts, any farther than we are willing to disclose ourselves; for, were every man compelled to speak all he thinks, there would be an end of society; and man would no more venture to dwell with man than with tigers and bears. We know what mischief one ungoverned tongue may sometimes occasion: now, the tongue can do no evil, any farther than as it is an instrument of disclosing the hidden things of the heart; yet it is but a small part of these the worst tongue is capable of disclosing. What, then, would be the case, if all our hearts were open, all our desires known to one another? What a mixture of confusion and defiance, shame, rage, fear, and contempt, would overspread every countenance! and yet thus we are exposed to the searching eye of a pure and holy God! The Lord knows the thoughts of man's heart, that they are vain. He long ago declared the result of his observation: "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," Gen. vi. And though the world was drowned for this, matters were not mended afterwards; for, upon a second survey, the judgment amounts to the same: "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips." Psalm xiv. Isaiah liv. Compare Romans iii. How it was in our blessed Saviour's time, we have already observed; and neither scripture nor

experience gives us reason to hope it has been better since, or is now. The apostle Paul has assured us, "That, in the last days" (a character which, it is likely, coincides with our days) "perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof," 2 Tim. iii.—Surely, I say, if these are marks of the last days, they must be already commenced. However, we see, upon the whole, how vile and hateful our hearts must appear in the sight of a heart-searching God.

III. One thing more we have to consider: That the Lord does not observe the heart of man with the indifference of a mere spectator, but as an impartial and inflexible judge; "that he may give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." This was the third particular to be spoken to.

But, alas! what can be said to this? Is it not sufficient to fill our souls with astonishment, and to cause all faces to gather blackness, to hear, that the Lord has purposed to render to every man according to his works; and that he sits judge, not only upon outward actions, but examines the very thoughts and intents of the heart? Dare any of us abide the issue of such a trial? Which of us will presume to say, I am clean! To what purpose can any of us plead, I have not committed adultery, if God charges us with every inordinate desire, with every offence of the eye? What will it avail, that we have never assaulted the life of our neighbour, if every angry word, every degree of ill-will or revenge, is considered as murder in God's sight? It will not suffice to say, I am no thief or extortioner, unless we can clear ourselves of the most distant wish of possessing what was the property of another. If we are sure that we have not forsworn ourselves, but have performed to the Lord our oaths, it is only thus far well, that we shall not be condemned for open and actual perjury: but if we have at any time mentioned, or even thought of the name of God, without the highest habitual reverence, we have taken his name in vain; and he has declared he will not hold us guiltless. That this is no gloss of my inventing, but the very words of truth, the declaration of him by whom we must be one day judged, the 5th chapter of Matthew will inform you. There a wanton glance is styled adultery; an angry expression censured as murder; and to speak unadvisedly even of the hairs of our head, is deemed a branch of profane swearing. And why? because all these spring from the

heart, which is "naked and open," without either covering or concealment, "in the sight of him with whom we have to do," Heb. iv. This is thought uncomfortable doctrine; and not without reason, could we go no farther. For there is nothing in heaven or in earth, in time or eternity, that affords the least glimpse of comfort to fallen man, if either God is strict to mark what is amiss, or if he, trusting in himself, presumes to plead with his Maker. The divine law requires perfect, unremitted, unsinning obedience; it denounces a curse upon the least failure; "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" (Gal. iii. 10;) every one, without exception of person or circumstance, that continueth not, from the beginning to the end of life, in all things, great and small, to do them, *τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά*, to finish them, to do them completely, without any defect either in matter or manner. Most uncomfortable doctrine indeed, were there no remedy provided. For the law of God is as eternal and unchangeable as his nature: it must not, it cannot be attempered or brought down to our capacities; neither can the penalty be evaded: for the God of truth has said, has sworn, that "the soul that sinneth shall die," Ezek. xviii. 4. Here, then, we must receive "a sentence of death in ourselves," 2 Cor. i. 9. Here, "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God," Rom. iii. 19. Here we must say, with the apostle, "Therefore, by the deeds of the law, there shall be no flesh justified in his sight;" (Gal. ii. 16;) "for by the law is the knowledge of sin," Rom. iii. 20. O that we could all sincerely say so; that we were brought to this, to feel and confess our lost, undone estate, and our utter inability to save ourselves! then with joy should I proceed to what I have had in my eye all along. For with what view have I said so much upon so disagreeable a subject! why have I attempted to lay open some of the depths of the heart? but that I might more fully illustrate the wonderful grace and goodness of God, vouchsafed to us in the gospel; and at the same time show the utter impossibility, not of being saved at all, but of finding salvation in any other way than in that which God has appointed. For, behold! God so loved the world (John iii.) that he sent his Son to accomplish that for us, which the law could not do through the weakness of our flesh, Rom. viii. Jesus Christ performed perfect obedience to the law of God in our behalf; he died, and satisfied the penalty due to our sins; he rose from the grave as our representative; he is entered into heaven as our forerunner. "He has received gifts for men, even for the rebellious," Psalms lxxviii. He is "exalted" on high, "to bestow repentance and remission of sins" (Acts v.) on all that seek to him. He has

established his ordinances for this purpose: he has commanded his people not to neglect the assembling of themselves together. He has charged his ministers at such seasons to declare first the guilty, deplorable condition of mankind, and then to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation, by faith which is in him. He has promised to be with them in this work to the end of the world. He has promised, that where his word is faithfully preached, he will accompany it with a spirit and power that will bear down all opposition. He has promised, that while we are speaking to the ear, he will, by his secret influence, apply it to the heart, and open it to receive and embrace the truth spoken, as in the case of Lydia. Who would venture to preach a doctrine so unpalatable to the carnal mind, as Jesus Christ, and him crucified? Who would undertake so ungrateful a task as to depreciate that noble creature man, and arraign him publicly of insensibility, ingratitude, pride, and deceit; were it not that we have, first, a command, and that, at our peril, to speak plain; and, secondly, a promise that we shall not speak in vain? Not that we can expect to be universally received: The time is come, when many "will not endure sound doctrine;" (2 Tim. iv. 3;) but some there will be, whom God is pleased to save by the foolishness of preaching, so called. Some such I would hope are in this assembly. To such I say, think not to satisfy the divine justice by any poor performances of your own; think not to cleanse or expiate the evil of your hearts by any of your own inventions; but, "behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world," John i. 29. He died, that you may live: he lives, that you may live for ever. Put, therefore, your trust in the Lord; for with him is plenteous redemption. His sufferings and death are a complete final propitiation for sin. "He is able to save to the uttermost;" and he is as willing as he is able. It was this brought him down from heaven; for this he emptied himself of all glory, and submitted to all indignity. His humiliation expiates our pride; his perfect love atones for our ingratitude; his exquisite tenderness pleads for our insensibility. Only believe; commit your cause to him by faith and prayer. As a Priest, he shall make atonement for your sins, and present your persons and your services acceptable before God. As a Prophet, he shall instruct you in the true wisdom, which maketh wise to salvation; he shall not only cause you to know his commandments, but to love them too; he shall write them in your hearts. As a King, he shall evermore mightily defend you against all your enemies. He shall enable you to withstand temptations, to support difficulties, to break through all opposition. He shall supply you with every thing you need, for this life or a better, out of the unsearchable

riches of his grace. He shall strengthen you to overcome all things; to endure to the end; and then he shall give you a place in his kingdom; a seat near his throne; a crown of life; a crown of glory, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

SERMON II.

ON THE SAVIOUR AND HIS SALVATION.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.—1 Tim. i. 15.

THOUGH the apostle Paul has written largely and happily upon every branch of christian doctrine and practice; and with respect to his writings, as well as his preaching, could justly assert, that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God; yet there are two points which seem to have been (if I may so speak) his favourite topics, which he most frequently repeats, most copiously insists on, and takes every occasion of introducing. The one is, to display the honours, powers, and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ; the other, to make known the great things God had done for his own soul. How his heart was filled and fired with the first of these, is evident from almost every chapter of his Epistles. When he speaks of the mystery of godliness, "God manifested in the flesh," and the exceeding grace and love declared to a lost world through him, the utmost powers of language fall short of his purpose. With a noble freedom he soars beyond the little bounds of criticism; and, finding the most expressive words too weak and faint for his ideas, he forms and compounds new ones, heaps one hyperbole upon another; yet, after his most laboured essays to do justice to his subject, he often breaks off in a manner that shows he was far from being satisfied with all he could say. This reflection is most obvious to those who can read him in the original; but no disadvantages of a translation can wholly confine that inimitable ardour with which he seems to pour his whole soul into his words, when he is speaking of his Lord and Saviour. And he who can read the first chapters of his epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews, the second to the Philippians, or many similar passages, with indifference, must be, I say, not merely a person of small devotion, but of little taste and sensibility.

And how deeply his mind was impressed with the mercies he had received in his conversion and call, is equally conspicuous. He takes every occasion to aggrandize the goodness of God to himself; to exaggerate and

deplore the guilt and misery of his former life, in which he once trusted; and to lament the small returns he was able to make for such blessings; even when he could say, without boasting, that he had "laboured more abundantly" than the most diligent and zealous of his fellow-servants.

A powerful abiding sense of these two points upon the apostle's mind, have given rise to many sudden, lively, and beautiful digressions in the course of his writings. The context to the passage I have read is of this kind. Having incidentally spoken of the gospel in the 11th verse, he is suddenly struck with the reflection of his own misery while ignorant of it, and the wonderful goodness of God, in affording him the knowledge of salvation, and honouring him, who was before a blasphemer, with a commission to publish the same glad tidings to others. This thought suspends his argument, and fills his heart and mouth with praise. And having acknowledged, that "the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant" towards himself, he subjoins the words of the text, for an encouragement to others; assuring us, that his case was not so peculiar, but that multitudes might be partakers with him in the same hope of mercy.

The words easily resolve into two parts:

1st, A short, but comprehensive proposition, including the purport of the whole gospel, "That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

2d, A commendation of this doctrine in a twofold respect, "as a faithful saying," and as "worthy of all acceptation;" each of these illustrated by the instance of himself, when he adds, "of whom I am chief."

I. The apostle well knew the different reception the gospel would meet in the world; that many poor, guilty souls, trembling under a sense of sin and unworthiness, would very hardly be persuaded, that such sinners as they could be saved at all. To these he recommends it as "a faithful saying," founded upon the immutable counsel, promise, and oath of God, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;" sinners in general; "the chief of sinners;" such as he represents himself to have been. He knew likewise, that many others, from a mistaken opinion of their own goodness, or a mistaken dependence on something of their own choosing, would be liable to undervalue this faithful saying. For the sake of these he adds, "it is worthy of all acceptation." None are so bad but the gospel affords them a ground of hope; none are so good as to have any just ground of hope without it. There was a time when St. Paul could have made a fair profession of himself likewise; he could say, "circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee, as to the righteousness which is by the law, blameless," Phil. iii.

But he has been since taught, "to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ;" and is content to style himself the chief of sinners.

Having thus attempted to show the design and meaning of the words, I propose, somewhat more at large, to unfold the proposition, and point out some of those important and extensive truths it contains. I say some of them; for it is not possible that either men or angels can fully sound the depth of this one sentence, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." I shall afterwards infer, and enforce the other part of the text, "that it is indeed a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation." And may He, who came into the world to procure salvation for sinners, and is now exalted on high to bestow it, accompany the whole with his promised blessing.

The tenor of the proposition readily suggests three inquiries: 1st, Who this person is, here spoken of, Jesus Christ? 2d, What is meant by the salvation he is said to have undertaken? 3d, By what means he effected it?

Let us, first, speak of this gracious, this wonderful person, Jesus Christ. We already bear his name as professed Christians; and we speak of him as our Master, and our Lord; and so far we say well. But, as he has told us, many will call him Lord at the great day, to whom he will profess, "I never knew you whence you are, depart;" so it is to be feared there are many now, that outwardly acknowledge him, who neither know whence he is, nor who he is. Though we have Moses and the prophets, the apostles and evangelists, continually with us; though it is the immediate aim and intent of all their writings, in every history, promise, prophecy, type, ceremony, and law, to set him before our eyes; and though there is hardly an image in the material creation but is adopted by the scriptures to shadow forth his excellency; ignorance of Jesus Christ, and what he has done for his people, is the great cause that religion appears so low and contemptible to some, and is found so tedious and burdensome by others. Let us, therefore, attend to the record God has given of his Son; for I propose in this article to say little of my own, but to lay before you the express, powerful, indubitable testimony of holy scripture.

And here we are taught, first, That Jesus Christ is God. The first words of St. John's Gospel are full to this point: "In the beginning" (that is, at the commencement of time and things, when as yet nothing else existed) "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." To prevent a possibility of mistake, and to confirm the eternity of this divine Word in the strongest manner, it is immediately added, "The same was in the beginning with God: all

things were made by him." And lest this likewise should either be contested or misunderstood, it is guarded by an universal negative, "without him was not any thing made that was made." Farther, to prevent, if possible, the surmise that, in these glorious works, the eternal Word acted with a deputed power only, the apostle subjoins, "In him was life," life essentially; and from him, as the fountain, life and light proceeded to his creatures: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." To this agrees the declaration of St. Paul, "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him;" by his power and wisdom, and for his glory and pleasure. "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." Col. i. Elsewhere he speaks of him expressly, as "over all God blessed for ever; who upholdeth all things by the word of his power; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." It were easy to enlarge this way; but I shall content myself with observing this general proof of the divinity of Christ, that the scriptures, which were given to make us wise to salvation, do ascribe to him the names of God, particularly Jehovah; the essential attributes of God, such as eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence; the peculiar works of God, as creation, providence, redemption, and forgiveness of sin; and, finally, commands us to pay him those divine honours, and to rely on him with that absolute dependence, which would be idolatry if referred anywhere below the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth.

Again, we learn from scripture, that Christ is truly and properly *Man*. This is indeed wonderful! therefore styled, "the great mystery of godliness," 1 Tim. iii. But that he of whom we have begun to speak is the very person who came into the world to save sinners, we have abundant proof. The apostle John, whose testimony we have already cited, says, a few verses lower, (John i. 14.) "And the Word" (that glorious Word, which was God with God) "was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory;" (that is, we his disciples, whose eyes were spiritually enlightened, for the world in general saw nothing of it;) "as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In other places it is said, "Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses, (Matthew viii. 16.) and "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin," Heb. iv. 15. "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same," Heb. ii. 14. "In the fulness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman," Gal. iv. Many are the mistakes of mortals, and wide the extremes into which mistaken mortals run. Some have rashly ven-

tured to deny our Lord's divinity; some have wildly and fancifully explained away his humanity; but may we, through grace, abide by the scriptural truth, and be directed in the midst of the path of judgment.

From this mystical union of the divine and human nature in one person, the scriptures speak of him, thirdly, under the character of a *Mediator*, the "one mediator between God and man." To this idea the names *Jesus Christ*, which are as ointment poured forth, direct us in their original import. The former, which signifies the *Saviour*, pointing out the success and efficacy of his undertaking; the latter, which is the same with *Messiah* or the *Anointed*, expressing both his divine appointment thereto, and the complete supply of all grace and power, wherewith he was filled for the discharge of it. Thus much for the person spoken of.

We proceed, in the next place, to consider the design of his appearance in the world, "to save sinners." And as the idea of deliverance presupposes a state of distress, it will be necessary previously to inquire into the condition of those whom he came to save, which is indeed emphatically implied in the appellation given them, sinners. Man having broken that law under which he was created, and with which his happiness was closely connected, fell under accumulated ruin. The image of God, in which he was formed, was defaced, and a far different image set up in his heart, even of him who had seduced him from his allegiance; darkness in the understanding, rebellion in the will, sensuality in the affections; the justice of God threatening a penalty he could neither satisfy nor sustain; the commandments of God still challenging an obedience he had no longer any power to yield. The very gifts and bounties of God, with which he was encompassed, designed not only for his comfort, but his instruction, to lead him, as by so many steps, to their gracious author, became eventually the occasions of withdrawing him farther from his duty, and increasing as well as aggravating his ingratitude. Thus stood man towards his Maker. With regard to his fellow-creatures, self-love and inordinate desires having raised a variety of interfering interests in the breasts of all, peace withdrew from the earth. Every man's heart and hand was set against his neighbour, and violence, rage, envy, and confusion overspread the world. Nor could he be easier in himself: hurried by restless desires towards things either unsatisfying or unattainable, haunted with cares, tortured with pains, tired with opposition, shocked with disappointment; conscience, like the hand that appeared at Belshazzar's feast, (Daniel v.) writing bitter things against him, when outward circumstances allowed a short repose, and vanity, like a worm, destroying the root of every flower that promised the

fairest bloom of success. Behold a few outlines of the picture of fallen man! miserable in his life, more miserable in the continual dread of losing such a life; miserable most of all, that neither his fancy can feign, nor his fear conceive, the consequences of the death he dreads, which will introduce him to the immediate presence, to the tribunal, of an incensed, almighty, ever-living God!

Such was the state from which Jesus Christ came to save us. He came to restore us to the favour of God; to reconcile us to ourselves and to each other; to give us peace and joy in life, hope and triumph in death, and after death, glory, honour, and immortality. For he came not merely to repair, and to restore, but to exalt; not only "that we might have life," the life we had forfeited, but "that we might have it more abundantly;" (John x.) that our happiness might be more exalted, our title more firm, and our possession more secure, than the state of Adam in paradise could boast, or than his posterity could have attained unto, if he had continued unsinning upon the tenor of the first covenant.

Now, could we suppose it possible that a set of innocent beings, without any default of their own, had sunk into a state of misery, we must confess it would have been great grace and favour in the Lord Jesus to save them. But let us not forget the stress laid in the text upon the word sinners. He came to save, not the unfortunate, but the ungodly, Rom. v. How, then, should every heart glow with love to him, who hath thus loved us! If any of us can hear or speak of this subject with indifference or disgust, it is to be feared we are quite strangers to the nature or the necessity of that salvation with which God has graciously visited his people. Let us no more usurp the sacred words of generosity, sensibility, or gratitude, if this astonishing instance of divine goodness leaves us cold and unimpressed; especially if to this we join the consideration of the third point I proposed to speak of, By what means Jesus Christ effected this salvation for sinners.

In the passage before us, it is only said, that he came into the world on this account; which teaches us, this was the sole design of his advent; and that, coming on set purpose for this, he would leave nothing undone that was necessary to accomplish it. He emptied himself of that divine glory and honour he possessed with the Father from eternity. "He bowed the heavens, and came down" to our earth; and that not with an external glory, as a celestial messenger, to constrain the attention and homage of mankind, "but was made of a woman;" (Gal. iv.) not of high and noble extraction in the judgment of men, "but in the form of a servant;" born in a stable, laid in a manger, brought

up in an obscure and contemptible place, and reputed no higher than the son of a carpenter. "He was despised and rejected of men; there was no form or comeliness in him," (Isa. liii.) to attract a general regard; on the contrary, "he came to his own, and his own received him not," John i. Farther, as he was made of a woman, he was "made under the law;" the one in order to the other; for this was the way divine wisdom had appointed, and which divine justice required, to make salvation possible to sinners. Eternal truth had pronounced tribulation, wrath, and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil. All men, in every age and place, had corrupted their ways before God; yet his mercy had designed, that where sin had abounded, grace should much more abound, Rom. viii. Jesus Christ was the grand expedient, in whom mercy and truth met together, (Psal. lxxxv.) and the inflexible righteousness of God was brought to correspond and harmonize with the peace of sinful man. That justice might be satisfied, truth vindicated, and sinners saved, God so loved a lost world, that, when no inferior means could avail, when none in heaven or earth were willing, or worthy, or able, to interpose, "he gave his only-begotten Son," John iii. Jesus Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, "so loved the world," that he assumed our nature, undertook our cause, bore our sins, sustained our deserved punishment; and having done and suffered all that the case required, he is now gone before, "to prepare a place" (John iv.) for all that believe in him and obey him. Man lay under a double incapacity for happiness; he could neither keep the law of God in future, nor satisfy for his past breach and contempt of it. To obviate the former, Jesus Christ performed a perfect unsinning obedience in our stead. To remove the latter, he became "the propitiation for our sins;" yielded up his life, as a prey, into the hands of murderers, and poured forth his precious blood, in drops of sweat in the garden, in streams from his side upon the cross. For this he endured the fiercest temptations of the devil, the scorn, rage, and malice of men, and drank the bitter cup of the wrath of God, when it pleased the Father to bruise him, and make his soul an offering for sin. His love carried him through all; and when he had finally overcome the sharpness of death, he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. In few words, he lived and died for us when upon earth; nor is he unmindful of us in heaven, but lives and intercedes on our behalf. He continually executes the offices of prophet, priest, and king, to his people; instructing them by his word and Spirit; presenting their persons and prayers, acceptable to God through his merits; defending them by his power, from all their enemies, ghosts

and bodily; and ordering, by his providence, all things to work together for their good, till at length they are brought home, to be with him where he is, and to behold his glory.

II. From what has been said, we may justly infer, in the first place, "that this is," as the apostle styles it, "a faithful saying." When man first fell, God, in the midst of judgment remembering mercy, declared, unsought and undesired, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, Gen. iii. In every succeeding age, he confirmed his purpose by types, promises, prophecies, and oaths. At length, in the fulness of time, Christ, the desire of all nations, came into the world, fulfilled all that had been foretold, and encouraged every humble penitent sinner to come unto him, that they might have life, pardon, and peace. To doubt, or to deny, his readiness to save, is, so far as in us lies, to make the word of God of none effect; it is, to charge God foolishly, as though, like the heedless unskilful builder in the gospel, he had begun to build that which was not to be finished. If, after all that is set before us, it is possible for any soul to miss salvation, that sincerely desires it, and seeks it in God's appointed way, it must be because the Lord Jesus Christ either cannot or will not save them. That he cannot, is flatly false; for, "all power is his in heaven and in earth;" (Matt. xxviii.) and it is particularly said, "that he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" (Heb. vii.) and that he will not, is as false; for he himself hath said, "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out," John vi.

We may infer, *2dly*, That this doctrine is not only faithful, but "worthy of all acceptance." And here, methinks, I could begin anew. A point so much mistaken by some, and neglected by most, rather requires a whole, or many discourses, than to be passed over in few words. The most high and wise God has esteemed the redemption of mankind so precious, "that he spared not his only Son," Rom. viii. And are there any amongst us, in a land of gospel-light and liberty, where the words of wisdom are sounding in our ears every day, that dare make light of this message, just give it a hearing, and return to their farms, their merchandise, and their diversions, as though this unspeakable grace of God called for no return! Alas! "How shall we escape if we neglect this salvation?" Heb. ii. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy. It was dangerous, it was destructive, to refuse him that spoke upon earth; take heed how you trifle with him that speaketh from heaven! To such as neglect this, "there remains no other sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of fiery indignation that shall devour his adversaries," Heb. x. *Let none of us think it is well with us, merely because we were born*

and educated in a christian country, have means of instruction in our hands, and enjoy frequent opportunities of presenting ourselves before God in public worship. To thousands these, so far from being advantages, will greatly aggravate their condemnation, and point the sting of the never-dying worm. Better were it for us to have been inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, (Luke x.) yea, of Sodom and Gomorrah, than to appear in judgment with no better plea than this. Neither let us speak peace to ourselves, because we are not so bad as others, but perhaps live decently and comfortably, are useful in society, and perform many things that are commonly called good works. If these works spring from a true love of God, if they are framed according to the rule of his word, if they are performed by faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, they are undoubtedly good, and shall be rewarded before men and angels; if otherwise, you have already your reward, in the complaisance of your own minds, and the approbation of friends and acquaintance. The christianity of the New Testament imports more than all this. It is, to believe in Jesus Christ; so to believe in him, as to obey him in all his commands, to trust him in all his dispensations, to walk in his steps, copying out the bright example of his love, meekness, patience, self-denial, and active zeal for the glory of God and the good of mankind. It is, from a consciousness of our utter inability to perform these great things, to depend continually upon the promised aid and direction of his Holy Spirit, to seek this assistance by frequent fervent prayer, to offer up ourselves daily as living sacrifices unto God; and, finally, when we have done all, to be deeply sensible of our unworthiness of the least of his mercies, to confess ourselves unprofitable servants, and to place all our hopes upon this faithful saying, "That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

Thus, from the consideration of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the greatness of our misery by nature, and the wonderful things he has done and suffered for our redemption, we may learn the complete security of that salvation he has provided, the extreme danger of neglecting it, and the folly and presumption of attempting to establish a righteousness of our own, independent of him who is appointed of God unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, 1 Cor. i. In setting these things before you plainly and faithfully, I trust I have delivered my own soul. Time is short, life is precarious, and perhaps to some this may be the last opportunity of the kind that may be afforded them. God grant we may be wise in time, that

we may understand

while it is called to-day,
Then we shall understand
better than words can

teach us; then we shall experience "a peace which passeth all understanding;" (Phil. iv.) "a joy" which "a stranger intermeddleth not with;" (Prov. xvi.) and a hope "full of glory," which shall be completed in the endless possession of those "pleasures which are at the right hand of God;" (Psal. xvi.) where sin, and its inseparable attendant sorrow, shall cease for ever; where "there shall be no more grief, or pain, or fear;" (Rev. xxi.) but every tear shall be wiped from every eye.

SERMON III.

ON THE CHRISTIAN NAME.

—*And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*—Acts xi. 26.

THE evangelist Luke having contributed his appointed part to the history of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, proceeds, in the book we style the *Acts of the Apostles*, to inform us of the state and behaviour of those faithful followers he left behind him on earth, when he ascended in the name and behalf of his people, to that heaven from whence his love had brought him down. We are informed, that the gracious promises he had made while he was yet with them, began soon to take place; for, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, (Acts ii.) the Holy Spirit descended powerfully upon them, qualified them for preaching the gospel to the whole world, and gave them an earnest of success in making their first essay the happy means of converting about three thousand souls.

The first believers, who were of one heart and one soul, who continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine, and had all things in common, would probably have been well content to have lived together in Jerusalem, till death had successively transplanted them to the Jerusalem which is above. But this was not to be their rest; and their Lord, who had appointed them to be "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world," (Matt. v.) made use of the rage of their enemies to effect that separation which those who are united by the grace of God are often so loath to yield to. Little did Herod and the Jews consider what would be the consequence of the persecution they raised against the church of Christ: but persecutors are always blind, and counteract their own designs. So here; for we are told, that those whom they scattered abroad "went every where preaching the word." Thus the word of the Lord "ran and was glorified;" their bitterest enemies contributing to push it forward, till, in a few years, it was published "from sea to sea," and "from the river to the ends of the earth," Psalm lxxii.

For a while these faithful followers of the Lamb were known only by particular names, according to the different humours of different places,—*Nazarenes, Galileans, the people of that way, pestilent fellows*, and the like; but at length, when they grew more numerous, when their societies were regularly formed, and their enemies universally alarmed, they began to bear a more general and emphatical name. St. Luke has informed us, that this was the case in fact, and has likewise told us where it first obtained; and as I suppose he did not this without some design, I shall endeavour to draw some observations for our use and direction, from this remark in the text, That "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch," which I shall divide into two: thus,—That the first general name by which the disciples were distinguished from the world, and united among themselves, was that of *Christians*; and, secondly, That this took place first at *Antioch*. Thus the propositions lie in the text; but, in treating of each, it may be more convenient to invert this order, and consider the latter as previous to the former.

Now, if we consider the state of the city of Antioch, before, at the time, and since the event which is here recorded; from each of these views we may gather some lesson of instruction for ourselves, which ought to be our view in all we read, but especially when we read those books "which are able to make us wise unto salvation," and where no one sentence is insignificant. But let us not forget, with all we read and hear concerning religion, to mingle our frequent prayers to the great Author and Fountain of all grace, for that aid and assistance of his Holy Spirit, without which we can do nothing to advantage.

Antioch, the capital of Syria, built about three hundred years before Christ, had been long the most flourishing city of the East. The most remarkable circumstance of its ancient state, as suiting our present purpose, was its having been the seat and residence of Antiochus, the most cruel and inveterate enemy of the church and people of God; the most direct and eminent type of that Antichrist who was afterwards to appear in the world; spoken of expressly by prophecy in Daniel, chap. xi.; the completion of which you may see at large in the first book of Maccabees, in Josephus, and more briefly in the 79th and 80th Psalms. But behold the wisdom, the power, and the providence of God! when his people were brought low, he helped them; he set those bounds to the rage of the adversary which could not be broken through; and, at length, in his appointed time, he erected this first general standard of the gospel upon the very spot where his grand enemy had so long encamped, and from whence his pernicious counsels and enter-

prises had so far proceeded. The application of this is very suitable to the times in which we now live. We see a powerful combination against the Protestant interest. Our enemies are many and mighty: their designs, we have reason to believe, are deep laid, and their efforts unwearied. Once and again our hopes have been almost swallowed up; and though we, through the singular goodness of God, have hitherto escaped, the storm has fallen heavy upon our brethren abroad. What may be the immediate issue of the present threatening appearances, we know not; but we may encourage ourselves, from the experience of past ages, as well as from the sure promises of scripture, that however the kings of the earth may assemble, and the rulers take counsel together, (Psal. ii.) God has a hook in their nose, and a bridle in their jaws; (Isa. xxxvii.) and all their force and policy shall at last bring about what they least desire and intend,—the welfare and glory of God's church. He that caused the christian name go forth first at Antioch, where the truth of God had been most eminently and successfully opposed, can likewise introduce a temper and worship truly christian, in those places which at present seem destitute of either. And for this it is our duty continually to pray.

Again, if we consider the state of Antioch at the time the disciples were first called Christians there, we may learn how to form a judgment of our profession. This city was then luxurious and dissolute to a proverb, even in Asia, where luxury and effeminacy were universally prevalent. Whether this name was assumed by the disciples, or imposed by their enemies, we cannot doubt but that, in common repute, it was a term of the most extreme reproach and ignominy. Nor can I suppose the worst appellations any sect in succeeding ages has been doomed to bear, have implied half of that contempt which an inhabitant of Antioch or Daphne expressed when he called a man a Christian. If we imagine a sect of people, who, at this time, in France, should style themselves the disciples of the late Damien, and be called after his name, we may perhaps form some idea of what the people of Antioch understood by the word Christian. The apostle assures us, that he and his brethren were "accounted the filth and offscouring of all things," (1 Cor. iv.) *ὡς περιβαλεμένα του κλισου—σκιτων περιφωρα.* He has chosen two words of the most vile and despicable signification; which, I believe, no two words in our language will fully express. The outward state of things is since changed, and the external profession of christianity is now no reproach; but let us not imagine the nature of things is changed too. It was then received as a maxim, That "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution:" (2 Tim. iii.) and it is a truth

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still founded upon scripture, and confirmed by experience. If we know nothing of it in our own cases, it is because our tempers and manners have hitherto been too conformable to that wicked world which in our baptisms we were engaged to renounce. I shall have occasion to speak farther upon this point before I close; in the mean time, here is a test to examine ourselves by. If we could not glory in the christian name, under the same circumstances as the disciples bore it at Antioch, we are yet unworthy of it. Let conscience judge.

Once more, Antioch, the city where the gospel once so flourished, that from thence the whole christian church received that name by which it is still called, is now no more. It has been a heap of ruins more than five hundred years. The light of the gospel has been long withdrawn; gaiety and festivity are likewise forgot. Slavery, imposture, and barbarism, have blotted out the resemblance, and even the remembrance of what it once was. O that our yet happy land could from hence take a timely warning! Our privileges are great; perhaps greater, all things considered, than any nation has possessed since the days of Solomon. Our preservation hitherto has been wonderful; often have we been in extreme danger, but have always found deliverance at hand. Yet let us not be high-minded; our sins and aggravations (it is to be feared) have been, and still are, very great likewise; and God, we see, is no more a respecter of places than of persons. Antioch is ruined; Philadelphia, which received so honourable a testimony from the mouth of the Lord himself, (Rev. iii.) has been long since destroyed. Let us beware of boasting; let us not presume too much on what we are; nor say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these." Jer. vii. We are the bulwark of the Protestant interest, and none can hurt us. If the Lord is with us, it is true; if we walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, we are safe; but, if otherwise, we know not how soon God may visit us with his heavy judgments, war, famine, discord, or pestilence; till we become a warning to others, as others are now proposed warnings to us. Our liberties, our properties, our religion, are in God's hands; may he incline our hearts to true repentance, lest at length these blessings should be taken from us, and given to a people that will bring forth more fruit.

There is an ambiguity in the original word *κληματα*, which our translation renders *called*; for, though that is the more general sense it bears in Heathen writers, wherever it occurs in the New Testament, except in this passage, and in Rom. vii. 3, it signifies to be taught or warned by a Revelation from heaven. Thus it is spoken of Joseph and the wise men; (Matt. ii.) Simeon; (Luke ii.) Cornelius;

(Acts x.) Noah; (Heb. xi.) and elsewhere. It does not therefore appear quite certain from the text, whether the disciples chose this name for themselves, or the wits of the time fixed it upon them as a mark of infamy; or, lastly, whether it was by the special direction of the Spirit of God that they assumed it. But I incline to the latter supposition; partly, because, in those happy days, it was the practice and the privilege of the disciples to ask, and to receive, direction from on high in almost every occurrence; but, chiefly, on account of the excellent instructions couched under this emphatical name, sufficient to direct and to animate those who were to be known by it, in their duty to each other, to God, and to the world. Some of these I propose to infer from the other proposition contained in the text, That the first name by which the followers of the gospel were generally known, was that of Christians.

Hitherto, as they were separated from the world, so they had been divided among themselves; and so strong were the prejudices subsisting between the members of the same body, that we find, in the beginning of this chapter, some of one party contended with the apostle Peter only for eating with those of another. Hence we read the phrases, "We of the Jews," "They of the Gentiles." But henceforward they are taught to blend and lose the greater distinction of Jew and Gentile, and the lesser divisions of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, in a denomination derived from him who alone was worthy to be their head, and who was equally "rich in mercy to all that call upon him" in every place.

And, as they thus were taught union and affection among themselves, so their relation to God, the way of their access to him, and their continual dependence upon him, were strongly implied in this name. A christian is the child of God by faith in Christ; he draws near to God in the name of Christ; he is led and supported by the spirit of Christ! Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, of the faith, hope, and love of every believer. From him alone every good desire proceeds: by him alone every good purpose is established: in him alone any of our best performances are acceptable. Let us beware (it is a necessary caution in these days) of a Christianity without Christ. I testify to you in plain words, that this is no better than a house without a foundation, a tree without a root, a body without a head, a hope without hope; a delusion, which, if persisted in, will end in irremediable destruction: "For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Christ Jesus:" he is the corner-stone, "chosen of God and precious." Alas for those who are offended with him in whom God is well pleased! but those who

trust in him shall never be ashamed. This is another important lesson comprised in the word Christian.

Nor is this all: in the name of Christian they might, and we may, read the terms upon which we are to stand with the world. If I were asked what the words Platonist or Pythagorean signified, I should say they expressed certain persons who embraced the sentiments, submitted to the institutions, and imitated the conduct of Pythagoras and Plato; and, in order to describe them farther, I need do no more than give an account of the lives and writings of their respective masters. Could I thus, in some distant, unknown country, where the name of christianity had been only heard of, have an opportunity of declaring the history, the doctrines, and the laws of Jesus Christ; how he lived, how he taught, how he died, and upon what account; what usage he himself received from the world, and what he taught his followers to expect after he should leave them: if I should then describe the lives and the treatment of his most eminent servants, who lived immediately after him, and show, "that as he was, so were they in the world;" (1 John iv.) that pursuing his pattern, they found exactly the same opposition;—would not the inhabitants of such a country conclude, even as the scripture has assured us, that the temper of christianity, and the temper of the world, must be exactly opposite; and that, as it is said, "Whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God," (James iv.) so, whoever had boldness to profess himself a friend of God, must necessarily be an enemy to the world; and would be sure to find the world, and all in it, at sworn enmity with him? But if I should farther tell them, that though the same laws, the same warnings, and the same examples, still subsist, yet that fierce opposition I have spoken of is at length nearly over, so that none are better pleased with the world, or more agreeable to it, than many of those who speak most honourably of the christian name; would not these people immediately infer, that one of these contending powers must have yielded to the triumphant genius of the other! that either the whole world were become such christians as those who were first styled so at Antioch, or that modern christians must be, for the most part, so only by profession, and have neither right nor pretence to their ancient spirit? And could we suppose farther, that after this information, some of these remote people were to land at Dover, and make the tour of this kingdom, can you think they would be long in determining which of these is indeed the case?

Numbers are deceived by restricting many passages in the New Testament to the times in which they were delivered, though it seems

to have been the great care of the apostles to prevent, if possible, our making this mistake. St. John, having expressly said, "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," immediately explains what he means by the world, namely, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," 1 John ii. If high distinction, vain show, and sensual pleasure, make no part of the world at this day, I must allow that we have no part in the apostle's decision, nor any cause to observe his caution; but if these things are as highly prized, as eagerly, and almost as universally pursued now in Britain as they were sixteen hundred years since at Rome and Antioch, surely we bear the name of Christians in vain; if our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, our comforts and our cares are not very different from those of the generality among whom we live. "If any man," says St. Paul, "have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his," Rom. viii. Now, whatever more is meant by the phrase of having the spirit of Christ, it must certainly mean thus much at least, a disposition and turn of mind in some degree conformable to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, to be evidenced by a life and conversation suitable to his precepts and example: "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; he went about doing good," Heb. vii. He was gentle and compassionate, meek and patient under the greatest provocations; so active for the glory of God, that his zeal, by a strong and lively figure, is said to have eaten him up; (John ii.) so affected with the worth of souls, that he wept over his bitterest enemies; so intent on his charitable designs towards men, that an opportunity of helping or instructing them was as meat and drink when he was hungry, (John iv.) and made him forget weariness and pain; so full of devotion towards God, that when the day had been wholly consumed in his labours of love, he would frequently redeem whole nights for prayer, Luke vi. But I must stop.—No pen can describe, no heart conceive, the life of the Son of God in the flesh: yet, in all these things he was our great exemplar; and no profession or appellation can benefit us, unless we are of those who copy closely and carefully after him. For thus saith the beloved apostle, "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself so to walk even as he walked. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," 1 John ii.

I shall conclude with a short address to three sorts of persons. And, first, If there are any such here (would to God this part of my labour may prove needless!) I would recommend this subject to the consideration of those who have almost, if not altogether, cast off the honourable name into which they were baptized, who, trusting to what they call the

light of nature, and the powers of human reason, venture to determine the fitness of things by their own standard, and declare in their words, as well as by their actions, "they will not have this man to rule over them," Luke xix. Is not this an unaccountable event upon your plan, that the name which first went out from Antioch, under the greatest disadvantages, should so soon overspread the world, without arts or arms, without any force, or any motive of any external kind? Is it possible that any kind or degree of enthusiasm could influence, not a few, at one time, or in one place, but multitudes, of all ages, sexes, tempers, and circumstances, to embrace a profession which, in proportion to the strictness wherewith it was followed, was always attended with reproach and suffering? Those laces which were most noted for opposition to this way, have been long since buried in the dust; but a succession of those whom the world counted "not worthy to live, and of whom the world was not worthy," (Acts xxv. Heb. xi.) has always subsisted, and still subsists. Had you lived in those days when Jesus Christ assured a company of poor disregarded fishermen, that neither the power nor the policy of the world, nor the gates of hell, should ever prevail against them, (Matt. xvi.) you might have been less inexcusable in refusing to believe him. But now, when you have the accomplishment of this promise before your eyes, and well know (for you are book-read) what various attempts have been made, with what steadiness and formidable appearances they have been for a while carried on, to render these words vain, but how at length such attempts have totally failed, and ended in the confusion and ruin of those who engaged in them,—what tolerable reason can you assign for the part you act? Does the tendency of the gospel displease you? Is it an enemy to that virtue you are so fond of talking of? On the contrary, we are ready to put it to the proof, that here are not only the sublimest maxims of true virtue, but that the practice, or even the real love of virtue, are quite unattainable upon any other scheme, and that the most specious pretences, independent of this, are no more than great "swelling words of vanity," 2 Pet. ii. I speak the more freely upon this point, because I speak from experience. I was once as you are. I verily thought that I "ought to do" (or at least that I might do) "many things against Jesus of Nazareth," Acts xxvi. None even went farther than me, according to the limits of my years and capacity, in opposing the truths of the gospel. But the mercy of God spared me; and his providence having led me through various changes and circumstances of life, in each of which I have had a still deeper conviction of my former errors, has at length given me this opportunity to tell you,

(O that I could speak it to your hearts!) "that at the name of Jesus every knee" (sooner or later) "must bow;" (Phil. ii.) before him every heart must either bend or break; that he is full of mercy, love, and pardon, to all that submit themselves to him; but that, ere long, he shall be "revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to execute judgment, and to convince ungodly sinners of all the hard speeches they have spoken against him," Jude.

I would, 2dly, address those who, while they profess to believe in the Lord Jesus, do in their works manifestly deny him, Tit. i. This is, if possible, a worse case than the other, yet how frequent! You believe that Jesus Christ came into the world both to be a propitiation for sin, and also to give us an example of a godly life, and yet continue contentedly in the practice of those sins for which he poured forth his soul, in the pursuit of those vices which the gospel disallows, and in the indulgence of those desires which your own consciences condemn. Think, I entreat you, of these words in the 50th Psalm; unto the wicked God saith, "What hast thou to do, that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth: seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?" This question is now proposed to our consciences, that we may be aware in time of the danger of insincerity, and not "perish with a lie in our right hands," Is. xliv. If we cannot answer it now, what shall we say in that awful hour when God shall speak in ten thousand thunders to all who, in this life, presumed to mock him with an empty outside worship? "drawing near him with their lips, when their hearts were far from him," Is. xxix. For the day is at hand, the day of the Lord, when God shall bring every hidden thing to light, when every man's works shall be tried and weighed; tried in the fire of his purity, weighed in the balance of his righteousness; and as the issue proves, so must the consequence abide to all eternity: a trial and a scrutiny which no flesh could abide, were it not for the interposing merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Judge. But he has already told us that he will then own none but those who were faithfully devoted to his service here. To the urgent cries and strongest pleas of others, he will give no other answer, but "I know you not, I never knew you," Matt. vii. "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire," Matt. xxv.—What will it then avail to plead our privileges, when, if this be all, we may read our doom already? "And that servant who knew his master's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more," Luke xii. O con-

sider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

Finally, let those who through grace have attained to worship God in spirit and in truth, be careful to adorn and hold fast their profession. You see your calling brethren: let the name of Christian always remind you of your high obligation to, and continual dependence upon, the author of your faith. Use it as a means to animate and regulate your whole behaviour. And if upon some occasions, you find undeserved ill offices, or unkind constructions, wonder not at it: thus it must and will be, more or less, to all who would exercise themselves in keeping a conscience void of offence, Acts xxiv. Yet be careful to model your actions by the rule of God's word. Our Lord says, "Blessed are ye when men revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake," Matt. v. Observe, first, the evil spoken of you must be false and groundless; and, 2dly, the cause must be for the sake of Christ, and not for any singularities of your own, either in sentiment or practice, which you cannot clearly maintain from scripture. It is a great blessing when the innocence and simplicity of the dove is happily blended with true wisdom. It is a mercy to be kept from giving unnecessary offence, in these times of division and discord. Endeavour that a principle of love to God, and to mankind for his sake, may have place in all your actions: this will be a secret, reasonable, and infallible guide, in a thousand incidents, where particular rules cannot reach. "Be sober, be vigilant, continue instant in prayer;" and in a little while all your conflicts shall determine in conquest, faith shall give place to sight, and hope to possession. Yet a little while, and "Christ, who is our life, shall appear," (Col. iii.) to vindicate his truth, to put a final end to all evil and offence; and then we also, even all who have loved him, and waited for him, "shall appear with him in glory," Is. xxv.

SERMON IV.

ON ALL THINGS BEING GIVEN US WITH CHRIST.

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?—Rom. viii. 32.

VARIOUS have been the disputes, and various the mistakes of men, concerning the things of God. Too often, amidst the heat of fierce contending parties, truth is injured by both sides, befriended by neither. Religion, the pretended cause of our many controversies, is sometimes wholly unconcerned in them: I mean, that pure religion and unde-

filed, that wisdom which cometh from above, abounds with proof of its divine original, being "pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy," James iii. Religion is a serious and a personal concern. It arises from a right knowledge of God and ourselves; a sense of the great things he has done for fallen man; a persuasion, or at least a well-grounded hope, of our own interest in his favour; and a principle of unbounded love to him who thus first loved us. It consists in an entire surrender of ourselves, and our all to God; in setting him continually before us, as the object of our desires, the scope and inspector of our actions, and our only refuge and hope in every trouble: finally, in making the goodness of God to us the motive and model of our behaviour to our fellow-creatures, to love, pity, relieve, instruct, forbear, and forgive them, as occasion offer; because we ourselves both need and experience these things at the hand of our heavenly Father. The two great points to which it tends, and to which it urges the soul, where it has taken place, incessantly to press after, are, communion with God, and conformity to him: and as neither of these can be fully attained in this life, it teaches us to pant after a better; to withdraw our thoughts and affections from temporal things, and fix them on that eternal state, where we trust our desires shall be abundantly satisfied; and the work begun by grace shall be crowned with glory.

Such is the religion of the gospel. This the life and doctrine of our Lord, and the writings of his apostles, jointly recommend. An excellent abridgement of the whole we have in this 8th chapter to the Romans, describing the state, temper, practice, privileges, and immoveable security of a true christian. Every verse is rich in comfort and instruction, and might, without violence, afford a theme for volumes; particularly that which I have read, may be styled *evangelium evangelii*: a complete and comprehensive epitome of whatever is truly worthy of our knowledge and our hope. The limits of our time are too narrow to admit any previous remarks on the context, or indeed to consider the subject according to the order of an exact division; therefore, I shall not at present use any artificial method; but, taking the words as they lie, I shall offer a few practical observations, which seem naturally and immediately to arise from the perusal of them, making such improvement as may occur as I go along. And may the Father of mercies, who has put this treasure into our hands, favour us with his gracious presence and blessing!

I. From the words, "He spared not his own Son," we may observe in one view, the wonderful goodness and the inflexible severity of God. So great was his goodness, that

when man was by sin rendered incapable of any happiness, and obnoxious to all misery; incapable of restoring himself, or of receiving the least assistance from any power in heaven or in earth; God spared not his only-begotten Son, but in his unexampled love to the world, gave him, who alone was able to repair the breach. Every gift of God is good: the bounties of his common providence are very valuable: that he should continue life, and supply that life with food, raiment, and a variety of comforts, to those who by rebellion had forfeited all, was wonderful: but what are all inferior blessings, compared to this unspeakable gift of the Son of his love! Abraham had given many proofs of his love and obedience before he was commanded to offer up Isaac upon the altar; but God seems to pass by all that went before, as of small account in comparison of this last instance of duty: "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me," Gen. xxii. Surely we likewise must say, "In this was manifested the love of God to us, because he gave his Son, his only Son, to be the life of the world." But all comparison fails: Abraham was bound in duty, bound by gratitude; neither was it a free-will offering, but by the express command of God: but to us the mercy was undesired, as well as undeserved. "Herein is love, not that we loved God;" on the contrary, we were enemies to him, and in rebellion against him; "but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," the sins we had committed against himself. My friends, ought not this love to meet a return? Is it not most desirable to be able to say with the apostle, upon good grounds, "We love him, because he first loved us?" Should it not be our continual inquiry, "What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits?" especially for this, which is both the crown and the spring of all the rest? Are we cold and unaffected at this astonishing proof of divine love, and are our hearts not grieved and humbled at our own ingratitude? then are we ungrateful and insensible indeed!

The justice and severity of God is no less conspicuous than his goodness in these words: as he spared not to give his Son for our sakes, so, when Christ appeared in our nature, undertook our cause, and was charged with our sins, though he was the Father's well-beloved Son, he was not spared. He drank the bitter cup of the wrath of God to the very dregs: he bore all the shame, sorrow, and pain, all the distress of body and mind, that must otherwise have fallen upon our heads. His whole life, from the manger to the cross, was one series of humiliation and suffering, John xviii. Observe him in the world, despised, vilified, persecuted even to death, by unreasonable and wicked men; ridiculed, buffeted, spit upon; and at length nailed to the accursed tree!

