











THE  
WORKS  
OF  
WILLIAM PALEY, D. D.

WITH  
ADDITIONAL SERMONS,  
ETC. ETC.

AND A CORRECTED ACCOUNT OF THE  
LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THE AUTHOR,  
BY THE REV. EDMUND PALEY, A. M.  
VICAR OF EASINGWOLD.

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# C O N T E N T S

OF

## VOLUME VI.

---

	Page
I.	
MEDITATING UPON RELIGION.	
<i>Psalm</i> lxxiii. 7.	
Have I not remembered thee in my bed; and thought upon thee when I was waking? - -	13
II.	
WHY MEN RESIST AND PUT ASIDE THE THOUGHTS OF RELIGION.	
<i>St. John</i> iii. 19, 20.	
And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd - - -	21
III.	
FEAR A RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE.	
<i>Proverbs</i> xiv. 16.	
A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil -	28
IV.	
NEGLECT OF WARNINGS.	
<i>Deut.</i> xxxii. 29.	
Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end - -	35

## V.

## THIS LIFE A STATE OF PROBATION.

*Psalm* cxix. 71.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes	-	-	-	-	42
---	---	---	---	---	----

## VI.

## OUR DEAREST INTERESTS TO BE PARTED WITH RATHER THAN ENDANGER OUR DUTY.

*Matthew* v. 29.

If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell	-	-	-	-	51
---	---	---	---	---	----

## VII.

## THE TERRORS OF THE LORD.

*Matt.* xvi. 26.

What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?	-	-	-	-	59
---	---	---	---	---	----

## VIII.

## THE LOVE OF GOD.

1 *John* iv. 19.

We love him, because he first loved us	-	-	-	-	69
--	---	---	---	---	----

## IX.

## SERIOUSNESS IN RELIGION INDISPENSABLE ABOVE ALL OTHER DISPOSITIONS.

1 *Peter* iv. 7.

Be ye, therefore, sober, and watch unto prayer	-	-	-	-	79
--	---	---	---	---	----



## X.

## TASTE FOR DEVOTION.

*John iv. 23, 24.*

But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit ; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth - - - - 98

## XI.

## PRAYER IN IMITATION OF CHRIST.

*Luke v. 16.*

And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed 112

## XII.

## THE STIRRING OF CONSCIENCE.

*Ephesians ii. 1.*

And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins - - - - 119

## XIII.

## ON INSENSIBILITY TO OFFENCES.

*Psalms xix. 12, 13.*

Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults. Keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me - 127

## XIV.

## A SENSE OF SIN TO BE KEPT UP IN OUR MINDS.

*Psalms xl. 15.*

For innumerable troubles are come about me ; my sins have taken such hold upon me that I am not able to look up ; yea, they are more in number than the hairs of my head, and my heart hath failed me - - 135

## XV.

TO THINK LESS OF OUR VIRTUES, AND MORE OF OUR SINS.

(Part I.)

*Psalm li. 3.*

My sin is ever before me - - - 142

## XVI.

TO THINK LESS OF OUR VIRTUES, AND MORE OF OUR SINS.

(Part II.)

*Psalm li. 3.*

My sin is ever before me - - - 153

## XVII.

SALVATION FOR PENITENT SINNERS.

*Luke vii. 47.*

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much - - - 164

## XVIII.

USE AND ABUSE OF THE MERCY OF GOD IN THE REDEMPTION OF MANKIND BY CHRIST.

*Eccles. v. 5, 6.*

Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin unto sin; and say not, his mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins; for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners - - - 171

## XIX.

OF THE DOCTRINE OF CONVERSION.

*Matthew ix. 13.*

I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance - - - 179

## XX.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

(Part I.)

*Hebrews ix. 26.*

Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself	-	-	194
--	---	---	-----

## XXI.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

(Part II.)

*Romans vi. 1.*

What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid	-	-	201
--	---	---	-----

## XXII.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

(Part III.)

*Romans vi. 1.*

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid	-	-	211
--	---	---	-----

## XXIII.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

(Part IV.)

*Romans vi. 1.*

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid	-	-	223
--	---	---	-----

## XXIV.

## ALL STAND IN NEED OF A REDEEMER,

(Part V.)

*Hebrews ix. 26.*

Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself	-	-	239
--	---	---	-----

## XXV.

## MISAPPREHENSION OF THE NATURAL EFFICACY OF REPENTANCE.

*Hebrews ix. 26.*

Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself	-	-	247
--	---	---	-----

## XXVI.

## OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE IN GENERAL.

(Part I.)

*1 Cor. iii. 16.*

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?	-	-	254
---	---	---	-----

## XXVII.

## ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT.

(Part II.)

*1 Cor. iii. 16.*

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?	-	-	262
---	---	---	-----

## XXVIII.

## ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT.

(Part III.)

*1 Cor. iii. 16.*

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?	-	-	270
---	---	---	-----

## XXIX.

## SIN ENCOUNTERED BY SPIRITUAL AID.

(Part I.)

*Romans vii. 24.*

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?	-	-	281
--	---	---	-----

## XXX.

EVIL PROPENSITIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE AID OF THE SPIRIT.

(Part II.)

*Romans vii. 24.*

○ wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from  
the body of this death? - - - 288

## XXXI.

THE AID OF THE SPIRIT TO BE SOUGHT AND PRESERVED  
BY PRAYER.

(Part III.)

*Romans vii. 24.*

○ wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from  
the body of this death? - - - 294

## XXXII.

PRESERVATION AND RECOVERY FROM SIN.

*Titus ii. 11, 12.*

For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath ap-  
peared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungod-  
liness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righte-  
ously, and godly, in this present world - - 302

## XXXIII.

RELIGION NOT A MERE FEELING BUT AN ACTIVE PRIN-  
CIPLE.