Consider him in the wilderness, (Luke iv.) given up to the power and assaulted by the temptations of the devil! Behold him in the garden, (Luke xxii.) and say, "Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger?" How inconceivable must that agony have been, which caused his blood to forsake its wonted channels, and start from every pore of his body! Behold him, lastly, upon the cross, (Matt. xxvii.) suffering the most painful and ignominious death: suspended between two thieves; surrounded by cruel enemies, who made sport of his pangs; derided by all that passed by! Attend to his dolorous cry, expressive of an inward distress beyond all we have yet spoken of, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" St. Paul reminds the Galatians, that, by his preaching among them, Jesus Christ had "been evidently set forth crucified before their eyes," Gal. iii. Would it please God to bless my poor words to the like purpose, you would see a meaning you never yet observed in that awful passage, "Tribulation, and wrath, and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil;" (Rom. ii.) for the punishment due to the sins of all that shall stand at the last day on the right hand of God, met and centred in Christ, the Lamb of expiation; nor was the dreadful weight removed, till he, triumphant in death, pronounced, "It is finished," John xix. Let us not think of this as a matter of speculation only; our lives, our precious souls, are concerned in it. Let us infer from hence, how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, Heb. x. The apostle Peter (2 Peter ii.) admonishes those to whom he wrote, from the fearful example of the angels who sinned, and of the old world; where the same word is used as in my text, *OUR LORDS*: "He spared them not;" that is, he punished them to the utmost; he did not afford them the least mitigation. It is a frequent figure of speech, by which much more is understood than is or can be expressed. Much more, then, may we say, if God spared not his own Son, "what shall be the end of those who obey not the gospel?" 1 Peter iv. If the holy Jesus was thus dealt with, when he was only accounted a sinner by imputation, where shall the impenitent and the ungodly appear? "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Luke xxiii. The punishment of sin in the soul in a future state is twofold: the wrath of God in all its dreadful effects, typified by fire unquenchable, (Mark ix.) and the stings of conscience, represented by a worm that never dies. Our Lord endured the former; but the other perhaps could have no place in him, who was absolutely perfect and sinless. *But if the prospect of one made him amazed and sorrowful beyond measure, what conster-*

nation must the concurrence of both raise in the wicked, when they shall hear and feel their irrevocable doom! May we have grace to reflect on these things, that we may flee for safety to the hope set before us, to Jesus Christ, the only, and the sure refuge from that approaching storm, which shall sweep away all the workers of iniquity as a flood, Isa. xxiii.

II. Here, as in a glass, we may see the evil of sin. The bitter fruits of sin are indeed visible every where. Sin is the cause of all the labour, sickness, pain, and grief, under which the whole creation groans. Sin often makes man a terror and a burden, both to himself and those about him. Sin occasions discord and confusion in families, cities, and kingdoms. Sin has always directed the march, and ensured the success, of those instruments of divine vengeance whom we style Mighty Conquerors. Those ravagers of mankind, who spread devastation and horror far and wide, and ruin more in a few days than ages can repair, have only afforded so many melancholy proofs of the malignity of sin. For this, a shower of flaming brimstone fell upon a whole country; for this, an overwhelming deluge destroyed a whole world; for this, principalities and powers were cast from heaven, and are reserved under chains of darkness (2 Peter ii.) to a more dreadful doom. But none of these things, nor all of them together, afford such a conviction of the heinous nature, and destructive effects of sin, as we may gather from these words, "He spared not his own Son."

III. Here we may likewise see the value of the human soul. We ordinarily judge of the worth of a thing by the price which a wise man, who is acquainted with its intrinsic excellency, is willing to give for it. Now, the soul of a man was of such estimation in the sight of God, who made it, that, when it was sinking into endless ruin, he spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for our ransom. Two things especially render the soul thus important in the view of infinite wisdom: 1st, The capacity he had given it: for "he formed it for himself;" (Isaiah xlvi.) capable of knowing, serving, and enjoying God; and by consequence, incapable of happiness in any thing beneath him; for nothing can satisfy any being but the attainment of its proper end: and, 2dly, The duration he had assigned it, beyond the limits of time, and the existence of the material world. The most excellent and exalted being, if only the creature of a day, would be worthy of little regard.* On the other hand, immortality itself would be of small value to a creature that could rise no higher than the pursuits of animal life: But in the soul of man, the capability of complete happiness or

* Vide Young's Night Thoughts, 7th Night.

exquisite misery, and that for ever, makes it a prize worthy the contention of different worlds. For this an open intercourse was maintained between heaven and earth, till at length the Word of God appeared "in the likeness of sinful flesh," that, in our nature, he might encounter and subdue the sworn enemy of our species. All that has been transacted in the kingdoms of providence and grace, from the beginning of the world, has been in subserviency to this grand point, the redemption of the deathless soul. And is it so? And shall there be found amongst us numbers utterly insensible of their natural dignity, that dare disparage the plan of infinite wisdom, and stake those souls for trifles, which nothing less than the blood of Christ could redeem! There is need to use great plainness of speech; the matter is of the utmost weight; be not, therefore, offended that I would warn you against the deceitfulness of sin. Suffer not your hearts to be entangled in the vanities of the world; either they will fail, and disappoint you in life, or at least you must leave them behind you when you die. You must enter an invisible, unknown state, where you cannot expect to meet any of those amusements or engagements which you here find so necessary to pass away the tedious load of time that hangs upon your hands. You, to whom a few hours of leisure are so burdensome, have you considered how you shall be able to support an eternity! You stand upon a brink, and all about you is uncertainty. You see, of your acquaintance, some or other daily called away, some who were as likely to live as yourselves. You know not but you may be the very next. You cannot be certain but this very night your soul may be required of you, Luke xii. Perhaps a few hours may introduce you into the presence of that God whom you have been so little desirous to please. And can you, in such a situation, sport and play, with as little concern as the lamb, already marked out to bleed to-morrow! Oh! it is strange! How fatally has the god of this world blinded your eyes! and how dreadful must your situation be in death, if death alone can deceive you!

IV. Lastly, we may gather from these words the certainty of the gospel-salvation. God himself delivered up his Son for us all. He declared himself well pleased with him (Matt. iii.) as our Surety, upon his first entrance upon his work; and testified his acceptance of his undertaking, in that he raised him from the dead, and received him into heaven as our Advocate. Now, "if God himself be thus for us, who can be against us!" Rom. viii. If he who only has a right to judge us, is pleased to justify us, "who can lay any thing to our charge! If Christ who died" for our sins, and is risen on our behalf, has engaged to "intercede for us, who shall condemn!"

"There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Nor is this all; but every thing we stand in need of is fully provided; and we may well argue, as the apostle has taught us elsewhere, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life:" (Rom. v.) or, as in the passage before us, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," when we were alienated from him, "how shall he not with him freely give us all things," now he has taught us to pray, and given us his own promises to plead for all we ask!—This brings me to the second clause of the text; only it may be proper, before I enter upon it, to subjoin two cautions, to prevent mistakes from what has been already said.

1st, Let us remember that all is a free gift. He gave his Son: he gives all things with him. The gospel allows no place for merit of our own in any respect, there was no moving cause in us, unless our misery may be deemed such. Our deliverance, in its rise, progress, and accomplishment, must be ascribed to grace alone; and he that would glory, must glory only in the Lord, 1 Cor. i.

2dly, Let us observe the apostle's phrase. He says not absolutely for all, but for us all; that is, those who are described in the former part of the chapter, "who are led by the Spirit of God, who walk not after the flesh, who are delivered from the bondage of corruption," who have liberty to call God "Abba, father," and prove their relation by following him as "dear children." Christ is "the author of eternal salvation to those only who obey him," Heb. v. It cannot be otherwise, since a branch of that salvation is to deliver us "from our sins," and "the present evil world;" (Gal. i.) to "purify us from dead works, to serve the living God." "Be not deceived, God will not be mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall," notwithstanding all that Christ has done or suffered, yea so much the rather, "of the flesh reap corruption," Gal. vi.

The text having declared, that God spared not his Son for our sakes, proceeds to infer, that "with him he will assuredly give us all things." Here we may take notice, first, that the words *all things* must be limited to such as are needful and good for us. It may be said of many of our desires, "ye know not what ye ask:" (Matt. xx.) in such cases, the best answer we can receive is a denial. For those blessings which God has promised absolutely to give, such as pardon, grace, and eternal life, we cannot be too earnest or explicit in our prayers; but in temporal things we should be careful to ask nothing but with submission to the divine will. The promises, it is true, appertain to "the life that was to

as well as that which is to come." 1 Tim. iv. "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are ours, if we are Christ's," 1 Cor. iii. But the particular *modus* of these things God has reserved in his own hands, to bestow them as best shall suit our various tempers, abilities, and occasions. And it is well for us that it is so; for we should soon ruin ourselves if left to our own choice: like children who are fond to meddle with what would hurt them, but refuse the most salutary medicines, if unpalatable; so we often pursue, with earnestness and anxiety, those things, which, if we could obtain them, would greatly harm, if not destroy us. Often, too, with a rash and blind impatience, we struggle to avoid or escape those difficulties which God sees fit to appoint for the most gracious and merciful purposes,—to correct our pride and vanity, to exercise and strengthen our faith, to wean us from the world, to teach us a closer dependence upon himself, and to awaken our desires after a better inheritance.

Again, as God, by his promise freely to give us all things, has not engaged to comply with the measure of our unreasonable, short-sighted wishes: so neither has he confined himself as to the time or manner of bestowing his gifts. The blessing we seek, though perhaps not wholly improper, may be at present unseasonable: in this case, the Lord will suspend it, till he sees it will afford us the comfort and satisfaction he intends us by it: and then we shall be sure to have it. Sometimes it is withheld, to stir us up to fervency and importunity in our prayers, sometimes to make it doubly welcome and valuable when it comes. So likewise as to the manner: we ask one good thing, and he gives an equivalent in something else; and when we come to weigh all things, we see cause to say his choice was best. Thus David acknowledges: "In the day that I called, thou didst answer me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul," Psal. cxxxviii. David asked for deliverance from trouble; the Lord gave him strength to bear it; and he allows his prayer was fully answered. A parallel case the apostle records: he besought the Lord thrice (2 Cor. xii.) for the removal of that trial which he calls "a thorn in the flesh:" the answer he received was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Such an assurance was more valuable than the deliverance he sought could be. Sometimes we seek a thing in a way of our own, by means and instruments of our own devising. God crosses our feeble purposes, that he may give us the pleasure of receiving it immediately from himself. It were easy to enlarge on this head; let it suffice to know, our concerns are in his hands who does all things well; and who will, and does, appoint all to work together for our good.

From the latter clause, thus limited and

explained, many useful directions might be drawn. I shall only mention two or three, and conclude.

1st, Since we are told, that God freely gives us all things, let us learn to see and acknowledge his hand in all we have, and in all we meet with. When Jacob was returning to Canaan after a long absence, (Gen. xxxii.) the fear of his brother Esau occasioned him to divide his family and substance into separate companies; and, comparing his present situation with the poor condition in which he had been driven from home twenty years before, he breaks out into this act of praise: "I am not worthy, O Lord, of all thy mercies; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands!" How pious and how cheering was this reflection! And afterwards, (Gen. xxxiii.) when his brother Esau asked him concerning his sons, "They are the children, (said he) which God has graciously given thy servant." Such a deep and abiding persuasion of the most high God ordering and over-ruling all our concerns, would, like the light, diffuse a lustre and a beauty upon every thing around us. To consider every comfort of life as an effect and proof of the divine favour towards us, would, like the feigned alchemist's stone, turn all our possessions into gold, and stamp a value upon things which a common eye might judge indifferent. Nor is this more than the truth: "The hairs of our head are all numbered," Matth. x. The eye of divine providence is upon every sparrow of the field: nor can we properly term any circumstance of our lives small, since such as seem most trifling in themselves do often give birth to those which we judge most important. On the other hand, to be able to discover the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father through the darkest cloud of troubles and afflictions, to see all our trials appointed to us, in number, weight, and measure: nothing befalling us by chance, nothing without need, nothing without a support, nothing without a designed advantage;—what a stay must these apprehensions be to the soul! Take away these, and man is the most forlorn, helpless, miserable object in the world; pining for every thing he has not, trembling for every thing he has; equally suffering under the pressure of what does happen, and the fear of what may: liable to thousands of unsuspected dangers, yet unable to guard against those which are most obvious. Were there no future life, it would be our interest to be truly and uniformly religious, in order to make the most of this. How unhappy must they be, to whom the thoughts of a God ever-present is a burden they strive, in vain, to shake off! But let us learn to acknowledge him in all our ways, and then he will direct and bless our paths, Prov. iii.

2d, Since all we have is the gift of God,

let this teach us, in whatever state we are, therewith to be content. Our heavenly Father knoweth what we have need of before we ask him, Matth. vi. The earth is his, and the fulness thereof; (Psal. xxiv.) and his goodness is equal to his power, a proof of which we have in the text. He has already given us more than ten thousand worlds. Are you poor? Be satisfied with the Lord's appointment. It were as easy to him to give you large estates as to supply you with the bread you eat, or to continue your breath in your nostrils: but he sees poverty best for you; he sees prosperity might prove your ruin; therefore he has appointed you the honour of being in this respect conformable to your Lord, who when on earth had not where to lay his head, Matth. viii. Have any of you lost a dear friend or relative, in whose life you thought your own lives bound up? Be still, and know that he is God, Psal. xli. It was he who gave you that friend; his blessing made your friend a comfort to you; and though the stream is now cut off, the fountain is still full. Be not like a wild bull in a net; the Lord has many ways to turn your mourning into joy. Are any of you sick? Think how the compassionate Jesus healed diseases with a word, in the days of his flesh. Has he not the same power now as then? Has he not the same love! Has he, in his exalted state, forgot his poor languishing members here below? No, verily: he still retains his sympathy; he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities; he knows our frame; he remembers we are but dust, Psal. ciii. It is because sickness is better for you than health, that he thus visits you. He dealt in the same manner with Lazarus, whom he loved, John xi. Resign yourselves, therefore, to his wisdom, and repose in his love. There is a land where the blessed inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick;" (Isa. xxxiii.) and there all that love the Lord Jesus shall shortly be. Are any of you tempted? "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him," James i. Sure, you need no other argument to be content, shall I say, or to rejoice and be exceeding glad? "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him," Heb. xii. Be it in poverty or losses, in body or mind, in your own person or another's, it is all appointed by God, and shall issue in your great benefit, if you are of the number of those that love him.

3d. Once more, since it is said that all things are freely given us in and together with Christ, let us "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure;" (2 Pet. i.) to know that we have an interest in him and his mediation; and then (if I may borrow a com-

mon expression) we are made for ever. The Lord Jesus Christ, sent from God on a merciful errand to a lost world, did not come empty: no; he is fraught with all blessings, suitable to all persons, extending to all times, enduring to all eternity. O make it your great care to know him and to please him; study his word, call upon his name, frequent his ordinances, observe his sayings, seek to know him as the only way to God; (John xiv.) the way to pardon, peace, and divine communion here, and to complete happiness hereafter. When once you can say, "My Beloved is mine," (Song ii.) I account all his interest my own; "and I am his," I have given myself up to him without reserve,—you will, you must be happy. You will be interested in all his attributes and communicable perfections. His wisdom will be your high tower, his providence your constant shield, his love your continual solace. "He will give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways," Psal. xci. In times of difficulty he will direct your counsels; in times of danger he will fill you with comfort, and "keep you in perfect peace," (Isa. xxvi.) when others quake for fear. He will bless your basket and your store, your substance and your families: your days shall happily pass in doing your Father's will, and receiving renewed tokens of his favour; and at night you shall lie down, and your sleep shall be sweet. When afflictions befall you (for these likewise are the fruits of love,) you shall see your God near at hand, "a very present help in trouble;" (Psal. xlvi.) you shall find your strength increased in proportion to your trial; you shall in due time be restored, as gold from the furnace, purified sevenfold, to praise your great deliverer. Every thing you meet in life shall yield you profit; and death, which puts a fatal period to the hope of the wicked; death, at whose name thousands turn pale, shall to you be an entrance into a new and endless life. He who tasted death for you, (Heb. ii.) and sanctified it to you, shall lead and support you through that dark valley; you shall shut your eyes upon the things of time, to open them the next moment in the blissful presence of your reconciled God. You that a minute before were surrounded by weeping, helpless friends, shall, in an instant, be transported and inspired to join that glorious song, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us priests and kings to God and his Father; to him be glory and strength for ever and ever. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing," Rev. v. Thus "blessed shall the man be that fears the Lord," Psal. cxviii. "Thus shall it be done to him whom the King delighteth to honour," Esth. vi. Amen.

SERMON V.

ON SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES.

Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.—John v. 39.

THE phrase in the Greek is ambiguous, and may be either rendered, according to our reading, as a command, *search the scriptures*; or else as simply affirming, *ye do search the scriptures*. And as the words were spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees, who were exceedingly studious in the letter of the scriptures, this may perhaps have been their first design. The difference is not material; and either sense will afford us instruction. If we receive it as a command, we should consider it as given by the Lord himself, whose disciples we profess to be, as bound on us by our own acknowledgment, since in them we think and say we have eternal life; and as absolutely necessary to be complied with, since it is these, and these only, which testify of Christ, in the knowledge of whom our eternal life consists. If we should understand it in the latter sense, as spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees, it may give us a useful caution not to lay too much stress either on what we think or on what we do. For these persons, we find, had in some respects a right sentiment of the holy scriptures: they believed that in them there was eternal life; and, in a sense likewise, they made this an inducement to read, yea, to search them. But though they thus thought and thus acted, and though the scriptures, from the first page to the last, do testify of Christ, yet they could not understand or receive this testimony, but rejected the Messiah whom they professed to hope for, and took all their pains in searching the scriptures to no purpose.

In what I am about to lay before you, I propose the following order: 1st, To mention a few requisites, without which it is impossible rightly to understand the scriptures: 2d, To show how the scriptures testify of Christ: 3d, To consider what the import of their testimony is: 4th, To press the practice of searching the scriptures, from the argument used in the text, which is equally applicable to us as to the Jews of old, that in them we think we have eternal life.

I. The first requisite I shall mention is *Sincerity*; I mean a real desire to be instructed by the scriptures, and to submit both our sentiments and our practices to be controlled and directed by what we read there. Without this, our reading and searching will only issue in our greater condemnation, and bring us under the heavy doom of the servant that knew his master's will and did it not. A remarkable instance of this we have in the 42d and two following chapters of Jeremiah.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, and the death of Gedaliah, the people that were left intreated the prophet to inquire of the Lord for them, concerning their intended removal into Egypt. Their request was fair: "That the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do." Their engagement was very solemn: "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee." But their hypocrisy was most detestable. The Lord, who seeth the inmost purposes of the soul, could not be put off with their fair pretences. He sent them in answer an express prohibition to go into Egypt; assuring them that his curse should follow them, and that there they should certainly perish. Yet they went, and verified what the prophet had told them: "For ye dissembled in your hearts, when you sent me to the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God, and according to all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it." Then they spoke out, and like themselves, when they told him, "As for the word which thou hast spoken unto us, in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee, but we will certainly do whatever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." None of us dare speak thus in express terms; but if we bring our preconceived opinions or purposes, not in order to examine them strictly by the test of scripture, but to find or wrest some passages in the word of God to countenance or justify ourselves; if our desire is not simply to be led in the very way of God's commandments; if we are not really willing to discover every error and evil that may be in us, in order to forsake them,—we closely imitate these deceitful, obstinate, insolent Jews, be our pretences ever so fair, and are liable to the like dreadful judgment for our hypocrisy; the curse of God upon our devices here, and the portion of his enemies hereafter.

Where this sincerity is wanting, every thing is wrong; neither praying, nor hearing, nor reading, can profit. The scriptures abound with the severest threatenings against those who presume to mock the all-seeing God. I shall only produce one passage, from Ezekiel xiv. 5. "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling-block of iniquity before their faces: should I be inquired of at all by them?—Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols." I say not this, that I would have any one throw aside the ordi-

nances of God, especially his public worship. These are the means which God has appointed, in which he has commanded us to wait, and where he is often pleased to be found, even by those who seek him not. But I would intreat such persons seriously to consider the dreadful condition they would be in, if death should surprise them in such a state of insincerity as renders their very prayers and sacrifices "an abomination to the Lord," and perverts those things which are designed for their advantage into an occasion of their falling.

A second thing necessary is *Diligence*. This, with the former, is finely described in the book of Proverbs. "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandment within thee; so that thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding: yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God," Prov. ii. The wisdom of God, in which we are concerned, is contained in his word. The best understanding is to keep his commandments: (Psal. cxl.) but as we cannot keep them unless we know them, neither can we know them without a diligent inquiry. The word which is rendered *search*, *ἔτιψον*, is borrowed from the practice of miners: it implies two things, to dig, and to examine. First, with much labour they pierce the earth to a considerable depth; and when they have thus found a vein of precious ore, they then break and sift it, and suffer no part to escape their notice. Thus must we join frequent assiduous reading, with a close and awakened meditation; comparing spiritual things with spiritual, carefully taking notice of the circumstances, occasion, and application of what we read; being assured, that there is a treasure of truth and happiness under our hands, if we have but skill to discover and improve it. Only let us be mindful that we have the same views in reading the scriptures, that God has in revealing them to us, which the apostle thus enumerates:—"All scripture," or the whole scripture, *ἡ ὅλη γραφή*, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work," 2 Tim. iii. And elsewhere it is said to be able to make us "wise unto salvation." How absurd would it be for a man to read a treatise of husbandry with a design of learning navigation, or to seek the principles of trade and commerce in an essay on music! No less absurd is it to read or study the scriptures with any other view than to receive its doctrines, submit to its reproofs, and obey its precepts, that we may be made "wise unto salvation." All dis-

quisitions and criticisms that stop short of this, that do not amend the heart, as well as furnish the head, are empty and dangerous, at least to ourselves, whatever use they may be of to others. An experience of this caused a learned critic and eminent commentator, (Grotius,) to confess, towards the close of his life, *Ah! vitam prorsus peridi, laboriose nihil agendo!* "Alas! I have wasted my life in much labour to no purpose!" But, on the contrary, when we are diligent and studious, that we may be better acquainted with the divine precepts and promises, and better inclined to observe and trust them, then we may hope for happy success; for, "blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates therein day and night: for he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which bringeth forth its fruit in due season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth" under this influence "shall prosper," Psal. i. Thus God has promised, and thus many have found it, and been enabled to adopt the words of David, "Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me: I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation," Psal. cxix.

Humility is a third thing very necessary to a profitable perusal of the scriptures. "God giveth his grace to the humble," James iv. "He will guide the meek in judgment, he will enlighten the simple in his way," Psal. xxv. The proud he resisteth, *resistit*, he draws up against him; he prepares himself, as it were, with his whole force to oppose his progress. A most formidable expression! If God only leaves us to ourselves, we are all ignorance and darkness; and what must be the dreadful case of those against whom he appears in arms? This has been a principal source of those various and opposite heresies and mistakes, which are the reproach of our holy profession, that vain man, though born a mere "wild ass's colt," (Job xi.) has undertaken, by his own strength and wisdom, to decide authoritatively on the meaning of scripture, without being aware of the ignorance, prejudice, and weakness which influences his judgment in religious matters, without knowing the utter inability of the natural man to discern the things of God, and without attending to those means the scriptures themselves have appointed for the redress of these evils. But would we not lose our time and pains; would we wish not to be misled ourselves, or not to mislead others! Let us aim at a humble spirit: let us reflect much on the majesty and grandeur of the God we serve: let us adore his condescension in favouring us with a revelation of his will: let us learn to consider the word of God, and the wisdom of God, as terms of the same import: in a word, let us study to know ourselves,

our sinfulness and ignorance; then we shall no longer read the scriptures with indifference or prepossession, but with the greatest reverence and attention, and with the most enlarged expectation.

I shall mention but one thing more upon this head, which is as necessary in itself as any of the preceding, and likewise necessary in order to obtain them, and that is *Prayer*. Sincerity, diligence, and humility, are the gifts of God; the blessing we seek in the exercise of them is in his hand; and he has promised to bestow all good things, even "his Holy Spirit, upon those who ask him." Prayer is indeed the best half of our business while upon earth, and that which gives spirit and efficacy to all the rest. Prayer is not only our immediate duty, but the highest dignity, the richest privilege we are capable of receiving on this side eternity; and the neglect of it implies the deepest guilt, and includes the heaviest punishment. A stranger to prayer, is equally a stranger to God and to happiness, "like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed," James i. Are any of you, my friends, unacquainted with prayer? Then are you without God in the world, without a guide in prosperity, without resource in distress, without true comfort in life, and while you continue so, without hope in death. But, especially, you are utterly unqualified to search the scriptures. There is a veil upon the mind and heart of every man, (as the apostle assures us, 2 Cor. iii.) so that he can neither see nor embrace heavenly truths, till this impediment is removed:—the means of this is prayer. Therefore David says, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Psal. cxix.) He knew there were wonderful things contained in the law, but confesses himself incapable of discerning them till the Lord should interpose. This he has promised to do in behalf of all who call upon him. But those who seek not assistance from God, can find it no where else: "for every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," who hath said, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God," James i. A critical knowledge of the original languages, a skill in the customs and manners of the ancients, and acquaintance with the Greek and Roman classics, a perusal of councils, fathers, scholiasts, and commentators, a readiness in the subtleties of logical disputation;—these, in their proper place and subserviency, may be of considerable use to clear, illustrate, or enforce the doctrines of scripture: but unless they are governed by a temper of humility and prayer; unless the man that possesses them accounts them altogether as nothing, without that assistance of the Spirit of God which is promised to *guide* believers into all truth; unless he *seeks* and prays for this guidance no less

earnestly than those who understand nothing but their mother-tongue; I make no scruple to affirm, that all his apparatus of knowledge only tends to lead him so much the farther astray; and that a plain honest ploughman, who reads no book but his Bible, and has no teacher but the God to whom he prays in secret, stands abundantly fairer for the attainment of true skill in divinity. But happy he, who by faith and prayer can realize the divine presence always with him! who is sincere in his intentions, diligent in the use of means, diffident of himself, yet full of trust and hope, that God, whom he desires to serve, will lead and guide him in the paths of peace and righteousness for his mercies' sake, *Psalm xxxi.* Those things which are necessary for him to know, shall be made so plain, that he shall not mistake them; and those things with which he is not so immediately concerned, shall at least teach him humility; teach him to adore the depths of divine wisdom, and to long for that happy hour, when all that is imperfect shall be done away; when we shall no more see in part, but shall know even as we are known, *1 Cor. xiii.*

II. I proceed to the second thing proposed: To show how the scriptures testify of Christ. In general, it may be said, that he is the main design and subject, both of the whole scripture, and of each particular book. This will be easily allowed of the New Testament, but it is not so obvious with regard to several parts of the Old: I hope, therefore, it will not be unacceptable to those who love the word of God, if I consider this point something at large, and help them to discover the Lord Jesus Christ in almost every page of the Bible. This will be a new inducement to them to search the scriptures, when they shall perceive that many passages which they were accustomed to read with indifference, as hardly able to discern any wisdom or meaning in them, do directly testify of Christ.

What is expressed in the Old Testament (for of this I am now to speak) concerning Christ, may be reduced to three heads,—prophecies, types, and ceremonies. To open and trace these in their proper extent, would require volumes; but it is only a hint of each that the bounds of our present meeting will permit me to offer.

The first glimmering of light which dawned upon a lost world was that promise (for I consider the promises as a branch of prophecy) which God (who, in the midst of judgment, remembers mercy) made to the woman, that her seed should bruise the serpent's head, *Gen. iii.* This was absolute and general, giving hopes of a recovery, but no information of person, time, or place: but the path of this just one was as the light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day, *Prov. iv.* In the time of Noah, the hope and desire of all nations was restrained to the line

of Shem, (Gen. ix.) and afterwards more expressly to the family of Abraham: when this divided into two branches, God, to show that his purpose is of himself, and that he will do as pleaseth him with his own, set aside the elder, and confirmed to Jacob, the younger, "that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed," Gen. xxviii. Jacob had twelve sons, which made a still more explicit restriction necessary. Accordingly, the patriarch, before his death, declared that this high privilege, of perpetuating the line of the Messiah, was fixed in the tribe of Judah, (Gen. xlix.) and the time of his advent was obscurely marked out, by the promise "that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till the Shiloh came." The last personal limitation was to David, (1 Chron. xvii.) that of his family God would raise up the King, who should reign for ever, and over all. Succeeding prophets gradually foretold the time, place, and circumstances of his birth, the actions of his life, the tenor of his doctrine, the success he met with, and the cause, design, and manner of his sufferings and death; in short, to almost every thing that we read in the gospel, we may annex the observation that the evangelists have made upon a few instances, (in order, as it may be presumed, to direct us in searching out the rest) "then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophets." From them we learn, that the Messiah should be born of a virgin, in Bethlehem of Judah, four hundred and ninety years after the commandment given to rebuild Jerusalem; that he should begin his ministry in Galilee; that he should be despised and rejected of men, betrayed by one of his disciples, sold for thirty pieces of silver, with which money the potters field should be afterwards purchased! "that he should be cut off, but not for himself;" and that his death should be followed by the sudden and total ruin of the Jewish government. To compare these promises and prophecies, among themselves, and with their exact accomplishment recorded in the New Testament,—this alone would engage us in a close and profitable search into the scriptures, and would afford us the most convincing proofs of their divine original and excellence.

The types of Christ in the Old Testament may be considered as two-fold, personal and relative. The former describing under the veil of history, his character and offices as considered in himself; the latter teaching under a variety of metaphors, the advantages those who believe in him should receive from him. Thus Adam, Enoch, Melchizedek, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Sampson, David, Solomon, and others, were in different respects types or figures of Christ. Some more immediately represented his person; others prefigured his humiliation; others referred to his exaltation, dominion, and glo-

ry. So, in the latter sense, the ark of Noah, the rainbow, the manna, the brazen serpent, the cities of refuge, were so many emblems pointing out the nature, necessity, means, and security of that salvation which the Messiah was to establish for his people. Nor are these fanciful allusions of our own making, but warranted and taught in scripture, and easily proved from thence, would time permit; for indeed, there is not one of these persons or things which I have named, but would furnish matter for a long discourse, if closely considered in this view, as typical of the promised Redeemer.

The like may be said of the Levitical ceremonies. The law of Moses is, in this sense, a happy schoolmaster to lead us unto Christ: (Gal. iii.) and it may be proved beyond contradiction, that in these the gospel was preached of old to all those Israelites indeed, whose hearts were right with God, and whose understandings were enlightened by his Spirit. The ark of the covenant, the mercy-seat, the tabernacle, the incense, the altar, the offerings, the high-priest with his ornaments and garments, the laws relating to the leprosy, the Nazarite, and the redemption of lands; all these, and many more, which I have not time to mention, have a deep and important meaning beyond their outward appearance; each, in their place, pointed to the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world, (John i.) derived their efficacy from him, and received their full accomplishment in him.

Thus the Old and New Testaments do mutually illustrate each other; nor can either be well understood singly. The Old Testament, in histories, types, prophecies, and ceremonies, strongly delineates him, who, in the fulness of time, was to come into the world to effect a reconciliation between God and man. The New Testament shows that all these characters and circumstances were actually fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth; and that it was he of whom "Moses in the law, and the prophets did write;" and that we are not to look for another.

We read in Genesis, (chap. xxi.) that Abraham had two sons,—Isaac, the child of the promise, the son of his old age, by his wife Sarah,—and Ishmael, born some years before, of Hagar, the handmaid and servant of Sarah; and that the latter, with his mother, were cast out of the family. The occasion some would think trivial, namely, the anger and jealousy of Sarah, because Ishmael had mocked her son; but when it was grievous to Abraham to put them away upon so slight a ground, God himself interposed and commanded him to comply with her desire. Had we heard no more of this, it is likely we should have considered it as a piece of family-history, of no very great importance but to those who were immediately concerned in

it. We should perhaps have wondered to find so much said upon such a subject, in a book which we profess to believe was written by divine inspiration; we should probably have presumed to arraign the divine wisdom, in descending to particulars, in which, according to our views of the fitness of things, we could discern nothing either interesting or instructive. To guard us from these rash mistakes, to explain the true meaning of this particular transaction, and at the same time to furnish us with a key for understanding many passages of the like nature, in which human wisdom can discover neither beauty nor benefit,—it has pleased God to favour us with an infallible exposition of the whole matter. Not for the sake of Abraham, or Isaac, or Ishmael, or Hagar, was this recorded; much less merely to gratify our curiosity. No: "These things," saith the apostle Paul, "are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sina, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sina in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.—Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman. So then, brethren, we are not the children of the bond-woman, but of the free," Gal. iv. I must not detain you by showing at large how the apostle teaches us to discover the spirit and privileges of the gospel, together with what all who truly receive it must expect to encounter, in a passage which we might otherwise have thought superfluous, if not impertinent. Keep this in your mind when you read the scriptures. Assure yourselves, that there is nothing vain or useless in the word of God. Compare one place with another, the law with the gospel, the prophets with the evangelists; pray unto God that he would open your understandings to understand the scriptures, as he did for the disciples; (Luke xxiv.) and in a little time you will find, that Christ is not only spoken of in a few verses, here and there, but that, as I said before, he is the main scope and subject of every book, and almost of every chapter.

I would add an instance or two of the meaning of the ceremonies, to what I have observed of Hagar in reference to the types. In the law of the Passover, it was especially enjoined, (Exod. xii.) that not a bone of the paschal lamb should be broken. Now, who would have thought that this referred to Christ! yet we see the evangelist expressly

applies it to him, and is filled with wonder at the accomplishment. The legs of those who were crucified at the same time were purposely broken, (John xix.) but our Lord was passed by; and that it should be so, was intimated near fifteen hundred years before, in this charge concerning the lamb. Again, we find, that in several places where a bullock was commanded to be slain for a sin-offering, it was enjoined, that the flesh and the skin should be burnt without the camp; and from the epistle to the Hebrews, (chap. xiii.) we learn, that this was not a slight or arbitrary circumstance. We have there this explication: "For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary, by the high-priest, for sin, were burnt without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth, therefore, without the camp, bearing his reproach." I must not enlarge any farther, or it were easy, by the clue the apostles in their writings have given us, to trace the important meaning of many of those institutions, which scoffers, who are wise in their own conceits, though neither acquainted with themselves nor the subject, presume to censure as frivolous. The sense of the sacred writings lies too deep for a captious, superficial, volatile survey; it must be a search, a scrutiny; a humble, diligent, sincere, and persevering inquiry, or no satisfaction can be expected.

The import of the scripture-testimony concerning Christ, which was the third thing I proposed to speak of, must be deferred to another opportunity. I hope what has been already said, may, through the divine blessing, engage you to search the scriptures. Remember, it is the command of our Lord Jesus Christ: it is the only appointed way to the knowledge of him, whom to know, so as to love, serve, and obey him, is both the foundation and the sum of our happiness, here and hereafter. We, as well as the Jews, think we have eternal life in the scriptures, and shall, like them, be inexcusable and self-condemned if we neglect it. Let us not be like fools, with a prize, an inestimable prize, in our hands, but without heart or skill to use it. Better would it have been for us to have lived and died in the wilds of America, without either means of grace or hopes of glory, than to slight this record which God has been pleased to give us of his Son. But happy the man whose delight is in the law of his God! He has sure direction in every difficulty, certain comfort in every distress. The beauty of the precepts is preferable in his eye to "thousands of gold and silver," Psalm cxix. The comforts of the promisee are sweeter to his taste, "than honey or the honey-comb," Psalm xix. He is happy in life; for the word of God is to him as a "four-

tain of living water." He shall be happy in death; the promises of his God shall support him through that dark valley; and he shall be happy for ever in the presence and love of him for whose sake he now searches the scriptures; "Whom, having not seen," yet, from the testimony there given of him, "he loves; in whom, though now he sees him not, yet believing, he rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Pet. i.

Pleraque autem (si detur libere loquendi venia) quæ etiam in Theologicis scholis tractantur, et magno cum apparatu et strepitu docentur, et disputantur, spinosum forte acumen habent, sed simul certe spinosum sterilitatem: lacerare et pungere possunt, animos pascere non possunt: "Nemo enim ex spinis uvas colligit unquam, aut ex tribulis ficus." "Quorsum alta (inquit quidam) de Trinitate disputare, si careas humilitate, et sic Trinitati displiceas!" Et apte S. Augustinus ad illud *Esaiæ*, "Ego Deus tuus docens te utilia;" "*utilia* (inquit) docens, non *subtilia*." Et hoc est quod opto et oro; ut nobis pro modulo nostro subdocentibus, ille efficaciter vos doceat, qui cathedram in cælo habens, corda docet in terris.

ARCHIEP. LEIGHTON, *Prælect. Theol.*
p. 4. edit. 4to. Lond. 1693.

SERMON VI.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.—John v. 39.

In a former discourse on these words, I mentioned four things as highly requisite, if we would acquire an useful knowledge of the scriptures,—sincerity with respect to the end, diligence in the use of means, a humble sense of our own weakness, and earnest prayer to God for the assistance of his grace and Spirit. To engage us to this practice, and perseverance therein, I next considered how the scriptures, when properly searched into and compared, do clearly, and in every part testify of Christ, that he is the end of the law, the sum of the prophets, the completion of the promises, the scope of the types and ceremonies, and the great object of the whole Old Testament dispensation. I am now to say something to the third point I proposed.

III. Concerning the import of the testimony which the scriptures bear to Christ.

The principal difficulties on this head are, where to begin on a subject absolutely boundless, and what to select that may be most suitable and useful to this assembly, from the

immense variety of topics that offer. For this being the great end and design of the scriptures, to proclaim the excellency of Christ Jesus our Lord, "that we, through him, may have strong consolation," (Heb. xii.) it is inculcated in so many places, set in such a diversity of views, and couched under such deep and comprehensive expressions, that not only our present opportunity but my whole future life, would be too short, if I would collect, state, and explain all that properly belongs to this single article. For order's sake, I shall reduce the little I must say at this time to three or four distinct particulars,—what the scriptures testify of Christ, as to his person, his offices, his power, and his love.

When we hear of some great undertaking to be performed, we inquire of course about the person who is chiefly concerned in it; so, when we are told of the mighty works Jesus Christ engaged to perform, to redeem a lost world, to satisfy divine justice, to make an end of sin, to abolish death, and to bring life and immortality to light; the first question that occurs is, Who is he? Search the scriptures, and you will have a clear and decisive answer. The prophet *Isaiæ*, "rapt into future times," describes him thus: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and he shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," *Isaiæ* ix. 6. The union of the divine and human natures in the Messiah is so strongly asserted, the names and attributes of God are so clearly ascribed, in this passage to one who should be born into the world, that he who runs may read; the way-faring man, though a fool, must understand it; and it requires a considerable share of unhappy ingenuity, to wrest the words to any other than their obvious meaning. This text, though it stood alone in the Bible (supposing the scriptures to be a revelation from God,) would be a full warrant, and a firm foundation, for that great point of christian faith and doctrine, That Jesus Christ is very God, and very man; or, as the apostle better expresses it, "God manifest in the flesh." But it is not alone: on the contrary, the Messiah is seldom mentioned, but something is either said of him, or referred to him, which teaches us the same important truth. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, (by *Jeremiah*, chap. xxiii.) that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." *Isaiæ* in general styles him, "A child to be born;" *Jeremiah* more particularly, a "Branch of David;" *Isaiæ* ascribes to him the name of "The Mighty God;"

Jeremiah says, he shall be called "The Lord our righteousness." You have the word LORD in capital letters here, as in other places, where it is in the original *JEHOVAH*. Some of the names of God are occasionally applied to inferior subjects, to angels, to magistrates, and sometimes to idols. But *Jehovah* is allowed by all to signify the essential and incommunicable name of the Most High God. Yet this is not the only place where it is expressly and directly applied to the Messiah. David himself speaks to the same purpose: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand," Psalm cx. That the Messiah was to be David's son, was known and acknowledged by the Jews in our Saviour's time; but how he could be the son of David, and yet his Lord, was a difficulty that utterly posed and silenced the most learned Rabbis and Scribes among them; because, being destitute of that sincerity and humility we have before spoken of, they could not understand the scriptures, which were read in their synagogues every day.

Now, although this important doctrine was not to be discovered by the light of nature, or the powers of human reason, yet, since it has pleased God to make it known to us, our reason, humbly tracing the steps of divine revelation, can easily prove the expediency, and even the necessity that it should be so. When we are informed from scripture, that all mankind being sunk into a state of sin and misery, God had in great mercy appointed a person to atone for the one, and deliver them from the other; we may safely, from these principles, infer, by our own reason, 1st, That this person cannot be mere man: for as the whole human race, and consequently every individual, is supposed to be previously involved in the same circumstances of guilt and condemnation, it is impossible that any one of these should be able either to answer or satisfy for himself, much less be qualified to interpose in behalf of another. From hence reason may ascend a step higher, and conclude, 2d, That no mere creature, however great and excellent, can undertake this part; for the two great points necessary in order to our redemption, to satisfy the justice of God, and to restore the divine image in man, are either of them beyond the sphere of finite power. We read in the scriptures of angels, archangels, thrones, principalities, and powers; and from several texts we may collect, that their number and excellencies are beyond any conceptions we can form. Could we suppose that the virtues and endowments of all these various and exalted beings were united and centred in one of them; however glorious this being would be in other respects, when we consider him as a creature of the divine power, he will be found to be as unfit, and as unable, to interfere in the behalf of *sinful man, as the meanest worm that crawls*

upon the earth. It is the duty of every being, great and small, to be entirely devoted, according to the extent of its capacity, to the service and glory of its great Creator; therefore an angel is no more capable than a man of performing the smallest work of supererogation. The highest archangel could not magnify the law of God, and make it honourable on the behalf of man, being already bound thereto for himself: much less can we suppose such a being capable of expiating the sins of mankind by suffering. If divine justice insisted on a propitiation, it must follow, that nothing less than an equivalent could be accepted. But what would be the temporary sufferings of a creature, or of all creatures, in this view? A finite satisfaction, however heightened and exaggerated, would at last be infinitely short of the demand. As to the other branch of redemption, the restoration of the image of God in the soul, I need only mention it; for it appears, at first glance, that this must be the prerogative of divine power alone to effect. It remains, therefore, that the deliverance of mankind could only be attempted by him, who, we are assured by the apostle, agreeable to the passages already cited, is over all, God blessed for ever.

That the Son of God should take upon him the nature and circumstances of our humanity, sin excepted, in order to atone for our transgressions, is indeed such an instance of condescension and love, as must for ever dazzle and astonish the brightest understandings. It is true, some persons in these refined times affect to speak of this point with admirable coolness and precision. But in the beginning it was not so. Either the apostle Paul was less master of his temper, or more unequal to sublime speculations, than these gentlemen, or else we must allow he had a very different view of the subject: for he cannot mention it without appearing to be transported, and (if I may use the expression) swallowed up by the thought; his ideas seem too great for words; and it is well if his best attempts to explain himself have not exposed him, in the judgment of some of his readers, to the charge of solecism. However, though this doctrine, above any other, is a proof that God "is able to do for us exceeding abundantly beyond all we could ask or think," it is not, upon the premises I before mentioned, in the least repugnant to right reason; rather it is exactly calculated to remove all those surmises which would rise in the mind of a reasonable sinner upon the first intimation of possible forgiveness. In our nature Christ fulfilled the law which we had broken: he sustained the penalty we had incurred: he vanquished the enemies we had to encounter; he trod the path which he has marked out for us; he is entered in our name into that heaven he has promised us; and retains a sympathy with us in all our sufferings and temptations, "in

as much as he himself has suffered, being tempted," Heb. ii.

I am next to consider the testimony of scripture, concerning the offices of Christ. These are, in general, included in the character of Mediator. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," 1 Tim. ii. In this word is summed up all that Christ has already done, now does, or will hereafter do, either on the part of God or on that of man. But for our better apprehension, it is proposed to us under three distinct and principal views, answerable to the three particulars in which the misery of fallen man does principally consist.

And, first, man, having departed from God, "became vain in his imaginations, and his foolish heart was darkened," (Rom. i.) so that he totally lost the knowledge of his Creator, and how entirely his happiness depended thereon. He forgot God and himself, and sunk so low as to worship the work of his own hands. His life became vain and miserable: in prosperity, without security or satisfaction; in adversity, without support or resource: his death dark and hopeless; no pleasing reflection on the past, no ray of light on the future. Such was the unhappy case when Christ undertook the office of a Prophet: in which character, under various dispensations, first by his servants inspired of old, and afterwards more clearly in his own person, and by his apostles, he has instructed us in the things pertaining to our peace; not only renewing in us the knowledge of the true God, which, where revelation prevailed not, was universally lost out of the world, but disclosing to us the counsels of divine love and wisdom in our favour, those great things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which never could have entered into the heart of man to conceive, had not he who dwelt in the bosom of the Father declared them to us. We can now give a sufficient answer to that question, which must have for ever overwhelmed every serious awakened mind, "Wherewithal shall I appear before the Most High God?" Mic. vi. We have now learned how God can declare and illustrate his righteousness and truth, by that very act which, without respect to satisfaction given, would seem the highest impeachment of both, I mean his justifying the ungodly. We have now a glass by which we can discover the presence of the Creator in every part of his creation, and a clue to lead us through the mysterious mazes of divine providence. But who can enumerate the various, the important, the interesting lessons we receive from this heavenly Teacher, when, by the influence of his Holy Spirit he powerfully applies his written word to the hearts of his real disciples, who search the scriptures with a sincere desire to be made wise unto salvation! Whatever is necessary

to make life useful and comfortable, and to gild the gloom of death with the bright prospect of a glorious immortality, is there contained: so that, instructed by these writings alone, a poor illiterate mechanic has been often enabled to converse upon a dying-bed with more dignity, certainty, and influence, than any, or all the philosophers, ancient or modern, could attain.

But, besides the natural ignorance of fallen man, he was chargeable with aggravated guilt. Guilt and ignorance are reciprocally causes and consequences of each other. Every additional guilt tends to increase the stupidity of the human soul, and every increase of this increases in the same proportion the natural indisposition for the practice or the love of virtue, makes the soul more blind to consequences, more base in its pursuits, and thus to become a more willing and assiduous servant of iniquity. No wonder, therefore, that when the understanding was totally darkened as to the knowledge of God, the will and affections became wholly disobedient to his law. But when a divine light has in some measure discovered the heart to itself, and at the same time set an offended God in view, every such sensible sinner would undoubtedly imitate our first parents, and flee (were it possible) from the presence of his Maker and his Judge. "I heard thy voice," says Adam, "and I hid myself, for I was afraid," Gen. iii. Vain attempt! and, if it were practicable, a dreadful alternative! since absence from God imports the utmost misery to a creature who can be happy only in his favour. But here the scriptures bring us unspeakable comfort, testifying of Christ as our great High-Priest. To point out and illustrate this part of his character is the chief end and design of the whole Levitical law, the main points of which are explained, and applied to our blessed Lord, throughout the epistle to the Hebrews. The principal parts of the priests' office were, to sacrifice in behalf of the people, to make atonement, to pray for them, and to bless them in the name of the Lord. No sacrifices could be offered or accepted, no blessings expected, but through the hands of the priests whom God had appointed. Thus Christ, the High-Priest of our profession, offered himself a sacrifice without either spot or blemish: he entered with his own blood within the veil, to the immediate presence of our offended God, and through him peace and good-will is proclaimed to sinful men. He continues still to exercise the other part of his appointment: he makes continual intercession for his people; he presents their prayers and imperfect services acceptable before the throne; he gives them confidence and access to draw nigh to God; and he bestows upon them those gifts and blessings which are the fruits of his sufferings and obedience. The Levitical priests were, like their people, sinners,

and were therefore constrained first to make atonement for themselves; they were mortal, therefore their service passed from hand to hand; their sacrifices were imperfect, therefore needed continual repetition, and had at last only a typical and ceremonial efficacy; for it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. ix. and x.) could remove either the guilt or pollution of sin. "The law made nothing perfect." But Jesus, "the Mediator of the new covenant," is "such a High-Priest as became us; holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; who needeth not (as those of old) to offer sacrifice, first for his own sins and then for the people; for this he did once, when he offered up himself," Heb. vii. The great inference from this doctrine, several times repeated by the apostle in a variety of phrase, is, that we may now have boldness to appear before God, that our prayers and services are pleasing in his sight, and all the blessings of grace and glory ready to be bestowed on us, if we faithfully apply for them, through the merits of his Son.

Once more, man is not only ignorant of God and himself, and too full of guilt to plead in his own name, but he is likewise weak and defenceless; unable to make his way through the opposition that withstands his progress to eternal life, or to secure him from the many enemies "that rise up against him," Psalm iii. We read, that when the Gibeonites made a league with Joshua, (Jos. ix.) which was the only step that could save them from utter ruin, the neighbouring states and cities all united to destroy them: so the soul that is desirous to submit to Jesus Christ, immediately finds itself in the midst of war; the world, the flesh, and the devil, unite their forces, either to recall such a one to the practice and service of sin, or to distress him to the uttermost for forsaking it. And none could support this conflict, if not themselves supported by a higher hand. But Jesus, the antitype of Joshua, the true Captain of the Lord's hosts, reveals himself in his word as the King of his church. He can inspire the fainting soul with unseen supplies: he, when the enemy comes in like a flood, (Isa. lix.) can, by his Spirit, lift up a standard against him; he can take the prey even out of the hand of the mighty. He has said it of his church in general, and he will make it good to every individual that trusts in him, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against them. What though a sense of the guilt and remaining power of sin often fills the humble soul with inexpressible distress! He that stills the raging of the sea, and the violence of the winds, with a word, can with equal ease calm all the unruly motions of the mind. What though the world opposes in every quarter, and presents snares and terrors all around! What though rage or contempt, threats or allurements, are by turns,

or altogether, employed to ruin us; behold "greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world;" (1 John iv.) "Christ has overcome the world for us," (John xvi.) and has promised to make us conquerors, yea, more than conquerors, in our turn. What though "the devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;" (1 Pet. vi) it is an argument of the strongest kind for watchfulness and prayer. But we need not fear him: The "beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety;" (Deut. xxxiii.) The "Lord shall cover him all the day long; he shall deliver him from the snare of the fowler;" (Psalm xci.) "his truth shall be a shield and buckler" to all who enlist under his banner; and at length, yea, shortly, "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet," Rom. xvi.

It is thus the scriptures, to help the weakness of our apprehensions, testify of Christ, under the threefold view of Prophet, Priest, and King of his people. These are his principal and leading characters, which include and imply the rest; for the time would fail to speak of him, as he is declared to be their head, husband, root, foundation, sun, shield, shepherd, lawgiver, exemplar, and forerunner. In brief, there is hardly any comfortable relation or useful office amongst men, hardly any object in the visible creation, which either displays beauty or produces benefit, but what is applied in the word of God, to illustrate the excellence and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. The intent of all is, that we may learn to trust him, and delight to serve him; for these must go together. Whoever would be benefited by his mediation as a Priest, must submit to his instructions as a Prophet, and yield him universal obedience as a King. Fatal are the mistakes in this matter now in the world. Some talk highly of the death and sufferings of Christ, who are little solicitous to keep his commandments; others labour in the very fire to observe his law; but "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own," (Rom. x.) they labour to no purpose. Dependence on the merits of Christ, and obedience to his commands, are inseparably united; and only the man who aims at both, can attain to either.

I should now lay before you some scripture testimonies of the power and love of Christ; but I have anticipated this part of my subject in what I have already said. His divine nature proclaims his power, his offices display his love. We have seen, that he emptied himself of his eternal glories; that he bowed the heavens, and came down in the form of a servant; that he submitted to all imaginable sufferings; all that the malice of men, all that the avenging justice of God could inflict; and having by this means opened the kingdom of heaven, and taken possession

sion there, in behalf of all believers, he has caused the glad tidings of salvation to be published through the world; declaring, "that whosoever cometh to him, (without one exception) he will in no wise cast out," John vi. Are not these proofs of unspeakable, unexampled love! We have seen, that he fully performed the work he undertook; that he has made an end of sin; (Dan. ix.) brought in an everlasting righteousness, spoiled principalities and powers; (Eph. ii.) triumphed over all our enemies, broke down the partition-wall, and brought life and immortality to light by his gospel, 1 Tim. i. We read, that he is highly exalted; "that God has given him a name that is above every name;" (Phil. ii.) that he is "far above all principality, and might, and dominion;" and what more can be said of his power! Read his own declaration, "All power is given me in heaven and in earth," Matt. xxviii. Were these two points, the power and the love of Christ, rightly understood, and fully believed, earth would be full of heaven. But, alas! we are fools, and slow of heart to receive all that Moses and the prophets, (Luke xxiv.) the evangelists and apostles, have written for our instruction. From hence proceeds our indifference, and that we need so much to be pressed to search the scriptures, though we readily acknowledge that in them we have the words of eternal life.

IV. It remains, therefore, in the fourth and last place, that I add a few words to recommend and enforce the command in the text, "Search the scriptures," from the argument there subjoined, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life;" and we think right; for it "is eternal life to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent:" (John xvii.) and every article of this knowledge is contained in the Old and New Testament; nor can any part of it be met with any where else. Yet let conscience judge this day, as in the presence of the living God, the searcher of hearts, before whom our private judgments must shortly come under a review: has any book a smaller share of the time, the memory, or the affections of many of us, than this book of God? Do not the successive returns of business and amusement so far engross our time and our thoughts, that we have either no leisure, or no disposition, to attend to the things which pertain to our peace? Consider, "in them we think we have eternal life." We know we are posting to eternity as fast as the wings of time can carry us; we know that the consequences of our behaviour in this span of life will attend us into an invisible unalterable state; and we confess, that the necessary directions for our conduct in these most important and precarious circumstances, are to be found only in the Bible; what words then can describe our fatal insensibility, if, all this acknowledged,

we have no heart to consult, or to value, this inestimable treasure put into our hands?

Many inquiries, more curious than useful, have been started concerning the divine procedure with the Heathen nations, and those who never heard of the gospel of peace. "The Judge of all the earth will (undoubtedly) do right," (Gen. xviii.) and will be justified at the great day, when every man shall receive according to their works. Till then we must wait for the knowledge of what he has not seen fit to reveal. But thus much he has already told us, that however it may go with those who know not the gospel, dreadful will be the doom of those who, having it published among them, refuse to obey it. "The servant who knew not his master's will shall be beaten with few stripes," Luke xii. But this will not be our case; at least our ignorance will be rather an aggravation than an excuse; a wilful, obstinate, infatuated ignorance. We have the words of eternal life in our hands; "line upon line, precept upon precept:" but how do we imitate those (whom perhaps we have been ready to blame) spoken of in the parable, who, when they received a kind and gracious invitation to a royal feast, made light of it, and "all with one consent began to make excuse!" Luke xiv. It is easy to apply this to the Jews of old; so David could clearly judge in the case of the rich man who killed his poor neighbour's lamb, (2 Sam. xii.) but had not the prophet helped him, he would not have collected that he himself was the person intended. But to bring the general truths of scripture home to the heart is the work of God; and, perhaps, while I am speaking at random, he may rouse the consciences of some to say in particular, Thou art the man. Then they will soon see how much it behooves them to search the scriptures, when they understand the weighty meaning of the words, eternal life.

Some of us, I hope, do already make conscience of frequent reading the scriptures; but let us remember the force of the word *search*. It is not a careless superficial reading, or despatching such a number of chapters in a day, as a task, that will answer the end. I have already reminded you, that it is a business will need your best application; a serious, impartial, humble, persevering inquiry, accompanied with earnest prayer for the light and assistance of God's Holy Spirit. When we set about it in this method, we shall soon find happy effects; pleasure and instruction will go hand in hand; and our knowledge advance as the growing light. The precepts shall inspire us with true wisdom; teach us how to order all our affairs, respecting both worlds; to fill up our several stations in life with propriety, usefulness, and comfort; and to avoid the numerous evils and distresses which those who live by no rule, or by any

other rule than God's word, are perpetually running into. The promises shall be a support in every trouble, a medicine in every sickness, a supply in every need. Above all, the scriptures will repay our trouble, as they testify of Christ. The more we read of his person, offices, power, love, doctrine, life, and death, the more our hearts will cleave to him: we shall, by insensible degrees, be transformed into his image. We shall, with the apostle, say, "I know in whom I have believed," 2 Tim. i. Every thing we see shall be at once a memorial to remind us of our Redeemer, and a motive to animate us in his service. And at length we shall be removed to see him as he is, without a cloud, and without a veil; to be for ever with him; to behold and to share the glories of that heavenly kingdom "which (Matt. xxv.) he has prepared (for his followers) from before the foundation of the world." Amen.

SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day; and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.—PSALM lxxxix. 15, 16.

TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE PARISH OF OLNEY.

MY DEAR FRIENDS:—I have principally two motives for publishing these Discourses. The one is, to exhibit a specimen of the doctrine that is taught and most surely believed amongst us, to satisfy those who desire information, and to stop, if possible, the mouth of Slander. I cheerfully submit them to examination, in full confidence that they contain nothing of moment which is not agreeable to the general strain of the word of God, and to the principles of the church whereof I am a minister, as specified in the Articles, Liturgy, and Homilies. And that what I now print is to the same purport with the usual course of my preaching, I doubt not but all who stately hear me, will do me the justice to acknowledge.

My other motive is, a desire of promoting your edification. It is my comfort that many of you live by the truths of the gospel, and highly prize them. You will not, therefore, be unwilling to view the substance of what you once heard with acceptance. But it is to be feared, that the far greater part of the congregation have need to have the things pertaining to their peace pressed upon them again and again, for a different reason; not because they know them, and therefore love to have them brought to their remembrance, but because they have hitherto heard them without effect. For the sake of both, therefore, I am willing to leave an abiding testimony amongst you. I hereby take each of your consciences to witness, that I am clear of your blood; and that, to the best of my knowledge and ability, I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.

In the choice of the subjects I have selected for publication, I have not been solicitous to comprise a succinct scheme of gospel-doctrine, but have given the preference to such topics, which the peculiar circumstances of the times, and of my hearers, make me desirous might be had in continual remembrance.

The exposition of the third commandment, which was first delivered in your hearing, I afterwards preached (nearer the form in which it now appears) at London; and as it led me to touch on some particulars of a very public and interesting concern, I have given it a place in this volume. And I shall think myself happy indeed, if it may please God to give weight to the testimony of so obscure a person, with respect to a grievance under which the nation groans.

As long discourses are in many respects inconvenient, I have chosen to publish no more than a brief summary of what you heard more at large from the pulpit. And as I aim to speak plain truths to a plain people, I have purposely avoided any studied ornaments in point of expression, being desirous to accommodate myself to the apprehensions of the most ignorant.

May it please the God of all grace to accompany my feeble endeavours to promote the knowledge of his truth, with the powerful influence of his Holy Spirit! And I earnestly entreat all who know how to draw near to a throne of grace by Jesus Christ, to strive mightily in prayer for me, that I may stand fast in the faith, and increase in the knowledge of Jesus the Saviour; and that, for his sake, I may labour, without fear of fainting, in the service to which he has been pleased to call me. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!—I am your affectionate friend, and servant in the gospel of Christ,

JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, January 20, 1767.

SERMONS, &c.

SERMON I.

THE SMALL SUCCESS OF A GOSPEL-MINISTRY.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.—Matt. xi. 25.

Our blessed Lord perfectly knew beforehand the persons who would profit by his ministry: but his observations, conduct, and discourses, were intended as a pattern and instruction to his followers. He is said to have marvelled at the unbelief of some, and at the faith of others; not as though either was strange to him, who was acquainted with all hearts, and always knew what he himself could do; but it is spoken of him as a man, and to show how his ministers and people should be affected upon the like occasions. In the preceding verses he had been speaking of Capernaum, and other places, where his mighty works had been performed in vain. He had denounced a sentence against them; and foretold that their punishment would be heavier in proportion to the greatness of the privileges they had abused. But this was not his pleasing work. Mercy and grace were his delight, and he usually expressed sorrow and pain for the obstinacy of sinners. He wept for his avowed enemies, and prayed for the murderers who nailed him to the cross. It was not without grief that he declared the approaching doom of these cities; yet raising his thoughts from earth to heaven, he acquiesced in the will of his heavenly Father, and expressed the highest satisfaction in his appointment. He knew, that however some would harden themselves, there was a remnant who would receive the truth, and that the riches and glory of the divine sovereignty and grace would be magnified. Before I enter upon the particulars, this connexion of the words will afford us ground for some observations.

I. That the small success and efficacy of the preached gospel upon multitudes who hear it, is a subject of wonder and grief to the ministers and people of God. It was so to our Lord Jesus, considered as a preacher

and messenger; and they, so far as they have received his Spirit, judge and act as he did.

1. Those who have indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious, have had such a powerful experience in their own souls of the necessity and value of the gospel, that in their first warmth, and till painful experience has convinced them of the contrary, they can hardly think it possible that sinners should stand out against its evidence. They are ready to say, "Surely it is because they are ignorant: they have not had opportunity of considering the evil of sin, the curse of the law and the immense goodness of God manifested in his Son; but when these things shall be plainly and faithfully set before them, surely they will submit, and thankfully receive the glad tidings." With such sanguine hopes Melancthon entered the ministry at the dawn of the Reformation: he thought he had only to speak and to be heard, in order to convince; but he soon found himself mistaken, and that the love of sin, the power of prejudice, and the devices of Satan, were such obstacles in his way, as nothing less than the mighty operations of the Spirit of God could break through. And all who preach upon his principles, and with his views, have known something of his disappointment. Speaking from the feelings of a full heart, they are ready to expect that others should be no less affected than themselves. But when they find that they are heard with indifference, perhaps with contempt; that those whose salvation they long for, are enraged against them for their labour of love; and that they cannot prevail upon even their dearest friends, and nearest relatives,—this grieves and wounds them to the heart.

2. They have been convinced themselves, that unbelief was the worst of all their sins

and therefore, though they pity all who live in the practice of sin, yet they have a double grief to see them reject the only means of salvation: and that this contempt will lie more heavily upon them, than any thing they can be charged with besides. It gladdens the heart of a minister to see a large and attentive assembly; but how is this joy damped by a just fear, lest any, lest many of them should receive this grace of God in vain, and have cause at last to bewail the day when the name of Jesus was first sounded in their ears!

It seems plain then, that those who are indifferent about the event of the gospel, who satisfy themselves with this thought, that the elect shall be saved, and feel no concern for unawakened sinners, make a wrong inference from a true doctrine, and know not what spirit they are of. Jesus wept for those who perished in their sins. St. Paul had great grief and sorrow of heart for the Jews, though he gave them this character, "That they pleased not God, and were contrary to all men." It well becomes us, while we admire distinguishing grace to ourselves, to mourn over others: and inasmuch as secret things belong to the Lord, and we know not but some, of whom we have at present but little hopes, may at last be brought to the knowledge of the truth, we should be patient and forbearing after the pattern of our heavenly Father, and endeavour, by every probable and prudent means, to stir them up to repentance, remembering that they cannot be more distant from God, than by nature we were ourselves.

II. The best relief against those discouragements we meet with from men, is to raise our thoughts to God and heaven. For this the Lord Jesus is our precedent here. He said, "I thank thee, O Father." The word* signifies, to confess, to promise, or consent, and to praise. As if it had been said, "I glorify thy wisdom in this respect, I acknowledge, and declare that it is thy will, and I express my own consent and approbation." Our Lord's views of the divine counsels were perfect, and therefore his satisfaction was complete. It is said, "He rejoiced in spirit," (Luke x. 21.) when he uttered these words. And the more we increase in faith and in the knowledge of God, the more we shall be satisfied in his appointments, and shall see and say, "He hath done all things well." It is needful for our comfort to be well established in the truth suggested in my text, That the Lord hath provided for the accomplishment of his own purposes, and that his counsels shall surely stand. From this doctrine we may infer,

1. That were the faithful labours and endeavours of ministers and others, to promote

* The original word, εὐχαριστοῦμαι, occurs Matt. iii. 9, Luke xxii. 6, and Rom. xv. 9.

the knowledge of grace and the practice of holiness, fail of success, yet they shall be accepted. The servants of Christ may in their humble measure adopt the words of their Lord and Master, in the prophet: "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength," Isaiah xlix. 5. When he sent forth his first disciples, he directed them, whenever they entered, to say, "Peace be to this house! and if a son of peace be there," if there be any who thankfully accept your salutation and message, "your peace shall rest upon it; if not, it shall return to you again," Luke x. 6. That is, your good wishes and endeavours shall not be lost for want of proper objects, but, when they seem to be without effect on others, shall be productive of the happiest consequences to yourselves: you shall receive all you were desirous to communicate. Thus his ministers are to declare his whole will, whether men will hear, or whether they shall forbear. And if they do this with a single eye to his glory, and in humble dependence upon his blessing, they are not answerable for the event; they shall in no wise lose their reward.

2. Faithful endeavours in the service of the gospel shall not wholly fail. Though all will not hear, some certainly shall both hear and obey. Though all are by nature equally averse and incapable, yet there shall be "a willing people in the day of God's power," Psalm cx. 3. If the wise and prudent turn away from the truth, there are babes to whom it shall be revealed. The Lord renews unto us a pledge of his faithfulness in this concern every time the rain descends. For thus he has promised, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it," Isaiah lv. 10.

3. The divine sovereignty is the best thought we can retreat to for composing and strengthening our minds under the difficulties, discouragements, and disappointments which attend the publication of the gospel. The more we give way to reasonings and curious inquiries, the more we shall be perplexed and baffled. When Jeremiah had been complaining of some things that were too hard for him, the Lord sent him to the potter's house, and taught him to infer, from the potter's power over the clay, the just right which the Lord of all hath to do what he will with his own, Jer. xviii. 6. It is only the pride of our own hearts that prevents this consideration from being perfectly conclusive and satisfactory. How many schemes de-

gatory from the free grace of God, tending to darken the glory of the gospel, and to depreciate the righteousness of the Redeemer, have taken their rise from vain unnecessary attempts to vindicate the ways of God; or rather to limit the actions of Infinite Wisdom to the bounds of our narrow understandings, to sound the depths of the divine counsels with our feeble plummet, and to say to Omnipotence, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther." But upon the ground of the divine sovereignty, we may rest satisfied and stable: for if God appoints and over-rules all according to the purpose of his own will, we have sufficient security, both for the present and the future.

1st, For the present. We may firmly expect, what scripture and reason concur to assure us, that "the Judge of all the earth will do right." Whatever to us appears otherwise in his proceedings, should be charged to the darkness and weakness of our minds. We know, that in every point of science, difficulties and objections occur to young beginners, which, at first view, may seem almost unanswerable; but as knowledge increases, the difficulties gradually subside, and at last we perceive they were chiefly owing to the defects of our apprehension. In divinity it is wholly so; "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all;" his revealed will is, like himself, just, holy, pure in the whole, and perfectly consistent in every part. We may safely rest upon this general maxim, that "the Judge of all the earth shall do right." Though he does not give us a particular account of his dealings, and we are not fully able to comprehend them; yet we ought, against all appearances and proud reasonings, to settle it firmly in our minds, that every thing is conducted worthy the views which God has given us of himself in his holy word, as a being of infinite justice, wisdom, goodness, and truth. And farther,

2dly, For the future. He has appointed a day when he will make it appear that he has done right. Though clouds and darkness are now upon his proceedings, they shall ere long be removed. When all his designs in providence and grace are completed; when the present imperfect state of things shall be finished; when the dead, small and great, are summoned to stand before him,—then the great Judge will condescend to unfold the whole train of his dispensations, and will justify his proceedings before angels and men. Then every presumptuous cavil shall be silenced, and every difficulty solved. His people shall admire his wisdom, his enemies shall confess his justice. The destruction of those who perish shall be acknowledged deserved, and of themselves; and the redeemed of the Lord shall ascribe all the glory of their salvation to him alone. What we shall then

see, it is now our duty and our comfort assuredly to believe.

The great subject of our Saviour's joy, and which, so far as it is apprehended, will bear up his servants above all their difficulties and disappointments, I mean the consideration of the sovereign hand of God directing the success of his word when and where he pleases, we must defer speaking of till the next opportunity; and we shall close at present with a few inferences from what has been said thus far, by way of introduction.

1. Take heed how you hear. The gospel of salvation, which is sent to you, will be either "a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death," to every soul of you. There is no medium. Though, in a common and familiar way of speaking, we sometimes complain that the gospel is preached without effect, there is in reality no possibility that it can be without effect: an effect it must and will have upon all who hear it. Happy they who receive and embrace it as a joyful sound, the unspeakable gift of God's love. To these it will be "a savour of life unto life." It will communicate life to the soul at first, and maintain that life, in defiance of all opposition, till it terminates in glory. But woe, woe to those who receive it not. It will be to them "a savour of death unto death." It will leave them under the sentence of death, already denounced against them by the law which they have transgressed, and it will consign them to eternal death, under the heaviest aggravations of guilt and misery. Remember the doom of Capernaum, and why it was denounced. Jesus preached amongst them the words of eternal life, and they rejected him. This was all. In other things, perhaps, they were no worse than their neighbours, and probably disdained to hear themselves judged worthy of a heavier punishment than Sodom, and those cities which, for their abominations, were consumed with fire from heaven. But our Lord assures us, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for those who slight his word. For this guilt and condemnation was not confined to the Jews who rejected his person, but extends to all who shall at any time treat his gospel with contempt. However inconsiderable his ministers are in other respects, if they faithfully deliver his message, he has declared himself closely interested in the reception they meet with: "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth both me and him that sent me," Matt. x. 40. It is therefore at your peril to treat what we say with indifference: (if we speak agreeably to the scriptures) the word of God which we preach will judge you at the last day.

2. Be afraid of being wise in your own eyes, lest you should approach to the charac-

ters of those from whom the righteous God sees fit to hide the knowledge of those truths, without which they cannot be saved. The gospel is not proposed to you to ask your opinion of it, that it may stand or fall according to your decision, but it peremptorily demands your submission. If you think yourselves qualified to judge and examine it by that imperfect and depraved light which you call your reason, you will probably find reasons enow to refuse your assent. Reason is properly exercised in the ordinary concerns of life; and has so far a place in religious inquiries, that none can or do believe the gospel without having sufficient reasons for it. But you need a higher light, the light of God's Spirit, without which the most glorious displays of his wisdom will appear foolishness to you. If you come simple, dependent, and teachable; if you pray from your heart, with David, "open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things in thy law," (Psalm cxix. 18,) you will be heard and answered; you will grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; but if you neglect this, and trust in yourselves, as supposing this promised assistance of the Holy Spirit unnecessary, the glorious light of the gospel will shine upon you in vain; for Satan will maintain such hold of you by this pride of your hearts, as still to keep you in bondage and darkness, that you shall neither see it, nor desire to see it.

3. Those of you who have some spiritual apprehensions of these things, have reason to praise God that you see a little. You were once quite blind; you neither saw your disease nor your remedy. You could discern nothing of the excellence of Christ, or the beauty of holiness. But now the eyes of your understanding are in some measure enlightened. It is the grace of God has made you thus far to differ from what you once were, and from what multitudes around you still are. Be thankful. Accept it as a token for good. Be not discouraged that the beginnings are small, but wait on the Lord, and they shall be increased. Seek him by prayer. Converse with your bibles. Attend upon the public ordinances. In the humble use of these means, (while you endeavour to act faithfully according to the light you have already received,) you shall gradually advance in wisdom and comfort. The christian growth is not instantaneous but by degrees, as the early dawn increases in brightness till the perfect day, (Prov. iv. 18,) and as the corn comes forward surely, though unperceived, Matt. xiii. 31, 32. In this manner your views of gospel-truth shall increase in clearness, evidence, and influence, till you are removed from this land of shadows to the regions of perfect light, to behold the truth as it shines in the person of Jesus, without a veil, and without a cloud for ever.

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SERMON II.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL HID FROM MANY.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.—Matt. xi. 25.

WHEN our Lord appeared upon earth, though he came on the most gracious and important business, displayed the perfection of holiness in his conduct, and performed innumerable acts of kindness and love, he met with little regard. He found many enemies, but few hearty friends. Especially those who were most eminent for riches, learning, power, or reputed goodness, disdained him; and most of those who followed him were either people in low circumstances, or whose character had been offensive. Publicans and sinners, fishermen, unlearned and obscure persons, were almost the only friends he had. The Lord Jesus, who was infinitely above the selfish views which are too apt to influence our little minds, was well satisfied with this event. He did not desire honour from men. "The souls of the poor were precious in his sight," Psalm lxxii. 13, 14. He spoke kindly to those whom men abhorred; and if he mourned over the obstinacy of the chiefs of the people, it was for their own sakes. Yet (as I observed formerly) when he considered the appointment and will of God in this dispensation, he was not only content, but he rejoiced. He expressed his approbation in these words: "I thank thee, O Father," &c. There is something observable in this passage which will be of continual use and application, so long as the gospel shall be preached. For as it was then, so is it still; the things that are hid from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes. Five particulars offer from the words for our consideration:

1. What may be intended by *these things*?
2. Where and in what sense they are *hid*?
3. From whom? *The wise and prudent*.
4. How the knowledge of them is to be obtained? By revelation: *Thou hast revealed*.
5. Who are thus favoured? *Babes*.

I. By the things which it pleases God should be hid from the wise, and revealed to babes, we may understand,

1. In general, the things pertaining to salvation. That most men are ignorant of them, and careless about them, is too plain. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and the tree is known by its fruits. Men speak as though their tongues were their own; they act as though they were to give no account; they live as though they were to live here for ever. The way of truth is hid from their eyes, and the fear of God has no place in their hearts.

2. More particularly, those doctrines which are in an especial sense peculiar to the gospel, seem here to be intended. If the principles of what some call natural religion, though agreeable to the light of natural conscience, are little regarded, the more spiritual truths of the Bible are not only neglected but scorned and opposed. The same spirit which showed itself under our Lord's personal ministry still subsists. The chief doctrines he taught, and for which he met with the fiercest opposition, were precisely the same with those which have awakened the scorn and rage of the world ever since, and which multitudes who bear the name of christians in this day oppose with all their strength. Such as,

1st, The divinity of Christ.—When he spoke of himself as existing before Abraham, and said that God was his *own* Father,* the Jews took up stones to stone him. And this mystery is still hid from the natural man. No one can say, acknowledge, and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord or Jehovah; that he who once hung upon the cross, bleeding to death, is God the maker of all things, the rightful object of the supreme love, trust, and homage of men and angels, but by the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. xii. 3.

2dly, Distinguishing grace.—When Jesus first preached at Nazareth, the eyes of all were fixed upon him; (Luke iv. 16, 20;) but when, making application to themselves, he touched upon this point, from the examples of Naaman and Syrian, and the widow of Sarepta, who were released when many lepers and widows in Israel were passed by; they were filled with indignation, and would have thrown him headlong down the rock. And it is to this hour an offensive doctrine to all who do not know the value and the need of it.

3dly, The new birth.—When this was proposed to a master in Israel, he cried out, "How can these things be?" John iii. 9. And by many who are wise and prudent in their own sight, it is at this day accounted nonsense. A small acquaintance with the general strain of what is published either from the pulpit or the press, may prove that modern divinity has, for the most part, found a smoother path to tread than that by which Nicodemus was conducted to the knowledge of himself and his Saviour. Such a doubtful inquirer might now be entertained with

* John v. 18. *Πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ λέγει.* "He said that God was his *own* Father," in a sense peculiar to himself, and exclusive of all others. The Jews well understood the meaning of this assertion, that thereby he made himself equal with God; and therefore, as they did not believe in him, they charged him with blasphemy. It would indeed have been blasphemy in a mere man, or in the highest archangel, to have spoken of himself in these terms. But the force of the expression is lost in our version of the New Testament, through the omission of the word *ἑαυτοῦ*, his *own*, which seems one of the most important mistakes to be found in that translation.

many ingenious essays on the beauty of virtue, the efficacy of benevolence, the excellency of the human mind, and other favourite topics. He would find teachers enow to encourage and improve the idea he has of his own importance, but he would hardly meet with any who would speak to him in our Lord's language, and refer him to the brazen serpent, and a new birth, in order to learn the means and the nature of the gospel-salvation.

4thly, The nature of the life of faith.—When our Lord spoke of this, under the metaphor of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, many who till then had professed themselves his disciples, "turned back, and walked no more with him," John vi. 66. And none can bear it now who are not taught of God, to see such an excellency and sufficiency in Jesus, and such emptiness in themselves, as constrains them to cry out with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" John vi. 68. These things are hid from the wise and prudent. But,

II. Where, and in what sense are these things hid?

1. Where are they hid?

1st, They are hid in Christ. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Col. ii. 3. He is the great repository of truth. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell," Col. i. 19. And he is the messenger by whom the will of God is made known to man, Luke ix. 35; John i. 18. From hence observe,

(1.) You can attain to no saving truth, but in and by the knowledge of Jesus Christ. If they are hid in him, it can be but lost labour to seek them elsewhere.

(2.) Whatever seeming knowledge you have, if it does not endear him to you, it is nothing worth. It is science falsely so called, and can do you no good; for in the knowledge of him, and of him alone, is eternal life, John xvii. 3.

2dly, They are hid in the word of God.

(1.) They are contained there. "The whole scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is able to make us wise unto salvation:" (2 Tim. iii. 16:) to furnish us with a sufficiency of knowledge and motives for every good work. The word of God is perfect.

(2.) Yet though contained there, they are not plain to every eye. Though they are revealed in the letter, they are still hid from the wise and prudent. Something more is necessary than barely to read, in order to understand them; otherwise all who can read, and have the Bible, would be equally enlightened with equal application. But experience shows it far otherwise. This leads me farther to inquire,

2. In what sense they are hid?

1st, They are not hid as if it were on pur-

pose that those who sincerely seek them should be disappointed in their search. Far be it from us to think so hardly of the Lord. We have express promises to the contrary, that all who earnestly seek shall find. Fear not, you that sincerely desire an experimental and practical knowledge of the truths of God, and are willing to be taught in his appointed way: though many things appear difficult to you at present, the Lord will gradually increase your light, and crown your endeavours with success.

2dly, But from some persons they are hid, even from the wise and prudent, whom we are to speak of hereafter. Suffer me to offer a familiar illustration of the Lord's wisdom and justice in this procedure. Let me suppose a person to have a curious cabinet, which is opened at his pleasure, and not exposed to common view: he invites all to come and see it, and offers to show it to any one who asks him. It is hid, because he keeps the key; but none can complain, because he is ready to open it whenever he is desired. Some, perhaps, disdain the offer, and say, Why is it locked at all? Some think it not worth seeing, or amuse themselves with guessing at the contents. But those who are simply desirous for themselves, leave others disputing, go according to appointment, and are gratified. These have reason to be thankful for the favour; and the others have no just cause to find fault. Thus the riches of divine grace may be compared to a richly-furnished cabinet, to which Christ is the door. The word of God likewise is a cabinet generally locked up; but the key of prayer will open it. The Lord invites all; but he keeps the dispensation in his own hand. They cannot see these things except he shows them; but then he refuses none that sincerely ask him. The wise men of the world can go no farther than the outside of this cabinet; they may amuse themselves and surprise others with their ingenious guesses at what is within: but a babe that has seen it opened, can give us more satisfaction, without studying or guessing at all. If men will presume to aim at the knowledge of God, without the knowledge of Christ, who is the way and the door; if they have such a high opinion of their own wisdom and penetration, as to suppose they can understand the scriptures without the assistance of his Spirit; or if their worldly wisdom teaches them, that these things are not worth their inquiry; what wonder is it that they should continue to be hid from their eyes? They will one day be stript of all their false pleas, and condemned out of their own mouths.

3dly, The expression, "Thou hast hid," may perhaps farther imply, that those who seek occasion to cavil shall meet with something to confirm their prejudices. When people examine the doctrines or profession of the

gospel, not with a candid desire to learn, imitate, and practise, but in order to find some plausible ground for misrepresentation, they frequently have their wish. The wisdom of God has appointed, that difficulties, offences, objections, and stumbling-blocks, should attend, to exercise and manifest the spirits of these wise ones. How largely do they expatiate on the divisions and differences of sentiments which too much prevail among those who are united in the same leading truths. If they can discover an instance of error, folly, or wickedness of a single person who professes to adhere to the gospel-doctrine, how do they rejoice as if they had found great spoil, charge the faults of a few indiscriminately upon the whole, and labour to show, that every mistake and inadvertence is a necessary consequence of the principles which those maintain who commit it. We do not plead for mistakes and errors of any sort, for weakness in judgment, or inconsistency in practice. But as these things are more or less inseparable from the present state of human nature, they necessarily increase and strengthen the prepossessions of scorners against the truth, and are so far a means of hiding it from their eyes. Yet here again the fault is wholly in themselves; for they seek and desire such occasions of stumbling, and would be disappointed and grieved, if they could not meet with them. But those who are babes in their own eyes, humble, sincere, and teachable, are brought safe through, by a simple dependant spirit, and are made wiser every day by their observation of what passes around them.

Many inferences and advices might be deduced from what has been said. I shall content myself with three.

1. Examine yourselves what understanding and experience you have of the things I mentioned under the first head. So much as you know of these, so far you are christians, and no farther. "A form of godliness without the power," (2 Tim. iii. 5,) is one of the worst characters of the worst times; yet how common in the present day! How many who choose to be called Christians, reject the testimony which God has given of his Son, deny the efficacy of his grace, speak of the new birth with disdain, as unintelligible and unnecessary, and account all that can be said of the life of faith (though founded upon express scripture, and attested by many witnesses) no better than enthusiastic jargon! But if you are thus minded, however sober your deportment, or professedly benevolent your disposition, though you may be applauded as a pattern of generosity, a philosopher, or a saint, by your acquaintance and neighbours, if the scriptures are true, you can be but as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal in the sight of God. You would have despised Thomas in your heart, if you had been

witness to his joyful exclamation when he worshipped Jesus, and cried, "My Lord, and my God!" John xx. 28. You would have despised Paul as a dark enthusiast, had you heard him say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me," Gal. ii. 20. Yea, you must have despised Jesus himself, if you had been present at his conference with Nicodemus. Our Lord Jesus is now in heaven, Thomas and Paul have been long dead; you cannot reach them; nor do they stand in your way; therefore, perhaps you are content to speak well of them in general terms. But those who come nearest to their language and spirit are the objects of your scorn and hatred. How then can you pretend to love him, or presume that he loves you? Jesus is worshipped in heaven; how then can you expect to come there? or what pleasure could you find there in your present turn of mind? O, kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish; for in a little time his wrath will burn like fire.

But to every one who understands, embraces, and lives under the influence of these truths, I may safely apply our Lord's words, "Blessed art thou," (Matt. xvi. 17,) however despised by men, or chastened of the Lord; for "flesh and blood hath not revealed these things to thee;" thou hast assuredly received them from God by his Spirit. He alone is able to cause the light to shine into our dark hearts, "to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. iv. 6.

2. Do not entertain hard and perplexing thoughts about the counsels of God, either respecting others or yourselves.

1st, With regard to others. It is a frequent difficulty, either thrown in the way of inquirers after truth by the subtilty of Satan, or perhaps arising from the natural pride of the human heart, that would be thought able to account for every thing. I say, when they begin to apprehend the gospel-way of salvation, this perplexing question arises, If things are so, what will become of multitudes? What! are all the Heathens, Mahometans, Papists, and even all the Protestants, except the few who adopt these singular sentiments, to be lost? I shall not attempt to conquer this objection by dint of reasoning, but would rather persuade you to direct your reasonings another way. When the same question, for substance, was proposed to our Lord, his answer to those who asked him was, "Strive (each one for yourselves) to enter in at the strait gate," Luke xiii. 23, 24. Take care of yourselves, and leave the cases of others to the Lord. Remember he is God, and therefore just and good.

2dly, With regard to yourselves. Secret things belong to God; your business is with what is revealed. Some put the word of sal-

vation from them perversely, and think, if the Lord designs me for eternal life, he will call me in his own time; till then I will go on in my sins. Those who can reason thus, and take encouragement to persist in wickedness, from the consideration of the power and efficacy of God's grace, do thereby avow themselves to be Satan's willing servants. But he terrifies many on whom he cannot thus prevail, with representing to them, that, let them do what they will, it is all in vain; unless the Lord has chosen them, notwithstanding any good beginnings they may hope he has wrought in them, they will come to nothing at last. It is your business to give all diligence to make your calling sure. If, by a humble waiting upon God, you are enabled to have your conversation according to the gospel, listen not to vain and perplexing reasonings, but commit yourself to the mercy and guidance of the Lord; and he, in his good time, will enable you to see, and to say, that it is not in vain to trust in him. Your path shall be like the advancing light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The Lord has already provided all that you can reasonably desire.

(1.) The means are pointed out, in the way of which you are to be found, and wherein you may expect his blessing. These are chiefly secret prayer, the study of his written word, an attendance on the preached gospel, and free converse (as proper opportunities are afforded) with his believing people. If you continue in the observance of these, and act faithfully to the light you have already received, by breaking off from the evil practices of the world, and watching against those things which you yourselves know to be evil, you will certainly gain ground in light, strength, and comfort. You will see more and more of the glory of the Lord in the glass of the gospel; and in proportion to your views, you shall be "changed into the same image from glory to glory." For,

(2.) The promise is sure. What God has said you may assuredly depend on. And what has he said? What, indeed, has he not said for the encouragement of those who are sincerely desirous to seek and serve him! "They that seek shall find," Matt. vii. 7, 8. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength," Isa. xl. 29. "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength," Isa. xl. 31. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground," Isa. xlv. 3.

If, therefore, you feel yourself a lost sinner, see a beauty and sufficiency in Jesus, have a hunger and thirst after his righteousness, and are made willing to expect the blessing in his way; you may look upon this as a token for good. Such views and desires as these never are found in any heart till he communicates them. By nature we are

averse and contrary to them. Give him the glory of what he has begun; and oppose your temptations, fears, and doubts, with this argument, drawn from your own experience, as the wife of Manoaah formerly reasoned: "If the Lord had been pleased to kill us, he would not have enabled and encouraged us to call upon him; neither would he at this time have shown us such things as these," Judges xiii. 23.

SERMON III.

OF THOSE FROM WHOM THE GOSPEL-DOCTRINES ARE HID.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.—Matt. xi. 25.

THE judgments of God are a great deep. He does not give us a full account of his matters; much less can we by searching find out him to perfection; yet if we carefully attend to what he has revealed, and apply his written word with humility and caution to what passes in ourselves, and around us, we may by his grace attain to some considerable satisfaction in things which at first view seem hard to be understood. The subject of my text is of this nature. That God should hide things of everlasting consequence from any person, sounds very harsh; but I hope, when the words are explained, we shall see, that though he acts as a sovereign in his dispensations, his ways are just, and good, and equal.

We have already made an entrance upon this attempt. Besides some general observations in my first discourse, I endeavoured to show you, in the second, 1. What the things are to which our Lord refers; 2. Where, and in what sense they are hid. I proceed now to consider,

III. From whom they are hid,—the wise and prudent. It will, I think, be readily supposed, that the expression does not mean those who are truly so, and in God's account. He esteems none to be wise and prudent but those who are enlightened with his spiritual wisdom, who now serve and love him in Christ. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning (or, as the word likewise signifies, the head or principal part) of wisdom;" (Psalm cxi. 10;) and from such as these he hides or keeps back nothing that is profitable for them: on the contrary, that promise is sure, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant," Psalm xxv. 14. When our Lord said, "The children of this world are wiser in their genera-

tion than the children of light," (Luke xvi. 8,) he did not mean they were so absolutely, for their boasted wisdom is the merest folly, but only that they acted consistently with their own principles. The wise and prudent here are either those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight, or those who are generally so reputed by the bulk of mankind. And these two amount to the same: for as the natural wisdom of man springs from the same fountain, self, and is confined to the same bounds, the things of time and sense, in all alike, (though there is variety of pursuits within these limits, as tempers and situations differ,) men are generally prone to approve and applaud those who act upon their own principles.

We may take notice, then, as a key to this inquiry, that what is accounted wisdom by the world, is not only different from the wisdom of God, but inconsistent with it, and opposite to it. They differ as fire and water, light and darkness; the prevalence of the one necessarily includes the suppression of the other. See this at large insisted on by St. Paul, in the beginning of his first epistle to the Corinthians, the first, second, and third chapters.

Who, then, are the wise and prudent intended in my text? May the Holy Spirit enable every conscience to make faithful application of what shall be offered upon this head.

1. In the judgment of the world, those are wise and prudent persons who are very thoughtful and diligent about acquiring wealth, especially if their endeavours are crowned with remarkable success. If a man thrives (as the phrase is) from small beginnings, and joins house to house, and field to field, so that he has lands to call after his own name, and large possessions to leave to his children, how is he applauded (though at the same time envied) by the most who know him! I do not deny, that a proper concern and industry in our secular calling, is both lawful and our duty; and I allow, that the providence of God does sometimes remarkably prosper those who depend on him in the management of their business; but I make no scruple to affirm, that where this is the main concern, (as some call it,) such wisdom is madness. Such persons are no less idolaters than those who worship stocks and stones. And if the things of God are hid from them, it is surely their own fault: they do not even complain of it as a hardship; they have their choice, their reward, and are satisfied. They are told that these things are in Christ, and there they are content that they should remain: they see no beauty nor suitableness in them, they have no desire after him; he might keep his heaven and truths to himself, if they could always have their fill of the world. They are told that these things are

hid in the scriptures, but they have neither leisure nor inclination to search there for them. Their time is taken up with buying and selling, building and planting, &c. O, beware of this wisdom! "What will riches profit you in the day of wrath," (Prov. xi. 4.) at death, or judgment? If you live and die in this spirit, you will bemoan your choice when it is too late.

2. Those are accounted wise and prudent, who think they have found a way to reconcile God and the world together. If a man should attempt to fly, or to walk upon the water, he would be deemed a fool. How is it that this endeavour, which is equally impossible (and expressly declared so by our Lord,) should be more favourably thought of? The deceitfulness of the heart and the subtilty of Satan concur in this point. You will have a sort of religion, but then you take care not to carry things too far. You are governed by the fear and regard of men. Something you will do to satisfy conscience, but not too much, lest you hurt your interest, disoblige your friends, or draw on yourselves reproach, or a hard name. I must tell you from the word of God, your attempt to halve things is an abomination in his sight. Would it not be treason by the law, to pay the king an outward respect, and yet hold secret correspondence with his enemies? The decisions of the word of God are to the same effect in this instance. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John ii. 15. "Know ye not, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God," James iv. 4.

3. A man is deemed wise, who has considerable knowledge and curiosity about natural things, and all those subjects which usually bear the name of science; if he can talk of the magnitudes, distances, and motions of the heavenly bodies, can foretell an eclipse, has skill in mathematics, is well read in the history of ancient times, and can inform you what is found in books concerning the folly and wickedness of mankind who lived some thousands of years ago; or if he understands several languages, and can call a thing by twenty different names. It is true, when these attainments are sanctified by grace, they may, in some respects, have their use. But, in general, the best use a believer will or can make of them, is to lay them down at the foot of the cross. When a man, possessed of a great quantity of these pebbles, has his conscience awakened, and his understanding enlightened, he is glad to renounce them all for the pearl of great price, and to adopt the apostle's determination, "to know *nothing* but Jesus Christ, and him crucified," 1 Cor. ii. 2. This was the effect when the

word of God mightily grew and prevailed, Acts xix. 19. We may at least say, that this kind of wisdom is for the most part dangerous and blinding to the soul.

1st, It tends to feed and exalt self, to make a person something in his own eyes. This we are prone enough to by nature. An increase of unsanctified knowledge adds fuel to the fire.

2dly, It engrosses the time and thoughts. Our minds are narrow, capable of attending to but few things at once; and our span is short, and will hardly admit of many excursions from the main concern. If we were to live to the age of Methuselah, we might pursue some things which at present are highly improper and impertinent, from this consideration alone. A man that is upon an urgent affair of life and death, has no leisure for amusement. Such is our situation. We are creatures of a day. Time is vanishing, and eternity is at stake.

3dly, The delusion here is specious, and not easily discovered. A person with these accomplishments is not always enslaved to money or to sensual pleasures: he therefore pities those who are, and comparing himself with others, supposes he is well employed because his favourite studies are a check upon his appetites, and prevents his selling himself for gold, or running into riot with the thoughtless. Yet an attachment of this sort equally blinds him with respect to his true interest. Will the knowledge of books, or men, or stars, or flowers, purify the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God? It is too plain that the truths of the gospel are hid from none more effectually than from many of this character. None cast a more daring or public slight upon the revealed will of God than some who are admired and applauded on account of their knowledge and learning.

4. Your nice and curious reasoners and disputers, that will see (as they profess) the bottom of every thing, and trust to their own judgment and inquiries, independent of the Spirit of God, are another sort of wise persons from whom these things are often and justly hid. And this character may be found in many, both learned and unlearned; for many have good natural faculties, who have not had the advantages of learning and education. But this spirit is directly contrary to that simplicity, dependence, and obedience of faith, which the scriptures exhort us to seek after. Its effects are various:

1st, Some (and those not a few) are led to reject the word of God altogether, because it evidently contains many things above and contrary to their vain imaginations. And herein they contradict the most obvious principles of that reason which they lay claim to. A revelation from God can only be thought necessary or probable, but on the supposition

that it is to inform us of something which we could not have known without it. Therefore, to pretend to try the scripture-claim to this character by such criteria or marks as we possess beforehand, is the same thing in effect as to determine to reject it without any trial at all.

2dly, When the scriptures as to the letter, are acknowledged to be true, persons of this turn, presuming themselves sufficient judges of the sense, are helped by their ingenuity to explain away all the sublime doctrines of truth, so as to suit the prejudices and apprehensions of their own carnal minds. This, especially when joined with a smattering of learning, has been the chief source of all the errors and heresies which have pestered the church of God in all ages. This is a principal cause why the depravity of man by nature, the deity and atonement of Christ, the operations of the Holy Spirit, and all the doctrines of grace, have been denied by men wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight, though evidently contained in the book which they profess to receive as of divine inspiration.

3dly, Even where the doctrines of grace have been notionally received, the same spirit of wisdom can still find occasion to work. When there is more knowledge in the head than experience in the heart, many and various are the evils that often ensue. Disputes and hard questions are started, contentions and divisions multiplied, and people are more eager to perplex others than to edify themselves. Thus the name and counsels of God are profaned by an irreverent curiosity, and the clear, express declarations of his will darkened by words without knowledge. When this natural wisdom puts on a spiritual appearance, no persons are more fatally deceived, or more obstinately hardened. They think they can learn no more, but are wise enough to teach every one: they neglect the use of God's appointed means themselves, and despise them in others: they are proud, censorious, obstinate, and full of conceit. Take care of Satan at all times, but especially when he would transform himself into an angel of light. There is reason to think the things of God are entirely hid, as to their power and excellence, from some who fondly dream that none are acquainted with them but themselves.

The consideration of this subject may lead to a variety of improvement. It may teach you,

1. What to fear.—A worldly spirit. This in a prevailing degree is inconsistent with a work of grace, and in whatever degree it obtains, or is indulged, will proportionably retard and abate the light and comfort of our souls. The cares and pleasures of this life are by our Lord compared to thorns, (Matthew xiii. 22,) unprofitable and painful;

they produce no fruit, but they wound and tear. Yea, they are thorns in the eyes, (Josh. xxiii. 13,) which will prevent the great things of God from being perceived.—A spirit of self-dependence. "Be not wise in your own conceits," Rom. xii. 16. "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know," 1 Cor. viii. 2. God giveth wisdom to the lowly, but he confounds the devices of the proud. His promises of teaching, leading, and guiding, are made to the meek, the simple, and those who are little in their own eyes.

2. What to pray for.—A simple child-like temper, that you may come to the word as to the light, and look beyond yourselves for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, without which your most laboured inquiries will only mislead you farther and farther from the truth.

3. How to examine yourselves.—Not by your notions and attainments in knowledge, for these you may have in a considerable degree, and be wholly destitute of true grace. The word of God supposes it possible that persons may have great gifts, (1 Cor. xiii. 1—3,) flaming zeal, and much success, and yet, having no true love to God, be in his sight no better than sounding brass or a tinkling sycambal. But if you would know your state, examine by your prevailing desires. Are your notions of grace effectual to lead you in the path of duty? Do you hunger and thirst for an increase of holiness? Does the knowledge you have of Christ lead you to love and trust him? Are you poor in spirit? You know nothing aright if you know not yourselves.

4. Ye that are believers may see cause to praise the Lord for his dispensations towards you.

1st, Had you been wise in men's esteem, you might have continued fools to the end of your lives. If the Lord has taught you the secret of them that fear him; if he has shown you the way of salvation; if he has directed your feet in the paths of his commandments;—then you have the true wisdom, which shall be your light through life, and in death your glory. Therefore,

2dly, Be not grieved that ye are strangers to human wisdom and glory. These things which others so highly prize, you may resign contentedly, and say, Lord it is enough if thou art mine. Nay, you have good reason to praise his wisdom and goodness for preserving you from those temptations which have ensnared and endangered so many.

3dly, Do you desire more of this true wisdom? Seek it in the same way in which you have received the first beginnings. Be frequent and earnest in secret prayer. Study the word of God, and study it not to reconcile and make it bend to your sentiments, but to draw all your sentiments from it, as

copy it in your heart, and express it in your conduct. Be cautious of paying too great a regard to persons and parties. One is your master, even Christ. Stand fast in the liberty with which he has made you free, and while you humbly endeavour to profit by all, do not resign your understanding to any but to him who is the only wise God, the only effectual and infallible teacher. Compare the experience of what passes within your own breast with the observations you make of what daily occurs around you, and bring all your remarks and experiences to the touch-stone of God's holy word. Thus shall you grow in knowledge and in grace; and, amidst the various discouragements which may arise from remaining ignorance in yourselves or others, take comfort in reflecting that you are drawing near to the land of light, where there will be no darkness at all. Then you shall know as you are known; your love and your joy shall likewise be perfect, and you shall be satisfied with the rivers of pleasure which are before the throne of God, world without end.