*Matt. vii. 21.*

Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall  
enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth  
the will of my Father which is in heaven - - 314

## XXXIV.

HOW VIRTUE PRODUCES BELIEF, AND VICE UNBELIEF.

*John vii. 17.*

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,  
whether it be of God - - - 322

## XXXV.

## PURE RELIGION.

*James i. 27.*

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world -	331
---	-----

## XXXVI.

## THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

*Matt. vi. 15.*

If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses - - -	339
--	-----

## XXXVII.

## RECONCILEMENT OF DISPUTES.

*Proverbs xvii. 14.*

The beginning of strife is, as when one letteth out water. Therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with	348
---	-----

## XXXVIII.

## OATHS.

*Hebrews vi. 16.*

For men verily swear by the greater ; and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife - - -	356
--	-----

## XXXIX.

## PROFANE SWEARING.

*Exodus xx. 7.*

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 - - -	363
---	-----

## XL.

## DRUNKENNESS.

*Romans* xiii. 13.

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness	-	-	-	-	371
--	---	---	---	---	-----

## XLI.

## ON PURITY OF THE HEART AND AFFECTIONS.

1 *John* iii. 2, 3.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God: and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure	-	-	-	-	379
---	---	---	---	---	-----

## XLII.

## LICENTIOUSNESS AND DEBAUCHERY.

*Ephesians* 5, 6.

Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience	-	-	-	-	387
---	---	---	---	---	-----

## XLIII.

## FORNICATION.

(Part I.)

*Hebrews* xiii. 4.

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge	-	-	-	-	394
---	---	---	---	---	-----

## XLIV.

## FORNICATION.

(Part II.)

*Hebrews* xiii. 4.

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge	-	-	-	-	402
---	---	---	---	---	-----

## XLV.

## DISCONTENT.

1 *Tim.* vi. 6, 7, 8.

Godliness with contentment is great gain—for we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out—and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content - - - - 410

## XLVI.

## SUICIDE.

2 *Sam.* xvii. 23.

And when Achitophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and got him home to his house, to his city, and put his house in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father - - - - 418

## XLVII.

## THE LAW OF HONOUR.

\* *Luke* xvi. 15.

For that which is highly esteemed amongst men is abomination in the sight of God - - - - 430

## XLVIII.

## HONESTY.

*Proverbs* xx. 7.

The just man walketh in his integrity - - - - 438

## XLIX.

## PRUDENCE IN THE CONDUCT OF OUR TEMPORAL CONCERNS.

*Proverbs* xxx. 8, 9.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I should be full and deny thee, and say who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal - 446



## L.

## THE MISAPPLICATION OF EXAMPLE.

1 *Cor.* xv. 33.

Evil communications corrupt good manners - - 454

## LI.

## THE DUTY OF PARENTS TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN.

(Part I.)

*Ephesians* vi. 4.

Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord 462

## LII.

## THE DUTY OF PARENTS TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN.

(Part II.)

*Proverbs* xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it - - 472

## LIII.

## THE DUTY OF CHILDREN TOWARDS THEIR PARENTS.

*Exodus* xx. 12.

Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee 480

## LIV.

## THE DUTIES OF SERVANTS.

*Ephesians* vi. 5—8.

Servants, be obedient unto them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart as unto Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good-will, doing service as to the Lord and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free - - 487



**SERMONS,**  
**DOCTRINAL, MORAL, AND**  
**MISCELLANEOUS.**

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I.

MEDITATING UPON RELIGION.

PSALM LXIII. 7.

*Have I not remembered thee in my bed ; and thought  
upon thee when I was waking ?*

THE life of God in the soul of man, as it is sometimes emphatically called, the Christian life, that is, or the progress of Christianity in the heart of any particular person, is marked, amongst other things, by religion gradually gaining possession of the thoughts. It has been said, that, if we thought about religion as it deserved, we should never think about any thing else ; nor with strictness, perhaps, can we deny the truth of this proposition. Religious concerns do so surpass and outweigh in value and importance all concerns beside, that, did they occupy a place in our minds proportioned to that importance, they would, in truth, exclude every other but themselves. I am not, therefore, one of those who wonder when I see a man *engrossed* with religion : the wonder with me is, that men care and think so little concerning it. With all

the allowances which must be made for our employments, our activities, our anxieties about the interests and occurrences of the present life, it is still true, that our forgetfulness, and negligence, and indifference about religion are much greater than can be excused, or can easily be accounted for by these causes. Few men are so busy, but that they contrive to find time for any gratification their heart is set upon, and thought for any subject in which they are interested: they want not leisure for these, though they want leisure for religion. Notwithstanding, therefore, singular cases, if indeed there be any cases, of being over-religious, over-intent upon spiritual affairs, the real and true complaint is all on the other side, that men think not about them enough, as they ought, as is reasonable, as it is their duty to do. That is the malady and the mischief. The cast and turn of our infirm and fleshly nature lean all on that side. For, first, this nature is affected chiefly by what we see. Though the things which concern us most deeply be not seen; for this very reason, that they are not seen, they do not affect us as they ought. Though these things ought to be meditated upon, and must be acted upon, one way or other, long before we come actually to experience them, yet in fact we do not meditate upon them, we do not act with a view to them, till something gives us alarm, gives reason to believe that they are approaching fast upon us, that they are at hand, or shortly will be, that we shall indeed experience what they are.