SERMON IV.

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL REVELATION, AND WHO ARE FAVOURED WITH IT.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.—Matt. xi. 25.

WE proceed now to the more pleasing part of our subject. The great things of the gospel, though hid, are not lost: not hid as in the bottom of the sea; but he who hides them from the wise and prudent, is ready and willing to make them known to every sincere inquirer. This discovery, on the Lord's part, is a revelation, and the character of those who obtain it is expressed by the word *babes*. Of the five particulars I proposed to consider from the text, these two yet remain to be spoken to.

IV. The saving knowledge of divine truth is a revelation. Our Lord uses a parallel expression, when he commends Peter's confession of his faith, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven," Matt. xvi. 17. Peter had Moses and the prophets, so had the scribes and the Pharisees; and after their manner they were diligent in reading and searching them. But that he could acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, when they rejected him, was because the Father had revealed this truth to him, and given him a clearer knowledge of it than he could have received from

the written word alone. But it may be proper to inquire into the meaning of this term. What are we here to understand by revelation?

Sometimes revelation is used in an extraordinary sense, as when of old the Lord made known to his servants, the prophets, those doctrines and events, which till then were neither heard nor thought of. Of this we are not now to speak, but of that which is common to all believers, and necessary to salvation.

Now this revelation supposes the things to be revealed were real and certain before, but unknown, and not to be found out any other way.

Revelation is not the creation or invention of something new, but the manifestation of what was till then unknown. The great things of eternity, the glorious truths of the gospel, are real and certain in themselves already, and do not begin to be when we begin to be acquainted with them: yet till God is pleased to reveal them to the heart, we have no more spiritual and effective knowledge of them than if they were not. Ignorance of things very near to us, and in which we are nearly concerned, may be from two causes:

1. From a want of light. Nothing can be perceived in the dark. If you are in a dark room, though it is richly adorned and furnished, all is lost to you. If you stand in a dark night upon the top of a hill that commands a fine prospect, still you are able to see no more than if you were in a valley. Though you were in a dangerous place, with pitfalls, and precipices, and thieves, and murderers all around you, still you might imagine yourself in safety, if you had no light with you.

2. It may be from some hinderance or obstruction between you and the object. Thus your dearest friend, or greatest enemy, might be within a few yards of you, and you know nothing of it, if there was a wall between you.

These comparisons may in some measure represent our case by nature. God is near; "in him we live, move, and have our being." Eternity is near; we stand upon the brink of it. Death is near, advancing towards us with hasty strides. The truths of God's word are most certain in themselves, and of the utmost consequence to us. But we perceive none of these things; we are not affected by them, because our understandings are dark, and because thick walls of ignorance, prejudice, and unbelief, stand before the eyes of the mind, and keep them from our view. Even those notions of truth which we sometimes pick up by hearing and reading, are but like windows in a dark room; they are suited to afford an entrance to the light when it comes, but can give no light of themselves.

I think, therefore, we may conclude, that

God's revealing these things to us only signifies his effecting such a change in us by his Holy Spirit, as disposes and enables us to behold them. He sends a divine light into the soul; and things begin to appear so plain, we wonder at our former stupidity, that we could not perceive them before. By the power of his spirit he breaks down the walls which prevented and confined our views; and a new, unthought-of prospect suddenly appears before us. Then the soul sees its danger: "I thought myself secure; but I find I am in the midst of enemies. Guilt pursues me behind; fear, and the snare, and the pit, are before me; which way shall I turn!" Then it perceives its mistake: "While my views were confined, I thought there was nothing but the span of life to take care of; but now I see a boundless eternity beyond it." It obtains a glimpse likewise of the glories of the better world, of the beauties of holiness, of the excellency of Jesus. This light is at first faint and imperfect, but grows stronger by the use of appointed means; and as it is increased, every thing appears with a stronger evidence.

We may more particularly illustrate this work of the Holy Spirit, as it influences those leading faculties of the soul, the understanding, affections, and will. By nature, the will is perverse and rebellious, and the affections alienated from God: the primary cause of these disorders lies in the darkness of the understanding. Here, then, the change begins. The Spirit of God enlightens the understanding, by which the sinner perceives things to be as they are represented in the word of God; that he is a transgressor against the divine law, and on this account obnoxious to wrath; that he is not only guilty, but depraved and unclean, and utterly unable either to repair past evil, or to amend his own heart and life. He sees that the great God might justly refuse him mercy; and that he has no plea to offer in arrest of judgment. This discovery would sink him into despair, if it went no farther; but, by the same light which discovers him to himself, he begins to see a suitableness, wisdom, and glory, in the method of salvation revealed in the gospel. He reads and hears concerning the person, sufferings, and offices of Christ, in a very different manner from what he did before: and as, by attending to the word and ministry, his apprehensions of Jesus, and his understanding, become more clear and distinct, a spiritual hope takes place and increases in his soul; and the sure effects of this is, he feels his love drawn forth to him, who so loved him as to die for his sins. Beholding, by faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, as bleeding and dying upon the cross; and knowing for whom, and on what account, he suffered, he learns to hate, with a bitter hatred, those sins which nailed him there. The amazing love of Christ

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constrains him to account all things which he formerly valued, as dross and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of his Saviour. Nor does his faith stop here; he views him who once suffered and died, rising triumphant from the tomb, and ascending into heaven in the character of the representative, friend, and forerunner of his people. Having such a High-Priest, he is encouraged to draw near to God, to claim an interest in the promises, respecting the life that now is, and that which is to come. Thus possessing, in the beginnings of grace, an earnest of the glory that shall be revealed, a real, universal, abiding change necessarily takes place in the affections. Now old things are passed away, and all things become new: the soul no longer cleaves willingly to the dust, or can be satisfied with earthly things, but thirsts for communion with God, and an increase of holiness. Sin is no longer consented to, or delighted in, but is opposed and watched against; and every unallowed deviation from the will of God excites the sincerest grief and humiliation, and leads to renewed application to the blood and grace of Jesus for pardon and strength. Thus the will likewise is brought into an unreserved subjection and surrender to the power of Christ, and acts as freely in his service as it once did against him. For that what is termed *the freedom of the human will* should consist in a suspended indifference between good and evil, is a refinement, which, however admired and applauded by many, is equally contrary both to sound reasoning and to universal experience. The will, in all persons and cases, is determined by the present dictates of the understanding, and the bent of the affections.

By ascribing so much to the Spirit of God, I do not mean, as you may perceive by what I have just now said, to exclude his holy word, or preached gospel. All these truths and prospects are already contained in the word of God; but without the light of the Spirit they are not discerned. They are propounded to you in the public ministry. We testify again and again the things which we have seen and heard of the word of life; and when we are in some measure affected with their evidence, we are ready to wonder how any of you can possibly avoid perceiving them; till we remember how it was with ourselves, and then we know, by our own experience, that we must preach, and you hear in vain, unless the Lord is pleased to open your hearts. But observe,

1. The Spirit of God teaches and enlightens by his word as the instrument. There is no revelation from him, but what is (as to our perception of it) derived from the scriptures. There may be supposed illuminations, and strong impressions upon the mind, in which the word of God has no place or concern; but this alone is sufficient to discountenance

them, and to prove that they are not from the Holy Spirit. For,

2. The scriptures are the appointed rule and test, by which all our searches and discoveries, all our acquisitions in religious knowledge, must be tried. If they are indeed from God, they will stand this trial, and answer to the word as face answers to face in a glass, but not otherwise. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Isa. viii. 20. If those who despise all claims to the influence of the Spirit of God, as enthusiasm, had not been frequently informed, that we expect, we acknowledge, no internal revelation, but by the medium of the word of God, and agreeable to it, they would be less inexcusable in repeating the charges of folly and intatuation, which they ignorantly fix upon the work of the Spirit, and all who profess a dependence on it. To those who are indeed candid and sincere inquirers after truth, what has been said upon this part of our subject, will, I hope, suggest the propriety of two directions. From hence learn,

1st, To set a high value upon the word of God. All that is necessary to make you wise to salvation is there, and there only. In this precious book you may find a direction for every doubt, a solution of every difficulty, a promise suited to every circumstance you can be in. There you may be informed of your disease by sin, and the remedy provided by grace. You may be instructed to know yourselves, to know God and Jesus Christ, in the knowledge of whom standeth eternal life. The wonders of redeeming love, the glories of the Redeemer's person, the happiness of the redeemed people, the power of faith, and the beauty of holiness, are here represented to the life. Nothing is wanting to make life useful and comfortable, death safe and desirable, and to bring down something of heaven upon earth. But this true wisdom can be found no where else. If you wander from the scriptures, in pursuit either of present peace, or future hope, your search will end in disappointment. This is the fountain of living waters: if you forsake it, and give the preference to broken cisterns of your own devising, they will fail you when you most need them. Rejoice, therefore, that such a treasure is put into your hand: but rejoice with trembling. Remember this is not all you want: unless God likewise gives you a heart to use it aright, your privilege will only aggravate your guilt and misery. Therefore remember,

2dly, The necessity of prayer. For though the things of nearest consequence to you are in the Bible, and you should read it over and over, till you commit the whole book to your memory; yet you will not understand, or discern the truth as it is in Jesus, unless the

Lord the Spirit shows it to you. The dispensation of the truth is in his hand; and without him all the fancied advantages of superior capacity, learning, criticism, and books, will prove as useless as spectacles to the blind. The great encouragement is, that this infallible Spirit, so necessary to guide us into the way of peace, is promised to all who sincerely ask it. This Spirit Jesus is exalted to bestow: and he has said, "Whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast him out." Therefore water your reading with frequent prayer. We proceed to,

V. The characters of those persons who succeed in their inquiries, and have the things of God savingly revealed to them; they are called *babes*.

1. They are for the most part babes in the world's esteem. They are despised by the wise and prudent for their weak capacities, small attainments, and their seeming insignificance in common life. But the Lord does not overlook any on these accounts. He is no respecter of persons. In the blessings of his common providence, those which are more immediately from his own hand, such as air and light, health and strength, the faculties of sight and hearing, &c. he bestows as freely, and in as great perfection, to the poor as to the rich, to the ignorant as to the learned. And thus it is with respect to his grace. Our incapacity is founded in our nature, and is common to all, and not in any particular circumstances. He is as ready to save the mean as the noble. Many of the great and wise are offended at this. As they engross the earth, they would willingly engross heaven also to themselves. But the Lord has appointed otherwise; and it has been one reproach constantly attending the gospel, that few but the common people (Mark xii. 37, John vii. 48, 49) have thought it worth their notice.

2. They are babes in their own esteem. Not that some are more humble than others by nature, and therefore the Lord gives them a preference on that account, for by nature we are all alike, equally destitute of the smallest good; but the expression teaches us, that those to whom the Lord is pleased to reveal these things, he first empties and humbles, strips them of all ground of boasting, and brings them to a dependence on himself. The true believer is frequently compared to a little child; and it is easy to trace an instructive resemblance.

1st, A child or babe has little knowledge, and its capacity and powers are as yet very feeble. All whose understandings have been spiritually enlightened will acknowledge themselves children in this respect. The little they know convinces them of their ignorance. They are convinced that their views of things are faint, partial, confused; that their judgments are weak; that if the Lord prevents it not, they are very liable to be im-

posed on by the subtilty of Satan, and the treachery of their own hearts. They feel that they have not in themselves sufficiency to think a good thought.

2dly, A child is teachable. Conscious of their own ignorance, they listen to all about them, and think every one is qualified to teach them something. Among men none are truly teachable, but those who know they need to be taught. The natural man, if possessed of any advantages, thinks every one needs his help. The humble christian gives this proof, that the confession he is ready to make of his ignorance is genuine, and from his heart, that he is desirous to learn from all. He is swift to hear, slow to speak, and open to conviction. Though he will not assent to every thing he hears without proof or examination, yet he is disposed to receive instruction, and thankful to those by whom he is profited. He is fearful of being mistaken, of giving way to prejudices, and therefore gladly improves every means of information.

3dly, A child is simple and dependent. He does not reason, but implicitly receives what he is told by his parents, or those whom he thinks wiser than himself. Such a resignation, indeed, the believer dares not make of his understanding to any men, however highly he may esteem them in the main; for he has learned from the word of God, not to put his trust in man: but this is the desire of the renewed heart, with respect to the teaching of God's word and Spirit. He allows no reasoning or questioning here; nor will he say with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" It is enough for him that God has said it, and is able to make it good. This is a happy temper. In this way innumerable difficulties that arise from appearances and sophisms are avoided; and the mind, by faith, steers in safety across the immense ocean of conjectures and opinions, which disputants and reasoners, essaying to do, are sunk and overpowered. It is true, there are various degrees of this simplicity; and in those who possess it in a larger measure, there is a remaining principle of pride and unbelief, which costs them much prayer and many conflicts to subdue. But this, in some degree, is essential to the character of those who are taught of God; they desire and endeavour to submit wholly to his guidance and will in all things.

Here, then, is a proper topic for self-examination. Let each one ask his heart, Have I this simple, child-like disposition?

If you have, if it is the desire of your soul to be taught of God, if his word is your rule, if you depend on his Spirit to teach you all things, and to lead you as it were by the hand, sensible that, unless you are thus led and guided, you shall certainly go astray; be thankful for this, accept it as a token for good. You were not always so: there was a time when you were wise in your own eyes,

and prudent in your own sight. You have good warrant to hope that the Lord, who has already taught you to depend on himself, will show you all that is necessary for you to know.

But if this is not the case, if you lean to your own understanding, what wonder is it that you are still walking in darkness and uncertainty? Will you say, I have read the Bible diligently; I have taken no small pains to examine things, to see which of the many divisions that obtain among Christians is possessed of the truth; but I am still at a loss: surely, if the tenets some plead for had been in the scriptures, I should have found them there? I answer, without detracting from your sagacity or your sincerity, your case is easily accounted for from the verse which we are upon, if your inquiries are not conducted in a humble dependence upon the Spirit of God. Too many instances we could produce of men, who having laboured for years in what seems one of the most laudable undertakings, the explaining the scriptures for the use of others, have at last been in a remarkable degree unsettled themselves; and the only visible fruits their reading and industry have afforded, have been error, invective, and dissatisfaction; so that their labours have been an exemplification of the former part of our text, a proof in point how entirely the things of God are often hid from the wise and prudent.

You that are seeking the Lord, and are little in your own eyes, rejoice that the dispensation of grace is in his hands. If men had the disposal of it, you might perhaps have been overlooked. We should have been ready to have accepted the fair-spoken young man who accosted our Lord with so much outward respect, and had so much to say in his own behalf; (Mark x. 20;) and probably we should have left the thief upon the cross to perish like a wretch as he deserved. "But the Lord seeth not as man seeth," 1 Sam. xvi. 7. "His ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts," Isa. lv. 7, 9. Therefore there is encouragement for the meanest and the vilest. He has excluded none but those who exclude themselves. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation! Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

SERMON V.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE ASSERTED AND ILLUSTRATED.

Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.—Matt. xi. 26.

THAT the doctrine in the preceding verse is true in fact, is sufficiently evident from

common observation. The greatest part of those whom the world esteems wise and prudent, and all to a man who think themselves so, pay but small regard to the truths of the gospel. They are hid from their eyes, and revealed to babes, to those whom they despise on account of their ignorance and insignificance. And if a few who are favoured with considerable advantages in point of genius, education, or rank, do receive the truth in the love of it, they have been at least taught that they are no better than babes, and are glad to count all outward things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.

If we could give no other reason for this dispensation of grace than that which is assigned in our text, it ought to be satisfactory, and would be so, if it was not for the pride of our hearts. Surely that which seems good in the sight of God, must be holy, and wise, and good in itself. How vain and presumptuous is blinded man, who would dare to reply against his Maker, to charge his holiness with injustice, his wisdom with mistake, his goodness with partiality! All their vain cavils will be silenced at the great day, when the secrets of all hearts are opened, and God will be justified when he condemns. However, though we dare not venture too far into the depths of the divine counsels, yet, from the light he has afforded us in his word, we may, in our feeble manner, assert and prove that his ways are just and equal; and, besides the argument of his sovereignty, that so it has pleased him, he has been pleased to favour us with some of the reasons why it has so pleased him. And this is the subject I propose to lead your meditations to from these words. May his spirit assist me, that I may not darken counsel by words without knowledge!

Let us begin with inquiring, What might be his principal ends in sending his Son into the world, that we might have life through him? These, I apprehend, were chiefly two:

1. The redemption and complete salvation of all who believe. All mankind are by nature in the same state of sin and misery. But we are told, that at the great day there will be an unspeakable difference in the circumstances between some and others. Many will then stand trembling at his left hand, to whom the King shall say, "Depart." But those on the right hand will hear those joyful words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." If you ask, To what is this difference primarily owing? The answer is provided: "Jesus loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood; he redeemed them out of every nation, and people, and language; they came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of

the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne." It was then for their sakes, who should be hereafter found at the right hand of God, that "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

2. But besides this, God had another and a still higher end in the work of redemption, namely, the manifestation of his own glory. It was unspeakable love to us that he provided the means of salvation at all; and we cannot wonder, much less ought we to complain, that in justice to himself he appointed such means, and such a way, as that all the praise and glory of the contrivance should in the end redound to himself alone. In order to this, it was necessary that the following things should be manifested with the fullest evidence.

1st, The greatness of man's depravity, guilt, and misery; that it was not a small thing, but a case worthy the interposition of almighty power and infinite grace.

2dly, The utter insufficiency of man to relieve himself; that so God might have the whole honour of his recovery, and we might be for ever debtors to his free undeserved mercy.

3dly, That whereas there are, to outward appearance, a great variety of characters among mankind, it was necessary the dispensation of his grace should be so conducted as to show that no case was too hard for his power, or too low and miserable for his compassion and condescension.

Upon these grounds we may see something of his wisdom in the methods he has appointed, and in the subjects of his choice; why it has seemed good in his sight, to hide these things from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes; for such reasons as these:—1. To stain the pride of all human glory; 2. To exclude every pretence of boasting; 3. That there might be a ground of hope provided for the vilest and meanest; and, 4. That the salvation of believers might be sure, and not subject to miscarry.

I. In the first place, then, the Lord of hosts hath proposed it, "to stain the pride of all human glory," Isaiah xxiii. 9. How much men are disposed to admire their own wisdom, learning, and fancied accomplishments, is sufficiently obvious. But now the pride of all this glory is stained, inasmuch as it is proved by experience to be utterly useless in the most important concerns. One man has talents to rule a kingdom, but is himself a slave to the vilest lusts and passions. Another has courage to face death in a field of battle, yet, with regard to religion is a mere coward: overawed by the feeble breath of the multitude, he is both ashamed and afraid to practise what his conscience convinces him is his duty. Another almost pretends to

count the number of the stars, and to call them all by their names; yet has no more thought of the God that made the heavens and the earth, than the beasts that perish. Another delights in books and languages which few can understand but himself; nothing so false or foolish but he accounts it worth his study, if it has but the stamp of antiquity to recommend it; only the book of God, (though much more ancient than all his fables,) because it may be read in plain English, is thrown by as unworthy his notice. Another, who professes to be scripture-wise, perverts the scriptures, and abuses his own reason, to establish the most absurd errors, or to overturn the plainest truths. Another amuses himself with setting forth the praises of virtue and morality, while his own conduct furnishes a standing proof, either of the weakness of his scheme, or the insincerity of his heart. Time would fail to recount all the achievements of these wise and prudent men. But behold the pride of them all stained! In the midst of all their acquisitions and inventions, they are strangers to God, to themselves, and to peace; they are without Christ, and without hope: those things which alone are of real importance, are hid from their eyes. Here the desperate depravity and deceitfulness of the heart are manifested, to the glory of God; and it is clearly seen, that if he does not interpose to save, men are wholly unable to save themselves.

II. To exclude boasting. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded." As the apostle speaks in another place, "If Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory:" (Rom. iv. 2;) so, if men were saved, either in whole or in part, by their own wisdom and prudence, they might in the same degree ascribe the glory and praise to themselves. They might say, My own power and wisdom gave me this; and thus God would be robbed of the honour due to his name. But now this is prevented. The word of the Lord is, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord," Jeremiah ix. 23, 24. For whatever outward advantages some may seem to possess, as to the things of God, they stand altogether upon a level with the meanest. These things cannot be understood by any sagacity on our parts, but must be revealed by the Father of lights. What could be done in this way, you may recollect from St. Paul's representation in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans. Many of the Heathens were eminent for wisdom and abilities, and made great proficiency in science; but with regard to the knowledge of God, the result of all their researches was error, superstition, and idolatry: professing themselves to be wise

they became fools, and their disquisitions had no other effect than to leave them without excuse. Their practice (as will always be the case) was correspondent to their principles; and in the midst of a thousand refinements in theory, they were abandoned to the grossest and most detestable vices. If it be said, These had not the light of revelation, we may observe the same or similar effects where the gospel is known. With this superior light, men are still equally vain in their imaginations; and though they do not pay an outward and formal worship to stocks and stones, they are gross idolators; for they serve, love, and trust the creature more than the Creator. When there is a difference, it is owing to grace, and grace is acknowledged. Such will readily say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise," Psalm cxv. 1. Thus all pretence to boasting is effectually excluded; and he that can glory upon good grounds, must glory only in the Lord.

If it should be supposed that this representation of things tends to discourage a diligent and serious inquiry after truth, I answer, When rightly understood, it will have just the contrary effect. What can be more suited to excite diligence, than to point out the method in which it will assuredly be crowned with success! You cannot succeed without the light and assistance of the Holy Spirit; but if conscious of this, and aware of your own insufficiency, you will seek his direction and guidance by humble prayer, it shall be afforded you. If you know not this, you will certainly be wearied in the end by repeated disappointments; but if you depend upon his teaching and co-operation in the use of the means he has appointed, your knowledge shall advance as the growing light.

III. This method of the divine procedure opens a door of hope to the vilest and the meanest. Let not any be cast down on account of any peculiar incapacity or difficulty in their case. If none but the wise and the learned, the rich, and those who are esteemed well-behaved and virtuous, could be saved, or if these stood in a fairer way for it than others, the greatest part of mankind might give up hope, and sit down in despair at once. But the case is exactly the reverse. It is true, the persons I am speaking of are not the worse for these distinctions, whenever they are sensible how vain and insufficient they are, and betake themselves as poor, helpless, miserable, blind, and naked, to flee for refuge to the mercy of God in Christ. But, alas! their supposed qualifications too often harden them to reject the counsel of God against themselves. They think themselves whole, and therefore see not the necessity or value of the physician. You who are sensible you have nothing of your own to trust to, take encouragement; the Lord has suited his gospel to your circumstances.

1. Are ye poor? The Lord Jesus Christ has sanctified the state of poverty by taking it on himself. He had not where to lay his head. He will not therefore despise you on this account. Only pray that you may likewise be poor in spirit. He looks through all outward distinctions, and often passes by a palace to make his presence and power known in a mud-walled cottage. Perhaps he appointed this state in mercy to your souls, that you might not be distracted with many things, nor take up with a portion in this world. You cannot be in a lower or more afflicted state than Lazarus, who, while he lay neglected at the rich man's gate, oppressed with want, and full of sores, was a child of God, and the charge of angels.

2. Are you ignorant? If you cannot read, you miss indeed a considerable advantage which you might derive from the perusal of his good word, and I would wish you to attain it if practicable. If not, give so much more diligent attention to the preaching of the gospel; entreat others to read the scriptures to you; but especially pray. The Lord can teach you without a book, and make up for every defect. It is very possible for you to attain to know and love God, to love your neighbour, to rejoice in Christ, to keep his precepts, to be content with your station, to live by faith, and to die with comfort, though you cannot distinguish one letter from another. The prophet Isaiah, in the prospect of gospel-times, gives a description of the way of salvation, which is peculiarly suited for your comfort. "And a high way shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein," Isa. xxxv. 8.

3. Have you been notorious, open sinners? Then you are in the less danger of trusting to your own righteousness. And as to the rest, if you are sick of sin, if you sincerely desire to be freed, as well from the power as from the guilt of it, you stand as fair for salvation as the most sober and regular person upon the earth. St. Paul, speaking to those who had been partakers of the saving grace of God, after he had made an enumeration of the blackest sins which man can be guilty of, adds, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11.

IV. In this way the salvation of believers is sure. If it depended on any thing in man, it might miscarry. Man's boasted wisdom is soon changed. A few hours of a fever, a small blow on the head, may change a wise man into a fool. "But it is of grace, to the

end that the promise might be sure to all the seed," Rom. iv. 16. Adam had a stock of wisdom, yet when he was trusted with his own happiness, he could not preserve it. But the second Adam is all-sufficient. Our dependence is upon him. To those who are babes, he is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and all that they want. If this concern had been left to the wisdom of man, it is most probable that Christ would have lived and died in vain, without a single real disciple. But now the dispensation of grace is in his hands, we are sure that some will believe in him; and we are likewise sure, that those who truly do so shall never be ashamed of their hope.

Now, from what has been said,

1. Inquire what is the temper of your minds with regard to this appointment. Our Lord rejoiced in it as the wise and holy will, the good pleasure of his heavenly Father. If you are displeased at it, is it not a proof that you have not the mind which was in Christ Jesus? If God wills one thing, and you will another, where must the contention end? To what purpose, or with what pretence can you use that expression in the Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done," when in effect your hearts rise with enmity against it? This is one topic from whence we may confirm the declaration of scripture, that man by nature is not only a transgressor of the law, but an enemy, yea enmity itself, against God, Rom. viii. 7. They may pay some profession of regard to the power that made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and the fountains of water, while they worship they know not what, according to their own vain and dark imaginations. But the attributes and characters of God revealed in scripture, his holiness, justice, truth, and sovereignty, they cannot bear. They are enemies to the declared strictness of his moral government, and enemies to the methods by which he has proposed to communicate his grace. But he is God, and who can control him? Who can say unto him, What hast thou done? You must either submit to his golden sceptre in time, or his rod of iron will fall upon you for ever.

2. Does it not appear from hence, that the doctrine of free sovereign grace is rather an encouragement to awakened and broken-hearted sinners than otherwise? If you are most unworthy of mercy, and destitute of every plea, should you not be glad to hear, that the Lord does not expect worthiness in those whom he saves, but that he himself has provided the only plea which he will accept, and a plea which cannot be overruled, the righteousness and mediation of his well-loved Son?

SERMON VI.

OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.—Matt. xi. 27.

THE two preceding verses have led us to consider grace (if I may so speak) in the unfathomable depths of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. In this verse our Lord calls us to the contemplation of his own glorious person, authority, and fulness. In him grace is treasured up as in a repository for communications, to be dispensed to needy perishing sinners.

When an ambassador is deputed from an earthly prince, to transact some business of great importance, he produces his commission and authority, without which all he could propose would be little regarded; and those who are most honoured and attended to are entrusted with full powers, that is, with a liberty to act and propose as occasions offer, without farther instructions, and with full security that the king will ratify and confirm whatever they agree to, in the same manner as if he had done it in his own person. Thus (if we may presume to compare small things with great) our Lord Jesus Christ, the great messenger of the Father's love, before he invites every weary, heavy-laden sinner to come to him, with a gracious assurance that he will receive, and pardon, and save them all, he condescends in this verse (as it were) to open his commission, to instruct us in his own personal dignity, and to communicate to us the example and unlimited authority which he has received from God to treat with rebels. He knows what hearts of unbelief we have; how greatly an awakened conscience is terrified with guilt; how busy Satan is to urge us to question either his ability or his willingness to save; and therefore he would leave nothing undone that might encourage us to come to him, and find rest for our souls. May his gracious Spirit enable me to speak aright, and so open your hearts to understand what may be said upon this high subject, that we may have joy and peace in believing!

The words contain a threefold declaration:

1. Of his person: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son."

2. Of his authority: "All things are delivered to me of my Father."

3. Of his office, summarily intimated in the expression, "He to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

To treat these points in their proper extent would be a subject more than equal to the abilities and life of man. Much would be left

unsaid at last. We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. This is a theme fit for an angel's tongue: the most exalted angel, or all the angels in heaven, would be unable to comprehend it, for it is infinite, as our text declares: "None knows the Son, but the Father." Here we are too prone to think highly of our own knowledge; but when we arrive in yonder world of light, to see him *as he is*, we will be ashamed of the highest conceptions we had of him, and of our most laboured attempts to express them, while we were imprisoned in this distant land. Then we shall say, with the queen of Sheba, "Behold, the half (the thousandth part) was not told us." In the mean time he is pleased to accept our imperfect stammerings, to assist our feeble inquiries, and does not disdain (as he justly might) to hear us take his name into our polluted lips.

I. The inconceivable dignity of his person is pointed out by two expressions:

1. "No man (or rather, as it might be rendered here and in many other places, No one*) knoweth the Father, but the Son." No one—

1st, Not the wisest man in a state of nature. Various degrees of knowledge there are amongst the sons of men. There is a great difference between man and man; between one who knows not his letters, or any thing beyond the bounds of his own village, and another who has a large acquaintance with arts and sciences, history and languages, and has surveyed the manners and boundaries of many nations. But with regard to the knowledge of Christ, the philosopher and the shepherd, the king and the beggar, are just upon a level. Of two blind men, one may know many things more than the other, but with regard to the knowledge of light and colours, they will be both ignorant alike.

Some of you perhaps think yourselves wiser than many of your neighbours. But I cannot too often remind you, that if you know not Christ, all your wisdom is folly, and you will find it so at last.

2dly, Neither do his own people know him in the sense of the text. Some knowledge of him indeed they have, which is their differing character from the world. But how small a portion! That they know him a little is plain, because they love him and trust him; but how little, is plain likewise, because their love is so faint, and their trust so feeble. Their doubts, fears, complaints, and backslidings, are so many mournful proofs that they are but poorly acquainted with him, and sufficiently evidence that a great part of what we account our knowledge, is not real and experimental, but notional only. The literal sense of what we read concerning Jesus is attainable by study

and human teaching; but the spiritual import can only be received from him who teaches the heart, who increases it in us by the various exercises and dispensations we pass through; and the best have much more to learn than they have already attained. There are indeed happy moments when he manifests himself to the eye of faith, in his glory and in his love, as he did to Peter on the mount, and to Thomas, when a sight of his wounds conquered his unbelief, and made him, in a transport of joy, cry out, "My Lord and my God." But these visits, though they have a powerful influence to conquer sin and fear, are transient; and when the cause is withdrawn, there is a proportionable abatement in the effect. The knowledge of Christ, in the present life, may be compared to the knowledge which a shepherd has of the sea, from having viewed it from the top of a cliff. In a sense, it may be said he has seen the sea; but how little has he seen in comparison of what lies beyond the reach of his eye! How inadequate is such a prospect to give him an idea answerable to the length, and breadth, and depth of the immense ocean! Nay, farther,

3dly, The glorified saints and holy angels who behold as much of his glory as creatures can bear, do not know him as he is. They are filled with his power and love. He comprehends them, but they cannot him. A vessel cast into the sea, can but receive according to its capacity. Thus are they filled with his fulness till they can hold no more; but his glory still remains infinite and boundless. The glorious seraphim, therefore, are represented as hiding their faces with their wings, unable to bear the splendour of his presence. For,

4thly, "None knows the Son but the Father." This proves his divinity. God only knows himself. The Son is his eternal Word, his eternal Wisdom, and therefore beyond the highest reach of finite understanding.

2 "None knows the Father but the Son." Here I might repeat the former particulars. God has made something known of himself in his works, much in his word, more still in his grace. All men have some faint perceptions of his power and presence. He manifests himself to his own family below, still more to his family above; yet, after all, he is said to dwell in light which no man can approach. None knows him but the Son, and he knows him perfectly, knows the incomprehensible God; therefore he is God himself. As he said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father," John xvi. 9.

Now, if we had no other proof of this doctrine but the passage before us, since this is the declaration of the true and faithful witness, it should be accepted as decisive. But

as this is the great mystery of godliness, the pillar and ground of truth, the foundation of all our hopes, I shall take this opportunity to confirm it more largely from other concurrent testimonies of scripture.

By the Son, I mean the person who speaks these words: he who was foretold by the prophets: who in the fulness of time came into the world; who with respect to his divine nature, is called "the Word" (John i. 1.) and, with respect to his human nature, was born of the Virgin Mary: he who was known upon earth by the name of Jesus; whose history is related by the evangelists; who suffered a shameful and accursed death upon the cross, without the gates of Jerusalem. Of him we affirm, "That he was, and is, the true God, and eternal life," 1 John v. 20. In proof of this, besides what has been already said, let the following particulars be considered.

1st, That the proper and peculiar titles of God are attributed to him frequently in the scriptures; so frequently, that it would be a very long task to transcribe them all. Let a few, the application of which to Christ is express and indisputable, suffice for a specimen: "The Word was God" (John i. 1.) "His name shall be called Emmanuel, that is, God with us" (Matt. i. 23.) "Jehovah our Righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 6.) "The mighty God," Isa. ix. 6. In the same style he speaks of himself by his servants the prophets and apostles: "Thy maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called" (Isa. liv. 5.) "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. xlv. 22.) "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Almighty," Rev. i. 8. 11.

Amidst the variety of testimonies which might be adduced to this purpose, there are two which are peculiarly observable. The Psalmist expresses the majesty, power, and immutability of God, in these sublime terms: "Of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end," Psal. cii. 25—27. Surely none can deny but this ascription must be incommunicably due to the Almighty: yet the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. i. 10—12) applies these words directly to the Son of God. The other passage I intend is the vision of Isaiah, recorded in the sixth chapter; which not only proves the point in hand, but irrefragably establishes the doctrine of the Trinity. For the Lord of hosts, whom

saw and heard, is affirmed by St. John to have been the Son, (John xii. 41,) by St. Peter to have been the Holy Ghost, Acts i. 5. Isaiah, therefore, had a manifest proof of what was afterwards in explicit terms set forth to the faith of the church, that there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and that these three are one," (1 John i. v. 7.)

His works upon earth were such as manifestly suppose a divine power. Who could control the elements (Mark iv. 39,) raise the dead (John xi. 43,) command the winds (Luke iv. 36,) search the heart, and forgive sin (Mark ii.) but God alone? If it be said, that many of his servants afterwards wrought miracles equal to his delegated power, and therefore this argument is not conclusive; I answer, There is an apparent difference in the manner of working, which proves the disparity between them and him. They could do nothing but in his name, and by his power; they usually addressed themselves to him as their Saviour, and always ascribed the praise and glory to him, Acts iii. 12—16. But his works were independent, sovereign, and uncontrolled: "he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." At the rebuke of his disciples, the raging tempest and the roaring seas were instantly hushed into perfect calm. The deaf heard his voice, and the dead came forth from their graves, at the first call.

His works of office can be performed by no one but God. This might be proved by examining each of the offices he exercises in consequence of his high character as Mediator between God and man; but I shall only mention two.

It is his office to keep his believing people in this present evil world. To act the part of a shepherd (Matt. ii. 6. *ποιμαίνει*) to them, to supply their wants of every kind, to direct their steps, to control their passions, to over-rule all things for their good, and to be a very present help in every time of trouble; to execute this important office, it is necessary that his knowledge, his compassion, his power, and his patience, be boundless. His eye must be every where at upon all their cases at once; his ear must be incessantly open to receive the cries of all people, nations, and languages; his arm must be continually stretched out to support so many that stand, to raise up many that fall, to afford seasonable and necessary supplies, at the same instant, to the necessities and temptations of millions. If it be the office he has undertaken, and if he be acknowledged sufficient and faithful in the discharge of it, what more undeniable evidence can be given, that he has all the attributes we can conceive as essential and

peculiar to the Godhead? The provocations, defects, and backslidings of his people, are likewise so numerous, so often repeated, and attended with such black aggravations, that if he was not God, invincible in goodness, unchangeable in purpose, if his mercy was not, as is his majesty, infinite, he would be wearied out, and provoked to cast them off for ever. The great reason why he bore with his people of old, holds equally strong with respect to us: "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," Mal. iii. 6.

(2.) The like may be said of the high office, character, and appointment he has received, to be the Judge of the world, of angels, and of men. For, besides that it is quite incredible, that God, who is jealous of his glory, should intrust this most illustrious prerogative to any mere creature, it seems evident, at first sight, that no creature can be possibly qualified for the discharge of it. To the great and final Judge all hearts must be open, all desires known, and every secret disclosed. He must be intimately acquainted with the counsels and plans that lay hid in God from eternity; he must have a sovereign, comprehensive, intuitive view of every event, of every design, that took place within the limits of time and creation; he must have unlimited authority to pronounce the decisive sentence which will fix the everlasting state of all intelligent beings, and uncontrolled power for the immediate and irrevocable execution of his supreme decree. And what higher than this can our most laboured conceptions reach of the Almighty God? If it be said, that Christ will act by a delegated authority, we answer, It is a contradiction to say, that God can delegate his omniscience to a creature; and without this attribute, any assignable measure of wisdom or power would be insufficient. The power and fulness of the Godhead must so reside in the Judge, as justly to denominate him to be "God over all blessed for ever," Rom. ix. 5. And this the scriptures assure us is the case in fact. The man, Christ Jesus, who is appointed the Judge of quick and dead, is so intimately and essentially united to, and inhabited by the Deity (Col. ii. 9,) that he is the proper object of our faith, as the true God, and eternal life.

4thly, The honours he claims from us afford a further argument for his proper divinity. He challenges our supreme love, obedience, trust, and worship: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John xiv. 1.); "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John vi. 53.); "That all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father" (John v. 23.); "My sheep know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life"

(John x. 27, 28;) "I am the light of the world" (John viii. 12;) "I am the resurrection and the life." (John xi. 25.) If we could suppose an apostle or an angel speaking of himself in terms like these, requiring our unlimited dependence, and directing our hope and love to centre wholly on him, we might justly reject him as a blasphemer. How the apostles understood these expressions, and that they did not mistake our Lord's meaning, is evident from the behaviour of Thomas. He saluted his risen Saviour, "My Lord and my God," John xx. 28. Had his transport of joy carried him too far in giving this ascription to Jesus, he would, doubtless, have corrected him, and provided us with a caution against committing the like fault. For who that has tasted his love, and been made partaker of the power of his resurrection, can avoid adoring him with the utmost homage their words can express, or their hearts conceive?

From hence we may take occasion to observe,

I. His wonderful condescension, that for us, and our salvation, he stooped so low, drew a veil over his eternal glories, and appeared in the form of a servant, to suffer, and to die: "Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich," 2 Cor. viii. 9. This was love passing knowledge, to pour out his blood, his life, his soul, for those, who by nature and practice, were enemies and rebels, disobedient to his government, and averse to his grace.

2. What a blessed and glorious hope is set before awakened sinners! Add to the consideration of his person, what we have yet to offer from the word of God concerning his authority and purpose, and say if these truths do not give sufficient encouragement to believe and be saved.

3. How awful must be the case of those who shall be found in final rebellion against him, and die in a state of impenitence and unbelief! Alas! poor obstinate sinners, that have stood out so long, will you still harden your hearts, and stop your ears, and rush (like the thoughtless horse in the battle) upon your own destruction? Do you consider whom you are opposing? "Did ever any harden himself against the Lord and prosper?" Job ix. 4. "Have you an arm like God, or can you thunder with a voice like him?" Job xl. Where will you stand, or what will you say, "when he shall arise to shake terribly the earth! when he shall be revealed in fire, to take vengeance on all that know not God, and obey not the gospel?" 2 Thess. i. 8. O, kiss the Son, throw down your arms, and fall prostrate at his footstool, lest his anger awake, and you perish without hope; for in a little time the great day of his wrath will be revealed, which will burn like "a furnace, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly,

shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch," Mal. iv. 1. Then will it appear, that those, and those only, are blessed, who put their trust in him: "For those who trust in him shall never be ashamed: but when Christ who is their life shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory," Col. iii. 4.

SERMON VII.

OF THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.—Matt. xi. 27.

WE have spoken something of the dignity and excellence of that Mighty One on whom our help is laid; and are now to consider,

II. The covenant-authority he is intrusted with to manage the great concerns of man's salvation. He is not only infinitely sufficient, but divinely appointed for this great work.

Of this covenant, there is express mention in many parts of scripture, to some of which I have referred in the note.* It is styled the covenant of peace, the everlasting, ordered, and sure covenant. The power and efficacy of this covenant respected the future incarnation of our Saviour. He asserted his right, while in the form of a servant, in the words of my text; and to the same purpose are the words of John the Baptist: "The Father loveth the Son, and hath delivered all things into his hands," John iii. 35. But the full manifestation of it was deferred to the time of his resurrection, when, and by which, he was declared to be the Son of God with power, Rom. i. 4. Hence, before he left his disciples, he assured them, "All power is committed to me in heaven and in earth," Matt. xxviii. 18.

The sum is, that our Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of his divine nature, and his voluntary undertaking in our flesh, to fulfil all righteousness for us, both as to obedience and satisfaction, is exalted in that nature wherein he suffered, to be the sovereign Judge and Lord of all, Phil. ii. 6, 11. He it is now with whom we have to do. The holy God, considered without respect to the covenant of grace, is a consuming fire to sinners; and we cannot stand before him. But now he reveals himself, he dwells as in his temple, in the man Christ Jesus. He has entrusted all his glory, and all grace in his hands: and to

* Psal. lxxxix. 3, 19; Prov. viii. 23; Isaiah xlii. 1, 6, compared with Matt. xii. 18, 21; Isaiah xliii. 2, 3; Zech. vi. 12.

him we are to look, on him we are to depend, for all the blessings we need for time and eternity. For "all things are delivered to him of the Father." *All things* is a most comprehensive expression. We may distribute it as referring to all persons, all blessings, and all dispensations.

1. All persons are in his hands. Hence his sublime title, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords," Rev. xix. 16. He doth what he will among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth, Dan. iv. 35. Thus Isaiah saw his glory, and spake of him, Isaiah vi. compared with John xii. 41.

1st, He is Lord over his enemies, and those that hate him. He rules them with a rod of iron, and so disposes their designs as to make them (though against their wills) the means and instruments of promoting his own purposes and glory, Psalm ii. 9. They are his servants, even when they rage most against him. He has a bridle in their mouths to check and turn them at his pleasure. He can and often does control them when they seem most sure of success, and always sets them bounds, which they cannot pass. So he showed his power over Pharaoh of old; that haughty king's resistance only gave occasion for a more glorious display of the greatness and goodness of the God of Israel. So he humbled the pride of Herod, and gave him up, in the midst of his guards, a prey to worms, Acts xii. 23. And thus, sooner or later, all his enemies are brought to lick the dust before him.

2dly, But especially he is Lord of his own people. By nature, indeed, they likewise are his enemies, but he knows them all by name. They have been in a peculiar manner given him by the Father; (John xvii. 6;) he accounts them his portion, and he will not lose his own, John x. 15, 16. He knows where to find them, and when to call them; and when his time is come, one word or look from him can disarm them in a moment, and bring them humbly to his feet. How soon did he stop and change the persecuting Saul! Acts ix. When they are thus made willing in the day of his power, he takes them under his special care; and whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye. He guides, and guards, and feeds, and strengthens them: he keeps them night and day, waters them every moment, and will not suffer any to pluck them out of his hand, nor will he himself leave them or forsake them, till he has done all that he has spoken to them of. He gives them likewise a new heart and gracious dispositions, suited to the honourable relation he has brought them into; so that they delight in his precepts, and yield him a cheerful, habitual, and universal obedience, from the constraining sense they have received of his inexpressible love.

2. All blessings are at his disposal. Is

not this a welcome declaration to awakened souls! What is the blessing you want? Seek to Jesus, and you shall not be disappointed. Hear his gracious invitation, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.—Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live," Isa. lv. 1, 3. The promised blessings which he holds in his hands, are the very same that the awakened enlightened conscience must have, and can have only from him.

1st, Pardon. How needful, how valuable is the pardon of sin to those who know what sin is, what it deserves, and what a share they have in it! Such are incapable of taking comfort till they know how God may be reconciled, and sin forgiven. These are the persons to whom Jesus says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved," Isa. xlv. 22. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," Isa. xliii. 25.

2dly, Righteousness. By believing in him sinners are not only pardoned, but justified. They are accepted in the beloved, and accounted righteous by his righteousness imputed to them, which we are assured is unto all, and upon all that believe, without any difference or exception, Rom. iii. 22. Hence his people adore him, and glory in him by his name, *The Lord our Righteousness*. In him they possess a righteousness answerable to the demands of the holy law, have confidence and liberty of access to God at present, though conscious of innumerable deficiencies in themselves, and they shall stand with boldness before him in this righteousness, and not be ashamed in the great day of his appearance, when he shall come to judge the world.

3dly, Strength. The forgiveness of sin that is past would little avail, unless there was provision made for a continual supply of needful grace. Without this we shall quickly grow weary, yield to the force of surrounding temptations, till at length the latter end would be worse than the beginning. But now every sincere soul may be freed from this fear. The way of prevention is pointed out, and the success infallibly secured by that one promise, though there are many to the same effect, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength," Isa. xl. 31.

4thly, Healing. This is often necessary; for the spiritual warfare is not to be maintained long without wounds. Our great enemy is so subtle, so watchful, so well provided with temptations adapted to every temper and circumstance; and we are so weak, unpractised, and so often remiss and off our guard, that he will at times prevail to bring us into a dark, barren, backsliding state, de-

poiled of comfort, and oppressed with fears. But see what a good and gracious shepherd we have: hear his comfortable words, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick," Ezekiel xxxiv. 16.

5thly, Support under trouble. He has engaged to lead his people safely through fire and through water, Isa. xliii. 2. He gives them leave to cast all their care upon him, with an assurance that he careth for them, 1 Pet. v. 7. He has said, All things shall work together for their good; (Rom. viii. 28;) that his grace shall be sufficient for them; (2 Cor. xii. 9;) and that in good time he will bruise Satan under their feet; (Rom. xvi. 20;) make them more than conquerors, (Rom. viii. 37,) and place them out of the reach of sin and sorrow for ever. Besides the habitual peace which arises from the believing consideration of these truths, he has likewise peculiar seasons of refreshment, when he manifests himself to the soul in a way the world knows not of, and often makes the hour of their sharpest trials the time of their sweetest and highest consolations. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth by Christ," 2 Cor. i. 5.

3. All dispensations are under his direction. He is Lord of all, and does according to his pleasure among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth. He is the supreme disposer,

1st, Of these external dispensations which are distinguished by the name of providential.

(1.) Those that are welcome and prosperous are both his gifts and his purchase. To his people they come free; but he paid dear for them. And this gives them their chief value in the judgment of those who know him, to receive them as the pledges and fruits of his redeeming love. When the blessings of common providence are received and enjoyed as the gifts of God reconciled in Christ, they are then, and not otherwise, truly comfortable. It is this thought enables the poor believer often to taste a sweeter relish and flavour in bread and water, than the voluptuary ever knew in the wasteful profusion and studied refinements of luxury. To be able to look back and see how the hand of our gracious Lord has led us from our childhood, chose and managed better for us than we could have done, corrected our mistakes, and in many things exceeded our desires; to look around and see all our concerns in his sure keeping, who delights in our prosperity, and will suffer nothing to grieve us, but what he intends to employ as means for our greater advantage; and to look forward and see, that he has prepared still better things for us than ever our eyes beheld, or our hearts conceived, —how cheering are these views! Those

who are thus stayed upon the Lord Jesus, as over-ruling and managing all our concerns, are not terrified with every shaking leaf: "their hearts are fixed, trusting in the Lord."

(2.) Afflictive dispensations are likewise of his sending. And the consideration of his hand in them, the good he designs us by them, the assurance we have of being supported under them, and brought through them; according to the degree in which these things are apprehended by faith, and accompanied with a humbling sense of their own demerits, his people submit to his appointment with patience and thankfulness, and say, after the pattern which he has left them, The cup which my Saviour puts into my hand, shall I not drink it!

In brief, it is he who appointed the time and place of our birth, and all the successive connections of our lives. Our civil and our religious liberties are both owing to his favour; and in these he has been peculiarly favourable to us. "He has not dealt so with every nation," Psalm cxlvii. 20.

2dly, Of the dispensation of grace. It is he who raises up instruments to preach his gospel, appoints them their places, furnishes them with that measure of gifts and sufficiency which he sees requisite and best. And it is he only that makes their poor labours successful. He sends his word to some, and brings others to his word; and in both cases, he so makes use of ordinary means, that to a common eye he seems to do nothing, when in reality he does all. He brought St. Paul to Corinth, and maintained him there a considerable time against all the efforts of his enemies, Acts xviii. 10. He over-ruled the thoughtless rambling of Onesimus, (Phil. 11,) and led him, by a way which he knew not, to the means by which he had appointed to bring him to the knowledge of himself. And these instances are recorded for our instruction, as specimens of what he does in the same kind every day.