The world of spirits, the world for which we are destined, is invisible to us. Hear St. Paul's account of this matter; "we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things

which are not seen are eternal." "We walk by faith, not by sight: faith is the evidence of things not seen." Some great invisible agent there must be in the universe; "the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Now if the great Author of all things be himself invisible to our senses, and if our relation to him must necessarily form the greatest interest and concern of our existence, then it follows, that our greatest interest and concern are with those things which are now invisible. "We are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." The first infirmity, therefore, which religion has to conquer within us, is that which binds down our attention to the things which we see. The natural man is immersed in sense: nothing takes hold of his mind but what applies immediately to his sense; but this disposition will not do for religion: the religious character is founded in hope, as contradistinguished from experience, in perceiving by the mind what is not perceived by the eye: unless a man can do this, he cannot be religious: and with many it is a great difficulty. This power of hope, which, as St. Paul observes of it, is that which places the invisible world before our view, is specifically described in Scripture, as amongst the gifts of the Spirit, the natural man standing indeed much in need of it, being altogether of an opposite tendency. Hear St. Paul's prayer for his Roman converts; "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." Again to the Galatians, how does he describe the state of mind

of a Christian? “we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

Again; another impediment to the thought of religion is the faculty and the habit we have acquired of regarding its concerns as at a distance. A child is affected by nothing but what is present, and many thousands in this respect continue children all their lives. In a degree this weakness cleaves to us all; produces upon us the same effect under a different form; namely, in this way, when we find ourselves necessarily disturbed by near or approaching evil, we have the means of forgetting the nearness or the approach of that, which must bring with it the greatest evil or the greatest good we are capable of, our change at death. Though we cannot exactly offer any arguments to show that it is either certainly or probably at a distance, yet we have the means of regarding it in our minds as though it were at a distance; and this even in cases in which it cannot possibly be so. Do we prepare for it? no: why? because we regard it in our imaginations as at a distance: we cannot prove that it is at a distance; nay, the contrary may be proved against us: but still we regard it so in our imaginations, and regard it so practically; for imagination is with most men the practical principle. But, however strong and general this delusion be, has it any foundation in reason? Can that be thought at a distance which may come to-morrow, which must come in a few years? In *a very* few years to most of us, in a few years to all, it will be fixed and decided, whether we are to be in heaven or hell; yet we go on without thinking of it, without preparing for it: and it is exceedingly observable, that it is only in religion we thus

put away the thought from us. In the settlement of our worldly affairs after our deaths, which exactly depend upon the same event, commence at the same time, are equally distant, if either were distant, equally liable to uncertainty, as to when the disposition will take place; in these, I say, men are not usually negligent, or think that by reason of its distance it can be neglected, or by reason of the uncertainty when it may happen, left unprovided for. This is a flagrant inconsistency, and proves decisively that religion possesses a small portion of our concern, in proportion with what it ought to do. For instead of giving to it that superiority which is due to immortal concerns, above those which are transitory, perishable, and perishing, it is not even put upon an equality with them; nor with those which, in respect to time, and the uncertainty of time, are under the same circumstances with itself.

Thirdly; the spiritual character of religion is another great impediment to its entering our thoughts. All religion, which is effectual, is and must be spiritual. Offices and ordinances are the handmaids and instruments of the spiritual religion, calculated to generate, to promote, to maintain, to uphold it in the heart, but the thing itself is purely spiritual. Now the flesh weigheth down the spirit, as with a load and burden. It is difficult to rouse the human constitution to a sense and perception of what is purely spiritual. They who are addicted, not only to vice, but to gratifications and pleasures; they who know no other rule than to go with the crowd in their career of dissipation and amusement; they whose attentions are all fixed and engrossed by business, whose minds from morning to night are counting and computing; the weak, and foolish, and stupid; lastly, which compre-

hends a class of mankind deplorably numerous, the indolent and slothful ; none of these can bring themselves to meditate upon religion. The last class slumber over its interests and concerns ; perhaps they cannot be said to forget it absolutely, but they slumber over the subject, in which state nothing as to their salvation gets done, no decision, no practice. There are, therefore, we see, various obstacles and infirmities in our constitutions, which obstruct the reception of religious ideas in our mind, still more such a voluntary entertainment of them as may bring forth fruit. It ought, therefore, to be our constant prayer to God, that he will open our hearts to the influence of his word, by which is meant that he will so quicken and actuate the sensibility and vigour of our minds, as to enable us to attend to the things which really and truly belong to our peace.

So soon as religion gains that hold and that possession of the heart, which it must do to become the means of our salvation, things change within us, as in many other respects, so especially in this. We think a great deal more frequently about it, we think of it for a longer continuance, and our thoughts of it have much more of vivacity and impressiveness. First, we begin to think of religion more frequently than we did. Heretofore we never thought of it at all, except when some melancholy incident had sunk our spirits, or had terrified our apprehensions ; it was either from lowness or from fright that we thought of religion at all. Whilst things went smoothly and prosperously and gaily with us, whilst all was well and safe in our health and circumstances, religion was the last thing we wished to turn our minds to : we did not want to have our pleasure disturbed by it. But it is not so with us now : there is a change in our minds in this respect. It



enters our thoughts very often, both by day and by night, "Have I not remembered thee in my bed, and thought upon thee when I was waking?" This change is one of the prognostications of the religious principle forming within us. Secondly, these thoughts *settle* themselves upon our minds. They were formerly fleeting and transitory, as the cloud which passes along the sky; and they were so for two reasons; first, they found no congenial temper and disposition to rest upon, no seriousness, no posture of mind proper for their reception; and secondly, because we of our own accord, by a positive exertion and endeavour of our will, put them away from us, we disliked their presence, we rejected and cast them out. But it is not so now; we entertain and retain religious meditations, as being, in fact, those which concern us most deeply. I do not speak of the solid comfort which is to be found in them, because that belongs to a more advanced state of Christian life than I am now considering: that will come afterwards; and, when it does come, will form the support, and consolation, and happiness of our lives. But whilst the religious principle is forming, at least during the first steps of that formation, we are induced to think about religion chiefly from a sense of its vast consequences; and this reason is enough to make wise men think about it both long and closely. Lastly, our religious thoughts come to have a vivacity and impressiveness in them which they had not hitherto: that is to say, they interest us much more than they did. There is a wonderful difference in the light in which we see the same thing, in the force and strength with which it rises up before our view, in the degree with which we are affected by it. This difference is experienced in no one thing more than in religion, not only between dif-

ferent persons, but by the same person at different times, the same person in different stages of the Christian progress, the same person under different measures of divine grace.

Finally, would we know whether we have made, or are making, any advances in Christianity or not? These are the marks which will tell us. Do we think more frequently about religion than we used to do? Do we cherish and entertain these thoughts for a longer continuance than we did? Do they interest us more than formerly? Do they impress us more, do they strike us more forcibly, do they sink deeper? If we perceive this, then we perceive a change, upon which we may ground good hopes and expectations; if we perceive it not, we have cause for very afflicting apprehensions, that the power of religion hath not yet visited us; cause for deep and earnest intercession with God for the much wanted succour of his Holy Spirit.

## II.

WHY MEN RESIST AND PUT ASIDE THE THOUGHTS  
OF RELIGION.

ST. JOHN III. 19, 20.

*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.*

OUR Lord, two verses preceding these, states the momentous truth, that "God had sent his Son into the world, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But in the works, no less than in the words of God, the intention is not always the same with the effect, but often of a nature entirely contrary. Who can doubt but that the intention of our Maker, in giving us the faculty of speech, was mutual utility and pleasure? Yet the faculty of speech often produces the very reverse of these, mutual annoyance and offence. Our joints and limbs were formed, without question, with a design of being instrumental to action and motion; yet the effect not seldom is, that they are the seats of pain and disease. It fares in like manner with the Christian dispensation. Its intention was to redeem souls, to save them from sin, from the devil, and from death; to turn us from our sins; to lead us into the ways of life, and to con-

duct us in the paths of righteousness, which is the path to Heaven and to God. This was its intention, but far different its effects: its effects, in many instances, are altogether opposite; they are not unfrequently such as to increase the condemnation and punishment. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?" It has been noticed, that this is no more than what happens in the gifts of nature: they are all intended for use, capable of abuse; calculated for good, convertible to evil; designed and suited for our benefit, turned by ourselves to our prejudice, perhaps to our destruction. What is generally true of the endowments which we receive from the hands of our Creator, may be expected to be true of spiritual things, of the works and operations of grace, distinguished indeed from the course of nature, but proceeding from the same cause; and more particularly true of those things which were meant and intended to be not only benefits but trials. Religion is a trial of character. The world we live in is a place, the life we live is a state, of trial and probation. Christianity itself is a part of this system. It is a trial to all, to whom it is proposed; infinitely to their advantage, if accepted; at their utmost peril, if put away and rejected. "Ye put it from you," says St. Paul, "and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life." Therefore we are not to wonder as though it were any thing strange, that the intention of the Gospel is different from its effects. It is, in a certain degree, the case with all things which belong to us. It is more

particularly true, as it was more particularly to be expected of every thing which partakes of the nature of a trial, which is the case with revealed religion.

And it may be observed, that it is not perhaps either a harsh or unauthorised interpretation of some prophetic descriptions of Christianity, to apply them to its character, spirit and intention, rather than to its effects, which are in so many other cases, as well as in this, contrary and opposite. “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” This, in the strong eastern manner, as applicable to Christianity, to which it has generally indeed been understood to allude, paints the *spirit* and *tendency* of Christ’s religion, which is exceedingly peaceable, rather than its *effects*, which are often in this respect frustrated and overcome by the perverseness of man.

Amongst many causes which occasion the thing we speak of, namely, why the effect of Christianity so frequently does not come up to the intention, is the cause assigned by our Lord himself in the text: “men love darkness rather than light.” Light, he states, is come into the world, yet mankind continue unenlightened; and why, because men love darkness rather than light. This our Lord lays down as a *fact*: men love ignorance rather than inquiry; to be without a sense of spiritual things, rather than to search into them; a determined resistance of the thought of religion, rather than any indulgence, or perhaps it ought to be called, intrusion of it. Of this fact, of this observation, experience attests the truth; and irrational as such conduct may seem, the inducement to it, and the motive of it, is not difficult to find out. Ignorance is a great *flatterer*, a great

soother of consciences, an opiate to the souls of men. While we remain in ignorance of the revealed will of God, we shall readily bring ourselves to think, that whatever it be, it must be a law of ease and indulgence to human infirmities; under which name of "human infirmities" we shall include every sensuality to which we are addicted, every sin which we have set our hearts upon, every passion we feel, and every temptation we wish to comply with. The heathen world counted and thought in this manner, because they were ignorant; and many Christians count and think in like manner, because they are ignorant also.

And is not this an inducement to remain in ignorance? The ignorance of the Christian is more voluntary than that of the unenlightened heathen: there is that difference; but the soothing effects of ignorance is the same in both. On this account, when the infidel became a Christian, and began to look into some of the truths and regulations which the Gospel introduces, he felt and found what an awakened Christian will find and feel now, that the law of God is a law of purity; that without holiness no man can see God; that continued sin is unrepented sin; that unrepented sin is an exclusion from heaven; and that this holds of all sins of all kinds. Now, though "light *be* come into the world," if it only serve to make such discoveries as these, no wonder that men, indolent, besotted, corrupted men, "love darkness rather than light." No man looking for heaven can continue in any known sin. But is it to find *this* out that we are to come to the light? Surely, surely, rather let me remain in darkness. For what must be the consequence of this knowledge? It is no other, nothing less, than to break up my plan of happiness—my pleasures, my enjoyments, and my

profits. The two first are not such, as I can pretend to say are reconcilable to purity and holiness; the last carries me *occasionally* to things which are not strictly just and honest; it carries me occasionally at least, and perhaps regularly. Whilst I was ignorant, I was easy; but this new information brings with it great disturbance. It requires me to change. I must change from the bottom.