3dly, Of the dispensation of death. Our times are in his hands. He claims it as his own prerogative that he keeps the keys of death, and the invisible state, Rev. i. 18. None can remove us sooner, none can detain us a moment longer, than his call. In this likewise he is little observed. We charge death to fevers, frights, and falls; but these are only the messengers which he sends. Sin has brought us all under a sentence of death; but the moment and the manner of the execution befall us according to his good pleasure. Till then, though his providence leads us through fire and water, though we walk upon the brink of a thousand apparent, and a million of unseen dangers, we are in reality in perfect safety. Having appointed St. Paul to stand before Cæsar, though the tempest greatly assaulted, and seemingly overpowered the ship he was in, St. Paul was as safe

on the stormy sea, when all probable hope of being saved (Acts xxvii. 24) was taken away, as Cæsar himself upon his throne. But when his time is come, in vain are all the assistance of friends, the skill of the physician, or the power of medicines, to procure the smallest respite.

4thly, Of the dispensation of judgment. "The Father hath committed all judgment to the Son;" (John v. 22;) and has especially appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by the man Christ Jesus whom he hath ordained, Acts xvii. 31. Then his glory shall be confessed by all. Every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him. Awful will that day be to those who hate him, when he shall appear in flaming fire, to convince sinners of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed, and of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him, Jude 15. They must give an account of all. Account, did I say! They can give none, but will be struck dumb before him, and hear with horror their dreadful doom, "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," Matt. xxv. 41.

But it will be a joyful time to his own people. The clouds of infirmity, affliction, and reproach, under which they are now obscured, shall vanish away, and they shall shine forth like the sun in the presence of their Father. God, even their own God, shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. They shall be glorified, and their enemies ashamed. What joy will fill their hearts when Jesus the Judge shall own his relation to them before assembled worlds, and shall say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Then sorrow and sighing shall be heard no more; but songs of triumph and shouts of everlasting joy shall take place; and so shall they be ever with the Lord.

How are your hearts affected with this subject! Do you not expect that I should close it with a suitable word of application!

1. To those who are as yet in their sins. Will you not tremble before this great Lord God? If these things are not so, if you can prove that we have followed cunningly-devised fables, go on secure. But have I not your consciences on my side! Do you not feel a secret foreboding that these are the truths of God? And dare you still persist? Do you not see that you are already in his hands? In a moment he could break you in pieces, yet he spares. He affords you one opportunity more. To-day, while it is called to-day, hear his voice, lest to-morrow should surprise you into eternity, and the weight of unpardoned sins should sink you into the lowest hell. As he has power to punish, so likewise he is mighty to save. Believe his word and live. His obedience unto death is

a plea with which you may approach the mercy-seat. He has power to take away your heart of stone, to subdue your enmity, to forgive your sins; and what he does he does freely, without money and without price. You need not, you cannot mend yourselves before you come to him. If you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you obstinately reject him, you will perish under the most aggravated guilt, as sinners against the light and grace of the gospel.

2. You that see your need of a Saviour, lift up your heads and rejoice. Is he not, thus qualified, able to save to the uttermost! Why should you keep back, when he bids you come unto him that you may find rest? Could you invent any invitations more free, more full than those that are recorded in the gospel! Can you desire any stronger security than the blood of Jesus and the oath of him that liveth for ever? Do you wish to know how other great sinners have succeeded in their application to him? Search the scriptures, and read how he saved Mary Magdalene, the dying thief, the cruel jailor, the persecuting Saul, and many of those who were actually concerned in nailing him to the cross. Be patient, continue waiting on him in prayer, and you shall find he has not inclined you to seek his face in vain.

3. To believers I hope this is a comfortable theme. You see all your concerns are in safe hands. He to whom you have committed your souls is able to keep them. Jesus, who has all authority and power in heaven and in earth, vouchsafes to be your Shepherd. What then can you want, who are at his providing? What have you to fear, who are under his protection? Why then do you so often distrust, so often complain! It is because your faith is weak. Are you tempted to think you could place yourselves to more advantage than he has placed you, that you could do better without the afflictions he is pleased to send you, that you cannot spare what he takes away, nor do well without something which he withholds! Reject all such thoughts; they are highly dishonourable to your Saviour, and to your profession. Those who know not God must reason thus; but you have a covenant-promise, that all things are working together for your good. "This is not your rest, it is polluted." But you will soon be at home; and then, when, by a clearer light, you look back upon the way by which the Lord led you through the wilderness, you will be ashamed (if shame is compatible with the heavenly state) of your misapprehensions while in this dark world, and will confess to his praise, that mercy and goodness surrounded you in every step, and that the Lord did all things well. What you will then now your duty and your privilege. If you sincerely desire his things, labour to submit.

which he has marked out for you is difficult, but he has trod it before you, and it leads to glory. The time is short. Yet a little while, and you shall receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

SERMON VIII.

THE GLORY AND GRACE OF GOD REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.—Matt. xi. 27.

The love we bear to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the confidence we place in him, will always be exactly proportioned to the apprehensions we form of him. Therefore, to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of him," (2 Pet. ii. 18,) are spoken of as inseparably connected. On this account the scriptures are frequent and full in describing him to us, that we may have a large acquaintance with his all-sufficiency, and be delivered from our sins and fears. An awakened conscience, that sees the need of a Saviour, well knows that the person who can deservedly lay claim to its trust, must have these three properties, power, authority, and intention to save. How these eminently belong to Jesus, we learn from his own words here. Power belongeth to him, for he is a divine person, the Creator, Possessor, and Upholder of all things. Authority is his, for all things are delivered to him. Thus far we have proceeded, and are now to speak of his intention or office, the design of his appearance, and for which he is authorised. This is intimated in the close of my text. We are therefore now to speak,

III. Of his office, summarily included in this one thing, *To reveal the knowledge of God.* "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

The knowledge of God here spoken of, intends something more than merely to know that there is a God. Some faint apprehensions of this all men have by nature. This great truth is so clearly manifested in the works of creation and providence, that any man would be greatly offended, if he was supposed to be ignorant of it. But as it is one thing to know that there is a king over the nation, and quite another thing to know the king, so as to have liberty of access to him, and an interest in his favour; so is it in the case before us. Our Lord did not come to tell us that there is a God, (the devils know this, and tremble,) but to reveal to us such a knowledge of God as may stand with our

comfort, to teach us how poor, guilty, hell-deserving sinners may draw near to God with hopes in his mercy, and call him their Father and their friend.

Now, besides the revelation of this knowledge in the Old Testament, which may be properly ascribed to Christ, inasmuch as he was the Lord, the guide, and teacher of his church from the beginning, and instructed Moses and the prophets in the things concerning himself,—I say, besides this (which was made at sundry times, and in divers manners, in a more dark and imperfect way,) our Lord Jesus, through his incarnation, has vouchsafed us a twofold revelation of that knowledge of God in which standeth our eternal life,—1. In his Person; and, 2. By his Spirit.

I. In his Person. In this respect he is said to be "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his * substance," Heb. i. 3. That God is great, and good, and wise, appears in part from his works; but it is only a small portion of these attributes we can spell out in this way; and there are other perfections in God, of which we can gain no certain knowledge, without a farther revelation. But would we see a glorious display of the great God, let us turn our eyes to Jesus, and behold him by faith in two principal views:

1. As hanging upon the cross. Could we have seen this awful transaction, and been in a right frame of mind, we should naturally have asked such questions as these: Who is he? What has he done? Had we been told, This person, thus destitute and tormented, is the beloved Son of God, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; we must have farther asked, Why then was he scourged, wounded, and nailed to the tree? Why are those barbarous men permitted to mock his sufferings? Why does he not deliver himself, and destroy his enemies? The proper answer to these questions includes a revelation of the divine perfections.

1st, Wisdom. We had deserved to perish, but his mercy designed to save us with an everlasting salvation. Yet this must be in a way worthy of himself. Sin must be punished, and the honour of his broken law vindicated. How could this be done, and the righteousness of God made to harmonise with our peace? A wisdom astonishing to angels is manifested in devising this wonderful means. No sacrifices (Heb. x. 4—7) or offerings, no acts of obedience or mediation, which creatures could supply, would have been of the least avail when the injured majesty of God demanded a satisfaction. But the eternal Word, united to our nature, afforded a propitiation worthy of God, and suitable for us. Jesus by his obedience unto

* THE SUBSTANCE.

death, has made an end of sin, (Dan. ix. 24,) and brought in an everlasting righteousness, available for all those who flee to him as the hope set before them, for refuge from approaching wrath.

2dly, Love. "God so loved the world."—If you ask, How! judge from this instance; words cannot express it. He so loved sinners, enemies, rebels, that for their sakes he abandoned and delivered up his beloved Son into the hands of wicked men, permitted him to be assaulted by the powers of darkness; yea, it pleased the Father himself to bruise him, and to make his soul an offering for sin. This is love without parallel, and beyond conception. We can only admire and say, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us," 1 John iii. 1. When Jesus Christ, as crucified, is clearly apprehended by faith, then we have the most convincing, the most affecting proof, that God is love.

3dly, Justice. Wonder not that God's own Son is thus treated. He stands in the place of sinners, and therefore he is not, he cannot be, spared. The words his enemies use (Matt. xxvii. 42) to his reproach, will, in the lips of his redeemed people, be an expression of his highest praise. Having undertaken to save others, and being determined not to give up their cause, it is, in that respect, absolutely impossible for him to save himself.

Again, this justice, which was once as a flaming sword, to forbid and exclude every hope of salvation to fallen man, is now engaged in our behalf. For since it has pleased the Father to charge sin upon his own Son, his wrath will turn away from all who believe. The immense debt is already paid, and justice will not exact it twice. From henceforth God is not only gracious and merciful, but (1 John i. 9) just and faithful, in the forgiveness of sin, and declares his own righteousness in justifying the believer in Jesus, Rom. iii. 26.

2. The knowledge of God is made known in the person of Christ, if we contemplate him as reigning in glory. He is no longer a man of sorrows, oppressed and despised. He is now upon the throne. In him the fullness of the Godhead dwells, and from him, as light from the sun, the unsearchable riches of his goodness are communicated to indigent, unworthy sinners. All the divine perfections shine gloriously in him, as the God-man, the Mediator, who is exalted above all conception and praise, and doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

1st, Grace. The great God is pleased to manifest himself in Christ as the God of grace. This grace is manifold, pardoning, converting, restoring, persevering grace, bestowed upon the miserable and worthless. Grace finds the sinner in a hopeless, helpless

state, sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death. Grace pardons the guilt, cleanses the pollution, and subdues the power of sin. Grace sustains the bruised reed, binds up the broken heart, and cherishes the smoking flax into a flame. Grace restores the soul from wandering, revives it when fainting, heals it when wounded, upholds it when ready to fall, teaches it to fight, goes before it in the battle, and at last makes it more than conqueror over all opposition, and then bestows a crown of everlasting life. But all this grace is established and displayed by covenant in the Man Christ Jesus, and without respect to him as living, dying, rising, reigning, and interceding in the behalf of sinners, would never have been known.

2dly, Power. The whole creation proclaims that power belongs unto God. But in nothing will his power be more illustriously displayed than in the wonders of redeeming love! What power is necessary to raise those who are spiritually dead in sin, to soften the heart of stone, to bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion! Wherever his gospel is faithfully preached, it is always confirmed by this accompanying power. How quickly, how easily, did he change Saul from a persecutor to an apostle! Again, how is his power illustrated by the care he takes of all who believe in his name, affording to every one of them seasonable, suitable, and sufficient supplies in every time of need? So that his weak, helpless, and opposed people, are supported, strengthened, and enabled to hold on, and to hold out, against all the united efforts of the world, sin, and Satan.

3dly, Bounty. How glorious is Jesus in his kingdom! Exalted beyond all conception and praise; wearing upon his vesture, and upon his thigh, the name that is above every name; and having all thrones, principalities, and powers, obedient to his will, and adoring at his feet. But all his riches and honours (so far as their capacities can receive) he condescends to share with his people. He owns their worthless names, he permits them to claim the most tender relation to him, and to call him their brother, their friend, and their husband. Yea, he says concerning them, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne," Rev. iii. 21. To him, therefore, we must look for the most astonishing and affecting display of the divine bounty.

Thus the knowledge of God is revealed in the person of Christ by the word. But great and important as these truths are, we cannot receive and understand them merely by reading. The Lord Jesus, therefore, has favoured his church with a farther revelation. That is,

II. By his Spirit. This was one principal fruit of his ascension and intercession, Acts ii. 33. With the promise of his spirit be

cheered his disciples when sorrowing under the apprehension of his departure: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you! but if I depart, I will send him unto you," John xvi. 7. The offices of the Holy Spirit are various as our wants; he teaches, comforts, sanctifies, and seals the children of God; but he effects all these benefits by revealing the knowledge of God as manifested in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

1. In convincing sinners of their lost estate, which is absolutely necessary to their deliverance. None will prize the Saviour but those who feel their need of him. Two things are necessary to convince a man of his lost condition by nature and practice as a sinner,—the spirituality of the law, and the sufferings of Christ: the one shows the universality of sin, the other its demerit. But these can only be truly discerned by the light of the Spirit of Christ. While St. Paul (who was never absolutely without the law) was ignorant of the law's spirituality, "I was (says he) alive," Rom. vii. 9. I had so little knowledge, both of the law and of myself, that I trusted to it for righteousness, and vainly thought that I yielded it obedience, and grounded my hopes of salvation thereon. "But when the commandment came," when the Spirit explained and enforced it in its full extent, as reaching to the very thoughts of the heart, and requiring an obedience absolutely perfect, "then sin revived, and I died." All my hopes vanished; I saw every principle, affection, and action, polluted, and the corruptions which I supposed were tamed, broke forth with redoubled vigour. Again, though sin is declared to be displeasing to God, and destructive to man, by all the evils and miseries with which the world is filled, and all the punishments which the righteous Judge of all the earth has inflicted on the account of it; yet the just demerit of sin is not to be learned by the destruction of Sodom, or of the old world, but only from the sufferings of Christ, who has borne the curse for sinners. Nor is it sufficient to know historically that he did suffer, and how he suffered. Where these things are not known by the light of the Spirit, they are no more regarded than a worn-out tale. But where the Spirit of Christ reveals by the word, the nature, cause, and end of his sufferings, then sin appears exceedingly sinful. Nothing less than this can make the soul abhor it.

2. The Spirit produces faith in Jesus, as having once suffered, and now mighty to save. His blood, his righteousness, his intercession, compassion, and power, are presented to the soul in a light which bears down the objections of guilt, unbelief, and Satan. Then the wounds made by sin are

healed. Then old things pass away, all things become new, all difficulties are solved, and God is revealed experimentally to the soul, as holy, righteous, and true, in justifying the believer in Jesus.

3. Those whom the Spirit thus comforts, he also seals, Ephea. i. 13. He impresses the image of Christ upon them. Such is the power of the views he gives them of his glory, that they are transformed into the resemblance of their Lord, 2 Cor. iii. 18. Though the first traces of this delineation are faint and indistinct in the sight of men, yet they are perfect in kind. The Spirit impresses feature for feature, and grace for grace; (John i. 16;) and in the chief thing he designs and effects by all his subsequent dispensations while the soul remains in the body, is to heighten and finish the heavenly signature. Together with this, and in the same degree, he seals and ratifies to their consciences an interest in all the promises of the gospel; and by infusing into their hearts the temper of children, he gives them confidence at the throne of grace, enables them to cry, Abba, Father, and bears witness with their spirits that they are born of God. Thus God is revealed not only to them, but in them; and they are made conformable to him in whom they believe, in all righteousness, goodness, and truth.

Let me once more address,

1. Poor mourning souls. Are you seeking to Jesus? you have good reason; you see he is a mighty Saviour. He is furnished with full authority, and came expressly on purpose to save such as you. He assures you that none shall sincerely seek him in vain. Believe his word, and dismiss your fears. He has begun his good work, by revealing to you your misery, danger, and helplessness, by leading your thoughts to himself. He will not stop here; he will, in due time, accomplish his whole commission, by revealing to you that knowledge of God in which standeth your present peace and eternal life.

2. Careless sinners. How greatly will your guilt be aggravated if you receive this grace of God, the gospel of salvation, in vain? Do not your hearts tremble when you think of meeting the Lord Jesus in glory? Have you an answer ready, when he shall ask you why you refused his instruction, and cast his words behind you? The light of truth has visited you: how long will you resist it? how long will Satan blind your eyes? To those who accept not his revelation of grace, he will be ere long revealed in flaming fire. O humble yourselves before him, while the hope of mercy is yet afforded; and pray for the Spirit we have been speaking of, that you may be recovered out of the snare of the devil, and made partakers of the knowledge and image of God.

3. Believers. This subject is the food of your souls. You remember when you had dark, hard, and uncomfortable thoughts of God; but you have seen his glory in the person of Christ, you have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, (1 Cor. ii. 12.) that you may know the things that are freely given you of God. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, Eph. v. 8. Walk then as children of the light; remember your calling, your privileges, your obligations, your engagements. Let these all animate you to press forward, to endure the cross, to despise the shame. Let it not grieve you to suffer with Christ here, for hereafter you shall reign with him. The hour is swiftly approaching, when you shall be out of the reach of changes and sorrow for ever. Then "thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended," Isaiah lx. 20.

SERMON IX.

LABOURING AND HEAVY-LADEN SINNERS DESCRIBED.

Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—
Matt. xi. 28.

WE read that when David was withdrawn into the wilderness from the rage of Saul, every one that was in distress, or in debt, or discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became their captain, 1 Sam. xxii. 2. This would be reckoned but small honour in the judgment of Saul and his court, to be the head of a company of fugitives. Those who judge by outward appearances, and are governed by the maxims of worldly wisdom, cannot have much more honourable thoughts of the present state of Christ's mystical kingdom and subjects upon earth. The case of David was looked upon as desperate by those, who, like Nabal, (1 Sam. xxv. 10.) lived at their ease. They did not know, or would not believe, the promise of God, that he should be king over Israel; and therefore they preferred the favour of Saul, whom God had rejected. In like manner, though our Lord Jesus Christ was a divine person, invested with all authority, grace, and blessings, and declared the purpose of God concerning himself, and all who should obey his voice, that he would be their King, and they should be his happy people; yet the most that heard him saw no excellence in him, or need of him; their portion and their hearts were in this world, therefore they rejected him, and treated him as a blas-

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phemer and a madman. A few, however, there were who felt their misery, and desired to venture upon his word. To these he gave the freest invitation. Those who accepted it, found his promise made good, and rejoiced in his light. Thus it is still: he is no longer upon earth to call us; but he has left these gracious words for an encouragement to all who need a Saviour. The greatest part of mankind, even in christian countries, are too happy, or too busy to regard him. They think they deserve some commendation, if they do not openly mock his messengers, disdain his message, and offer abuse to all who would press them to-day, while it is called to-day, to hear his voice. Even this treatment his servants must expect from many. But there are a few, like David's men, distressed in conscience, deeply in debt to the law of God, and discontented with the bondage of sin, who see and believe that He, and He only, is able to save them. To these labouring and heavy laden souls, he still says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." May his gracious Spirit put life and power into his own words, and into what he shall enable me to speak from them, that they may at this time receive a blessing and peace from his hands!

The text readily points out three inquiries:

1. Who are the persons here invited?
2. What is it to come to Christ?
3. What is implied in the promised rest?

1. The persons are those who labour (the Greek expresses toil with weariness*) and are heavy-laden. This must, however, be limited to spiritual concerns, otherwise it will take in all mankind, even the most hardened and obstinate opposers of Christ and the gospel. For let your conscience speak, you that account the yoke of Christ a heavy burden, and judge his people to be miserable and melancholy, are not you wearied and burdened in your own way! Surely you are often tired of your drudgery. Though you are so wedded and sold to your hard master, that you cannot break loose; though you are so mad as to be fond of your chains; yet you know, and I know (for I remember the gall and wormwood of that state,) that you do not find all that pleasure in your wickedness which you pretend to. So much as you affect to despise hypocrisy, you are great hypocrites yourselves. You often laugh when you are not pleased; you roar out your boisterous mirth sometimes, when you are almost ready to roar with anguish and disquiet of spirit. You court the friendship of those whom in your heart you despise; and though you would be thought to pay no regard at all to the word of God,

* Compare Luke v. 5, John iv. 6, where the original word is the same.

there are seasons when (like him you serve) you believe and tremble. And farther, what visible burdens do you bring upon yourselves? "The way of transgressors is hard," Prov. xiii. 15. Your follies multiply your troubles every day. Confusion and uneasiness in your families, waste of substance, loss of health and reputation, discord, strife, sorrow, and shame; these are the bitter fruits of your evil ways, which prey on your present hours, and make your future prospects darker every day. Surely you are weary and heavy laden beyond expression.

But this is not the case with others. You avoid gross vices, you have perhaps a form of godliness. The worst, you think, that can be said of you is, that you employ all your thoughts, and every means that will not bring you under the lash of the law, to heap up money, to join house to house, and field to field; or you spend your days in a thoughtless indolence, walk in the way of your own hearts, and look no farther: and here you will say you find pleasure, and insist on it, that you are neither weary nor heavy laden. I might enlarge on your many disappointments, the vain fears which are inseparable from those who live without God in the world, and the trouble we find from disorderly, restless, and unsatisfied passions. But, to wave these things, I say briefly, that if you are not labouring and heavy laden, then it is plain that you are not the persons whom Christ here invites to partake of his rest. And though you can rest without him now, think, O think, what rest you will find without him hereafter? If you now say, Depart, he will then say, Depart. And who will smile upon you when he frowns? To whom will you then flee for help? or where will you leave your glory? O that it would please him to touch your hearts, that, as weary and heavy-laden sinners, you might fall humbly at his feet, before his wrath burn like fire, and there be none to quench it!

But to proceed: let us,

1. Explain the terms, what it is to *labour* and be *heavy laden*.
2. Show who are the persons that answer this description.

First, the persons are said to be,

1. Labouring, toiling, weary. This is not hard to be understood. Weariness proceeds either from labour or from weakness; and when these are united, when a person has much to do, or to bear, and but little strength, he will soon be weary. The case of some, however, is, that when they are tired, they can lay down their burden, or leave off their work. But these are not only labouring, fainting, weary, but,

2. Heavy laden, likewise. As if a man had a burden which he was unable to bear a single minute, so fastened upon him, that he could not by any means be freed from it;

but it must always press him down, night and day, abroad or at home, sleeping (if sleep in such a circumstance was possible) and waking. How would the poor creature be wearied! How could you comfort or give him ease, unless you could rid him of his burden? How desirable would the prospect of liberty be to such a one! and how great his obligations and acknowledgments to his deliverer!

Secondly, This representation is an emblem of the distresses, and burdens of those who seek to Jesus, that they may have rest in their souls; nor can any truly seek him till they feel themselves in such a state. They may be generally comprised under three classes:

1. Awakened sinners. None but those who have felt it can conceive how sinners labour, toil, and faint, under their first convictions. They are burdened,

1st, With the guilt of sin. This is a heavy load. When Jesus bore it, it made him sweat great drops of blood. It is true, he bore the weight of all his people's sins; but the weight of one sin is sufficient to press us down, if God permits it to lie heavy upon us. I suppose the best of us can remember some action, some incident or other, in our past lives, which we would wish to forget if we could. Now, how would you be distressed to have a person sounding in your ears, from morning till night, and every day of your lives, that worst thing that ever you did! Would it not weary you? This is a faint image of the convinced sinner's state. When conscience is truly awakened, it acts this officious and troublesome part; but its remonstrances are not confined to one sin, it renews the remembrance and the aggravations of multitudes. Nor is this the voice of a man, but indeed of God, who speaks in and by the conscience. The poor sinner hears and trembles: then the complaint of Job is understood: "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth," Job xiii. 26. Do you wonder that such a one can no longer take pleasure in worldly things? It is impossible, unless you could silence this importunate voice, that they can bear themselves at all. Nay, often it is so strong and urgent, gives them such a lively sense of what sin is, and what it deserves from a righteous God, that they are almost afraid or ashamed to see any person that knows them. They are ready to think, that people can read in their faces what passes in their hearts, and almost expect that the ground should open under their feet. O how wearisome is it to be continually bowed down with such a burden as this!

2dly, With the power of sin. Perhaps they were once in some measure at ease in this respect; they saw others whom they supposed to be worse; and therefore trusted in them-

elves that they were righteous. But convictions rouse and inflame our sinful natures. St. Paul exemplifies this by his own case before conversion: "I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died," Rom. vii. 9. He never was strictly without the law, for he expected salvation by obeying it; but he was without the knowledge of its spirituality, demands, and sanction; and while he remained thus, he was alive, that is, his hope remained good, and he was satisfied with his obedience. But when the commandment came, when its extent, purity, and penalty were brought home to his conscience, sin revived, and he died. He found all his pretensions to liberty, obedience, and comfort were experimentally confuted by what he felt in himself. The more an awakened sinner strives against his corruptions, the more they seem to increase. This wearies him; for, besides the greatness of the toil itself, he finds himself weak, weak as water, weaker and weaker. And he is not only weary, but heavy laden; for this likewise is a burden which he cannot shake off. He sees that he cannot succeed, yet he dares not desist.

2. Those who are seeking salvation by the works of the law are labouring and heavy laden, engaged in what is beyond their strength, and baffles all their endeavours. This may appear from what has been already said. It is a hard task to keep the whole law; and nothing else will either please God, if made the ground of justification, or satisfy the conscience that has any true light. Those declarations of the word, that "cursed is the man who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them," (Gal. iii. 10,) and "whoso keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, he is guilty of all," (James ii. 10,) keep them in continual anxiety and servitude. The wickedness of their flesh makes it impossible for the law to give a ground of hope; yet they cannot lay down their burden, but are compelled to renew the fruitless task. I speak not of mere formalists, who go through a round of external services without meaning or design; but all who are in a measure sincere, find themselves still followed with a restless inquiry, "What lack I yet?" Matt. xix. 20. Endless are the shifts and contrivances they are put to, but all in vain; for, what makes it worse, they always add to this burden many inventions of their own, as though the demands of the law were too few.

3. Those who are under temptation. It is a hard and wearisome service to be in close conflict with the powers of darkness. The leading branches of this exercise are,

1st, When the soul is assaulted, and, as it were, filled with insufferable blasphemies. When Satan is permitted to shoot these fiery darts, none can express (not even those who

have felt them) the amazement and confusion that fills the mind. For a person who has received a reverence for the name and attributes of God to be haunted from morning to night, from day to day, with horrid imprecations, so strongly impressed, that he often starts and trembles with an apprehension that he has certainly consented, and spoken them aloud with his lips,—this is irksome and terrifying beyond description.

2dly, When the foundations of faith and experience are attacked. Many who have thought themselves grounded in the truth, who have hoped that they had surely tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have in their first comforts been ready to say, "I shall never be moved, (Psalm xxx. 6,) thou, Lord, of thy goodness hast made my mountain so strong," have found themselves afterwards at their wits end, when the enemy has been permitted to come in upon them like a flood, Isa. lix. 19. One black cloud of temptation has blotted out all their comfortable evidences; and they have been left to question, not only the justness of their own hopes, but even the first and most important principles on which their hopes were built.

3dly, When the hidden corruptions and abominations of the heart are stirred up. And perhaps there is no other way but this of coming to the knowledge of what our depraved natures are capable. Such things a season of temptation has discovered to some, which I believe no rack nor tortures could constrain them to disclose, though but to their dearest friend. This subject, therefore, will not bear a particular illustration. The Lord's people are not all acquainted with these depths of Satan. As people who live on shore have a variety of trials, dangers, and deliverances, yet know but little of the peculiar exercises of those who go down to the sea in ships; so, in the present case there are great waters, (Psalm cvii. 24,) depths of temptation, known comparatively to few. Those who are brought through them, have more to say of the wonders of God in the great deep than others; and this is his design in permitting it, that they may know more of him and more of themselves. But while they are under these trials, they are weary and heavy laden; and this burden they must bear till the Lord removes it. The help of men, books, and ordinances, is sought and tendered in vain, till his appointed hour of deliverance draws near.

These, therefore, convinced, striving, and tempted souls, are the persons to whom Jesus says, "Come to me, and I will give you rest." The purport of this gracious invitation we are to consider hereafter. In the mean time rejoice in this, Jesus has foreseen your cases, and provided accordingly. He says, *Come*; that is, *believe*, as he himself expounds it: "He that cometh unto me, shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never

thirst," John vi. 35. See how his promises suit the state you are in.

1. Are you heavy laden with guilt? The gospel-message is, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin," I John i. 7.

2. Are you groaning under the power of indwelling sin? Hear his gracious words: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," John xi. 25. And to the same purpose his prophet: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increases strength," Is. xl. 29.

3. Are you striving in the fire to keep the law? "Wherefore will you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Forego the vain attempt. Is it not written, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth?" Rom. x. 4.

4. Are you in temptation? He that says, "Come unto me," has been tempted himself, (Heb. ii. 18,) and knows how to pity you. He has power over your enemy, and can deliver you with a word, Mark i. 27. Did he not thus dispossess Satan in the days of his humiliation? And if then, surely he is no less able now; for since that time he has gloriously triumphed over the powers of darkness, Col. ii. 15. And as his arm is not shortened, neither is his ear heavy; he has said, without exception, "Whosoever cometh unto me I will in no wise cast him out;" (John vi. 37;) and thousands who have been in your distress, have successively found that promise fulfilled: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," Rom. xvi. 20; Zech. iii. 2.

SERMON X.

OF COMING TO CHRIST.

Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—Matt. xi. 28.

THE dispensation of the gospel may be compared to the cities of refuge in Israel. It was a privilege, an honour to the nation in general, that they had such sanctuaries of divine appointment; but the real value of them was known to few. Those only who found themselves in that case for which they were provided could rightly prize them. In like manner, the gospel of Christ is the highest privilege and honour of which a professing nation can boast; but it can be truly esteemed and understood by none but weary and heavy-laden souls, who have felt their misery by nature, are tired of the drudgery of sin, and have seen the curse of the broken law pur-

suating them like the avenger of blood of old. This is the only consideration that keeps them from despair, that God has provided a remedy by the gospel; and Jesus has said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." If they could receive the full comfort of these words, and heartily obey the call, their complaints would be at an end; but remaining ignorance, unbelief, and Satan, combine in various ways to keep them back. Some will say, "O that I could come! but, alas! I cannot." Others, "I fear I do not come aright."

—Having, therefore, endeavoured to show you the persons chiefly intended here under the character of those who labour and are heavy laden, I proceed to consider,

II. What it is to come to Christ. I have observed in general, that it appears to have the same signification with believing in him. But that we may understand it the more clearly, let us inquire,

1. How those to whom he personally spoke these words, in all probability, understood them?

2. How far their apprehensions of them are applicable and suitable to our circumstances?

3. Whether, as we have the same necessity, we have not likewise equal encouragement to come to him with those who were conversant with him upon earth?

1. It does not appear, that those to whom our Lord spoke in person, were so much perplexed as many are now, to know what *coming* or *believing* should mean; he seems to have been understood, (John vi. 30, and xix. 36,) both by friends and enemies. Many questioned his authority and right to exact a dependence on himself: but they seemed to be at no difficulty about his meaning. It certainly implied more than a mere bodily coming into his presence. He was surrounded, and even followed, by multitudes, who never came to him in the sense of his invitation. To such, while standing about him, he complained, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life," John v. 40. Therefore, if we consult what is written of those who came to Jesus for relief, and obtained it, we may conclude, that coming to him implies,

1st, A persuasion of his power, and of their own need of his help. They knew that they wanted relief, and conceived of him as an extraordinary person, empowered and able to succour them. This persuasion of Christ's sufficiency and willingness was then, as it is now, afforded in different degrees. The centurion spoke with full assurance: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," Matt. viii. 8. The leper more dubiously: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," Matt. viii. 2. Another, in still fainter language: "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion, and help us," Mark ix. 22. The faith of this last was, as the man himself ac-

knowledge, mixed with much unbelief and fear; yet Jesus did not despise the day of small things; he pardoned his suspicions, confirmed his fluctuating mind, granted him his request; and his case is recorded as an instance how graciously he accepts and cherishes the feeblest effects of true faith: "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

2dly, An actual application. This evidenced their faith to be right. They did not sit content with having heard of him, but improved it: they went to him, told him their cases, and implored his compassion. Their faith prevailed against all discouragements. In vain the multitude charged them to hold their peace; (Mark x. 48;) knowing that he only was able to relieve them, they cried so much the more a great deal. Even when he seemed to discover a great reserve, (Matt. xv. 27,) they still waited, and knew not how to depart without an answer. Nor could a sense of unworthiness, fear, or shame, keep them back, (Mark v. 27,) when once they had a strong persuasion of his power to save.

3dly, When he was sought to as a soul-physician, as was the case with many whose bodily diseases he healed, and with others who were not sick, those who came to him, continued with him, and became his followers. They depended on him for salvation, received him as their Lord and Master, professed an obedience to his precepts, accepted a share in his reproach, and renounced every thing that was inconsistent with his will, Luke ix. 23, 60. Some had a more express and open call to this, as Matthew, who was sitting at the receipt of custom, regardless of Jesus, till he passed by him, and said, "Follow me," Matt. ix. 9. That word, accompanied with the power of his love, won his heart, and diverted him from worldly pursuits in an instant. Others were more secretly drawn by his Spirit and providence, as Nathaniel, and the weeping penitent, (John i. 46; Luke vii. 38,) who silently washed his feet with her tears: and this was the design and effect of many of their bodily and family afflictions. The man who was brought to be healed of the palsy, (Mark ii. 5,) received the forgiveness of his sins; and the ruler, who first came to Jesus with no other view than to obtain the life of his son, (John iv. 53,) obtained much more than he asked or expected. The Lord afforded such an affecting sense of his power and goodness upon that occasion, that he from henceforth believed, with all his house.

2. These things are applicable to us. Jesus is no longer visible upon earth; but he has promised his spiritual presence to abide with his word, ordinances, and people, to the end of time. Weary and heavy-laden souls have now no need to take a long journey to seek him; for he is always near them, and

in a spiritual manner, where his gospel is preached. Poor and inconsiderable as we are in the judgment of the world, I trust we have a right to claim his promise, (Matt. xviii. 20,) and to believe that he is even now in the midst of us. Therefore come unto him; that is,

1st, Raise your hearts and breathe forth your complaints to him. Do you see your need of him? Be persuaded, and pray to him to assure you more strongly of his power and goodness. He is just such a Saviour as your circumstances require, as you yourself could wish for; and he is able to convince you in a moment that he is so. If he is pleased to cause a ray of his glory to break in upon your mind, your fears and doubts, and griefs, would instantly give place.

2dly, Persevere in this application to him. Set a high value upon these his public ordinances, and be constant in attending them. His eye is fixed upon us; his arm is revealed amongst us. I trust it is a time of his grace, and that every day we meet he does something for one or another in the assembly. He has a fixed time for every one whom he relieves. He knew how long the poor man had waited at the pool-side; (John v. 6;) and when his hour came, he spake and relieved him. So do you endeavour to be found in his way; and not here only, but in whatever he has made your duty. Read his word; be frequent in secret prayer. You will find many things arising from within and without to discourage and weary you in this course; but persist in it, and in good time you shall find rest for your souls. These are the means which the Lord has appointed you. Converse likewise at proper opportunities with his people; perhaps he may unexpectedly join you, as he did the two disciples when walking to Emmaus, (Luke xxiv. 32,) and cause your hearts to burn within you. Further,

3dly, You are to follow him, to take up his cross, to make a profession of his name and gospel, to bear contentedly a share in the reproach and scorn which is the usual lot of those who will live godly in Christ Jesus, in the midst of an unbelieving and perverse generation. You are not only to trust in him as a priest to atone for your sins, but to receive and obey him as your teacher and your Lord. If you are truly weary and heavy laden, you will be glad to do this, and are crying to him to enable you: and you are likewise willing to forsake every thing that is inconsistent with his will and service. If you are desirous to come to Christ, it is not grievous to you to think of parting with your sinful pleasures and vain companions. Rather these are a part of the burden from which you long to be freed.

Come in this way, and you shall find rest for your souls. Are any of you thinking,—

O that I could! Surely if I had seen him, and heard him, I should have ventured. But now unbelief and fear keep me back. I observe, therefore,

3. That as we have no less need of Jesus than those of old, who saw him and conversed with him; so we have at least equal encouragement to come unto him. This, I think, will appear, if we consider that,

On the one hand, the bodily presence of Christ, considered in itself, had no peculiar or extraordinary influence upon those who saw him, but all was wrought by the power of his Spirit; the same Spirit which is promised to abide with his church for ever.

1st, Multitudes who saw and heard him were unmoved and unconvinced by all the wonders of his love. Though he spake as never man spake, and went about doing good, he was slighted, opposed, and hated, even to the death. And those who know the heart of man, and believe that the carnal mind is enmity against God, will allow it highly probable, that upon a supposition he should appear again in the same circumstances of humiliation, and to use the same authoritative freedom in vindicating the commands of God from the vain figments, traditions, and customs of men, he would meet with little better treatment, even in those countries which are called by his name, than he did from the proud, self-righteous, unbelieving Jews. We may warrantably suppose there were many more lepers, blind, &c. in the places where he resorted, than those who came to him to be healed.

2dly, Many of his professed disciples, even after they had followed him for a while, turned back, and forsook him, John vi. 66. We have, therefore, the less reason to wonder, when we see any give up the profession of the gospel, and return to the world again. It was thus from the beginning, and those who do so now, would have done so if they had lived then. His looks, his voice, his gesture, and even his discourses and miracles, could not engage a single person to cleave to him with full purpose of heart, unless he was likewise spiritually revealed to the eye of their faith, as the image of the invisible God, the brightness of the Father's glory, full of grace and truth.

3dly, Even his true disciples, who were constantly with him, to whom he had personally made the most express and endearing promises, and who sometimes thought themselves assured beyond the power of a doubt, yet could not maintain their confidence longer than his Spirit upheld them. To them expressly, though not to them exclusively, Jesus had said, "I go to prepare a place for you," (John xiv. 2,) and I will come again to receive you to myself, that "where I am, there ye may be also," John xiv. 3. When he had concluded that affectionate discourse,

their doubts and fears were dissipated, and they could confidently say, "Now we believe;" (John xvi. 30;) yet it was not long before they found his reply fulfilled. Jesus said unto them, "Do you now believe? The hour is coming, when you shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone," John xvi. 32. Will not this instance convince you of your mistake, when you think you could depend more on a voice from heaven, than on the written word? The apostles had the strongest ground of assurance imaginable, the word of the Lord Jesus himself, face to face: and yet this would not support them, without renewed supplies of strength.

On the other hand, consider if the loss of his bodily presence is not more than made up to us,

1st, By the fuller manifestation of the Holy Spirit than was afforded before his ascension. The Holy Ghost was not then given in that clear and abundant measure as afterwards, (John vii. 39,) because Jesus was not yet glorified. While he was with them he was their Comforter and Teacher; but he told them, "When I depart, I will send you another Comforter," (John xiv. 16, and xvi. 7,) whose office and abode with you will be in many respects so much more advantageous, that on this account it is expedient for you that I go away.

2dly, By the greater number and variety of promises which we enjoy. We have not only the scriptures of the Old Testament in common with them, but to us the ancient revelations of the will and love of God are enlarged, explained, applied, and confirmed, by the superaddition of the New, Ephes. iii. 5.

3dly, By the experience of multitudes of all ages, people, and languages, who have gone before us, since their time, the cloud of witnesses to the truth and grace of God, the reality of eternal things, and the victorious power of faith, is now increased by the concurrent evidence of thousands and millions, who have overcome all opposition by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony.

4thly, By the proofs and living witnesses of his power and grace amongst ourselves. Are there not many, with whom you worship and converse from day to day, who can tell you, they were even dead in trespasses and sins, but he has quickened them? They were once as you are, labouring and heavy laden: they waited for him long, had a share in such temptations and conflicts as you now feel, were often at a stand, and upon the point of concluding their case to be desperate, as you may think yours at present; but at length they were enabled to come unto him, and they have found rest. Every such instance should encourage you to gird up the loins of your minds; to be patient, and hope to the

end. As they have known your troubles, so shall you partake of their consolations in due time. What is it then should hinder you from coming to Jesus, that you may find rest? What exceptions can your unbelief devise against the invitations, motives, and example which the Lord sets before you by his preached gospel?

(1.) Is it a sense of your load which makes you say you are not able? But consider that this is not a work, but a rest. Would a man plead, I am so heavy laden, that I cannot consent to part with my burden; so weary, that I am not able either to stand still or lie down, but must force myself farther? The greatness of your burden, so far from being an objection, is the very reason why you should instantly come to Christ, for he alone is able to release you.

(2.) But perhaps you think you do not come aright. I ask, how would you come? If you can come as a helpless unworthy sinner, without strength, without righteousness, without any hope but what arises from the worth, work, and word of Christ, this is to come aright. There is no other way of being accepted. Would you refresh and strengthen yourself, wash away your own sins, free yourself from your burden, and then come to him to do these things for you? May the Lord help you to see the folly and unreasonableness of your unbelief!

I have observed already, that coming to Christ signifies more at first than merely to come into his presence; so likewise, it means more now than to be found among his worshippers. Let none of you be deceived with a form of godliness. Examine your religious profession by these tests: Have you laboured under a sense of your misery? Have you known the burden of sin? Has Jesus given you rest? Or are you earnestly seeking to him for it? If you understand not the meaning of these questions, you are not yet in that state to which the promises are made. And why are you not labouring and heavy laden? Are you not sinners? Has not the righteous God revealed a law? Has he not guarded this law with the sanction of a dreadful curse? Have you not transgressed this holy law in thought, word, and deed, times without number? If you have not, why do you join in the public confession, and call for mercy when the commandments are repeated? If you have, how will you escape the penalty? How indeed, if you dare to neglect this great salvation? The law condemns you already; if you receive not the gospel you must perish without remedy; for other name or names whereby men can be saved there is none under heaven. Once more you are warned of danger; once more the refuge is set before you. We preach Jesus, who came to seek and to save those who were lost; Jesus, who was wounded with whips, and thorns, and

nails, that his enemies might be healed. Does not this thought affect you? Will you slight his love, despise his blood, and crucify him afresh? God forbid. Is there not some heart now relenting, beginning to feel impressions of fear, shame, and grief? Happy beginning! Obey the voice of God now opening in your conscience! Now is the time to pray; before you knew not what to pray for; but now you see you want the blood of Christ, and the teaching of his Spirit. "Ask, and you shall receive; and seek, and you shall find." Take your warrant from my text; Jesus has said, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Let your hearts answer, "Take away our iniquity, and receive us graciously: Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God; and in thee the fatherless, the helpless, the comfortless, find mercy."

SERMON XL

OF BELIEVERS' REST IN CHRIST.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—
Matth. xi. 28.

THE learned have a variety of arguments whereby to prove the scriptures to be the word of God. But though that kind of proof which may be brought in a way of reasoning and external evidence, is doubtless useful upon proper occasions; yet I apprehend the chief and most satisfactory argument to those who are capable of receiving it, arises from the correspondence between the subject-matter of the scriptures and the state of an awakened mind. When the eyes of the understanding are opened, we begin to see every thing around us to be just so as the scriptures have described them. Then, and not till then, we perceive, that what we read in the Bible concerning the horrid evil of sin, the vileness of our fallen nature, the darkness and ignorance of those who know not God, our own emptiness, and the impossibility of finding relief and comfort from creaturea, is exactly true. We cannot but apply the words of the woman of Samaria, and say, Come and see a book that has told me all that ever I did, (John iv. 29,) the ground of all my complaints, the true cause and nature of all the evil I either see, hear, or feel, from day to day. And as we find our disease precisely described, so we perceive a suitableness in the proposed remedy. We need a Saviour, and he must be a mighty one; but though our wants and sins, our fears and enemies, are great and numerous, we are convinced that the character of Christ is sufficient to answer them all. We need a rest, a rest which the world cannot give. Inquire where

we will among the creatures, experience brings in the same answer from all, "It is not in me." This again confirms the word of God, which has forewarned us that we shall meet nothing but disappointment in such pursuits. But there is a spiritual rest spoken of which we know to be the very thing we want, and all our remaining solicitude is how to attain it. From hence, as I said, we may assuredly conclude, that the book which gives us such just views of every thing that passes, must be given by inspiration from him who is the searcher of hearts. This proof is equally plain and conclusive to all capacities that are spiritually enlightened, and such only are able to understand it. We are now to speak,

III. Of this promised rest. And here two things offer to our consideration :

1. What this rest is?

2. How it is obtained?

1. The Greek word* expresses something more than rest, or a mere relaxation from toil; it denotes refreshment likewise. A person weary with long bearing a heavy burden, will need not only to have it removed, but likewise he wants food and refreshment, to restore his spirits, and to repair his wasted strength. Such is the rest of the gospel. It not only puts a period to our fruitless labour, but it affords a sweet reviving cordial. There is not only peace, but joy in believing. Taken at large, we may consider it as twofold :

1st, A present rest. So the apostle speaks, "We who have believed *do enter* into rest," Heb. iv. 3.

(1.) The common, wearisome pursuit of the world, is described as "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not;" (Isa. lv. 2;) wandering from object to object in quest of good, (Psalm iv. 6,) but still mortified by incessant and repeated disappointment. We should pity a person whom we should see seeking some necessary thing day after day, which we knew was impossible to be found there. It is, however, the case with all till they come to Christ. Satisfaction is what they profess to aim at, and they turn every stone (as we say,) try every expedient to meet with it, but in vain. It is only to be found in him. When they come to him their wishes are answered. This is exemplified by our Lord in the character of a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, (Matt. xiii. 46,) who was still upon the inquiry till he had found one pearl of great price. This answered and exceeded his desires: upon the discovery of this one, he rejoiced to forego all his former acquisitions, and to give up every other possession on purpose that he might obtain it.

(2.) I have spoken something concerning

the wearisome exercise of a conscience burdened with guilt; but by coming to Jesus, and believing in him, an end is put to this. When we are enabled to view our sins as laid upon Christ, that those who come are accepted in the Beloved, that there is no more condemnation, but pardon, reconciliation, and adoption are the sure privileges of all who trust in him,—O the sweet calm that immediately takes place in the soul! It is something more than deliverance. There is a pleasure more than answerable to the former pain, a comfort greater than all the trouble that went before it. Yea, the remembrance of the former bitterness greatly enhances the present pleasure. And the soul understands and experiences the meaning of those scriptures: "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing," Psalm cxxvi. 1, 2. "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation," Isa. xii. 1, 2.

(3.) There is likewise a rest from the power of sin. In vain is this sought from resolutions and endeavours in our own strength. Even after we are spiritually disposed, and begin to understand the gospel-salvation, it is usually, for a season, rather a fight than a rest. But when we are brought nearer to Christ, and taught to live upon him as our sanctification, deriving all our strength and motives from him by faith, we obtain a comparative rest in this respect also. We find hard things become easy, and mountains sink into plains, by his power displayed in our behalf. Farther,

(4.) There is a rest from our own works. The believer is quite delivered from the law as a covenant, and owes it no longer service in that view. His obedience is gracious, cheerful, the effect of love, and therefore he is freed from those fears and burdens which once disturbed him in the way of duty. At first there was a secret, though unhallowed dependence on himself. When his frames were lively he was strong, and thought he had something to trust to, but under a change (and changes will happen) he was at his wits end. But there is a promised, and therefore an attainable rest in this respect,—a liberty and power to repose on the finished work and unchangeable word of Christ; to follow him steadily through light and darkness; to glory in him only when our frames are brightest; and to trust in him assuredly when we are at our lowest ebb.

Such is the present rest; different in degrees according to the proportion of faith, and capable of increase even in those who

* Αναπαυω.

have attained most, so long as we remain in this imperfect state. But there is,

2dly. A future rest, besides and beyond all that can be experienced here: "There remaineth yet a rest for the people of God," Heb. iv. 9. Faint and imperfect are our most enlarged ideas of that glory which shall be revealed. "It does not yet appear what we shall be," 1 John iii. 2. Who can describe or conceive the happiness of heaven! The most we can clearly understand of it lies in negatives. It will be as unlike as possible to this wilderness of sin and sorrow where we are now confined. Here we are in a warfare, but then we shall enter into perfect rest.

(1.) A rest from all sin. There no unclean thing shall defile or disturb us for ever. We shall be free from sin in ourselves. This alone would be worth dying for. Indwelling sin is a burden under which even the redeemed of the Lord must groan, whilst they sojourn in the body; and those who are most spiritual are most deeply affected with shame, humiliation, and grief, on this account, because they have the clearest views of the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, the love of Christ, and the deceitfulness of their own hearts. Therefore the apostle Paul, though perhaps in grace and talents, in zeal and usefulness, distinguished above all the children of Adam, accounted himself the chief of sinners, (1 Tim. i. 15,) less than the least of all saints, (Eph. iii. 8,) and cried out, under the disparity he felt between what he was and what he would be, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Rom. vii. 24. But we shall not carry this burden beyond the grave. The hour of dissolution shall free us from the inbred enemies (the inseparable concomitants of this frail perishing nature) which now trouble us, and we shall see them no more for ever.