Again: As ignorance of the laws of God encourages an opinion of ease and latitude in those laws, which is not true; so an ignorance of our own religious character will make us at peace with ourselves, and cause us to fondle an opinion, that we are better than we seem to be, or, in reality, than we are. Here, if in any thing, men love darkness rather than light; error without examination, rather than truth with it. For what shall we gain by examination? Only more and more insight into the deep and numerous corruptions of our hearts, our lives and conversation. Things little thought of, or unthought of altogether; circumstances unperceived, and slight failings without number, will start up to our view. In the negligent way of life in which we have passed our days, we found some degree of contentment; at least, we were not very unhappy. We judged of ourselves by what we remembered of ourselves; and if any thing troubled our memory of its own accord, it was some black offence, of which in some part of our lives we had been guilty. Recollections such as these can be, we must suppose, but very few with any, except with notorious offenders: with a very great part of those who hear me, it is possible there may be no such things to recollect. That I can allow very well, and believe to be true; and the absence of such recollections keeps up a kind of peace in the soul; but is it a just, well-grounded confidence, which the event will verify?

Here, then, are two grand inducements for continuing in voluntary ignorance, for loving "darkness rather than light." It makes us believe the law of God and Jesus Christ to be more lax than it is; and it makes us believe our own life and character to be better than they are: and these two reasons amount, in many persons, to unconquerable inducements. But let them now call to mind, that no physician who saw his patient at ease would disturb that ease, except it were to save his life; and then undoubtedly he would, if he was true to his trust. In the same manner the careless, negligent, sensual and thoughtless; and not only they, but another description of character, worse, it is to be feared, than they; namely, such as are not forgetful in other things, but in this particular concern of religion do purposely and by design put it from them, cast it out of their thoughts by a positive act of their will. These must be called upon, again and again, to behold their danger, and to view their condition earnestly, and truly, and really.

They are at ease in their ignorance; but what is ease which ends in perdition? It is beyond all doubt an ease which will become the sorest of all evils, worse than any terror, any disturbance, which inquiry and reflection can produce; and reflection is recommended by an assurance, that it will lead to good. You will allow it possible for a man to be in the wrong way, and not to be thinking of the way he is in; to be entirely careless about it. And how is such a person ever to be brought into the right way, except by opening his eyes, coming to the light, taking up the matter and consideration of religion in earnest, and with seriousness. It is utterly necessary that something should be done in order to save his soul, and this must be the beginning of the work. It signifies nothing to allege,



that this disposition to religion and to serious reflection is natural to man. This may be allowed to be true, but is nothing to the purpose; for the question is really come to this, whether our souls are to perish, or this disinclination, whether natural or not, be got the better of.

One would suppose that light was always more grateful than darkness, knowledge than ignorance: but our Saviour knew it to be otherwise; he knew what was in man; he knew, that though lost and bewildered, though not seeking their way, but going on unconcerned, and not knowing whither, by reason of the darkness which surrounded them, yet they would turn away from that light which alone could guide them in safety;—that if they could obtain for themselves any thing like ease, though it were only that false ease which results from inconsiderateness, insensibility, and ignorance, and that upon the most unfit subject of which men can remain insensible or ignorant; they would prefer even *that* to the anxieties which they foresee must follow, from entering upon religious meditation and inquiry. And to every argument and every plea which may be offered, or which may pass in our minds in favour of putting aside the thoughts of religion, this single string of conclusions is an answer: 1. That it is by religion alone that a sinner can be saved. 2. That religion can have no effect where it has no influence. 3. That until we come to think, to ponder, to ruminatè upon religion, it is impossible that we should acquire its instruction; and still more impossible, that we should feel its power, its authority, its rule and direction, in the regulation of our hearts, and in the government of our lives.

## III.

## FEAR A RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE.

## PROVERBS XIV. 16.

*A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil.*

THE beginning of religion in the heart is a subject of curious inquiry; it is also more than curious, it is of great practical importance. But it appears that there is no sufficient reason for supposing that it is in all men alike, or rather, the same in all good, religious men, as it is in those who become such; both experience and reason seem to speak the contrary. If we refer to the operations of God's Holy Spirit, we shall not be able to collect any authority for limiting them to a particular mode, or for saying that it must either be sudden or slow, early or late, more or less frequent or powerful. It surely may be all these, and in very different degrees in different times, and in different men. Nor yet, if we refer to the natural influence of what is usually called principle, have we any rule for saying, that religion must either necessarily, or that it does usually spring from the same cause. Different men are affected by different motives; and what sinks deep into the heart of one man, makes little impression upon another; and this depends not only upon a difference of disposition, which yet is very great, but upon a difference of circumstances, which are various beyond computation. Still, if we do but really become religious,

from whatever origin we set out, we are authorised to hope that our religion will save us.

Thus it is, that religion sometimes, not seldom indeed, has a *violent* origin in the soul, and begins in terror: "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil." The punishment of men's crimes overtaking them in this world, brings them to reflection, and reflection brings them to God. And not only does the punishment of the law effect this change, but the punishment of misery which men endure in consequence of losses either in their health, or fortune, or reputation. These are stings which sin inflicts, and we hope that they are sometimes available to repentance. We know but too well that they do not always answer their purpose; because we know, that when the frights or pains are over, men go back to their old courses. This may be a frequent, but it is a deplorable case; for little can be hoped for from lessons and admonitions addressed to a conscience upon which even the experience of danger, and mercy, and suffering takes no hold: one cannot indeed say, makes no impression, but takes no firm and abiding *hold*. First, then, let those who have suffered either alarm or affliction by reason of their sins, and under the visitations consequent upon sin, yet who, so soon as the calamity or fear is passed, forget it, and return to their vices with as much greediness as ever, let *them* know that they are far gone, and deep sunk in iniquity. "They have," as the Apostle expresses it, "yielded their members servants of sin unto sin;" not merely sinners, but slaves of sin, chained to their vices, under the dominion, and in no slight sense, in the possession of the father of sin. Secondly: Repentance, though violent in its beginning, though founded in what some will call a base motive, the dread

of punishment, may yet be sincere; and if sincere, it will be effectual. The shock which the mind receives *may* loosen and unfix that hardness of the soil into which the seeds of religion would never before penetrate. All chastisement is not lost; grief is not always wasted. There is a "godly sorrow, a sorrow unto repentance." Many may cry out not for form, but in perfect sincerity of heart, "we are grieved for our offences, and laden with the burden of our sins;" and true religion *may* spring from the sense and weight of this burthen.

Again: It is in misery and distress, though not the misery and distress brought on by our sins, but unconnected with them, that religion sometimes has its origin. Ease, and prosperity, and wealth, and<sup>d</sup> pleasure, and gaiety, and diversion, are sadly unfavourable to the impressions of religion; they are not *inconsistent* with these impressions; to say that, would be to say more than the truth; but they are *adverse* to them. "How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven;" that is, one either intent upon acquiring riches, or addicted to the pleasures which riches procure, and lost in them altogether: and it may, perhaps, be difficult to find a person who is not in fault by one or other of these means. However, what ease and wealth efface, the troubles of adversity write and engrave deeply on the heart. Seriousness is, above all things, necessary to the reception of the word; therefore, whatever makes men serious, prepares them for becoming disciples of Christianity. Sickness, poverty, disappointment, the house of mourning, the loss of our family, the death of our friends, do tend powerfully to produce seriousness, to show us the folly, and unreasonableness, and end of that levity and giddiness which

have taken up our time, from which we have drawn our delights. It seems impossible to be serious, and not to think of God and of religion. It is possible in the height and flow of spirits, pleasures and enjoyments; it is possible also in the eagerness and hurry of business, not to think of those things at all. But when pleasures fail, when pain and misery come in their place, when employment fails, when we can no longer follow it, or when distress is come upon us; then we naturally draw and turn towards that which was, and is, and always will be a grand concernment, whether we have been accustomed to reflect upon it or not. Yet even in this case, and even in any case, we may, if we please, avoid the subject; we *may* shut our eyes against, or turn them aside from any object, how great soever, or however near: but it is an unnatural effort so to do.

Thirdly: A great and loud call upon the conscience of the most thoughtless and hardened sinner, is any thing which puts him in mind of the uncertainty of his life, or gives him reason to expect that it will be short. The common course of human mortality, though it ought to be the most affecting consideration in the world, does not much affect us: it has lost its force by its familiarity: but particular admonitions have, with most men, their influence. It is something to see our companions go down into the grave. It is more when they are of our own age, our own apparent strength, habit and constitution of body; more still when they appear to have hastened their end by the same practices to which we have been addicted. But many, who will not take warning from others, begin for the first time to be startled and alarmed by what they feel in themselves—symptoms of danger and decline in their own

bodies. There may be fatal symptoms, and known to be so ; there may be dangerous symptoms, and known to be so ; there may be symptoms and inward sensations of which we know little : but all these are strong and loud calls. There are two opposite courses which men take upon this occasion : the one is to put from them, obstinately and strenuously, the thoughts of approaching death ; the other is, to prepare and make themselves ready for it. And it is in this last way (not, we may hope, unfrequently) that religion begins in the heart, and begins too with an operation which is finally successful. Above all things we must avoid the following thought, that it is to no purpose to begin to be religious now. From religion having hitherto made no impression upon us, it does not follow that it *can* make none. We are altered—our case is altered : we have not, as in times past by, a long life before us ; schemes of futurity in prospect ; and death and judgment, sure indeed, but lying at the end of a long train of worldly hopes. Let our souls experience the benefit of this change ! Why should we suffer depressions of mind, body or estate, waste of years, lapse of life, without drawing from them religious advantages, which they are capable of yielding ; some amendment, some improvement at least in the condition of our souls ? Repentance, be it how or when it may, will, if sincere, be accepted in Jesus Christ. If it *would* produce reformation, supposing life and opportunity to be allowed, it may be, in the sight of God, the same as if it *did*. This is true, and therefore it is not impossible that even the repentance of a death-bed may be effectual. But it is only not impossible ; to say that it is an uncertain dependence, is to say too little for it. It is only not impossible, because it is only not impossible to give

to it that sincerity which is required in repentance ; and it is absolutely impossible for the person himself to be assured of that sincerity, or to distinguish it from those fits of remorse and penitence which he and every sinner has a thousand times felt, and felt in vain, because they passed away with the alarm and danger which produced them. And this is still more true, when it is the beginning of religion in the heart, when there has been no religion in that place before. We must not therefore speak of the extremity of a death-bed ; but of some serious case short of that, which is, when men are reminded by their bodily constitution that their time is drawing towards its conclusion, yet have enough both of strength and life left to carry, if they will, their good resolves into execution ; not only to repent, but to reform, to put their repentance, by their future conduct, to the proof, whether it be sincere or not. If it be sincere, it will be accepted ; if it be not, which in this case the effect upon our lives will show, let not the grace or mercies of God be accused, because no acceptance is promised to such repentance. This, therefore, is a case, in all respects, capable of generating religion in the soul, and of giving proofs of it ; and therefore it is thought to be highly probable, that saving religion frequently begins in the soul from this cause, and under those circumstances.