Again, we shall be free from all the displeasing effects of sin in others. Our hearts shall be no more pained, nor our ears wounded, nor our eyes filled with tears, by those evils which fill the earth. Now, like Lot in Sodom, we are grieved every day with the filthy conversation of the wicked, 2 Pet. ii. 7. Who that has any love to the Lord Jesus, any spark of true holiness, any sense of the worth of souls in his heart, can see what passes amongst us without trembling! How openly, daringly, almost universally, are the commandments of God broken, his gospel despised, his patience abused, and his power defied! To be a silent spectator of these things is sufficiently grievous; but if (as we are in duty bound) we dare to stand as witnesses for God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, we find the spirit of the first-born. Cain instantly takes fire, and denounces war against all who should presume to say, that we ought

to obey and fear God rather than men. Invections and ill treatment, are the certain lot of all who openly and consistently appear on the Lord's side; and if they escape stripes and bonds, imprisonment and death, it is to be ascribed to the restraints of divine providence, and (as a means in our happy land) to the temper of the laws, and to the clemency of the powers under whom we live. These things often constrain the believer to say, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away, and be at rest," Psalm lv. 6. Let us not be weary or faint in our minds; ere long this wish shall be answered. A glorious rest awaits you, where sin and sinners shall have no place, nor the alarms of war be heard any more.

(2.) A rest from all outward afflictions, which, though necessary, and, under the influence of divine grace, profitable, are grievous to bear; but then they will be necessary no more. Where there is no sin, there shall be no sorrow. Then, believers, God "shall wipe away all tears from your eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away," Rev. xxi. 4.

(3.) A rest from Satan's temptations. How busy is this adversary of God and man! what various arts, what surprising force, what constant assiduity, does he employ to ensnare, distress, and terrify those who by grace have escaped from his servitude! He says, like Pharaoh of old, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will destroy," Exod. xv. 9. He follows them to the last stage of life, but he can follow them no farther. The moment of their departure out of the body, shall place them beyond his reach for ever.

(4.) A rest from unsatisfied desires. Here the more we drink, the more we thirst; but there our highest wishes shall be crowned and exceeded; we shall rest in full communion with him whom we love; we shall no more complain of interruptions and imperfections, of an absent God, and a careless heart. Here, when we obtain a little glimpse of his presence, when he brings us into his banqueting-house, and spreads his banner of love over us, how gladly would we remain in such a desirable frame! How unwilling are we to come down from the mount! But these pleasing seasons are quickly ended, and often give place to some sudden unexpected trial, which robs us of all that sweetness in which we lately rejoiced. But when we ascend the holy hill of God above, we shall come down no more; we shall be for ever with the Lord, never offend him, never be separated from him again. We shall likewise rest in full conformity to him, Psalm xvii. 15. Here we find a mixture of evil in our best moments: when we approach nearest to him, we have the quickest sense of our defilement, and how

much we fall short in every branch of duty, in every temper of our hearts; but when we shall see Jesus as he is, we shall be fully transformed into his image, and be perfectly like him.

2. But how is this rest to be obtained? Blessed be God, in that way which alone can render it attainable by such unworthy indigent creatures. If it was to be bought, we have nothing to offer for it; if it was proposed as a reward of merit, we can do nothing to deserve it. But Jesus has said, "I will give you rest." Our title to it cost him dear; he purchased it for us with his own blood; but to us it comes freely. Faith in his name puts us in immediate possession of the first-fruits, the earnest of this inheritance; and faith will lead us powerfully and safely through all hinderances and enemies to the full enjoyment of the whole. Faith unites us to Christ; gives us an immediate interest in all the benefits of his life, death, and intercession; opens the way of communication for all needful supplies of grace here, and insures to us the accomplishment of all the Lord has spoken to us of, in a state of glory. "He that believeth shall be saved;" (Mark xvi. 16;) saved in defiance of all the opposition of earth and hell; saved notwithstanding he is in himself unstable as water, weak as a bruised reed, and helpless as infancy. What Jesus will give, none can take away. Only remember that it is a free gift. Receive it thankfully, and rejoice in the Giver. Let him have all the glory of his own undertaking. Renounce every hope and every plea, but his promise and mediation. Commit your souls to him, and then fear nothing. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms," Deut. xxxiii. 27. He will fight your battles, heal your wounds, refresh your fainting spirits, guide you by his counsel while here, and at last receive you to himself.

May we not therefore say, Happy are the people that are in such a case! happy they, who have been enabled to accept this gracious invitation, who have already entered upon the rest of grace, and have a well-grounded expectation that they shall rest in glory! Believers, what should you fear, or why complain? Look back to where the Lord found you sleeping in, helpless and hopeless, yet insensible of your danger: look forward to what he has provided for you, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; a crown of life, a kingdom that cannot be shaken: think of the love, the suffering, the glory of him to whom you owe these blessings; and let these considerations animate you to run with patience and thankfulness the race that is set before you, Heb. xii. 1.

Happy likewise are you, whose hearts are

fixed upon this rest, and this Saviour, though as yet you are in heaviness through manifold temptations. The Lord will give you rest. Doubt it not; he cannot deny himself; wait his hour; though he seems to tarry long, yet maintain your confidence in his promise. Redouble your prayers, cry mightily to him, he will not (as perhaps many around you do) rebuke your importunity, and charge you to hold your peace. Look at the generations of old, and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear, and was forsaken? or whom did he ever despise that called upon him?

And you, who are yet strangers to rest, are thus far happy, that you are still spared, and have the gospel continued to you. The Lord is still waiting to be gracious; he says to all, Come unto me, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Do you not see this rest desirable? What rest, either here or hereafter, can you expect, if you remain in the service of sin? Why may not you obtain your liberty? You are no worse than others, either by nature or practice. Though you have been transgressors from the womb, you are not excluded, if you do not exclude yourselves: though your sinful habits and inclinations are exceeding strong, he is able to subdue them. There is a power in his blood, and in that Spirit which he is exalted to bestow, sufficient to make the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots, (Jer. xiii. 23,) to soften the hardest heart, and to pardon the most aggravated guilt, and to enable those to do good who have been accustomed to do evil. Arise, he calleth you. O may he accompany the outward call of his word with the efficacious power of his grace, that you may this instant obey his voice, and flee to him for refuge! Whither can you flee else? Who but Jesus can save you from the wrath to come? Be wise, and delay no longer. "But if you will not hear, mine eye shall weep for you in secret places," Jer. xiii. 17. If you will not come to Jesus for life, you must die. If you are out of Christ, God is angry with you every day. The curse of his broken law lies heavy upon you, whether you are asleep or awake abroad or at home, at the market or in the church. The wrath of God is revealed against you; if you turn not, he will whet his sword; (Psalm vii. 12;) he hath bent his bow, and made it ready: he hath prepared the instruments of death to smite you; he hath ordained the arrows of his vengeance against you: And can you, dare you, go on in your sins, and say, I shall have peace? O may you be wise in time! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 31. "Consider this, ye that forget him, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver," Psalm l. 22.

SERMON XII.

OF THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me : for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest to your souls.—Matt. xi. 29.

THOSE who are enabled to come unto Christ, not only experience a change of state, but of character, disposition, and practice. They are not only freed from condemnation, but they are made partakers of a divine nature. They are delivered from the slavery and yoke of Satan, and made willing in the day of the Lord's power, to accept and embrace his yoke, which is commended to us in the following verse, as easy and pleasant. Our Lord speaks of his service as a yoke or burden, because it is so esteemed by all who know him not. They account him a hard master, and think his service wearisome; but those who have made the experiment, find it otherwise: though, it must be confessed, it exposes to some difficulties, calls for the daily exercise of self-denial, and will not admit either of competition or composition with the world, nor can be pleasing to the unrenewed part of our nature. But the knowledge of his love, the hope of glory, and those seasonable refreshments with which he is pleased to favour those who come unto him, sweeten every bitter thing, and make them willing to bear his yoke, and to prefer it to all that the world accounts freedom.

Let us inquire,

1. What is meant by the yoke of Christ?
2. The proper means by which we are enabled to take it upon us; that is, the believing consideration of him, as our effectual teacher and perfect pattern.
3. The happy effect of bearing his yoke: We shall find rest to our souls.

I. The yoke of Christ, taken at large, includes all the dependence, obedience, and submission which we owe him, as our rightful Lord and gracious Redeemer. He has a double right to us; "he made us," Psalm c. 3. We are the creatures of his power: he gave us our being, with all our capacities and enjoyments. And farther, "he brought us;" (Acts xx. 29;) he pitied us in our low and fallen state, and gave his own life, his precious blood, to ransom us from that ruin and misery which was the just desert of our sins. There is good reason, therefore, that we should be his, and live and cleave to him in love alone; that we should no longer live to ourselves, but to him who died for us, and rose again. In particular, we may consider,

1. The yoke of his profession. This is very pleasing to a gracious soul, so far as faith is in exercise. Far from being ashamed of the gospel of Christ, he is ready and willing to tell all who will hear, what God has done for

his soul. Many young converts, in the first warmth of their affection, have more need of a bridle than of a spur in this concern. For want of prudence to time things rightly, and perhaps for want of more tenderness mixed with their zeal, they are apt to increase their own troubles, and sometimes, by pushing things too far, to obstruct the success of their well-meant endeavours to convince others. But though this is a fault, it is a fault on the right side, which time, experience, and observation, will correct. And though we are hasty enough to condemn the irregular overflowings of a heart deeply impressed with a sense of eternal things, I doubt not but the Lord, who owns and approves the main principle from whence they spring, beholds them with a far more favourable eye than he does the cold, cautious, temporizing conduct of some others, who value themselves upon their prudence. We should judge thus, if we had servants of our own. If we had one who was heartily and affectionately devoted to our interests, always ready to run by night or by day, refusing no danger or difficulty, from a desire to please us, though sometimes, through ignorance or inattention, he should make a mistake, we should prefer him to another of greater knowledge and abilities, who was always slow and backward, and discovered at least as much care to save himself from inconveniences as to promote our service. However, this warm zeal usually suffers abatement; we are flesh as well as spirit; and there are some circumstances attending a profession of the gospel, on the account of which it may be with propriety termed a yoke to us, who have so many remaining evils within us, and so many outward temptations to call them forth. It will certainly stir up opposition from the world, and may probably break in upon our dearest connections, and threaten our most necessary temporal interests, 2 Tim. iii. 12; Matt. x. 36.

2. The yoke of his precepts. These the gracious soul approves and delights in; but still we are renewed but in part. And when the commands of Christ stand in direct opposition to the will of man, or call upon us to sacrifice a right hand or a right eye; though the Lord will surely make those who depend upon him victorious at the last, yet it will cost them a struggle; so that, when they are sensible how much they owe to his power working in them, and enabling them to overcome, they will, at the same time, have a lively conviction of their own weakness. Abraham believed in God, and delighted to obey; yet when he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, this was no easy trial of his sincerity and obedience; and all who are partakers of his faith are exposed to meet, sooner or later, with some call of duty little less contrary to the dictates of flesh and blood.

3. The yoke of his dispensations. This

none can bear as they ought, but those who come to him. It is natural to us to repine, to fret, and toss like a wild bull in a net, (Isa. li. 20,) when we are under afflictions. Believers likewise find their flesh weak, when their spirits are willing; yet they see sufficient reason to submission, and they know where to apply for grace. Affliction is a touchstone that discovers what spirit a man is of. The hypocrite may keep up a fair semblance of true piety, while all things go smooth and to his wish; but in sharp troubles the mask will drop off. Satan proceeded upon this maxim in his contest with Job; and the maxim is a truth, though Satan was mistaken in the application.

II. The appointed means by which sinners are enabled to bear this threefold yoke, is suggested in the words, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly." However amiable and desirable the disposition I have described may appear, you will never acquire it by any strength, wisdom, or diligence of your own. Our Lord, to prevent you wearying yourselves with unsuccessful efforts and needless disappointments, has assured you beforehand, "Without me ye can do nothing," John xv. 5. But here he graciously offers you the assistance you need. As if he had said I know you are unable of yourselves, but I will help you. Be not afraid of the prospect, but consider what I can do. To my power all things are easy; I can make the crooked straight, and the rough smooth; I can sweetly engage your affections, subdue your wills; influence your practice, and deliver you from your sinful fears. Consider likewise what I have done; thousands, who by nature were as unskilful and impatient as yourselves, have been made willing in the day of my power.

Therefore, *Learn of me.*—Be not afraid to come to me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. Great and mighty as I am, you may freely apply to me in every doubt and difficulty. Awakened souls, through a sense of guilt, and the power of unbelief, are backward and unwilling to come to Christ. They think, surely he will take no notice of such a one as I am. But observe how kind and condescending is his invitation; how graciously suited to engage our confidence! It was said of a Roman emperor, that those who durst speak to him were ignorant of his greatness, but those who durst not were still more ignorant of his goodness. This was a false and impious compliment when applied to a sinful mortal; but it is justly applicable to Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. His glorious majesty may well fill our hearts with awe, and humble us unto the dust before him: but his immense compassions, tenderness, and love, are revealed, to overbalance our fears, to give us confidence to draw nigh to him, and an encouraging hope that he will draw nigh to us.

Again, *Learn of me.*—I know the cause why these things appear so hard. It is owing to the pride and impatience of your hearts. To remedy this, take me for your example; I require nothing of you but what I have performed before you, and on your account: in the path I mark out for you, you may perceive my own footsteps all the way. This is a powerful argument, a sweet recommendation of the yoke of Christ, to those who love him, that he bore it himself. He is not like the Pharisees, whom he censured (Matt. xxiii. 4) on this very account, who bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers.

1. Are you terrified with the difficulties attending your profession, disheartened by hard usage, or too ready to show resentment against those who oppose you? Learn of Jesus, imitate and admire his constancy: "Consider him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself," Heb. xii. 3. Make a comparison (so the word* imports) between yourself and him, between the contradiction which he endured, and that which you are called to struggle with, then surely you will be ashamed to complain. Admire and imitate his meekness; when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; he wept for his enemies, and prayed for his murderers. Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

2. Do you find it hard to walk steadfastly in his precepts, especially in some particular instances, when the maxims of worldly prudence, and the pleadings of flesh and blood, are strongly against you? Learn of Jesus. He pleased not himself, (Rom. xv. 3,) he considered not what was safe and easy, but what was the will of his heavenly Father. Intreat him to strengthen you with strength in your soul, that as you bear the name of his disciples, you may resemble him in every part of your conduct, and shine as lights in a dark and selfish world, to the glory of his grace.

3. Are you tempted to repine at the dispensations of divine providence? Take Jesus for your pattern. Did he say, when the unspeakable sufferings he was to endure for sinners were just coming upon him, "The cup which my Father has put into my hands shall I not drink it?" (John xviii. 11;) and shall we presume to have a will of our own? especially when we further reflect, that as his sufferings were wholly on our account, so all our sufferings are by his appointment, and all designed by him to promote our best, that is our spiritual and eternal welfare?

It is thus by looking to Jesus that the believer is enlightened and strengthened, and grows in grace and sanctification, according to that passage of St. Paul, "We all with

* *Analogy*.

open face," or unvail'd face, " beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18. The word of God is a glass in which the goodness and beauty of the Lord Jesus are manifested to the eye of faith by the light of the Holy Spirit. In this wonderful glass the whole object is not seen at once, but every view we take strengthens the sight to discover something not perceived before. And the prospect is not only affecting, but transforming; by beholding we are gradually formed into the resemblance of him whom we see, admire, and love. All those whom Jesus thus teaches to bear his yoke, find his promise fulfilled; they obtain,

III. Rest to their souls. Those who are truly awakened want nothing to make them happy, but to be assured that they have an interest in the Redeemer's love. Now, this satisfaction is peculiar to those who take his yoke upon them, and are daily learning of him, and copying after him. For,

1. This affords the best and most unshaken evidence that he has begun a good work of grace in our hearts: I say the best, because the most unshaken. Many are greatly perplexed to know if they are truly converted; and are kept the longer in suspense, because they overlook the ordinary scriptural method of confirmation. They expect to know it by some extraordinary sensation suddenly impressed upon their minds. But besides that there have been many instances in which this expected evidence has been counterfeited, and a groundless confidence has been placed in a delusion or vain imagination (to the hurt of many, if not to their overthrow,) even when they are from the gracious Spirit of God, they are for the most part transient; and when a different frame takes place, the believer is often tempted to question the reality of what went before. I think therefore the testimony of an enlightened conscience, judging by the word of God, and deciding in our favour, that by his grace we have been enabled to take up the yoke of Christ, is in some respects a more satisfactory evidence, that we are his, and that he is ours, than if an angel was sent from heaven to tell us, that our names are written in the book of life.

2. The promise of the peculiar manifestation of his love, (John xiv. 21,) is made and restricted to those who walk in the path of obedience. If the discoveries the Lord is pleased sometimes to make of himself to the soul, are not the proper and direct evidences of a state of grace, they are however exceedingly desirable. Whoever has tasted the sweets of that water of life, cannot but long for repeated draughts. When he lifts up the light of his countenance upon the soul, then is love, joy, and peace within, however dark

and distressing things may be without. But this desirable presence can only be expected, while we bear his yoke and walk in his steps. If we turn aside into forbidden paths, if we decline or dishonour the profession of his truth, we grieve the Holy Spirit, on whose communications our comforts are suspended; we give the enemies of our souls encouragement to assault us, and are in danger of falling from one wickedness to another, without the power of withstanding either the greatest or the smallest temptation, till the Lord is pleased to turn again to our assistance. In such a situation there can be no rest. "But he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely, and findeth rest," Prov. x. 9.

And true rest is no otherwise to be obtained. Those of you who refuse the yoke of Christ, well know in yourselves that you are far from rest. Your experience agrees with this declaration in the prophet: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," Isa. lvii. 21. In what respect will you dare to pretend that you have the advantage of those who bear the yoke of Christ?

We allow, the profession of the gospel is subject to inconveniences, but surely not to so many as you meet with who are ashamed, or afraid, or averse to maintain it. If those who are of your household are not your foes on this account, yet we can see how it fares with those who live without the fear of God. How many, and how sharp are your trials from disobedient children, unfaithful servants, false friendships, ungoverned passions, and unsatisfied desires! Nor do you save anything in point of character, not even with those by whom you are most desirous to be esteemed. They cannot indeed reproach you with being a believer, but may they not, do they not reproach and despise you for being a drunkard, or a liar, or a miser, or an extortioner? And is this more honourable than to suffer shame for the cause of Christ?

Do the precepts of Christ seem hard? Certainly not so hard as that miserable bondage you are under to Satan, the god of this world, who works in you, and rules over you at his will. He will not allow you to listen to the united remonstrances of conscience, health, interest, and reputation. But you are hurried on in his drudgery, constrained, like a mill-horse, to toil in the same tedious round of folly and sin, though you are aware of the consequences and wages beforehand. How absurd is it for you to boast of your freedom, while you are compelled to rush into present misery, and to dare your eternal ruin, with your eyes open!

And how greatly are you to be pitied under the many unavoidable afflictions of life, to which you are equally liable with the servants of Christ! When your idols are torn from you, when sickness seizes you, or death stares you in the face, then how do you fret

and pine! how many are your fears and alarms! Then you are your own tormentors. The review of the past affords you only shame and regret. If you look forward to the future, you are filled with foreboding fears and distressing apprehensions; you are weary of living and afraid to die.

Why then will you continue thus, when Jesus says, "Come unto me, that you may have rest?" O may he incline your hearts this day to hear his voice! Have you been hardened in your evil ways by a suspicion that your case is desperate, that it is now too late, and that he whom you have so often rejected will refuse you mercy? Beware of such a thought: "There is forgiveness with him," Ps. cxxx. 4. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." He is gracious to pardon and mighty to save; only acknowledge your offences, and throw down the arms of your rebellion. He is mighty to save, and no less willing than able. As yet there is hope, but who can tell how long his patience may bear with you? Take notice of that awful denunciation, "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," Prov. xxix. 1. If you seek him to-day with all your hearts, you shall find him. But who can answer for to-morrow? To-morrow, or to-night, your souls may be required of you; or, if your lives are spared, you may be given up to judicial and incurable hardness of heart. If his Spirit should cease from striving with you, you are lost for ever.

SERMON XIII.

THE SERVICE OF CHRIST EASY AND PLEASANT.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
Matt. xi. 30.

THIS verse alone, if seriously attended to, might convince multitudes, that though they bear the name of Christians, and are found among the Lord's worshipping people, they are as yet entire strangers to the religion of the gospel. Can it be supposed that our Lord would give a false character of his yoke? If not, how can any dream that they are his followers while they account a life of communion with God, and entire devotedness to his service, to be dull and burdensome? Those, however, who have made the happy trial, find it to be such a burden as wings are to a bird. Far from complaining of it, they are convinced that there is no real pleasure attainable in any other way.

What the yoke of Christ is, we have already considered. It includes the profession of his gospel, obedience to his precepts, and submis-

sion to his will under every dispensation. But since it is confessed that a sinful nature and a sinful world will bring many difficulties, trials, and temptations upon all who walk in this way, it may be worth our while to inquire more particularly what there is in the yoke of Christ that overpowers all these hardships, and makes such amends for every suffering, that, upon the whole, every believer will subscribe to this as a sure and experienced truth, that the "yoke is easy, and the burden light."

I. Those who bear the yoke of Christ act from a principle which makes all things easy. This is love. It is said of Jacob, that when he served a hard master seven years for Rachel, they seemed to him but a few days, for the love which he bore her, Gen. xxix. 20. And many of you find it easy to do much for your parents, children, and friends, because you love them. But there is no love like that which a redeemed sinner bears to him who "has loved him, and washed him from his sins in his own blood." Farther, love produces the greatest effects when it is mutual. We are willing to do and suffer much to gain the affection of a person we regard, though we are not sure of success; but when the affection is reciprocal, it adds strength to every motive. Now, the believer does not love at uncertainties: he knows that Jesus loved him first, loved him when he was in a state of enmity; (1 John iv. 19;) and that nothing but the manifestation and power of this love could have taught his hard, unfeeling heart to love him whom he never saw, 1 Pet. i. 8. This love, therefore, affords two sweet and powerful encouragements in service.

1. A cordial desire to please. Love does what it can, and is only sorry that it can do no more. We seldom think much, as I have hinted already, either of time, pains, or expense, when the heart is warmly engaged. The world, who understand not this heartfelt spring of true religion, think it strange that the believer will not run into the same excess of riot with them, 1 Pet. iv. 4. They wonder what pleasure he can find in secret prayer, in reading and hearing the word of God; they pity the poor man who has such a melancholy turn, and gravely advise him not to carry things too far. But the believer can give them a short answer in the apostle's words: "The love of Christ constrains me," 2 Cor. v. 14. His ruling passion is the same with theirs, which makes his pursuit no less uniform and abiding; but the objects are as different as light from darkness. They love the perishing pleasures of sin, the mammon of unrighteousness, and the praise of men; but he loves Jesus.

2. A pleasing assurance of acceptance. If we know not whether what we do will be favourably received or not, it makes us remiss and indifferent. But this animates the Lord's

people; they are assured, that he will not overlook the smallest services or sufferings they are engaged in for his sake. He has told them in his word, That if they give but a cup of cold water in his name, and on his account, he will accept and acknowledge it, as if it were done immediately to himself, Mark ix. 41.

II. It makes a service still more easy and pleasant, if besides acting from a principle of love, the service itself is agreeable to our inclination. Esau would probably have done any thing to please his father, in hopes of obtaining the blessing; but no command could please him more than to be sent for venison, because he was a cunning hunter, and his pleasure lay in that way, Gen. xxv. 27, and xxvii. 3. Now, the believer has received a new nature; so that the Lord's commandments are not grievous to him, but he delights in them with his whole heart. It is true, he groans under remaining corruptions; and this is properly his burden, not the service of Christ, which he approves and delights in, but because he can serve him no better. So far as faith is in exercise, he rejoices in every part of the yoke of Christ. He glories in the profession of his name. He has made Moses's choice; he prefers even the reproach of Christ to all the honours of the world; (Heb. xi. 26;) and has a measure of that spirit, by which the apostles were enabled to rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, Acts v. 41. He heartily consents to the precepts; he esteems them as a light to his feet; he makes them his meditation all the day. Nothing pleases him more than to find an increasing victory over the hinderances to his obedience; and the time of his greatest grief is, when, through infirmity, or the prevalence of temptation, he is seduced to neglect or transgress them, though in the smallest instance, and in what does not pass under human observation. Even afflictions, though not joyous in themselves, but grievous, are cheerfully submitted to, because the Lord has appointed them, and is pleased to account them a filling up of his sufferings, Col. i. 24.

III. In other cases, even when there is a principle of love, and the service not disagreeable in itself, yet weakness may render it wearisome or impracticable. Though perhaps you would willingly take a long journey to serve a friend; yet if you are sick or lame, what could you do! But the yoke of Christ is light and easy in this respect, that there is a sufficiency of strength provided for the performance. This consideration makes every difficulty vanish; for though these should be increased tenfold, yet if strength be increased in an equal proportion, it amounts to the same thing. What is hard or impossible to a child, is easy to a man; what is hard to flesh and blood, is easy to faith and grace.

The believer, though weak in himself, is strong in the Lord. The power on which he depends is not in his own keeping; but it is treasured up in the covenant of grace, or in the Lord Jesus, in whom all fulness dwells, and is always to be obtained by prayer. Every child of God is interested in the blessing of Asher: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy day is, so shall thy strength be," Deut. xxxiii. 25. By the day may be understood,

1. A day of service. Whatever the Lord appoints for us to do, if we depend upon him in the use of appointed means, he will certainly qualify, furnish, and strengthen us, for the accomplishment of it. If David is called out to meet Goliath, though he is but a stripling, (1 Sam. xvii. 37,) and the other a practised warrior from his youth, he shall not be disheartened or overcome, but be made a conqueror though all appearances are against him. If we are in the path of duty, and if our help and hope is in the name of the Lord, we may confidently expect that he will uphold us, however faint and enfeebled we may seem to be to ourselves or others.

2. A day of suffering. If, like Daniel and his companions, we should be threatened with lions and flames, we may confidently commit our way to God; he can control the fire, and stop the lions' mouth, Dan. iii. 16, and vi. 22; Psalm xci. 13; 2 Tim. iv. 17. While all things are in his hands, whose we are, and whom we serve, why should we fear that they will act beyond the bounds of his permission, or that he will permit them to do any thing which is not his purpose to overrule to his advantage? Such considerations in the hour of need, seasonably impressed by his good Spirit, together with a trust in his promises, shall inspire us with new strength to meet the greatest danger undismayed; and with regard to trials immediately from his own gracious hand, he will so adjust them, in number, season, weight, and measure, to the ability he communicates, that we both shall be able to bear, and also find a way made for us to escape. With such assurances, we may boldly say, "The Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man (or Satan) can do unto me."

IV. There is further, a consideration of profit and advantage, which makes the yoke of Christ easy. The believing soul is not mercenary. He loves his master and his service; yet it is impossible to serve God for nought. In the keeping of his commandments, there is a reward, though not of debt, yet of grace: (Psalm xix. 11:) A great and sure reward, respecting both the life that now is, and that which is to come.

Those who sincerely take up the yoke of Christ, and cleave to him in love alone, have ample compensation in the present life for all that their profession can cost them. They

enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, which is compared to a continual feast. St. Paul, though a champion for free grace, and determined to glory only in the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, (2 Cor. I. 12.) expresses a high and just value for this privilege; and that it afforded comfort, yea joy, in a time of trouble. Superadded to this, they are often favoured with the peculiar consolations of the Holy Spirit, which, though slightly esteemed by those who know them not, satisfy the soul as with marrow and fatness, and can change the voice of mourning into songs of praise in an instant, Psalm lxxiii. 3. And though these are not their constant food, yet they have real and habitual communion with God, from day to day, in his ordinances and providences. They live in his presence; they converse with him, and he with them; their good things are doubly pleasing, because they receive them from his hand; and this thought likewise sweetens every bitter cup of affliction which he prepares for their good. The mutual intercourse and communion his people have with each other, is likewise a considerable branch of their present reward. How pleasing is it, when speaking to each other in his name, they take sweet counsel together! they are confirmed in his way, by finding how their experiences answer as face to face in a glass; and he causes their hearts to burn within them, while they are freely declaring what he has done for their souls. Lastly, they are happy in a comfortable expectation of a better world; (Gen. xix. 18;) and when the appointed time comes, death will put an end to all their troubles; and then shall they fully know and possess the future reward which the Lord has prepared and reserved for them that love him.

This is briefly summed up by the apostle: They shall be absent from the body, (2 Cor. v. 8,) and all its inseparable evils; sin and sorrow, want, pain, and every distress that belongs to this mortal state, shall affect them no more; and they shall be present with the Lord, whom they love. Then they shall see his face without a cloud, and share his joy without abatement or interruption; and all this shall be for ever. When they are made pillars of the new Jerusalem, (Rev. iii. 12; 1 Thess. iv. 17,) they shall come out no more. The prospect of this makes them rejoice under all their tribulations; for they know whereto they lead, and how they will end. "These light and momentary afflictions are working for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17.

From these things I hope it will appear that the yoke of Christ is easy. His people serve him because they love him; they love his ways: he is their strength; he comforts them now, and will be their portion for ever.

But perhaps some, whom I would willingly comfort, will rather be discouraged by this representation, and say, Alas! if it is thus, I am yet to seek. My love is so faint, my strength so feeble, my consolations so small, my obedience so imperfect, that I am afraid I have not known the easy yoke of Christ. There are therefore some other things to be taken into the account, and which are no just exception to the character our Lord here gives of his yoke.

1. The entrance, or first application of the mind to the yoke, or profession of the gospel, is seldom pleasant. Though the work of grace leads to love, it usually begins in fear. On this point we have already spoken at large. It is no pleasing state to be weary and heavy laden, to see ourselves obnoxious to a curse, and unable to escape; yet, by apprehensions of this kind, the soul is prepared to embrace the yoke of Christ; and none but those who have experienced the misery of a fallen state, will be truly desirous of the gospel-rest.

2. The progress is gradual. The first dawns of grace in the heart are faint, and hardly perceptible; hence the whole process is compared to things that are very inconsiderable in their first principles. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which is hid and lost in the earth for a season; it is like leaven, which when cast into meal may be concealed and unnoticed for a while, but by degrees diffuses its influence through the whole mass; (Matt. xiii. 31, 33;) it is like the corn, which springs up and comes forward night and day, a man knows not how, Mark iv. 27. The growth in the christian life being thus slow and indistinct, many who aim to ascertain their interest rather by the degree than the reality of grace, are often dejected to find their attainments proceed no faster. It is indeed a humbling consideration, but ought not to rob us of the comfort arising from a believing view of what Jesus has completely wrought out for us, and of what he has promised he will infallibly perform in us, in his own good time. A deliverance from this poring into ourselves for the grounds of our hope, is a part, a considerable part of the rest to which he invites us.

3. The difficulties attendant on that course of faith and obedience, which is included in taking his yoke upon us, are many and great. While we sojourn in a wilderness-state, and in a sinful nature, there will be fightings without and fears within. It is the appointed and necessary rule of our profession, that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God," Acts xiv. 22. All who are against him will be against us for his sake, and the evil heart of unbelief will show itself in a variety of forms, as it is acted upon by various impressions, from the

things of sense and the powers of darkness. But these troubles do not arise from the spiritual yoke of Christ, but from our present situation and circumstances, and shall therefore shortly cease for ever. His ways are ways of pleasantness, though we are sure to meet with perplexity and uneasiness, so far and so often as we wander from them into our own crooked paths. But,

4. The end is sure. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved;" (Matt. x. 22;) and all who are in his way, have his promise and power engaged in their behalf, that they shall certainly endure, that he will so lead, guide, support, and strengthen them, that neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall separate them from his love, Rom. viii. 38. Your complaints and fears, therefore, are no proof that you are not right. Go on, in his name. Trust in him in whom you have believed, and be nothing terrified by your adversaries. The longer you wear the yoke, the easier you will find it.

Let each one examine himself by what has been offered. If you have not a principle of true love to Christ, and a prevailing desire to live in all holy obedience to his will, you are no christian; and, though you may begin warmly, you will not be able to hold out, but your profession will wither away for want of root and moisture. Nor is it difficult to know whether you love him or no; if you do, you have seen your need of him, and abhor yourself in dust and ashes.

From hence likewise you may discern the difference between the religion of the gospel and the formal worship that many are contented with, in which the heart has no place. Remember that "God is a Spirit," (John iv. 24,) and unless you love him, you cannot possibly please him. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly condemned. His commandments likewise are spiritual; they extend beyond the surface of the outer conduct, and take cognizance even of the retired thoughts and intents of the heart. Many sins may be avoided, and many duties performed, from motives and principles which, not being derived from his word, or conformable to it, are therefore sinful in themselves, and make every thing proceeding from them defective and displeasing in his sight. If you are attempting to serve him by your own natural strength and understanding, be assured that you have not yet taken up the yoke of Christ; if you had, you would find it answerable to the character he has given of it, for his word is truth. But your constrained obedience you know in yourselves, far from being easy and light, is a heavy burden, which you would be glad to cast off if you durst. You serve the Lord as a slave serves a hard master, not with a willing mind, but of necessity,

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and from a dread of punishment. But in vain do you draw near to him with your lips while your heart is far from him. Therefore spend no longer your labour for that which is not bread, but come to Jesus, that you may find rest for your souls. He is able to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, to put a new spirit in you that shall delight in his yoke, to give you strength and ability for every part of your duty, and to make you a willing people in the day of his power.

Believers, rejoice in your security. The Lord has given you a never-dying principle of love, and provided for you a never-failing supply of grace. These will bear you up through all your journey, and at last bring you safely home to the mansions provided for you in your Father's house. Then shall you praise him, world without end.

SERMON XIV.

BELIEVERS CAUTIONED AGAINST MISCONDUCT
IN THEIR PROFESSION.

Let not your good be evil spoken of.
Rom. xiv. 16.

THE immediate occasion of this caution you may learn from the context. It has pleased God from the beginning, to permit his people, who all agree in the great and essential truths of the gospel, to differ in some things of less importance. This difference of judgment gives room for the mutual exercise of patience, forbearance, tenderness, and charity, but, at the same time, too often affords opportunity for the remaining corruptions of the heart to discover and exert themselves. The Jewish converts were for some time attached to the observance of that distinction in meats and drinks which had been enjoyed by the law of Moses: the Gentiles, on the contrary, claimed a right to be free from this yoke, as a part of the liberty which they had received from Christ. The apostle does not in this place blame either party with respect to their own judgment and practice; but he reprove them for censuring and despising each other, and he especially reprove those who understood their liberty in the gospel, for not being prudent in the use of it, but rather forward to provoke and offend their weaker brethren. He confirms their liberty, but admonishes them not to abuse it, either by urging others to act against their consciences, or by treating them with contempt, because they had not entirely laid aside these scruples and prejudices to which they had been long accustomed. "Let not your good be evil spoken of." Be thankful for your liberty, but do not

bring it into discredit and reproach, by acting in an unbecoming spirit towards others.

The instruction in my text, understood in this sense, has always been applicable and seasonable in the christian church, and perhaps never more so than in our land and in our times. While believers in Jesus, who are led by the same Spirit into the same fundamental truths, and stand in the most endeared relation to each other through their common Head, place such undue stress upon lesser incidental differences, and are professed partisans for the little interests of systems, denominations, and leaders, love, the grand characteristic of their profession, is hardly discernible; they censure and grieve each other, retard the success of the cause which they would all be thought to have most at heart, and open the mouths of the adversaries to revile that which they understand not. The prevalence of this wrong disposition calls for the admonition in my text. Be thankful for your privileges; you not only claim the rights of private judgment and liberty of conscience, as men and as christians, but as Britons you possess them. "Let not then your good be evil spoken of;" allow to others that freedom which you expect yourselves; and, if you do not suppose yourselves infallible, suppose it possible that some may be as near to the Lord as yourselves, who cannot agree with you in every sentiment you have adopted.

But this direction may be taken in a much more general sense. It behoves all who honour the Lord Jesus Christ to be careful in every part of their conduct, that they do not give occasion for their good to be evil spoken of. To make the subject as suitable as I can to the different states and characters of all present, I shall,

1. Inquire what is the believer's good.

2. Explain and apply the advice here given, "Let not your good be evil spoken of."

I. All mankind have something near at heart, on which their dependence is placed, and wherein they find their chief pleasure. This (whatever it is) is their good; and, according to the object in which they delight, is their proper character. By nature the world and worldly things are the highest good we seek after; and these, in one view or other, as tempers and situations vary, are pursued with unwearied earnestness. Riches, honour, sinful pleasures, are the poor things in view, when the unrenewed heart cries out, in its eager pursuits, "Who will show us any good?" Psalm iv. 6. If your strongest desires tend this way, your good will not be evil spoken of by many. Men will praise you when you do well for yourself; you are not therefore concerned in the admonition of my text. Only take notice what the word of God declares of your good, and of you for accounting it so. Your good is vanity, your

fruit is vexation of spirit, and you who set your hearts on such a good as the objects of sense can furnish, are adjudged "enemies to God," James iv. 4. You yourselves will speak evil of this good when you come to die, if you die in your sins. Then you will see a propriety in Esau's words to your own case, "Behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" Gen. xxv. 23.

As the world is the good of the unconverted, so a covenant God in Christ is the good and portion of all who are called by his grace. They are ever looking to the obedience and blood of Jesus, applied by the Spirit of grace, as the sole foundation of their hope and comfort. God is their good in the highest sense, and every thing else is good, so far as it leads to him, and assists them in maintaining communion with him. In this view we may mention several particulars, each of which they account their good, because the means of enjoying and glorifying their God.

1. The gospel, that gracious revelation by which they have been taught to know themselves, and to know Jesus, is their good. All the doctrines, precepts, and promises, contained in the scriptures, are a very precious treasure, in which they rejoice more than those who find great spoil. Each of them can say in the language of the Psalmist, "The law of thy mouth is dearer to me than thousands of gold and silver. How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day long," Psalm cxix. 72, 97, 103. By this word they are enlightened, quickened, warned, comforted, and supported; therefore it is the joy and rejoicing of their hearts, and more than their necessary food, Job xxiii. 12.

2. The ordinances make a part of their good. A famine of the word of the Lord would distress them greatly; and if they may but have frequent opportunities of this kind, and meet with his gracious presence in them, they can be content to be without many things which the men of this world highly value. When beset with many straits, and surrounded with troubles, they can find refreshment in the Lord's assurance by the prophet, "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more; but thine eyes shall see thy teachers," Isa. xxx. 20. If this promise is fulfilled to them, they will not greatly complain of the bread of adversity, although that is joined with it. But on the contrary, they find it a hard trial to be deprived of lively ordinances and faithful ministers, however advantageous and pleasing their situation may be in temporal things, because these are not their good.

3. They account their profession a part of their good. They esteem it a high privilege

to bear the name of Christ, though it exposes them to the reproach of the world. They account it a great and important trust to have the honour of the gospel committed to them, and in some measure dependent on their conduct. When they are in their right minds, they would rather die than be guilty of any thing that might bring it into discredit. Wilfully they cannot, they dare not do it; but through ignorance and infirmity they are prone to mistake, and therefore need, and are desirous to observe, the caution in my text.

4. Their experiences are their good, their choice pearls; I mean, the inward dealings of the Lord with their souls: the proofs they have had of his power and wisdom in bringing them thus far safely on their way to his kingdom, the discoveries he has given them of the deceitfulness of their own hearts, the manifestations of his grace, love, and nearness to them, notwithstanding all their unworthiness and unfaithfulness. Some of these experiences have cost them dear, have cost them many a pang, trouble, and conflict; yet they would not be without them to avoid all that they have suffered; and they are content to suffer on, if by any means they may increase this precious stock. They delight to recollect how low they were brought, how wonderfully delivered, what answers they have been favoured with to their poor prayers; and from hence to collect the all-sufficiency and goodness of him to whom they have fled for refuge, and to derive arguments wherewith to combat their unbelieving fears in time to come. Thus far their experiences are their good; not as the foundation of their hope, or the source of their comfort, for these their whole reliance is on the obedience and blood of Jesus the Saviour; but as evidences, that they have neither "followed cunningly-devised fables, nor received the grace of God in vain," 2 Pet. i. 16; 2 Cor. vi. 1.

Thus much in general, that you may all have something whereby to try your spirits, and to know whether you have embraced the good of the Lord's chosen people, Psalm cvi. 4, 5. If your good does not lie in such things as I have mentioned, you have no durable riches, nothing but what you must soon leave behind you. Can you be content to be stript of all, and to enter poor, naked, and friendless, into an eternal world! O that you would take our Lord's advice! He might command, for he has all authority: but he says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich: and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see," Rev. iii. 18.

But some there are whose hearts can go along with me in what I have said. The great God himself is your good. His word

and ordinances, your profession of his name, and your experience of his goodness, are what you rejoice in. To you, then, I address the rest of my discourse. "Let not your good be evil spoken of." I am,

II. To explain and apply this advice. The words plainly imply two things:

1. That there are many ready enough to speak evil of your good: many who despise the gospel, and you for professing it; they watch for your halting, and will be glad of the smallest occasion to expose you. The world, that loves its own, will make allowances in other cases. Indiscretions, and even vices, will be charged to the account of human infirmity, and the amiable name of candour shall be employed to conceal or palliate such things as can by no means be justified. But if you are a professed believer in Jesus, you must not expect this candour will be extended to you; rather, all your words and actions will be sifted, your mistakes exaggerated; and if any part of your conduct will bear a double construction, it will generally be viewed in the most unfavourable light. Nay, even when there is no just occasion afforded, falsehoods and calumnies have been, and will be, industriously propagated against the servants of Christ, Matt. v. 11. That it must be so, we are often warned by scripture, and it is abundantly confirmed by experience.

2. That though it is impossible wholly to stop the mouths of evil-minded men, yet they would not be able to talk so fast if the imprudence of believers did not too often afford them advantage. That such occasions should sometimes be given by those whose hearts and aims are in the main sincere, will not be thought strange to any person who is acquainted with the true state of human nature. Through inadvertence, want of experience, errors of judgment, sudden and unexpected temptations, and other evils inseparable from our present situation, persons, whose chief desire is to adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour in all things, may, and do, in some instances cause their good to be evil spoken of. It is, however, our bounden duty, as we regard the honour of God and his truth, to endeavour as much as possible to cut off occasion from them that seek occasion in this respect, 2 Cor. xi. 12; 1 Pet. ii. 12.

In order to this, let us inquire, what are the most common objections which are made against the gospel preaching and profession, not only by malicious enemies, but sometimes by persons who discover no very bad intention, but are partly imposed upon by the misrepresentations of others, and partly stumbled by the faults of professors!

1st, It is objected, that our doctrine lays no sufficient stress upon good works. We dare not indeed recommend them out of their proper place, or propose them as the ground

of our acceptance with God. But I hope none who attend here will dare to say, that they are not frequently reminded, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," Heb. xii. 14. However, the world will judge more by what they see in you, than by what they hear from me. Be upon your guard, therefore, lest by any instances of a trifling, foolish, unkind, or unjust conduct, you let your good be evil spoken of. It will not be a sufficient apology to say, that your principles do not allow of these things, if those who know you can charge them upon your practice.

2dly, It is farther objected, that the evangelical system is a scheme chiefly made up of notions and subtle distinctions, and opens a door to a thousand disputes. This is one unhappy consequence of our many divisions and subdivisions, and the heat with which they are contended for by their respective partisans. Let this engage you to avoid a disputing contentious spirit. "Be swift to hear, slow to speak;" (James i. 19;) and when a reason is asked "of the hope that is in you," (1 Pet. iii. 15,) give your answers with meekness and fear, lest you cause your good to be evil spoken of.

3dly, It is likewise a very common objection, that an usual effect of this doctrine, is to make people idle and careless with regard to the necessary concerns and business of life. Indeed I should not be unwilling to plead with candid and fair reasoners, in behalf of young converts, on this point. At first setting out, the change is so great, their views of eternal things so strong and affecting, that considering human infirmity, it can hardly be otherwise but that the attention will be almost entirely taken up with them for a season. While a sense of unpardoned sin is fixed upon the conscience and a person now duly aware of the uncertainty of life, is in suspense about the greatest of all concerns, and knows not how or whether he shall be able to flee from the wrath to come, it is no wonder if this solicitude should in a great measure swallow up his thoughts, and leave him but little either leisure or ability to attend to other concerns, which, however proper in their respective places, are confessedly, in comparison of this, of little or no importance. In like manner, the removal of this burden is usually accompanied with such a lively sense of the wisdom, love, power, and grace of God, revealed in Christ Jesus by the gospel, as may for a little while almost overpower and extinguish the apprehension of inferior things. But if this indifference about common duties continues very long, or is indulged to an extreme, it gives great and just offence. It causes the ways of truth to be evil spoken of, and we hardly know what to say, but this. That the fault is not owing to the gospel, but to the neglect of what the gospel teaches and

enjoins. This is no new inconvenience; the apostles observed and reproved it in their day. There were such mistaken persons among the Thessalonians, who supposed or pretended, that the gospel exempted them from labour. Of these he says, "Now them that are such we exhort and command, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread;" and farther directs, "that if they would not work neither should they eat," 2 Thess. iii. 10—12. The Sabbath is the Lord's; and the same command which forbids us to do any work then, requires us to labour on the other six days. "Let not your good be evil spoken of." Be faithful to your trust, diligent in your business, do every thing heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men. Give no one just cause to say, that since you have become religious, you care not (as the phrase is) which end goes foremost; for this would be to put a stumbling-block in their way, and to increase their prejudices against the truth.

4thly, Once more, the gospel-doctrine is charged with weakening the bands of natural and social relation; that it makes children and servants heady, high-minded, and disobedient, so that they presently think themselves wiser than all about them, and are obstinately bent to have their own wills. This objection will indeed cleave to the gospel, so long as the spirit of the world and the spirit of God are opposite to each other. For cases will inevitably arise, where we must either displease God or man, and then we ought not to hesitate a moment. But professors should take care to be assured that there is such a necessity, before they act against lawful authority; and especially when the point in dispute lies between children and parents. For though we ought to disobey and forsake father and mother when God's commands require it; yet next, under God, parents are, above all, to be honoured, consulted, and obeyed; and the excepted cases are not near so numerous as persons in the warmth of their first zeal are apt to suppose. The enemy suits his temptations to occasions; and it is no uncommon thing to be drawn to act violently in our own spirits, while we imagine we are striving in the cause of God and truth.

In short, we are directed to examine ourselves, and others are allowed to examine us by our fruits. The people of the world are not proper judges of spiritual experiences, but they can judge tolerably right of tempers and actions. Some will watch you out of illwill, and some will observe you for information. If they hear you have begun to make a religious profession, they will take notice, to see if you are the better for it. They will observe you not only in the church, but in the shop and in the house; and if they perceive you are all of a piece, steady, quiet, humble, diligent, who knows but this may be

a means in the hand of God to win upon them, and to give them a more favourable regard to the means which have wrought so effectually on you! But on the contrary, if you are imprudent, rash, and careless, if you either conform to the world, or neglect your acknowledged duty in it, you will cause your good to be evil spoken of, bring difficulties upon yourselves, and put it out of your own power to be useful to others. Pray, therefore, for wisdom and grace, to make your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven. This is the great design and proper effect of the gospel, when rightly understood. For as it is the grace of God alone which bringeth salvation; so this grace not only enlightens the understanding, but purifies the heart, regulates the conduct, works by love, and overcomes the world. It effectually teaches and enforces (what the best schemes of morality and philosophy have always failed in) the denial of all ungodliness and worldly lusts: (Tit. ii. 11—15:) and by the motives it displays, and the strength it communicates, enables the true christian to adorn his character in every relation, and to fill up the whole circle of duty as it respects himself, his neighbour, and the God with whom he has to do. It teaches to live soberly, righteously, and godly; to avoid whatever is contrary to the purity of the gospel; to practise moderation in the use even of lawful things; and to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. It teaches the rich to be humble and bountiful, the poor to be thankful and resigned. It teaches superiors to be kind, inferiors to be faithful. Husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and people, are all instructed by this grace to a conduct answerable to their high calling, and the common relation they stand in to him who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood. For the morality of the gospel has a nobler spring, a more extensive scope, than the ties of social life. Their sobriety and righteousness are not substituted in the place of vital godliness, but are the fruits derived from it. The grace of God teaches them to live godly, to delight in him to obey him, to do every thing for his sake, as under his eye, and to be continually governed by a sense of his unspeakable love manifested in his Son, and "an expectation of the blessed hope set before us, the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that by his blood and Spirit he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Labour to show, that you are not only called by his name, but have sat at his feet, and drank of his Spirit; and if, after all, unreasonable and wicked men will speak evil of you and

your good, be not moved at it, but pity and pray for them. When he shall return to vindicate your cause, and wipe away your reproach, then "every cloud shall be removed, and the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," Matth. xiii. 43.