Fourthly : Pain itself, abstractedly considered, has a close connexion with religious sentiment, inasmuch as it induces us to reflect what creatures we are, and what we are liable to ; particularly, what inexhaustible stores of punishment and misery are in the hands of our Creator, when he pleases to use them, that is, when insulted or despised mercy is turned into correction and exemplary justice, which is the case when the de-

noanced and forewarned judgement of God upon sinners comes to be executed. What torment can even the touch of his hand inflict! Let a person under the agonies of pain reflect, what it must be to exist for ages in that condition; and yet that his sins may bring him to this, and worse. The risk, the danger, the very chance, the very possibility of such a thing coming to pass, must rouse, one would suppose, every fear in his nature; must put him upon considering betimes, how he may secure himself against it; and when he finds, which he soon will do, that his only security is repentance and change, he betakes himself in earnest to those resources.

It may now be remarked very obviously, that though what has been stated may be allowed to be a true representation, yet it may be deemed a base and unworthy beginning of religion in the heart; it may be said, that if the principles of men are no better than those, they are principles lodged in the very lowest part of our nature, and have nothing in them of dignity or virtue. Religious obedience, provided it be sincere, from whatever cause it proceeds, will at last, will after a little time, produce unbounded love and gratitude to our God of so great mercies; will finally avail us, and work our eternal salvation.



## IV.

## NEGLECT OF WARNINGS.

DEUT. xxxii. 29.

*Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!*

THERE is one great sin, which, nevertheless, may not be amongst the number of those of which we are sensible, and of which our consciences accuse us : and that sin is the neglect of warnings.

It is our duty to consider this life throughout as a probationary state : nor do we ever think truly, or act rightly, but so long as we have this consideration fully before our eyes. Now one character of a state, suited to qualify and prepare rational and improveable creatures for a better state, consists in the warnings which it is constantly giving them ; and the providence of God, by placing *us* in such a state, becomes the author of these warnings. It is his paternal care which admonishes us by and through the events of life and death that pass before us. Therefore it is a sin against Providence to neglect them. It is hardness and determination in sin ; or it is blindness, which in whole or in part is wilful ; or it is giddiness, and levity, and contemptuousness in a subject which admits not of these dispositions towards it, without great offence to God.

A serious man hardly ever passes a day, never a

week, without meeting with some warning to his conscience: without something to call to his mind his situation with respect to his future life. And these warnings, as perhaps was proper, come the thicker upon us, the farther we advance in life. The dropping into the grave of our acquaintance, and friends, and relations, what can be better calculated, not to prove (for we do not want the point to be proved), but to possess our hearts with a complete sense and perception of the extreme peril and hourly precariousness of our condition; namely, to teach this momentous lesson, that when we preach to you concerning heaven and hell, we are not preaching concerning things at a distance, things remote, things long before they come to pass; but concerning things near, soon to be decided, in a very short time to be fixed one way or the other! This is a truth of which we are warned by the course of mortality; yet, with this truth confessed, with these warnings before us, we venture upon sin. But it will be said, that the events which ought to warn us are out of our mind at the time. But this is not so. Were it that these things came to pass in the wide world only at large, it might be that we should seldom hear of them, or soon forget them. But the events take place where we ourselves are; within our own doors; in our own families; amongst those with whom we have the most constant correspondence, the closest intimacy, the strictest connexion. It is impossible to say that such events can be out of our mind; nor is it the fact. The fact is, that, knowing them, we act in defiance of them: which is neglecting warnings in the worst sense possible. It aggravates the daringness; it aggravates the desperation of sin: but it is so nevertheless. Supposing these

warnings to be sent by Providence, or that we believe, and have reason to believe, and ought to believe, that they are so sent, then the aggravation is very great.

We have warnings of every kind. Even youth itself is continually warned, that there is no reliance to be placed, either on strength or constitution or early age : that, if they count upon life as a thing to be reckoned secure for a considerable number of years, they calculate most falsely : and if they act upon this calculation, by allowing themselves in the vices which are incidental to their years, under a notion that it will be long before they shall have to answer for them, and before that time come they shall have abundant season for repenting and amending : if they suffer such arguments to enter into their minds, and act upon them, then are they guilty of neglecting God in his warnings. They not only err in point of just reasoning, but they neglect the warnings which God has expressly set before them. Or, if they take upon themselves to consider religion as a thing not made or calculated for them ; as much too serious for their years ; as made and intended for the old and the dying ; at least as what is unnecessary to be entered upon at present, as what may be postponed to a more suitable time of life : whenever they think thus, they think very presumptuously. They are justly chargeable with neglecting warnings. And what is the event ? These postponers never enter upon religion at all, in earnest or effectually. That is the end and event of the matter. To account for this, shall we say, that they have so offended God by neglecting his warnings, as to have forfeited his grace ? Certainly we may say that this is not the method of obtaining his grace, and that his grace is necessary to our conversion. Neglecting warnings is not the way to obtain God's

grace : and God's grace is necessary to conversion. The young, I repeat again, want not warnings. Is it new ? is it unheard of ? is it not, on the contrary, the intelligence of every week, the experience of every neighbourhood, that young men and young women are cut off ? Man is, in every sense, a flower of the field. The flower is liable to be cut down in its bloom and perfection, as well as in its withering and its decays. So is man : and one probable cause of this ordination of Providence is, that no one of any age may be so confident of life as to allow himself to transgress God's laws ; that all of every age may live in constant awe of their Maker.