SERMON XV.

THE EXTENT AND SANCTION OF THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.—Exod. xx. 7.

THE foundation of true religion is laid in a right knowledge of God and ourselves. How deficient we are in each of these, how far fallen from original righteousness, is strongly implied in this prohibition, which would be wholly unnecessary, if we were not wholly sunk in stupidity and wickedness. That such worms as we should be liable to trifle with the Divine Majesty, whose presence fills the heavens and the earth, before whom the angels hide their faces; that such frail dependent creatures have need to be cautioned, that we do not profane the name of the God in whom we live, and move, and have our being, is a striking proof of our depravity; and that we can dare to break through this caution, and slight the awful threatening with which it is closed, is a dreadful aggravation of our guilt.

These words, when first spoken to the Israelites, were delivered in flames and thunder. The mountain shook, the people trembled; and even Moses, who had been honoured with peculiar freedom of access to God, was constrained to cry, "I exceedingly fear and quake," Heb. xii. 22. Such a scene, or rather an infinitely more dreadful one, shall hereafter take place, "when the Lord himself shall again descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God;" (1 Thess. iv. 16;) "when he shall be revealed in flaming fire, to take vengeance on all who know him not, and obey not his gospel;" (2 Thess. i. 8:) "then shall sinners be convinced not only of their ungodly deeds, but of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him;" (Jude, 15;) and they shall know the full meaning of that terrible exception which I have read, "that the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

The terms of my text require little explanation. The name of God is in every one's mouth upon one occasion or other, in places where his revealed will is known. In a

more eminent and peculiar sense, his name is discovered to his believing people in Christ Jesus the Lord; those who know the name of God in Christ will put their trust in him; (Psalm ix. 10;) they dare not, they cannot, blaspheme that holy name by which they are called. But I shall take it more extensively here; for though but few understand the name of God in an evangelical and saving sense, there is not a person in this assembly but knows and makes mention of his holy name, so far as to render them transgressors of this commandment. To take his name in vain, is to use it falsely or profanely, inconsiderately, without due reverence, or unprofitably, and without a suitable necessity. The sanction, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless," has indeed a meaning and emphasis beyond what is expressed. Similar forms of speaking are frequent in scripture, as, "The Lord will not spare that man;" (Deut. xxix. 20; 2 Pet. ii. 4, 5;) that is, he will punish him to the utmost; for it is immediately added, "All the curses of this book shall come upon him." Again, "He spared not the angels;" that is he showed them no mercy, as the following words declare: "He spared not the old world, he visited them with utter destruction, and swept them all away with a flood." So "he will not hold him guiltless," implies two things: 1st, That the Lord God has appointed a day to call sinners to an account for their words, as well as their actions. 2dly, That whatever shall become of others, those who have presumed to take his name in vain, have their doom already determined. Whoever escapes, they shall surely be punished; whomsoever he acquits, he will certainly condemn them.

As the import of the expressions is not difficult, so likewise it will be far more easy than agreeable to point out some of the many ways in which this commandment is customarily and carelessly broken. The law is general, and each particular precept is spiritual; (Rom. vii. 14;) and perhaps this will be found of a more extensive signification than some of you are aware. The delightful theme of a minister of the gospel is to preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified; to open the treasures of divine mercy, and to show the grace, freeness, and security of the promises; to raise up them that fall, to strengthen those that stand; "to support the weak, to comfort the feeble-minded; to preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," 1 Thess. v. 14; Luke iv. 18. But these subjects do not comprise the whole of our message; and in general we find that the full soul loatheth the honey-comb; (Prov. xxvii. 7;) and multitudes, through ignorance of the spirituality and purity of God's holy law, and a partial judgment of their own hearts, can neither see the beauty nor the necessity of the gospel-salvation. We are

therefore constrained frequently to insist on far less pleasing subjects, to lift up our voices like a trumpet, (Isa. lviii. 1,) to demand a general attention, while we attempt to show our hearers their transgressions and their sins, that they may thereby make the doctrine of the cross of Christ welcome and desirable. It is painful to the patient, and without doubt displeasing to the human artist, to probe a deep and dangerous wound: but necessity commands, and without it a complete and lasting cure is not to be expected.

1. The first and most direct way in which the name of God is taken in vain, is by perjury; that is, when he is expressly appealed to in confirmation of what is false, or when engagements are made, as in his name and presence, which are not strictly and literally complied with. I need not take up your time in proving that this is a sin of a deep dye in itself, and attended with peculiar aggravations under the light of the gospel; and I wish it was more difficult to prove the frequency of it in our land, but this likewise is as obvious as the light. I have sometimes met with a random assertion, that though we are wicked enough, we are not worse than other countries. In other things I am content to wave the parallel; but with respect to the sin of perjury, I fear we are much worse than any nation now under the sun, perhaps worse than any that the sun ever saw. I am afraid, there are more and more daring instances of this wickedness amongst us than in all the rest of Europe. By an unhappy kind of necessity, it is interwoven, as it were, with the very constitution of the body politic, and diffuses itself like a deadly contagion amongst all orders and ranks of people. Oaths are so excessively multiplied, and so generally neglected, that it is equally difficult and rare for a person to engage through a course of years in any kind of employment, either civil or commercial, (O that it stopped even here!) without being ensnared. Some are so expressed, that it is morally impossible to comply with them; others so circumstanced, that they are usually swallowed without the remotest design of regarding either in whole or in part. If here and there a few make conscience of their engagements, and are desirous to perform to the Lord their oaths, (Matt. v. 33,) or decline taking such as open a door either to honour or profit, so strong is the torrent the other way, that it is well if they escape the charge of singularity and preciseness. Though wickedness of every kind too much abounds amongst us, perjury is perhaps peculiarly and eminently our national sin; and I tremble to think it is so, for it gives too just a ground to fear the approach of national judgments. Surely all who have any regard for the honour of God, any sense of the worth of souls, will pray

earnestly that this iniquity may not be our ruin, but that the Lord would be pleased to inspire and succeed the most proper means for the removal, or at least the mitigation of this evil. This would be an event worthy to stand in the annals of the happy times and auspicious government under which we live.

2. And though the matter of an oath be strictly true, yet if it is not transacted with a serious acknowledgment and homage of that Divine Being to whom appeal is made, such an oath, however lawful and necessary it may be in itself, is, with regard to all such thoughtless triflers, no better than taking the name of God in vain. It cannot but be grievous to every serious mind, to observe the little reverence and solemnity, or rather the total want of common decency, which too frequently prevails among us in this respect, so that sometimes it is not easy to say whether those who tender the oath, or those who take it, seem least in earnest. Without doubt this indifference may be assigned as one cause of the increase and prevalence of perjury. If those who are authorised to require or receive those solemn appeals, were themselves impressed with a due reverence of the awful majesty of God, and were solicitous to inspire all who came before them with the same sentiments, and would remind them (those especially who appear very positive and unguarded) of the impiety and danger of swearing falsely, it is possible many mischiefs would be prevented. Some persons would probably tremble and start back from the first temptation to this wickedness, and others might be deterred from persisting in it, who, for want of such admonitions and examples, and because they never saw any solemnity observed, precipitately rush upon this enormous evil, and are at length given up to a dreadful habit of wilful and corrupt perjury.

3. If an oath, lawful and necessary in itself, may thus become criminal through inconsideration, what shall we say of the throng of profane swearers, who wound our ears and pollute our language, by a horrid mixture of execrations and blasphemies in their common conversation? "Their throats are an open sepulchre: their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness: the poison of asps is under their lips," Rom. iii. 13, 14. This I have to say from the word of God, that the Lord will not hold them guiltless. In vain their thoughtless plea, that they mean no harm: in vain their presumptuous comparison of themselves with others, as though these were trivial escapes that did not affect the peace of society. If these were small sins singly, their frequency would swell to a vast amount; but is it indeed a small sin, to rush against the thick bosses of God's ouckler, and to despise so terrible & threatening as this? Surely "the plague shall never

depart from the house of the swearer." "As he clotheth himself with cursing like as with his garment; so it shall enter into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones," Ps. cix. 17, 18. A habit of swearing is a sure sign not only of an unsanctified heart, but of a conscience hardened, and as it were seared with a hot iron, callous, and quite insensible.

4. Some persons who scruple expressly to mention the name of God, accustom themselves to swear by his creatures, by the heavens, by the light, or by their own souls, &c. But that this likewise is a direct violation of the law, and exposes to the same penalties, we are assured by him who best knew how to explain his own commands. Our Lord determines this point in his sermon on the mount, so as not to leave the possibility of a doubt. "I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool.—Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair thereof white or black," Matt. v. 34—36. "And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein: and he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon," Matth. xxiii. 21, 22. "But let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." This decision evidently condemns, not only what is usually deemed swearing, but the whole multitude of idle expletives, whether fashionable or vulgar, which have the force of affirmations in common discourse. Will any who live in a christian country, and have the Bible at hand, think to plead ignorance of these things in the great day?

5. If I should stop here, some of you would applaud yourselves, and perhaps not be displeased with me for what I have hitherto said. Some who think themselves clear thus far, will join with me in saying, "Because of swearing, the land mourns," Jer. xxiii. 10. But are there no other ways of taking the name of God in vain? Yes; many do it as often as they pray; and it is easily proved against numbers who join in our established worship. Let each one consider with what dispositions and desires they have engaged in the service we have already gone through this day. Our mouths have all spoken the same things; but have they been the language of our hearts? In the confession, we acknowledge that there is no health in us, and speak as if we were true penitents. In the communion-service, we cry for mercy as miserable sinners; we pray that the thoughts of our hearts may be cleansed by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit; that we may perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name; and for this we

appeal to God, as to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid. More than a few of you, at certain seasons, publicly declare, that the remembrance of your sins is grievous, and the burden of them is intolerable. Now, what apprehensions can such of you have of God as can dare to use this solemn language when your hearts meant no such thing! Is not this to take his name in vain in the grossest manner? Is it not plain that you think him altogether such a one as yourselves; (Psalm l. 21;) nay, more easily imposed upon, and more safely to be trifled with, than a fallible mortal! Strange it is to think, that many can, not only content themselves with this lip-service, but make it the meritorious ground of their hope, and conceal themselves religious because they come so often to church to mock the power that made them! But hardly can any wickedness be imagined more daring, and more dreadfully provoking to the Most High, than such a religion as this. To all such worshippers I may address those striking words of St. Peter to Ananias, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God," Acts v. 4.

6. The whole lives of those who live in the allowed practice of known sin, under the profession of the christian name, may be considered as one continual breach of this command. In all you say and do, you blaspheme that holy name by which you are called: and still more so if you are declared friends and favourers of evangelical preaching. By your means, "the ways of truth are evil spoken of," 2 Pet. ii. 2. You give occasion to those offences of which it is said, "Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh," Matt. xviii. 7. You injure the cause of Christ, stumble the weak in faith, grieve the hearts of all who love the Lord, and make his enemies rejoice. "Better it would have been for you never to have known the ways of righteousness," (2 Pet. ii. 21,) than thus to abuse your knowledge. You are now mingled with his faithful servants as the chaff is blended with the wheat upon the floor. But "behold the Judge standeth at the door," James v. 9. His fan is in his hand, he will thoroughly purge his floor; and when he gathers the wheat into his garner, you will be consumed like stubble before the flame of his indignation, Matt. iii. 12. What distress and remorse will seize your hearts, when you shall see them with whom you have often joined in the same ordinances, that have lived with you under the same roof, dined at the same table, perhaps slept in the same bed, when you shall see them received into the kingdom, and you yourselves excluded, and thrust into that outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for ever! Luke xiii. 28.

From this subject we may observe, by way of inference and application,

1. The truth and propriety of that scripture, "We know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Rom. iii. 19. What person in this assembly can plead guiltless to every part of this charge! Must we not all stand silent and self-condemned! and if you are a transgressor, what can you do, either to repair the dishonour you have opened to the Divine Majesty, or to prevent the contagious effects of your own evil example! Nothing can be more false, than a too frequent form of speech amongst us; when a man of some amiable qualifications in social life tramples without fear upon the laws of God, how often is it said, by way of extenuation, he is no one's enemy but his own! when indeed his practice declares him to be an enemy of God, an enemy to his holiness and government: and he is a most mischievous enemy to all who live under his influence, and within the circle of his acquaintance, by tempting and encouraging them to sin to the hazard of their souls. Things standing thus with all men by nature, with what language can we answer the law's demands! Must we not adopt the pathetic confession of the prophet! "For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim. The crown is fallen from our heads; woe unto us that we have sinned!" Lam. v. 16.

2. The necessity and value of the gospel; otherwise how can you escape the penalty, and stand acquitted before the supreme Judge! If you refuse this, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins," Heb. x. 26. But if you humble yourself, and apply to Jesus, there is yet hope. He died for sinners, the chief of sinners, and the greatest of sins. For his sake, all manner of sin and blasphemy is pardonable: "He is able to save to the uttermost." But he must do the whole, and have all the glory. Believe in his name. This is the first step; without grace derived from him, you can do nothing. Remember his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion; and that he is now exalted a Prince and a Saviour, on the behalf of those who are ready to perish. Let this be your plea and encouragement to draw near to a throne of grace. Pray for his Spirit to reveal his righteousness, power, and love to your souls; and as your knowledge of him increases, your repentance will be more spiritual, evangelical, and effectual. Entreat him to enable you to forsake your former evils, to set a guard upon the door of your lips, and to inspire you with an awful veneration of that holy name which you have hitherto profaned. He can teach your polluted lips to show forth his praise.

And let the redeemed of the Lord, whom

he has delivered from the guilt and power of this iniquity, adore the grace and mercy that has saved them. Look back upon your past lives, and rejoice with trembling. How often have you defied his vengeance and power, and perhaps madly uttered horrid imprecations against yourselves! Why have others been cut off in these sins, and you spared? Yes; "such were some of you: but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11. And now your tongues, which once uttered blasphemies almost with every breath, or, under a form of godliness, pronounced a language foreign to your hearts, delight in extolling the name of Jesus, and celebrating the wonders of redeeming love. Now, when you speak of the great God, your hearts are awed with an apprehension of his majesty, yet comforted with the thought that this God is your God, your almighty friend, your everlasting portion. Now you feel the influence of the Spirit of adoption, whereby you cry, "Abba, Father." Little did you think in the days of your ignorance, that the God whom you was presumptuously offending, had, in the counsels of his everlasting love, chosen you to salvation by Jesus Christ, Eph. i. 4. But he was found of you when you sought him not, Isa. lxv. 1. He passed by you when you were lying in your blood, and bade you live, Ezek. xvi. 6, 8. This was the secret reason why you could not destroy yourselves. And at length his time of love came, the hour which he had appointed to open your eyes, to show you mercy, to deliver you from the power of darkness, and to translate you into the kingdom of his dear Son, Col. i. 13. Do not your hearts glow with a sense of your obligations to him who hath loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood? Will you not live to him who has saved you from so great a death? Yea, doubtless you will count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. You will use all your influence to diffuse the saviour of his precious name. You will take shame to yourselves, and ascribe glory to him. You will be zealous for his cause, and have a tender compassion for poor sinners, who know not what they do, remembering, from your past experience, the misery and gall of an unconverted state. Let as many of us as have received mercy be thus minded; let it be our great study to show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, till the welcome hour shall arrive, when he will say to all who fear and love him, and long for his appearance, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Matth. xxv. 34.

3 N

SERMON XVI.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMPARED TO A RACE.

So run that ye may obtain.—1 Cor. ix. 24.

THE scriptures teach us to derive profitable lessons from common occurrences: and since we cannot avoid seeing and hearing the vanities of those who know not God, unless we would go wholly out of the world, we may learn some instruction from them at a distance. The country of Greece, and especially the neighbourhood of Corinth, was famous for trials of skill in a variety of exercises, such as racing, wrestling, fighting, and the like. And because the children of the world are very wise in their generation, and spare no pains to accomplish the point they have in view, the apostle would stir up believers to diligence from their example; and therefore, in several places, compares the christian life to one or other of the contests which were managed in the public games, and here particularly to a race. In those ancient races much solemnity was observed. The ground or course was exactly marked out; those who were to run went through a strict regimen and exercise beforehand; a vast concourse of people were assembled as spectators; authorized judges were appointed to award the prize, which was a crown of laurel or oak leaves, to the winner: and before they began, a herald publicly proclaimed the rules to be observed by the competitors; which unless strictly complied with, all their pains and endeavours issued only in disappointment and shame. To each of these particulars the apostle alludes in different parts of his writings.

Let us then briefly consider wherein the allusion holds, and take notice of some things in which there is a remarkable difference.

I. That the christian life is compared to a race, may intimate to us,

1. That it is a laborious and strenuous service, and incompatible with an indolent and careless frame of spirit. Not that we can do any thing of ourselves; in this sense, "it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth," Rom. ix. 16. But when a believer is animated by a view of Jesus, and the prize of the high calling, to run the race set before him, he finds that it demands his utmost strength, courage, and patience. A spectator may divert himself with the prospect, or the company; he may make observations upon what passes around him, and ride as softly as he pleases; but then he has no pretensions to the prize. But those who are actually candidates for it, may be easily distinguished without being pointed out: they have no leisure for amusement; their eyes are fixed, and their thoughts wholly engaged, upon

what they have in hand; and they exert all their powers, and strain every nerve, to reach the goal. How inconsistent is the conduct of many professors! They enter the lists, they inform themselves of the rules, they even presume to expect the prize, though they idle away their whole lives, without once attempting to run in good earnest. Not so those who are taught and called of God: a sense of the worth of their souls, of the love of Christ, of the glory that shall be revealed, of their own weakness, and of the many obstacles that withstand their progress, stirs them up to watchfulness, diligence, and prayer, and excites a holy jealousy, "lest a promise being made of entering into his rest, any of them should come short of it," Heb. iv. 1.

2. That we should press forward, and not rest in what we have received. If a man sets out in a race with the greatest speed, and seems to outstrip all his antagonists; yet if he does not persevere to the end, he will be sure to lose. The apostle alludes to a race in another place, where he says, "Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, I stretch forward," Phil. iii. 13, 14. The Greek word beautifully expresses the earnestness and energy of those who run, and are determined to be first: they make no account of the ground already passed over, but exert themselves to the utmost, labour with their hands and feet, and strain every joint to the utmost, as though the whole success depended on each single step. We see too many instances of persons who begin warmly, and seem to run well for a season; but they are hindered in their progress, slacken their pace first, and then stop short. Take notice of the exhortation in my text: "So run that you may obtain;" for it will be a dreadful disappointment if you should be set aside disapproved, when others receive the prize.

II. The heralds or criers in the christian race are the ministers of the gospel, and their proper name of office is expressed by the same word. They have it in charge to invite all to run, and to declare the prescribed rules, and these must be carefully attended to; for "if," or, as it might be rendered, "although, a man strive," (2 Tim. ii. 5,) although he wrestle, and fight, and run, weary himself, and excel others; yet, after all, he loses the prize, "he is not crowned, unless he strive lawfully," unless he strictly conforms to the prescribed regulations: he will be judged unqualified, though in other respects skilful and diligent, unless he runs in the limits marked out, fights with the usual weapons, and observes in all points the discipline of the place. We are bound in duty, at the same time that we proclaim the race, and point out the prize to your view, to tell you, that without faith and holiness (Mark xvi.

16; Heb. xii. 14) there can be no acceptance. And we cannot but be grieved to see how little these cautions are regarded by multitudes. Some are labouring, as it were, in the fire, to establish a righteousness by their own works, and refuse to believe in Christ for salvation. Others who profess indeed to believe in him, call themselves his people, and affect to speak highly of his gospel, yet eventually deny him by their works and conversation. But unless you can alter the sure determinations of the word of God, there must be an alteration in yourselves, or else when you think you have attained, and shall confidently demand the prize, you will hear him say, "I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity," Luke xiii. 27.

There is a circumstance in this resemblance which I would not pass over, because it is peculiar to the christian race. The ministers or heralds are not only to invite others, but are likewise to run themselves. To this the apostle alludes, when he says, "Lest, when I have preached to others, I should be myself a cast away," (1 Cor. ix. 27,) or be disapproved of the Judge for breaking those regulations himself which he had been authorised to propound to all. We have need to preach to ourselves no less than to you, and to entreat your prayers for us, that we may stand perfect and complete in the whole will of God. And the caution may be proportionally extended to every one that is entrusted with any measure of gifts for the edification of the people of God. Keep close to his word; pray for his spirit; be diligent and temperate in all things; and maintain a watchful jealousy over your own hearts:—these are the means by which the Lord keeps his people from falling. But trust not to any outward talent, calling, or usefulness; for it is possible for a man to be instrumental to the good of others in families and societies, and yet to come short of the kingdom himself at last.

III. I have observed that a great concourse of spectators attended at the ancient games. The christian, in his race and warfare, has likewise innumerable eyes upon him, a great cloud of witnesses, Heb. xii. 1. We are exhibited (says the apostle) as a spectacle to the world, to the whole universe, both to angels and to men, 1 Cor. iv. 9. Though he may be placed in an obscure situation, yet his neighbours at least will observe him, to see how his profession and practice agree. Invisible beings attend him in every step; the good angels (Luke xv. 10) rejoice over the returning sinner, and it is probable, by God's appointment, support and refresh him in ways which are beyond our apprehension. The powers of darkness watch him with subtlety and envy, and go to the utmost bounds of their

commission, in their endeavours either to divert him from his course, or to make it uncomfortable to him. How should this thought both animate and humble every sincere soul! Be not discouraged, because to appearance you are almost left to serve God alone. If the veil of flesh and blood could be drawn aside, you would see you are not alone: all the host of heaven are on your side; the glorious company that are before the throne of God, day without night, rejoicing, are engaged in your cause, and drink of the same fountain from which you are supplied. The spirits of just men made perfect, who are now all eye, all ear, all love, were once, as you are, partakers of the same infirmities, sorrows, and cares; and you ere long shall be as they are, clothed with light, and freed from every burden. And Jesus, the Lord of angels, the King of saints, beholds your toil and conflict with complacency, and says, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown," Rev. iii. 11. He is always near to succour, strengthen, and to save. Rejoice, therefore, that you run not as unnoticed, but rejoice with trembling. Be ashamed to think how disproportionate your efforts are to the company that behold you, and to the prize that awaits you. Remember likewise other eyes are upon you; Satan envies your privileges, and scorns your profession; he is every minute waiting permission to sift you as wheat; (Luke xxii. 31;) he is incessantly spreading snares for your feet, and preparing his arrows against you; therefore be not high-minded, but fear, and give all diligence so to run that you may obtain.

IV. The judge who presides at the end of the race is Jesus, the Judge of all. He holds forth the prize full in view to the eye of faith, and shall shortly crown the conqueror with his own hand. How sweetly does the apostle spiritualize upon this circumstance! "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life, which the Lord, the righteous Judge" (who does not decide by appearances, nor can be influenced by partiality, as is too frequent among men,) "shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all who love his appearing," 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. Be of good cheer, believer; your case may be misrepresented or misunderstood by men, but the Lord, the righteous and unerring Judge, will vindicate, approve, and reward you in the great day, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.

Thus much concerning the resemblance of the christian life to a race, to which the apostle alludes. I shall briefly take notice of some particulars in which the resemblance fails; and a very interesting and important difference may be observed.

1. In the reward. The "bodily exercise"

employed in the games, (for to these the apostle refers,) "profited little;" (1 Tim. iv. 8:) a crown of oak or laurel, or some such bauble, was their highest aim, and this the most of the competitors came short of: for though all ran, one only received the prize. Of little more value, and equal uncertainty, is the prize that has engaged the time and thoughts of many. "But godliness" (the whole course and conflict in which the believer is engaged) "is profitable for all things," or in every view, having promises to support the life that now is, and to crown that which is to come. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son," Rev. xxi. 7. "I will give him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," Rev. ii. 7. "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; yea, I will grant him to sit down with me in my throne," Rev. iii. 12, 21. The Lord will give grace here, and will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly: (Psal. lxxxiv. 11;) and hereafter he will crown grace with glory, and place his servants out of the reach of every trouble and enemy, in the kingdom which his love has prepared for them from before the foundation of the world. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord," 2 Cor. vii. 1.

2. In races, though many run, one only can receive the prize. But thanks be to God, it is not so in the christian race. All who run, as the Lord has appointed, shall be sure to win. No opposition can prevail against them, nor will the number of candidates be any diminution to the happiness of each individual. The inheritance of the saints in light, like the light of the sun, is not diminished by being shared amongst many; each one possesses the whole, in the same perfection as he could do, if there was none to enjoy it but himself.

3. In the races the apostle alludes to, none were compelled to run. The proclamation was general: but those who did not choose to engage, suffered no disadvantage. But it is not so in the race to which you are invited by the gospel. The Lord is greatly offended with those who slight the message, and refuse to enter the list. If you only give his ministers a hearing, and return to your farms and merchandise, (Matth. xxii. 5,) forget the worth of your precious souls, and suffer your thoughts to be engrossed with the cares and pleasures of this life, to the neglect of this one thing needful, the Lord will account it a contempt offered to himself, and will ere long call you before his tribunal to answer for it.

4. Those who ran, and did not win the prize, only lost their labour, or at the worst were exposed to shame; but they were liable

to no positive punishment. But you who are professors of the gospel, if you come short at last, will be lost for ever. "So run that you may obtain." Be not content with having set out; the promise is made to perseverance. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved;" (Matth. x. 22;) but if any draw back, or stop short, the Lord will have no pleasure in them, Heb. x. 38. They will not only lose the prize, but will receive a heavy and aggravated doom. It would have been better for them not to have known the ways of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. If you were forced to run for your lives, you would be very thoughtful about the event. But if you are not found amongst those who come in for the prize of eternal life, you will be cast into outer darkness, and sink under the curse of God for ever.

Fain, therefore, would I persuade you to address yourselves with earnestness to run the race set before you. Flee from approaching wrath. The wrath of God is already revealed against all unrighteousness, and soon it will be poured forth upon the head of every transgressor. Though God is patient and forbearing, he is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his glittering sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he hath ordained his arrows against those who shall finally disobey his great command, to receive the gospel of his grace. It is impossible to elude his eye, or to withstand his power. You are upon the brink of danger, if you are not already entered in this race; you stand upon a precipice, and hell from beneath has opened its mouth to receive you. But a respite is still afforded; the Lord waits to be gracious; and as yet there is room. The gate of mercy is not yet shut: "turn therefore to the strong hold, as prisoners of hope;" no longer refuse his gracious invitation, or trifle with your precious souls; seek to Jesus that you may live; apply to him for faith and repentance; and in his strength and name prepare to run this important race. Meditate upon the glorious prize, which is provided for all who endure to the end; it is freely proposed to all who run. Pardon, grace, and eternal life, are promised and bestowed, without money and without price. If, after so many repeated calls, you still harden your hearts, and stop your ears, and determine that you will not come unto Jesus, that you may have life, you must assuredly perish without mercy, and without excuse.

But if you are desirous to run, remember the admonition in my text, "So run that you may obtain." Your steps must be regulated by the word of God, or you will wander wide from the good old way; you must derive your sufficiency and strength from Christ by

faith and prayer, or you will faint, and be unable to endure to the end. We read of some (Gal. v. 7) that run well for a season, but were afterwards hindered, and turned aside. Be upon your guard; for there are many that will strive to divert you from your course. Satan, the world, and your own evil hearts, will combine, and form various attempts to slacken your pace, and to withdraw your attention from the one thing needful. Dread the thoughts of stopping short, or turning back; and the more you meet with opposition, be so much the more earnest to redouble your diligence, and especially to cry mightily to him who is able to keep you from falling, to preserve you unblameable in love while here, and at last to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

Believers, why are not we as wise in our generation as the children of the world! We see how those who are fond of a common horse-race are thinking and talking of it, and preparing for it every day. Does not their diligence shame us, who are so cold, faint, and dilatory, in the most important and honourable concerns! Let us gird up the loins of our mind: some of you have not far to run now; you have taken many a weary step since you were first called; but the end is at hand; the period of your complete salvation is now much nearer than when you first believed, Rom. xiii. 11. Think of Jesus, the forerunner and the judge: he has already entered within the veil for us, his eye is upon us, he is near to assist, and waiting to receive us. May his Spirit and his example animate us to press forward to the prize of our high calling, to tread down every difficulty, and to be faithful unto death, that we may receive the crown of life!

SERMON XVII.

NO ACCESS TO GOD BUT BY THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

*Wherewith shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before the high God!
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He hath showed thee, O man, what is good,
and what doth the Lord require of thee,
but to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God?—Micah vi. 6, 7, 8.*

THERE is no question that can arise in the mind of man, that is of so high im-

portance as this in my text, and yet, alas! how seldom is it laid to heart! May the Spirit of God impress it upon all your consciences! You are now come before God to worship; ask yourselves, wherewith? On what do you ground your hope, that you offer him acceptable service? You must shortly appear before him in judgment. Are you prepared to meet him? Amos iv. 12. What plea have you provided? Take heed in time. Be sure that it is such a one as he will admit, lest your hopes should fail, and you perish in his presence as chaff before the devouring flame.

The passage plainly expresses the inquiry of an awakened mind. It is to be feared many of you have often read these words without being suitably affected with their meaning. But if you can indeed make them your own, if you are truly solicitous how you are to come before God, both here and hereafter, I hope his good Spirit will enable you to receive satisfaction from the answer given by the prophet.

If you can speak these words from your heart, you will readily acknowledge that they imply the following things:

1. A sense of duty; that you are under an obligation to come and bow before the High God. You are sensible that you ought not, and you find that you cannot, live without paying him homage and worship, but that he has a right to your service, and expects it. Too many show in this respect, that they are dead while they live, dead to God, insensible and regardless of their many obligations to him, in whom they live, and move, and have their being. They live without prayer; they offer no praises to the God of their lives, but rise up and lie down, go out and come in, without one reflection on his power, goodness, and providence, even like the beasts that perish. But the awakened soul cannot do so. He trembles to think that he once could neglect that God, whom all the hosts of heaven worship, and is convinced, that however fair his character might have been amongst men, he justly deserved to have been struck to hell for so long restraining prayer before God.

2. A sense of the majesty and glory of God. Whoever seriously asks this question, has an awful view of the Lord as the High God. Many, who do not wholly neglect prayer and worship, yet have no spiritual and humbling apprehensions of the God whom they profess to serve. Their prayers, whether in public or private, are only lip-service, as though they thought him altogether such a one as themselves. Their petitions are not guided by their desires, but they utter with their mouths what they find in the book, though their hearts have no love or relish of the things they ask for. How often is God mocked by those who join in

our established worship? Has he not been so this morning by some of you? How little he is revered by many, is plain from the little regard they pay to his commands. They will break his Sabbaths, blaspheme his name, live in drunkenness, whoredom, anger, and malice, and yet pretend to worship him. But those who rightly understand the inquiry in my text, cannot do thus. They consider him as the High God; they know that he humbles himself to behold even the worship of heaven, and are therefore struck with this thought, Wherewith can I, a poor worm, who am but dust and ashes, come before this High God?

3. A sense of guilt. Alas! says the soul that is enlightened to see itself, I am not only mean, but vile. "I have sinned, but what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?" Job vii. 20. Wherewith shall such a polluted, obnoxious creature as I am, appear before a holy God? Can my services atone for my sins, or what service can I perform that is not defiled and rendered unworthy of acceptance by the evil of my heart? But could I perform ever so well from this day forward, what would this avail for what is past? If I had offended a man like myself, I might think of making some amends; but my sins are against God. His justice, wisdom, holiness, and truth, have all demands upon me. What then can I bring? Will sacrifices appease him? No; these, though of his own appointment, are not of themselves sufficient. "It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins," Heb. x. 4. Though all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills were mine, though I should offer all Lebanon, hills of frankincense, rivers, yea, ten thousand rivers of oil, all would not do. Or should I give my son, my only son, the fruit of my body, neither would this atone for the sin of my soul.

Here, then, you may see, that to an awakened sinner sin is the heaviest burden imaginable. He is willing, and would be glad (if it might be,) to purchase the pardon of sin with the loss of every thing he accounts most valuable. If he had the whole world, he would freely part with it to be free from guilt. But at the same time he finds it a burden that he cannot shake off; he knows that he never can be delivered for any thing he can do or propose, and therefore the great subject of inquiry always upon his mind is, Wherewith, or how shall I appear and stand before the High God?

I hope some of you are thus minded; to you I have a comfortable message from the other part of my text. But as I cannot hope thus of you all, I must previously take notice, that there is hardly any one passage in the Bible more generally misunderstood, and which ignorant and careless men are more

see much of the sovereign power and providence of God. When a youth, though the least of his father's house, he was singled out, and called from following sheep, to rule a kingdom. We see him supported through a variety of difficulties, and at length established in his throne, to the amazement and confusion of his enemies. In him likewise we have a striking proof of the evil that is in the heart of man. Who would have thought it, that David, the man so highly favoured, so wonderfully preserved, the man after God's own heart, who, in the time of his distress, could say, "My soul thirsteth for God, even for the living God," (Psalm xlii. 2,) that he should be, in an unguarded hour, seduced, surprised, and led captive of the devil! From gazing he proceeds to adultery, from adultery to murder, and at length sinks into such a stupid frame of mind, that an express message from God was needful to convince him of his sin. And in this circumstance we farther see the riches of divine grace and mercy, how tenderly the Lord watches over his sheep, how carefully he brings them back when wandering from him, and with what rich goodness he heals their backslidings, and loves them freely. David was fallen, but not lost. "The things which he had done displeased the Lord," (2 Sam. xi. 27,) yet his loving-kindness and faithfulness were unalterable. He was interested in that covenant, "which is well ordered in all things and sure;" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5;) and therefore, when he confessed his sin, the Lord assured him, by his servant Nathan, that "he had put away his sin, and he should not die for it," (2 Sam. xii. 13.)

However, though the Lord is thus gracious in passing by the iniquity of his children, yet he will let them know, by sorrowful experience, that "it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against him," Jer. ii. 19. Though he will not cast off, he will chasten; he will withdraw his presence, and suspend his gracious influences; and this to a sensible heart is a heavy punishment. Though David was delivered from the fear of death and hell, he penned his psalm in the bitterness of his soul. He did not consider the Lord as his enemy, but as a Friend and a father, whom he had greatly offended. He longed to be reconciled; but could not as yet recover his former confidence. He hoped, indeed, that a time of refreshment would come from his presence; and therefore he continued waiting; but for the present he made heavy complaints, that his bones were broken, and his mouth stopped. He had lost his strength and life, and found he could not restore himself. He was struck dumb by his late fall; and therefore he breathes out this prayer, "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

From these words I propose to consider that mournful case, which too often happens

in the christian life, when the believer's mouth is stopped, and his lips closed, so that he cannot show forth the praises of his God. And in this view,

1. I shall point out to you the persons who have reason to make this complaint.

2. Explain what is implied in their lips being thus shut up.

3. Show you by what means the Lord opens the closed lips. And,

4. I shall observe, that when a person's lips are thus opened, his mouth, and all that is within him, will certainly show forth the Lord's praise. May the Holy Spirit apply the word, and command a blessing upon the whole!

I. This petition especially suits two sorts of persons:

1. The *backsliding* believer; one who has formerly known the goodness of God; has rested in his love, and rejoiced in his salvation; "has tasted that the Lord is gracious," (1 Pet. ii. 3,) and walked with comfort in the way of his commandment; but at length, by an unguarded conduct, or by building wood, hay, and stubble upon the Lord's foundation, (1 Cor. iii. 11—13,) has grieved the good Spirit of God, and he is withdrawn. The comforter and instructor of his soul is far from him, and therefore he sits in darkness and silence, Lam. i. 16. He only retains a sense of his loss, and can do no more than sigh out this prayer: "O Lord, open thou my lips."

2. The *doubting* believer; the unbelieving believer (if I may be allowed the expression;)—I mean one who has been deeply convinced of sin, and taught by the Spirit of God that there is no salvation but in the Lord Jesus Christ; one who loves the word, and ways, and people of God, who is careful to the utmost of his power to abstain from the evil that is in the world, and esteems "the loving-kindness of the Lord to be better than life;" (Psal. lxxiii. 3;) one at whom the enemy has often thrust sore that he might fall, (Psal. cxviii. 13,) but the Lord has secretly upheld him through many a bitter hour, and he finds he is not cut off yet, though he perhaps expects it every day. Such as these have indeed sufficient ground to say, "If the Lord was not on my side, I had been swallowed up long ago," Psal. cxxiv. 3. They have reason to conclude with David, "By this, if by nothing else, I know that thou favourest me, seeing my enemies, who have assaulted me so continually, have not yet prevailed against me," Psal. xli. 11. But yet, through a sense of past guilt, a sight of present corruptions, the prevalence of unbelief, the workings of a legal spirit, the want of a clear apprehension of the Lord's way of justifying the ungodly, and from the force of Satan's temptations, who is exceeding busy to press all these things upon the heart, their mouths are stopped

the once offering up of himself hath made a full, perfect, and everlasting atonement, and now he reigns in our nature, possessed of all the fulness of grace, exercising the power of God in the salvation of men. Would you then come before the High God! come in the name of Jesus, and you shall find acceptance. In him God is well pleased; (Matth. iii. 17;) and for his sake he is well pleased with all who honour his beloved Son, and put their trust in him. He has authority and compassion sufficient to save the most deplorable and the most unworthy. If you read the history of his life and death, you will read of a display of love and grace beyond expression; and he is the same still. Before he ascended, he left an assurance for your encouragement, that whosoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast him out. If you say, I want faith, remember it is his gift, and he has promised to do whatever you ask in his name. Therefore fight against unbelief, resist Satan with the sword of the Spirit. If it is suggested that you are a great sinner, you cannot deny it, nor need you; avow the charge, take shame to yourselves, and give glory to God; but it is equally true, that Jesus is a great Saviour, he is able to save to the uttermost; and though your iniquities are great, yet cast not away your hope, for his mercy is greater than the heavens.

When you come in this way, what does the Lord require of you? Is it to make your own peace! He would as soon require you to make a new heaven and a new earth. Is it to keep your own soul! No more than he requires you to keep the sun in its course. His own arm has wrought salvation, and he will secure it. He requires none of your help here; nay, he disdains the thought: you might as well offer to help him to govern the world. But this he requires of you, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God;" and the methods of his grace will enable you to do so.

1. "To do justly." We are by nature attached to worldly goods, and wholly influenced by selfish principles. But faith in Jesus communicates new motives, views, and aims to the soul: it teaches us to have our treasure in heaven; to sit loose to the world; to be satisfied with that station and competence which Divine Providence has allotted us; and to love our neighbours as ourselves, because they are our fellow-sinners, and are capable of being called to a participation with us in the honourable relation and privilege of the children of God. Upon these principles the practice of justice is attainable, but upon no other; for though there are many characters honourable and blameless in the outward concerns of life, and in the judgment of men, there is no person upon earth who does or can love or practise justice in its full extent, till he has received the Spirit

of Christ, and lives upon him by faith, for wisdom and strength from day to day.

2. "To love mercy." None can truly love it but those who have tasted it." When your hearts feel the comforts of God's pardoning love, you will delight to imitate him. When you can truly rejoice that he has freely forgiven you that immense debt, which is expressed by ten thousand talents (Matth. xviii. 24,) you will have no desire to take your fellow-servant by the throat for a few pence. This sense of God's goodness, and the continual need you find of his renewed mercy from day to day, will soften your spirit (if you are a believer,) disarm and gradually weaken every proud thought that would plead for the exercise of anger and resentment towards those who have offended you. You will be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; you will put on (as the beloved of God) bowels of meekness, (Col. iii. 12,) long suffering and compassion, forbearing and forgiving, if you have ought against any; because God, for Christ's sake, has freely forgiven you. If you find this practice difficult, it is owing partly to the remaining depravity of your nature, and partly because you have had but a faint sense of his mercy. Pray for a more powerful manifestation of it, and you will do better; mercy will be your delight.

3. "To walk humbly." "Can two walk together except they are agreed!" Amos iii. 3. When Christ is your peace, you will delight in God; you will set him before you, commune with him, study to please him, and to keep all his commandments. This is to walk with God; and you will walk humbly, remembering how much you owe to free grace, and how far you fall short in your best endeavours. These considerations, impressed by the Holy Spirit, will humble you, will keep you from being high in your own esteem, wise in your own conceit, and from seeking great things for yourself. You will be habitually thankful when the Lord gives, content when he withholds, patient when he afflicts. You will confess yourself unworthy of the smallest mercies you possess, and acknowledge in your heaviest trials, that he has laid far less upon you than your iniquities have deserved.

This is the pattern we are to copy after, and this is the certain tendency and effect of his grace. A measure of this disposition is found in all who are christians indeed. Yet we may take shame to ourselves that we are still so far defective in every branch of our duty. Let us stir up ourselves to greater diligence, watchfulness, and prayer, that we may obtain more lively, abiding, and transforming views of that which is our true good, that so we may be enabled to glorify our heavenly Father, and to adorn our profession, by doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.

SERMON XVIII.

OF A LIVING AND A DEAD FAITH.

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.— James ii. 26.

WHOEVER has read the scriptures with attention, must have observed several passages, which, at first view, and till thoroughly examined and compared, appear hard to reconcile to each other. No instance of this sort is more remarkable than the seeming difference of judgment between St. Paul and St. James on the point of justification. St. Paul having said, "That a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law;" (Rom. iii. 28.) produces the example of Abraham to confirm his assertion. St. James, (in the chapter before us,) from the example of the same Abraham, draws a conclusion which seems directly to contradict this: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only," James ii. 24. Can any two opinions be more opposite in appearance? How then can both be true, or how can we believe both writers infallible in their doctrine, and influenced by the unerring Spirit of God? Must we cleave to the one, and reject the other? and if so, how shall we know which is the real truth?

We may confidently answer, The apostles are both right: their doctrine is equally from God, and does not clash in any particular. The darkness and difficulty is in the apprehensions of men, and not in the word of God. Yet a difficulty there is, and I hope I shall not detain you unprofitably at this time, by endeavouring to clear it, and afterwards to press upon you the words of my text as a proper inference from the whole.

When men who are strangers to christian experience, and who trust more to their own sagacity and learning than to the word and Spirit of God, attempt to resolve cases of this sort, they make strange work. And it is no wonder; for how can any one explain what he does not understand? It would tire you if I should relate a tenth part of the conjectures of learned men upon this very subject. I shall mention one or two as a specimen. A writer of some eminence in the world confesses the difficulty I have noticed in its full strength. He allows and affirms that it is not only hard, but impossible, to reconcile the apostles to each other, and concludes that, since it is impossible to hold both their sentiments, we must abide by him who wrote the last. This, from many arguments his learning furnished him with, he thinks to have been St. James. Accordingly, he gives up the other, and his doctrine of faith without works, to shift for themselves. He supposes that St. Paul, in the heat of his argument, carried

the matter a little too far, and that St. James wrote afterwards to correct him.

But to show you (excuse a familiar expression) how doctors differ, and at the same time to warn even true believers against hastily judging beyond the line of their experience, I would observe, that that great servant of God, Luther, soon after he began to preach the gospel, made a mistake no less bold and presuming on the other side of the question. He had felt the power of St. Paul's doctrine in his own soul, and would have defied an angel that would have dared to oppose it; therefore, when his adversaries pressed him with the authority of St. James, not having at that time light to give a more solid answer, he ventured to deny the authenticity of the whole epistle, and rashly insisted, both in his sermons and books, that St. James never wrote it. But Luther, though mistaken in this point, was under the Lord's teaching; he went on from strength to strength, increasing in knowledge and grace; and when his judgment was better informed, he publicly retracted his former unguarded assertion.

Leaving, therefore, the authority of men, let us betake ourselves to the word of God, and humbly seek the light of his Spirit, who is promised to guide his people in their sincere inquiries after truth.

Now, if you consider the scope and design of our apostles, and take in the context, I hope this seeming opposition will be soon removed. St. Paul is evidently treating on the great point of a sinner's justification in the sight of God; he shows that it cannot be of the law, because by the law all men were already condemned, and because then boasting could not be excluded, but that it was freely by grace, through the redemption that is by Christ Jesus. His reasoning will appear to greater advantage by perusing the whole passage, than by producing a few detached sentences. After he had summed up the evidence with respect both to Jews and Gentiles, and pronounced his verdict, that every mouth must be stopped, and that the whole world stood guilty before God, he proceeds thus: "Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference: For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God: Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; 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; to declare, I say, at this

time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law! of works! Nay; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law," Rom. iii. 20—28. And because the Jews had a high opinion of Abraham, he proceeds in the next chapter to show that Abraham was justified in the same way. "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness," Rom. iv. 3—5. The circumstance in Abraham's life referred to is, when he believed the promise of God, that though he was then childless, he should be the father of many nations, (Gen. xii. 3; xvii. 4,) and that particularly from him should proceed the Messiah, the promised seed, in whom both he himself, and all the families of the earth should be blessed.

St. James expressly treats of those who rested in a notion which they called faith, and accounted sufficient for their salvation, though it had no influence upon their hearts, tempers, and conduct. He shows that their hope is vain, because such a faith as this the devils have. And he proves, by the example of Abraham, that his faith was very different from theirs, because it enabled him to perform the hardest and most painful act of obedience, the offering up of his only son. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can (this)* faith save him? If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed, and filled: notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou dost well: the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man! that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect! And the scripture was fulfilled (confirmed), which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only, James ii. 14—24. It is exceedingly plain that he had not

the same thing in view which St. Paul has for the incident to which he here refers, but opened a great many years after Abraham had been declared justified in the sight of God.

The sum is, the one declares that nothing renders us acceptable to God but faith in Lord Jesus Christ; the other, that such faith, when true and genuine, is not solitary but accompanied with every good work. The one speaks of the justification of our persons; this is by faith only: the other, of the justification of our profession; and this is by faith also, but not alone, for it works by love, and produces obedience.

St. James has the same view in speaking of Rahab; (James ii. 25;) and by producing her as a confirmation, it is still more evident that he is only considering works as the proof of our sincerity. We have no sure ground to conclude, that Rahab, in the act of receiving the spies, and at that time, had any saving faith, or any view to the Messiah and the covenant of grace; though it is most probable she had, after she was joined to the people of Israel, and became acquainted with divine revelation. But in Jericho her thoughts seem to have been confined to a temporal deliverance; and the profession of faith which she made to the spies implies no more. "As she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your territory is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red-sea for you, when you came out of Egypt; and what you did unto the kings of the Amorites.—And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt: neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now, therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you will also show kindness unto my father's house; and give me a true token," Joshua ii. 9—12. Had she thus, and yet delivered the spies up to the king of Jericho, it would have proved, that she did not speak from her heart; but that her profession was justified by receiving them into her house, concealing them from the search made after them, and sending them away in peace. Surely this conduct of Rahab would be sufficient to condemn many who would thought Christians.

We may, therefore, deduce two propositions, perfectly consistent with each other from the passage in question.

1. That there is no acceptance for the sons of Adam with the just and true God, but through Jesus Christ as our Redeemer; and that the righteousness received by faith; and that the discern works of every kind was excluded.

This is the capital doct

* *is not, this faith.*

it is not only clearly asserted in innumerable passages both of the Old Testament and the New, but is St. Paul's express subject and design in his epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. Though he was yielding and compliant in many things of less importance, and was willing to become all things to all men, yet he would not give place, no not for an hour, to any who offered to invalidate this foundation-truth. He declares, that to mix any thing, to contend for any qualification or observance, as of necessary influence, to concur with the perfect work of Christ in the justification of a sinner, is to darken, alter, and destroy the gospel which he preached; and denounces an anathema against every one who should be guilty of this presumption, yea, though he should be (if such a thing were possible) an angel from heaven, Gal. i. 8, 9. How cordially he rested his own hope upon the truth which he proposed to others, he declares elsewhere: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ; and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith," Phil. iii. 8, 9.

If this is the scriptural doctrine, let each of you examine on what ground you stand. Has God appointed one way of salvation? and will any of you dare to propose another? This would be both wicked and dangerous: "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. iii. 11. You may please yourselves now with what you account your good works; but when God shall "lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet," (Isa. xxviii. 17,) none will be able to abide his appearance, but those who can plead a righteousness perfectly answerable to the law's demands, which can only be found in Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

And as this doctrine is of so great and essential importance, beware how you listen to any other. Take heed how you hear; (Mark iv. 24; Luke viii. 18,) be not influenced by the names, characters, or stations of men, when the salvation of your souls is at stake. Prize the liberty, which as protestants and Britons you enjoy, of bringing every doctrine to the trial of God's word, and freely use it. I account it my honour and happiness that I preach to a free people, who have the Bible in their hands. To your Bibles I appeal. I entreat, I charge you to receive nothing upon my word, any farther than I prove it from the word of God; and bring every preacher, and

* *Ex vobis*, of law; that is, of any law whatsoever, not of the law, as if he only meant the Jewish law. The article *vs* seems here to be purposely left out.

every sermon that you hear to the same standard. If this is the truth, you had need to be well established in it; for it is not the current and fashionable doctrine of the times. Let me then farther recommend to you, (it is a direction our Lord has given,) to examine doctrines by their effects: "By their fruits ye shall know them," Matth. vii. 16. The truths of God, when faithfully preached, in humble dependence upon his blessing, will be attested by his power. At such times, and in such places, a visible change will soon be observable in some one or other of the hearers; they cease to do evil, they learn to do well; they acknowledge God in all their ways, and glorify him before men, by living according to his precepts. And if you ask them the reason of this change, they will freely ascribe it to the blessing of God upon that sort of preaching, which by too many is accounted foolishness, 1 Cor. i. 21.

On the other hand, we are not afraid to challenge those who are most acquainted with men and books, to produce instances of the same effects wrought by any other doctrine than that which commends the Lord Christ in his person, offices, and power, as the only object of a sinner's hope. How much is said and wrote to tell people what they should be, and what they should do! yet where these principles are not enforced, there is nothing effectually done, nothing indeed attempted, beyond a formal round of dull and heartless service; a little something that looks like religion, on the Lord's day to appear in church at the summons of the bell, to repeat words because other people do the same, to hear what is delivered from the pulpit with little attention or affection, unless something occurs that is suited to exalt self, or to soothe conscience, and then to run with eagerness into the world again.

Or if here and there a person is truly touched by the secret influence and guidance of the Spirit of God, where this evangelical doctrine is not publicly maintained, the consequence always is, that they renounce the things which they before held for truths, are brought into that way of thinking which is agreeable to St Paul's doctrine, and receive it gladly whenever it comes in their way.

It must be allowed, however, at the same time, that there are counterfeit professors, whose religion lies in notions, and who, while they profess to believe in God, in works deny him; by reason of whom the ways of truth are evil spoken of, 2 Pet. ii. 2. This the apostles have taught us to expect; nay, it was so from the beginning, even while the apostles were themselves personally with the churches. To such St. James addresses the passage I have been reading to you, of which my text is the conclusion; and as I dare not hope that there are none such in this great assembly, it is highly proper that, before I

conclude, I should take notice of a second proposition which naturally offers from the subject we have had in hand: and more especially from the reasoning of St. James, and from the words of my text.

2. That true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has a prevailing and habitual influence upon the hearts and lives of those who possess it; and that they are vain men, and deceivers of themselves, who pretend to faith in him, while their lives and conversations show them to be enslaved to the love of the world, and the dominion of sin. The apostle, to inspire us with a just abhorrence of this false profession, makes use of two comparisons, which are exceedingly striking. May God open the eyes of those who are concerned in it, to perceive and tremble at the justness and horror of the resemblance!

1st, He compares it to the faith of devils. "Thou believest there is one God; thou dost well. The devils also believe, and tremble," James ii. 10. Are there any here whom it is needful to address in this harsh manner? My dear brethren, bear with me; I wish you well, and would willingly rejoice in every good appearance; but, alas! how little does it signify what you believe, or what you say, unless your acknowledged principles have an effect upon your conduct!

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? so does Satan. Do you believe the election of God, the sovereignty of grace, the perseverance of the saints? it is possible the devil may have a more extensive knowledge in these doctrines than the wisest of men; yet this benefits him not; it is not want of knowledge, but want of love, that makes him what he is.

The only effect mentioned of the faith of devils is, that it increases their terror and aggravates their guilt. They believe (there are no sceptics in hell,) and tremble. Is not this too much the case of some of you? If you knew less, you would be easier at least, and less inexcusable; and yet perhaps you mistake your state, and think yourselves, on this account, far less blameable than you really are. Perhaps sometimes, when you reflect sincerely on your ways, and how strangely you are hurried to act contrary to the convictions which the preaching of the gospel forces upon you, you are ready to charge the Lord and his dispensations hardly, and to say, O that he would give me his grace! but if not, what can I do without it! Let conscience now speak faithfully, and it will tell you, that if you are condemned, it will not be for what you cannot do, but for wilfully refusing to improve the power already given you. When I tell you, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord with comfort, and that you must break off from your vain company and evil practices, if you expect or desire to be saved, you know that I speak the truth; and your

looks often testify that you feel the force of it. Now, while the word of God is sounding in your ears, you perhaps are thinking, "It is time, high time indeed, to break off: though the Lord has forborne me long, he will surely strike at last, if I go on thus." And yet, alas! what I have formerly seen gives me much cause to fear, that to-morrow, or the next time they entice you, you will consent again. But could I tell you, that by going a different way, you might gain a sum of money, or could I make it appear, that the next time you went to such a place, your house would certainly be robbed, I make no doubt but you would forbear. And yet gold is not grace. It is then plain that you have power, but your will is in fault. God has enlightened your conscience; but you rebel against it. O repent! while there is yet space afforded. Call upon the name of Jesus; who knows but he may even yet deliver you!

2dly, He compares it to a dead carcass, which is not only unprofitable, but loathsome and offensive. May God show you to-day, how odious your profession is in his sight! for by assenting to the truths of the gospel, and outwardly favouring the cause, and the instruments which the Lord has raised up to promote it, you are so far professors. May he enable you to be, not only almost, but altogether christians! For while you thus halt between two opinions, and stand divided between God and the world, you are an abomination to God, a grief to his people, a stumbling-block to the ignorant, and are (if this was of any weight in comparison of what I have already said) secretly despised by those who pretend to court your acquaintance. Your guilt is in some respects more aggravated, and your example unspeakably more mischievous, than either would be if you openly rejected the truth. You stand in the rank of those wicked servants who know their master's will, but do it not. The great Judge has determined concerning these, that they shall be beaten with many stripes, Luke xii. 48. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; look up to Jesus, who is exalted to bestow both faith and repentance, that you may no longer be torn in pieces by those inward contentions, but experience that peace which passes all understanding, Phil. iv. 7.

SERMON XIX.

GUILT REMOVED AND PEACE RESTORED.

O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.—Psalm li. 15.

THE history of David is full of instruction. Every thing recorded of him affords us either consolation or caution. In his example we

likewise. They cannot believe, and therefore they cannot speak. However, there are seasons and intervals when they obtain a little glimpse of hope, and then the whole desire of their souls is expressed in words of my text, "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

II. I proceed to consider what may be included in this case, what it is to have the mouth stopped. The persons I have mentioned have the same liberty of speech in common affairs as others; but because they cannot converse freely with him, who, notwithstanding all their doubts and fears, and follies, still maintains a secret hold of their souls, they account themselves no better than dumb. They cannot *speak* to the Lord, nor *of* him, nor *for* him, as they wish and ought to do. These are the three heads of their complaint, and therefore they sigh and say, "O Lord, open thou my lips!"

1. Alas! says the believer that has sinned, and lost his strength, "O that it was with me as in times past!" Job xxix. 2. I well remember when I had freedom of access, and found it good to draw near to my God, when I could pour out all my complaints and cares before him, and leave them with him. I remember the time when my heart was overwhelmed within me, and my spirit was burdened, Psal. cxlii. 3. I saw myself a wretched, helpless sinner. Innumerable evils took hold of me. I thought I was marked out for destruction. I found Satan at my right hand, waiting for a permission to seize my soul, and make me his prey for ever, Zech. iii. 1. I looked around, but saw no way to escape, and gave up all for lost. But, O! I remember, when none in heaven or earth could help me, how the Lord drew "near to me in the day of my distress, and said unto my soul, Fear not, I am thy salvation," Lam. iii. 57. He revealed himself as an almighty, suitable Saviour. He said, "Deliver from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom," Job xxxiii. 24. "He brought me out of the horrible pit and miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock," Psal. xl. 2. "He brought me into his banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. I sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste," Cant. ii. 3, 4. This was the beginning, but it was not all; many a gracious visit he favoured me with afterwards. O the sweet hours of secret prayer! O the happy communion in which I walked with him all the day long! "Then in the multitude of thoughts within me, his comforts refreshed my soul," Psal. xciv. 19. Then I could smile at Satan's rage, and face a frowning world. Every blessing of common providence was doubly welcome, for I could read his name of love written upon it; and every affliction brought resignation and peace, because I saw my Father's hand in it, and found at a throne

of grace renewed strength always suited to my need. Happy were those times; but, alas! they are gone. I could hardly then persuade myself that I should be moved any more. I little thought there was such desperate wickedness in my heart, that, after so much experience of his goodness, I should foolishly wander from him again. But, O! what a change have I lived to see! I have grieved that good Spirit of God by which I was sealed, and now I find myself in the hands of my enemies. The Lord hides himself and stands afar off, and I have lost the power of prayer. Those precious promises which once were the joy of my soul, which I could boldly plead at the throne of grace, and say, All these are mine, have no longer any power or sweetness; I read them, but I cannot feel them, and my trials and sins, which once I could cast upon my Saviour, and find instant relief, are now a heavy burden, too great for me to bear. Mercies have lost their relish, and afflictions have lost their usefulness, since neither the one nor the other are of force to stir up my soul to prayer. "O Lord, open thou my lips."

I remember likewise, when I had this freedom in speaking with God, how pleasing it was to me to speak of him. My heart was full, and running over with a sense of his goodness, so that it was my meat and drink to say, "Come unto me, all you that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul," Psal. lxxvi. 16. Then the company of his people was delightful indeed. The meanest of his children that would sit and hear me speak of his loving-kindness, was precious to me; I esteemed them the excellent of the earth in whom was all my delight, Psal. xvi. 3, and lv. 14. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company. And I thank God I love them still; but I can neither help them, nor be helped by them, as in times past. In vain they say unto me, Come, sing us one of the songs of Zion. Alas! how can I sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land! My harp is hung upon the willows, my tongue cleaveth to the roof of my mouth, Psal. cxxxvii. 3—5. I dwell in darkness and silence, as those who have been long dead. "O Lord, open thou my lips."

And when I could thus speak to God, and of him, I had likewise liberty to speak for him. I was then very jealous for the Lord of hosts, 1 Kings xix. 10. It wounded my soul to hear his name profaned, to see his commandments broken, and his gospel slighted. I had a tender concern for poor sinners; I could not but wish, that, if possible, every person I met might know what I knew, and feel what I felt. And especially where I had friendship and influence, I was ready to improve it to the best purpose. The love of Christ constrained me to lay myself out for

his service, 2 Cor. v. 14. I could not but oppose sin and self-righteousness, and plead the cause of my Saviour upon every occasion. I was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for I felt it to be the power of God unto salvation in my own soul, (Rom. i. 16,) and durst recommend it to every one, as the only balm for sin and sorrow. But now the crown is fallen from my head: woe unto me that I have sinned, Lam. v. 16. I am shut out from the fountain, and all my streams are dried up. My comforts and my usefulness are declined together. "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

Such is the complaint of the backslider in heart, when he is filled with his own ways. And,

2. This, with a little variation, will suit the doubting tempted soul too. These will confess, that the experience I have described is the desire of their hearts. Such communication with God, such a freedom in his ways, such a zeal for his service, is the very thing they mean, when they entreat the Lord to open their lips. And indeed they cannot, they dare not deny, but they have at times had some little tastes of them, otherwise they would not know what I mean. For these things are to the natural man the merest folly imaginable; he understands them not, therefore he despises them; nay, he hates them with a perfect hatred, and opposes them with all his heart. But still they complain under a present burden. One dark hour of temptation blots out all the traces of comfort they have known, and they refuse consolation. They will insist on it, I have neither part nor lot in the matter; I cannot get near him, and I fear I never shall. When I attempt to pray, a sense of my sins and sinfulness stops my mouth. I see the Lord, not upon the golden mercy-seat, but upon the fiery throne of justice, and I am ready to call upon the rocks and mountains to hide me from his presence. When I would commune with his people, I am silenced by that dreadful word, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or to take my covenant into thy mouth?" Psal. l. 16. When I would bear my feeble testimony for him in the world, conscience alarms me, and says, "Thou that teachest others, teachest thou not thyself?" Rom. ii. 21. And then "the enemy comes in like a flood," (Isaiah lix. 19,) with "God has forsaken him; persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him," Psal. lxxi. 11. Thus I "spend my days in groaning, and water my couch with tears," Psal. vi. 6.

This is a heavy case indeed; and would be insupportable, but that the faithful Shepherd, in a secret unseen way, affords timely succour, and sets bounds to the raging enemy, beyond which he cannot pass. "Hitherto shalt thou come;" (Job xxxviii. 11;) thus far thou art permitted to vex, and wound, and

tear, "but no farther." The Lord knows our frame, and has promised with every temptation to provide either strength to endure, or a way to escape, 1 Cor. x. 13. Two things are proper to be mentioned for the encouragement of such souls to wait on, and expect deliverance.

The first is, The examples of the saints. Think not your lot strange, as though some new and unheard-of thing had befallen you. Thousands, and ten thousands, now in glory, have tasted, yea drank deeply of this cup before you. And many yet upon earth, who are now rejoicing in the light of God's countenance, have said in times past, as you say now, "I shall one day perish by the hand of these enemies; (1 Sam. xxvii. 1;) the Lord hath cast me quite off, and I shall never live to see his goodness in the land of the living," Psal. lxxiv. 1. Or if you choose scripture-proofs, you need only read the book of Job, the Psalms, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah, to be convinced that some whom you number amongst the Lord's most eminent and highly-favoured servants have been reduced to use such expressions as suit your case, no less than if they had been wrote for you alone. Do not they say, "That they were broken with breach upon breach; (Job xvi. 14;) that the arrows of God stuck fast in them; (Psal. xxxviii. 2;) that the Lord wrote bitter things against them, and counted them his enemies; (Job xiii. 26, and xxxii. 10;) that he had shut them up within stone walls, and covered himself with a cloud, that their prayers might not pass through?" Lam. iii. 9, 44. These are but a small part of their complaints; and what can you say more than this?

Again, consider the precious promises of the word. Are they not expressly directed to you? Do you account yourself a backslider? "Return unto me, ye backsliding children, and I will receive you, saith the Lord," Jer. iii. 14, 22. Do you think yourself a sinner of uncommon size? yet, saith the Lord, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isa. i. 18. Do you say your neck is as an iron sinew, and your brow brass? yet hear the word of the Lord, "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness. I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off," Isa. xlvi. 12, 13. Is there something peculiarly dreadful in your case, something that you could hardly be prevailed on to intrust to your dearest friend? yet be not afraid; for Truth has said, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men," Matth. xii. 31. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God for he will abundantly pardon," Isa. lv. 7. But still, when we have said all, we

are but miserable comforters. Even with the word of God in our mouths, we speak too often in vain. It is the Lord alone that can open the lips. And, O! that this may be the happy opportunity of his gracious appearance in favour of all here present, that our wounds may be healed, and our tongues unloosed to proclaim his praise! Lift up your hearts to him, while I endeavour to show you by what means, or in what manner, the Lord is pleased to open the lips that have been long closed. This is the third particular I proposed to consider from my text.

III. I say then, that when the Lord is about to open the lips, he proceeds by the following steps:

I. "He opens the eyes." We are often in a similar case with Hagar in the wilderness. The water was spent in the bottle, and she sat down in despair. There was a well or fountain close to her, sufficient to have supplied her with water to her life's end; but she saw it not till God opened her eyes, Gen. xxi. 15—19. Just so, many a poor soul is distressed, and says, My stock is spent; I had but little grace at the best, and, alas! that little is gone. And now, if the Lord should ask some hard thing, would you not do it to obtain a supply? You would willingly take a long journey, or part with all your wealth to have grace abounding in your hearts; but you know you cannot expect help in this way. It is true, all contrivances of our own will have no effect; but, blessed be God, they are as needless as they would be useless. We need not dig in the earth, nor climb the skies, nor cross the seas; our remedy is near, Rom. x. 6—8. We need no costly offerings of silver or gold; our remedy is cheap. Come, pore no longer upon your empty bottle, but look to the fountain, the river, the ocean of all grace. May the Lord open your eyes, as he did the eyes of Elisha's servant, (2 Kings vi. 17,) and I will undertake to point you to an object that shall answer all your wants. Look unto the Lord Jesus Christ; look unto him as he hung naked, wounded, bleeding, dead, and forsaken upon the cross. Look unto him again as he now reigns in glory, possessed of all power in heaven and in earth, with thousands of thousands of saints and angels worshipping before him, and ten thousand times ten thousand ministering unto him; and then compare your sins with his blood, your wants with his fulness, your unbelief with his faithfulness, your weakness with his strength, your inconstancy with his everlasting love. If the Lord opens the eyes of your understanding, you would be astonished at the comparison. Would you compare a small grain of sand upon the shore with the massy mountains which hide their heads in the clouds, and spread their roots from sea to sea? or the spark of a glow-worm with the noon-day's sun! yet there is less disproportion

between these, than between the utmost capacity of your desires and wants, and the immense resources provided for you, in the righteousness, compassion, and power of our dear Redeemer. "He is able to save to the uttermost;" (Heb. vii. 25;) and all our trouble arises chiefly from this, that our eyes are holden, so that we do not know him, Luke xxiv. 16. Therefore the first step towards opening the lips is to open our eyes, that we may see him, and look upon him by such a sight as unloosed the tongue of unbelieving Thomas, and constrained him to cry out, "My Lord, and my God!" John xx. 28.

2. When the eyes are thus opened, the Lord, in the next place, and by that as a means, "opens the ear." When Christ is out of sight, we are deaf to all the calls, invitations, and promises of the scripture. But a believing view of him who died that we might live, rouses the attention, and makes us willing and able to hear what the Lord will speak to his people, Psal. lxxxv. 8. And what does he say from the cross? "Look unto me, and be ye saved," Isaiah xiv. 22. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me," John xii. 32. "Behold my hands, my feet, my pierced side; all this I bore for you," John xx. 27. "Be not afraid, only believe," Mark v. 36. "O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?" Matth. xiv. 31. "See, sinner, how I have loved thee, I have trodden the wine-press alone," Isaiah lxiii. 3. "I have destroyed death, and him that had the power of death," Heb. ii. 14. "There is henceforth no condemnation to them that believe in me," Rom. viii. 1. And what does he say from his kingdom? "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not," Luke xxii. 32. "For a season you have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice," John xvi. 22. "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37. "I am the first and the last;—that was dead and am alive. I keep the keys of death and hell, and save whom I will," Rev. i. 17, 18. "Cast thy burden upon me, I will sustain thee," Psal. lv. 22. "I will take away thy iniquity," Micah vii. 19. "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee," Matth. ix. 2. "Go in peace, and sin no more," John viii. 11. *My sacrifice, my God, what words are these!*

3. By opening the eye to see his excellence and power, and the ear to hear his gracious words, he, in the next place, "opens the heart." He breaks the prison doors, forces for himself an entrance, and sets the prisoner at liberty. He touches the rock, and the waters flow, Psal. lxxviii. 20. Now a true and filial repentance takes place; now sin appears exceedingly sinful indeed. There was a sorrow before, but it was fruitless and ineffectual; but the sight of him who was pierced for our sins, and the welcome sound of

pardon proclaimed in the conscience, produce a sorrow after a godly sort, a repentance never to be repented of. Thus it was with the woman who washed our Lord's feet (Luke vii. 38, 47;) she had been a great sinner, much was forgiven her, and therefore she loved much. Thus it was with Peter: he had been a grievous backslider; he had been with Jesus upon the mount, and saw the excellent glory; he was stout in his protestation, "Though all men deny thee, yet will not I;" but he shrunk at the voice of a girl, and said, "I know not the man." When the servants spoke to him, he cursed and swore; but when Jesus looked upon him, he wept, Luke xxii. 61, 62. Do you think our Lord looked upon him with disdain and indignation? rather with a look of love; a look that at once convinced him of his sin, and gave him to understand that the Lord pitied and forgave him. This look broke his heart in pieces. He went out and wept bitterly. And afterwards, though greatly humbled as to confidence in himself, yet, when asked the question, he could boldly appeal to the Searcher of hearts, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee," John xxi. 17.

And when the eyes, the ears, the heart, are thus opened; when the understanding is enlightened, the will engaged, and the affections inflamed, the cure is wrought. Then the lips will open of course, and the mouth be filled with thanksgiving and praise. O that it would please the Lord to give to me, and to each of you, a clearer knowledge of this blessed change from heart-felt experience, than is in the power of words (of my poor words especially) to describe: "Come, my friends, let us return unto the Lord: for he hath wounded, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up," Hosea vi. 1. Verily we are all guilty in this matter; we have all provoked him by unbelief, and wandered from his good way; and therefore we live so far below our privilege, and are so often heavy and sorrowful, when we have in him grounds of continual joy. Now, let us unite in this prayer, "O Lord, open thou our lips, display thy power in the midst of us, heal all our breaches, rend the veil of our unbelief, blot out the thick clouds of our sins, cleanse us from all our iniquities and idols, and teach our stammering tongues, and barren hearts, to show forth the praise of thy abundant goodness."

I proceed to observe in the last place,

IV. That if the Lord is pleased to answer our desire, and to open your lips in this manner, then you will surely praise him. You will praise him with your mouths, and in your lives; you will thankfully acknowledge *his mercy, his power, and his wisdom.*

1. *You will praise his mercy.* Is the cooling stream welcome to the thirsty soul? is a

reprieve acceptable to a poor condemned malefactor? Still more welcome is a sense of pardoning love to a soul that has felt the evil and effects of sin. What! to be taken from the dung-hill, (1 Sam. ii. 8,) and made a companion with princes! to have all our guilt and complaints removed at once! to be snatched as it were from the brink of hell, and placed in the very suburbs of heaven! to be able to say, "O Lord, thou wast [justly] angry with me [and I went mourning under a sense of thy displeasure;] but [now] thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me!" (Isa. xii. 1;) is not this a mercy! especially considering how undeserving we are of the smallest favour! And farther, the way in which it was conveyed! that the pardon, though free to us, is a pardon "bought with blood:" that it cost the Lord Jesus his life, his soul, to effect that blessed reconciliation in which we are beginning to rejoice! still more, that all we can now receive of his love is but a taste, a small thing, in comparison of what he has reserved for us! O what mercy is here! O what thanks does it call for! "O Lord, open thou our lips, and our mouth shall show forth thy praise."

2. *You will praise his power.* I thought, says the poor soul at such a time, I was fallen so low that there was no help. The more I toiled and laboured in my own strength, the farther the blessing seemed from me. I know from experience, that none but an almighty arm could relieve me. Creatures, means, and contrivances, I had tried, and tried again, but found them all physicians of no value. But now, "The right hand of the Lord has done wonderfully, the right hand of the Lord has brought mighty things to pass," Psalm cxviii. 15, 16. What shall I say? "He hath both spoken himself, and also hath done it," Isa. xxxviii. 15. The work is his; to him be all the glory. I got not this victory by my own bow, (Psalm xli. 6,) neither did my own arm save me; "but the Lord himself has been pleased to show the exceeding greatness of his mighty power in my behalf," Eph. i. 19. Therefore, "not unto us, but unto thy name, O Lord, be the glory and the praise," Psalm cxv. 1.

3. *You will praise his wisdom.* "What I do (said our Lord to Peter,) thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter," John xiii. 7. The mourning soul often asks the question with David, "I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forsaken me? why go I mourning because of the enemy?" Psalm xlii. 9. When the Lord turns your mourning into joy, you shall know why. You will then see that there was a need (1 Pet. i. 6) of all these things. It is to show you what is in your hearts, to mortify the spirit of self-righteousness, "to teach you, that without him you can do nothing."

v. 5.) to make you wise and ex-
posed against Satan's devices; to give
under sympathy and fellow-feeling in
sufferings and infirmities of your brethren
to enable you to encourage and
comfort others, (2 Cor. i. 4.) who shall be
in your case, by relating what you
have done and known yourself in your van-
quishes and strivings against sin.
Here are some of the reasons why the Lord
loves his dear children to groan being bur-
dened sometimes permits their enemies
to take a short advantage over them, that he
may humble and prove them, (Deut. viii.
1.) in order to do them good in their
tribulation. And, O! with what wisdom is
he appointed! A little of it we may
desire, but we shall not have a com-
fort till we get safe home. Then to
look upon the way by which he led us
through this wilderness, will furnish matter
for eternal praise.

Remember, not only your mouths, but your
eyes shall praise him. What is the language
of a loving heart, when the Lord pardons
and binds up his wounds? It is this,
"O Lord, I am thine, thy vows are upon
me, thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God
our Father." Psalm cxvi. 14, 16, and xxxi. 5.
"I will not continue in sin because grace has
been given me; God forbid!" Rom. vi. 1. "I
am crucified with Christ, crucified to the
world and the world to me," Gal. ii. 20, and
"The love of Christ constrains me,"
2 Cor. v. 14. "The time past is sufficient to
me, I will live in vanity; henceforth I am the
Lord's," 1 Pet. iv. 3. "Has he bound me by
his mercies, to present myself, body
and soul, to his service? (Rom. xii. 1;) here,
I offer my whole self, all that I am,
all that I have, a living sacrifice, holy
and acceptable to thee. O let me never
separate from thee again, but walk in
the light, as thou art in the light, and have
thine abode with thee here below, till thou
take me out of the reach of sin and
death forever," 1 John i. 7.

Are there any here who have neither
felt the loving-kindness of the Lord, nor
under the sense of his displeasure,
shut your lips are closed to this hour.
Would you die thus incapable of praising
the God who made you, and the grace
which has brought the sound of the gospel to
you, it were better for you that you had
never been born, Matt. xxvi. 24. You have
reason to cry out, "O Lord, open thou
mine eyes to see my danger,
to know the evil of my nature and life. Open
mine ears to confess my wickedness. Open my
heart to receive thy word, that I likewise may
be part in the praises thy people pay
to thee, and not perish (as without thy mercy I
should) with a lie in my right hand, Isa.
li. 10. Consider, the time is short; (1 Cor.

vii. 29;) death is near, and may be sudden.
May the Lord enable you to consider the
things belonging to your peace, before they
are hid from your eyes! Luke xix. 42.

And you, my friends, who at present en-
joy the light of God's countenance, who know
your sins are forgiven (1 John ii. 12) for
his name's sake, and have a happy freedom
of access at a throne of grace, O be mindful
of your privileges; beware of sin, beware of
yourself, beware of Satan. Your enemy envies
you your liberty; he watches you with sub-
tilty and malice; he spreads snares for your
feet; he desires to have advantage of you,
"that he may sift you as wheat," Luke xxii.
31. Therefore be upon your guard, be hum-
ble, make much of secret prayer, keep close
to the scriptures of God: by the words of his
lips you shall be preserved from the paths of
the destroyer, Psalm xvii. 4. Attend dili-
gently upon the ordinances, and speak often
one to another, (Mal. iii. 16.) in love and
faithfulness, of what the Lord has done and
prepared for you, and of what manner of per-
sons you ought to be, in all holy conversa-
tion and godliness, 2 Pet. iii. 11. Thus you
shall be kept safe from evil. Jesus has prayed
for you, that your faith may not fail, Luke
xxii. 32. Fix your eye (Heb. xii. 2) and
your heart upon him, as he that must do all
for you, all in you, and all by you. And he
has said, "Yet a little while, and behold I
come quickly," Rev. iii. 11. Hold fast that
which thou hast. "Be thou faithful unto
death, and I will give thee a crown of life.
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus," Rev.
ii. 10, and xxii. 20.

SERMON XX.

OF THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

And we know that we are of God.

1 John v. 19.

A WELL-GROUNDED and abiding persuasion,
not only that the doctrines of the gospel are
true in themselves, but that we, through
grace, are surely and unchangeably inter-
ested in them, is highly desirable. If we
may be safe, we cannot be happy and com-
fortable without it, when once we have re-
ceived an experimental knowledge of the
deceitfulness of our own hearts, and the va-
riety, subtilty, and force of Satan's tempta-
tions: and he who knows our frame and
situation has, in his holy word,
provision for us in this respect
it to be his intention, that
refuge to the hope he
might have strong com-
fort not be left at an
of the highest im-
grounded, esta-
knowledge of

maintain it as an unshaken principle through every change of dispensation and frame, "that he who hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," Phil. i. 6.

This animating confidence, so well suited, and so necessary to render the soul superior to all the trials of life, to inspire a noble disdain of the sinful pleasures and vain pursuits of the present evil world, and to engage the grateful exertion of every faculty and power in the service of God, is generally expressed by the word Assurance. But though the word is in frequent use, the thing itself has been, and still is, a subject of much dispute and controversy amongst professors of the gospel. Many not being conscious of such a cheering persuasion in themselves, and too hasty in supposing their attainments must be a standard to others, have ventured to deny the possibility of such an assurance, and treated every claim to it as visionary and enthusiastic. On the other hand, some have maintained the opposite extreme, and held assurance so essential to faith, that without it no person has a scriptural warrant even to hope that a work of grace is begun in his heart. This sentiment, especially when asserted by persons of undoubted character for gifts, graces, and usefulness, has greatly startled and discouraged weak and feeble-minded souls, and been too often an occasion of adding to the distress of those who rather ought to have been comforted.

Great differences of judgment have likewise obtained concerning the means whereby, the manner in which, and the persons to whom, this assurance is communicated, supposing it attainable. It is not needful to insist on particulars. Perhaps the best way to prevent or remove mistakes, is to propose the truth simply, which, so far as it takes place, will necessarily prevent the entertainment of error. I only mention in general, that there is a variety of sentiments on this point, and the most of them supported by respectable names, in order to caution you against paying too great a deference to human authority, and to urge you to praise God for your Bibles, and to be diligent in the perusal of them. If you search the scriptures, and pray for the Spirit, you may arrive to a clear satisfaction for yourselves, no less than if all the learned were of one mind, and all of your side.

My text assures us that this assurance was possessed in the first ages of the church. There were some who could say without hesitation, "We know that we are of God;" and though they are an apostle's words, he uses them not exclusively as an apostle, but generally as a believer. The greatest part of the chapter, and indeed of the epistle, shows that he considers those to whom he was writing as partakers with him in the

common privileges of christians. So likewise St. Paul joins the believing Corinthians with himself, when he says, "We know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," 2 Cor. v. 1. And elsewhere he takes it for granted, that they (some of them at least) had this assurance, and presses them to a lively discharge of their duty upon that consideration: "for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord," 1 Cor. xv. 58.

And we need make no scruple of affirming from the fullest evidence, that this precious privilege was not confined or designed by God to be so, to the first ages of the gospel. There have been in all periods of the church, where the word and ordinances of Christ have been faithfully administered, many who could say, "We know that we are of God;" and we trust there are more than a few who can say so, and give a solid scriptural evidence of the hope that is in them, even in this degenerate day. But because arguments from facts, which must depend upon persons' testimony in their own cases, are not allowed to be fully conclusive; and because the greater part of those who we hope sincerely love the Lord Jesus, live far below their just right and privilege, and are perplexed with doubts and fears, which dishonour their profession, weaken their hands, and make their lives uncomfortable; I shall endeavour at this time to state and explain the nature of assurance, to prove that it is attainable, to point out the means by which we are to expect it, and to take notice of the hinderances which keep so many who are interested in the gospel-salvation from enjoying their privilege, and make them unwilling or afraid to say, "We know that we are of God." What I have to offer on these particulars, will occur under one or other of the following propositions:

I. Assurance is not essential to the being of faith. It is a strong faith, but we read likewise of a weak faith, (Rom. xiv. 1,) a little faith, (Matth. iv. 31,) and faith like a grain of mustard-seed, Matth. xvii. 20. True saving faith in Jesus Christ is only distinguishable by its different degrees; but in every degree, and in every subject, it is universally of the same kind, and produces (according to its degree) the same uniform effects. It purifies the heart from the love and practice of sin; (Acts xv. 9;) it works by love to the Lord Jesus Christ, his ordinances, ways, and people; (Gal. v. 6;) and it enables the possessor to overcome the world, (1 John v. 4,) to stand fast against its frowns, and to resist the more pleasing, but not less dangerous, influence of its smiles. Each of these effects is beyond the power, and contrary to the inclination of the natural man. "No man can say that Jesus Christ is the Lord," (1 Cor. xii. 3,) that

can give him the honour due to his name, renounce every other hope of salvation, and count all things but loss and dung that he may win Christ, (Phil. iii. 8,) "but by the Holy Ghost." Yet thus far many have undoubtedly attained, who have not assurance; but while they give sufficient evidence by their conduct that they have received precious faith in their hearts, they go mourning all the day long, and almost pass sentence against themselves as unbelievers. Now, what these mourners want, in order to their establishment and assurance, is not some new principle, which they have not yet received, but only a stronger degree of that faith which they already possess. Some good writers speak of a faith of reliance, a faith of adherence, a faith of assurance, and of the direct and reflex acts of faith, &c.; but these are not scriptural modes of expression, nor do they appear to me to throw light upon the subject, but rather to increase the perplexity of plain people, who are apt to imagine these are so many different kinds of faith. The scriptures mention only two kinds, a *living* and a *dead* faith, James ii. 17. True faith is faint and weak in its beginnings, like the life of a newborn infant, but is growing up to maturity, and shall increase with the increase of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," Eph. iv. 13. From thence it follows,

II. The grounds and principles of faith and assurance are exactly the same. The first and lowest act of saving faith necessarily includes three things:

1. An apprehension of the sufficiency and authority of Christ to save. Men that live in their sins will rest upon a slender hope! but conscience truly awakened must have sure grounds to go upon, and, without the discovery of such a Saviour as is revealed in the gospel, would sink into despair. It is afraid of being deceived, and is so far enlightened that it cannot be easily imposed upon; a sense of the sinfulness of sin, an impression of the majesty of God, will not suffer it to rest in anything short of a perfect atonement and a perfect righteousness. But when the eyes of the mind are opened, and Jesus is seen as revealed by the word and Spirit of God, all scruples of this sort are silenced, and the soul receives and feels, that he is fully equal to the mighty undertaking.

2. An application to him. This of course flows a persuasion of his ability to save: or who will sit down and perish, when there is a possibility of relief! There is, perhaps, a great questioning of Christ's willingness; but still, since there is a peradventure, a sense of distress on the one hand, and a view of his power and grace on the other, will extort a cry, "Lord, save me, or I perish," Matth. iii. 25, and xiv. 30.

3. From hence there arises a hope in his

mercy, which is fainter or stronger according as the knowledge of Jesus is more or less distinct, and the surrender unto him more or less simple and unreserved, and therefore, in general, it is very faint at first; for the knowledge of Christ in a measure depends upon our knowledge of the scriptures, which testify of him, and on the proofs we have had of his wisdom, grace, and love to ourselves; but the young convert, in whom the seed of faith is but lately sown, has but little acquaintance with the word; for he has but just begun to know the value of it, and he has but little experience; though his eyes are opened, his sight is not yet confirmed, nor his spiritual senses exercised.

Farther, though he was sincerely convinced of his need of a Saviour, there is still much of a legal bias, and a principle of self-righteousness in his heart, which, so far from being removed, is not yet discovered to himself; and while he thinks he looks to Christ alone, he is looking in himself for qualifications to recommend him, and afraid to draw near with confidence, because he cannot find them. These things discourage his hopes, and demonstrate his faith to be but weak.

But the strongest and most lively assurance that we can conceive attainable in the present life, is wrought and maintained by the very same principles which have so faint an influence in the infancy of faith. Let us hear the great champion St. Paul, in the close of an exemplary, laborious life, giving an account to a dear and intimate friend of the hope that was in him. He had been honoured and distinguished for grace, gifts, and usefulness, in a peculiar manner; he had laboured more abundantly than all the apostles; he had fully preached the gospel, and gathered churches throughout a very large part of the Roman empire; (1 Cor. xv. 10; Rom. xv. 19;) his first call was extraordinary, by the Lord's appearing to him in glory; and some of his succeeding experiences had been no less singular, for he had been caught up into the third heavens: (Cor. xii. 2;) finally, his suffering for the gospel had been as great and remarkable as his services. But when he expresses his assurance of support and salvation, he says not a syllable of these things, but rests the whole upon such points as were common to him with all believers: "I know whom I have been believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," 2 Tim. i. 12. We see there St. Paul's assurance was founded on, 1st, A knowledge of Jesus Christ, the object of his faith; 2dly, A consciousness of transactions which had passed between him and his Saviour,—he had committed something to him, that was, his soul with all his interests; 3dly, A persuasion of his ^{own} willingness, and faithfulness, to ^{see} preserve what he had taken charge

these are the very same principles which are necessary to the first act of weak faith, only here they exert themselves with their proper power and efficacy. From hence,

III. Assurance is equally open to all believers. It is not the exclusive privilege of great services or sufferings; it is not confined to apostles, ministers, or martyrs, but is a prize set before all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, being no other than the growth and establishment of that faith which they have already received. The reasons why all who believe are not happy in the assurance of hope, are to be sought, not in the will of God, who hath made abundant provision for our comfort, but in the perverseness, ignorance, and misapprehensions of our own hearts, and from inattention to his revealed word. We are not straitened in him, but in ourselves. It is not easy to enumerate the many ways in which our depravity works to keep this good thing from us. A few of the principal are these:—

1. *Insincerity.* Where grace is really implanted by the Holy Spirit, it will surely prevail at length, and subdue the whole soul to the obedience of faith. But in too many there is, for a long time, not only a great opposition from indwelling corruption, but a secret cleaving of the will to evil; a double-mindedness, (James i. 8,) a kind of halting between two opinions, (1 Kings xviii. 21,) so that, while the desire and prayer of the soul seems expressed against all sin universally, (Prov. xxiii. 26,) there is still an allowed reserve of something inconsistent with light received, Psal. ix. 1. An habitual indulgence of known or suspected evil, or an habitual neglect of any known duty, will certainly prevent the growth of grace and consolation. For the Lord claims (what is his just due) the whole heart, and will not afford the strengthening light of his countenance, while any idol is deliberately set up in his presence. "Then," says David (and not till then) "shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments," Psalm cxix. 6. And our Lord Jesus, when asked, "How wilt thou manifest thyself unto us?" answered, "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him," John xiv. 22, 23. Till the pride and naughtiness of our spirits are conquered, and we are made willing to give up all, to renounce whatever is contrary to his precepts, though pleasing as a right eye, and seemingly necessary as a right hand, it is in vain to expect a full and abiding assurance of his love.

2. *Indolence.* With respect to this valuable blessing, it may be often said, "Ye receive not, because ye ask not," James iv. 2. It is too common for those who were earnest in crying for mercy, while they thought themselves under the curse and

power of the law, to grow slack and remiss in prayer soon after they obtain some hope of salvation from the gospel, and particularly they do not "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure," (2 Pet. i. 10,) in the careful use of every means appointed for their establishment in the truth as it is in Jesus. Therefore that word is fulfilled in them, "The slothful soul desireth, and hath nothing," Prov. xiii. 4. They go on for months or years in a complaining, unsettled state, and deservedly, because they are not earnest in seeking, asking, waiting, knocking at the gate of wisdom, and at the throne of grace, for that blessing which the Lord has promised to those who persevere in wrestling prayer, and will take no denial.

3. *Misapprehensions.* These arise from a neglect of examining the scriptures, and an undue deference to the decisions of men. If assurance is supposed unattainable, it will consequently not be sought after. If it is expected as an instantaneous impression of the Spirit of God upon the mind, independent of his word, or to arise from some sudden, powerful application of a particular text of scripture, this persuasion will end in disappointment. For, though it must be allowed that the Lord does at times favour his people with peculiar manifestations of his goodness, and perhaps seal some promise especially suited to their present circumstances, with a remarkable sweetness and evidence upon their minds, yet these do rarely produce the assurance we are speaking of. These are but visits seldom vouchsafed, and quickly suspended; and those who depend chiefly on such impressions, instead of endeavouring to grow in the scriptural knowledge of Christ, are generally as changeable in their hopes as in their frame. While their affections are thus engaged, "their mountain stands strong, and they think they shall never be moved; (Psalm xxx. 7;) but when the cause is withdrawn, the effect ceases, and they presently relapse into their former fears and inquietudes: not to say that expectations of this sort have a tendency to great inconveniences, and often open a door to the delusions of enthusiasm and dangerous impositions; for Satan, when permitted, knows how to transform himself into an angel of light, 2 Cor. xi. 14. If inherent sanctification, or a considerable increase of it, is considered as the proper ground of assurance, those who are most humble, sincere, and desirous of being conformed to the will of God, will be the most perplexed and discouraged in their search after it. For they of all others will be the least satisfied with themselves, and have the quickest sense of the innumerable defilements and defects which the scriptures assure us are inseparable from our best tempers and best actions. These mistakes, with others that might be mentioned, prevent

many from seeking after assurance at all, and bewilder many more, by putting them upon a wrong pursuit. But what then is assurance? and how is it to be attained? I shall attempt an answer to these questions together in the next proposition.

IV. "Assurance is the result of a competent spiritual knowledge of the person and work of Christ as revealed in the gospel, and a consciousness of dependence on him and his work alone for salvation." What I apprehend necessary to make my meaning plain, will occur from a brief explanation of the terms I have made use of in this description.

1. By the term *spiritual knowledge*, I would ascribe it to the influence and teaching of the Holy Spirit of God, and distinguish it both from that speculative knowledge of divine things which natural men may acquire from books and human instruction, and likewise from that knowledge which a real believer may obtain in the same way, beyond the limits of his present experience. Those who are favoured with great outward advantages, particularly the light of a clear gospel-ministry, may very soon arrive to a notional apprehension of the most important truths; but with respect to the spiritual and abiding perception of those truths, there is no effectual teacher but the Spirit of God; and we often find, that what we think we have learned of men, we have occasion to be taught again by the Lord the Spirit, for our acquisitions fail us when we have most need of them, and will not stand the trial of an hour of temptation. But, so far as we have received our views of Jesus, his person, offices, mediation, and promises, from him, we possess them, and should be able to defy an angel, if he were to propose to us any other doctrine than that which we have surely known and believed, Gal. i. 8.

2. I use the word *competent*, because there is not, that I know of, any determinate standard where to fix. When our knowledge is so far increased as to overpower the objections arising from inward corruptions, defects of obedience, unbelieving fears, and the temptations of Satan; when we can cut them short with that question of the apostle, "Who is he that condemneth! it is Christ that died," (Rom. viii. 34,) assurance follows of course. For I do not understand assurance in the strictest sense for the highest degree of certainty imaginable. Assurance itself is capable of increase; and will be so continually, while there is any darkness in our understandings, or any remaining propensity to a self-righteous spirit. Then only will our assurance be perfect, when we shall see Jesus as he is, and be completely freed from all our infirmities. For these, in whatever degree they prevail, will so far affect the strength and steadiness of our confidence in God.

3. This knowledge is wrought in us by the Spirit, through the medium of the written word. He teaches no unrevealed truths. We are not to expect that he will assure us by a voice from heaven, or by a sudden impulse upon our hearts, that our names in particular are written in the book of life; but he opens our understandings to understand the scriptures, (Luke xxiv. 45,) to assent to, and feel, that we are such sinners as are there described, to see the dignity and sufficiency of Christ Jesus, as God-man, the mediator, the suitableness of his offices, the value of his atonement and righteousness, and the harmony and glory of the divine attributes, in the adorable methods of redeeming love, which renders it just, righteous, and worthy of God to justify and save the believing sinner, Rom. iii. 26. He likewise gives us to understand the freedom and security of the gospel-promises confirmed by the oath of God, and sealed with the blood of his Son. He shows us the establishment and immutability of the covenant of grace; convinces us that there is a fulness of wisdom, grace, life, and strength, treasured up in Christ, for the use and support of those who in themselves are poor, miserable, and helpless, and to be freely communicated in measure and season, as he sees necessary to support, nourish, and revive the believing soul, and to lead him in the path of perseverance to everlasting life. Such a discovery of almighty power, and unchangeable love, engaged for the infallible salvation of every believer, which they cannot lose by their own unworthiness, nor be deprived of by all the opposition which earth or hell can raise against them, (John x. 28,) produces a suitable assurance in the soul that receives it. And we can confidently say, "We know that we are of God," when we can in this manner know in whom we have believed.

4. Such discoveries of the person and grace of Christ are connected with a heartfelt consciousness, that the believer's dependence for all the great hopes and ends of salvation are fixed on him and his work alone. They draw forth acts of surrender and trust, and keep the mind from forming any vain scheme of hope or refuge, either in whole or in part, from any other quarter. Indeed, from the very first dawns of faith, as I have observed, the soul is led to commit itself into the hands of Jesus; but while knowledge was weak, and the heart very imperfectly humbled, there was a secret, though unallowed, dependence upon self, upon resolutions, frames, and duties. But as Jesus rises more glorious in the eye of faith, self is in the same degree depressed and renounced; and when we certainly see that there is no safety or stability but in his name, we as certainly feel that we expect them from him, and from him only. And

the Holy Spirit assists here likewise, bears a comfortable witness with our spirits, (Rom. viii. 15, 16.) by drawing us to a throne of grace, pleading in us as a spirit of adoption, and prompting us to renew the renunciation of ourselves, and to glory in Jesus, as made unto us, of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, (1 Cor. i. 30,) from day to day. And from hence arises a solid, permanent assurance. The believer, though weak and unstable as water in himself, and though continually assaulted by a powerful combination against his peace, can look through all to Jesus, and say, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Rom. viii. 38, 39.

What remains then, but to animate and press every sincere believer to strive, in God's appointed way, for a comfortable assurance, that they are accepted in the Beloved, passed from death unto life, and infallibly freed from all condemnation. Though this knowledge is not absolutely necessary to our safety, it is exceeding useful to make us unwearied, cheerful, and evangelical, in a course of holy obedience, to the exertion of all our powers and faculties in the service of him who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and to give us courage to endure and surmount the many difficulties and oppositions which we are sure to meet with in the course of our profession. Unbelief and distrust weaken our hands, "and make our knees feeble," Heb. xii. 12. The more steadily we confide in God, the better we shall serve him; we shall be enabled to cast all our cares upon him, to rely on his promise, that he will make our strength equal to our day; and having a well-grounded expectation of receiving the end of our hope, even the salvation of our souls, we shall stand fast in the evil day, and say, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear, so that I may finish my course with joy." Acts xx. 24. I would only subjoin two cautions to those who are thus minded.

1. Remember that the progress of faith to assurance is gradual. Expect it not suddenly, but wait upon the Lord for it in the ways of his appointment. As it depends upon the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, let this engage you to constancy and earnestness in prayer; and as it arises from a knowledge of Jesus, be assiduous in searching the scriptures, which testify of him. The blessing of the Lord and the hand of the diligent concur in the attainment of this benefit, Prov. x. 4, 22. If you persevere in this path, you will be helped forward by the experience of every day; and every dispensation of providence, as well as every exercise and frame

of mind you pass through, will be sanctified, to give you an increasing conviction, that you are nothing, and that Jesus is all in all.

2. As you cannot see or maintain a sight of your interest in the covenant, but by the light of the Spirit, beware of grieving him, Ephea. iv. 30. If you indulge a careless, trifling disposition, or venture upon known sin, you will find dark clouds raised between the Sun of righteousness and your souls. Assurance is not so invariable, but that it may be affected, weakened, and perhaps for a season quite suspended, by unfaithfulness and backsliding on our part. If you have a persuasion of your interest in the love of God, that remains always the same, though prayer is restrained, the ordinances slighted, and watchfulness intermitted; take heed, lest this, instead of assurance, should be vain confidence and presumption. The hope that maketh not ashamed, endears every precept and ordinance to the soul, weans the affections from low and trivial pursuits, and strengthens the exercise of every gracious principle.

As it is thus possible and desirable for a believer to "know that he is of God;" so a concern for many here present will not suffer me to close, without desiring you to consider if you have not cause to conclude, from scripture-testimony, that you are not of God. See the cause determined by an apostle: "Whoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God," 1 John iii. 10. And again, by another, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his," Rom. viii. 9. Are not these decisions plain and absolute? If your love and dependence are not fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ, if your tempers and practice are not governed by his commands, you are not of God. Who, then, do you belong to? The whole world is divided between two masters, and ranged under opposite banners. A neutrality is impossible. If you are not of God, you belong at present to Satan; you are his captives; (2 Tim. ii. 26;) he leads you blindfold; and he meditates your destruction, when you shall have worn out your lives in his miserable service. And will you continue fond of your bondage, and follow him like an ox to the slaughter? There is a redemption-price paid, there is an arm of power revealed in favour of such helpless perishing prisoners. Jesus, whom we preach, "is able to take the prey out of the hand of the mighty, and to deliver the lawful captive," Isaiah xlix. 24. "The Lord help you to apply to him before iniquity is your ruin. O may he incline you to believe and be saved! Acts xvi. 31. If you reject him, you seal yourself to an aggravated condemnation, and must perish without mercy: but if you hear his voice, and call upon his name, he is able to save to the uttermost, and to bless you, in turning every one of you from your iniquities," Heb. vii. 25; Acts iii. 26.



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