I do admit, that warnings come the thicker upon us, as we grow old. We have more admonitions both in our remembrances, and in our observations, and of more kinds. A man who has passed a long life has to remember preservations from danger, which ought to inspire him both with thankfulness and caution. Yet I fear we are very deficient in both these qualities. We call our preservations escapes, not preservations ; and so we feel no thankfulness for them : nor do we turn them into religious cautions. When God preserved us, he meant to warn us. When such instances, therefore, have no effect upon our minds, we are guilty before God of neglecting his warnings. Most especially if we have occasion to add to all other reasons for gratitude this momentous question, What would have become of us, what would have been our condition, if we had perished in the danger by which our lives were threatened ? The parable of the fig-tree (Luke, xiii. verse 6), is a most apt Scripture for persons under the circumstances we have described. When the Lord had said, " cut it down : why cumbereth it the ground ?"

he was entreated to try it one year longer ; and then, if it proved not fruitful, to cut it down. Christ himself there makes the application twice over (verses 3d and 5th), “ except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” If the present, or if the then, state of our conscience and of our souls call up this reflection, then are we very guilty indeed, if such preservations leave no religious impression upon us : or if we suffer the temporary impression to pass off without producing in us a change for the better.

Infirmities, whether they be of health, or of age, decay, and weakness, are warnings. And it has been asked, with some degree of wonder, why they make so little impression as they do ? One chief reason is this : they who have waited for warnings of this kind before they would be converted, have generally waited until they are become hardened in sin. Their habits are fixed. Their character has taken its shape and form. Their disposition is thoroughly infected and invested with sin. When it is come to this case, it is difficult for any call to be heard ; for any warning to operate. It is difficult ; but “ with God all things are possible.” If there be the will and the sincere endeavour to reform, the grace of God can give the power. Although, therefore, they who wait for the advances of age, the perception of decay, the probable approach of death, before they turn themselves seriously to religion, have waited much too long, have neglected and despised, and defied many solemn warnings in the course of their lives ; have waited indeed till it be next to impossible that they turn at all from their former ways : yet this is not a reason why they should continue in neglect of the warnings which now press upon them, and which at length they begin to perceive ; but just the contrary.

The effort is greater, but the necessity is greater. It is their last hope, and their last trial. I put the case of a man grown old in sin. If the warnings of old age bring him round to religion, happy is that man in his old age, above any thing he was in any other part of his life. But if these warnings do not affect him, there is nothing left in this world which will. We are not to set limits to God's grace, operating according to his good pleasure; but we say there is nothing *in this world*; there is nothing in the course of nature, and the order of human affairs, which will affect him, if the feelings of age do not. I put the case of a man grown old in sin, and, though old, continuing the practice of sin: that, it is said, in the full latitude of the expression, describes a worse case than is commonly met with. Would to God that the case was more rare than it is! But allowing it to be unusual in the utmost extent of the terms; in a certain considerable degree the description applies to many old persons. Many feel in their hearts, that the words "grown old in sin," belong to them in some sense which is very formidable. They feel some dross and defilement to be yet purged away; some deep corruption to be yet eradicated, some virtue or other to be yet even learnt, yet acquired, or yet, however, to be brought nearer to what it ought to be, than it has hitherto been brought. Now, if the warnings of age taught us nothing else, they might teach us this: that if these things are to be done, they must be done soon; they must be set about forthwith, in good earnest, and with strong resolution. The work is most momentous; the time is short. The day is far spent: the evening is come on: the night is at hand.

Lastly; I conceive that this discourse points out the true and only way of making old age comfortable; and

that is, by making it the means of religious improvement. Let a man be beset by ever so many bodily complaints, bowed down by ever so many infirmities; if he find his soul grown and growing better, his seriousness increased, his obedience more regular and more exact, his inward principles and dispositions improved from what they were formerly, and continuing to improve; that man hath a fountain of comfort and consolation springing up within him. Infirmities, which have this effect, are infinitely better than strength and health themselves: though these, considered independently of their consequences, be justly esteemed the greatest of all blessings, and of all gifts. The old age of a virtuous man admits of a different and of a most consoling description.

It is this property of old age, namely, that its proper and most rational comfort consists in the consciousness of spiritual amendment. A very pious writer gives the following representation of this stage of human life, when employed and occupied as it ought to be, and when life has been drawn to its close by a course of virtue and religion: "To the intelligent and virtuous," says our author, "old age presents a scene of tranquil enjoyments, of obedient appetites, of well regulated affections, of maturity in knowledge, and of calm preparation for immortality. In this serene and dignified state, placed, as it were, on the confines of two worlds, the mind of a good man reviews what is passed with the complacency of an approving conscience, and looks forward with humble confidence in the mercy of God, and with devout aspirations towards his eternal and ever increasing favour."

## V.

## THIS LIFE A STATE OF PROBATION.

## PSALM CXIX. 71.

*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.*

OF the various views under which human life has been considered, no one seems so reasonable as that which regards it as a state of probation; meaning, by a state of probation, a state calculated for trying us, and calculated for improving us. A state of complete enjoyment and happiness it certainly is not. The hopes, the spirits, and the inexperience of young men and women are apt, and very willing, to see it in this light. To them life is full of entertainment: their relish is high, their expectations unbounded. For a very few years it is possible, and I think barely possible, that they may go on without check or interruption; but they will be cured of this delusion. Pain and sorrow, disease and infirmity, accident and disappointment, losses and distress, will soon meet them in their acquaintance, their families, or their persons. The hard-hearted for their own, the tender for others' woe, will always find and feel, enough at least to convince them, that this world was not made for a scene of perpetual gaiety or uninterrupted enjoyment.

Still less can we believe that it was made for a place of misery: so much otherwise, that misery is in no in-



stance the end or object of contrivance. We are surrounded by contrivance and design. A human body is a cluster of contrivances. So is the body of every animal ; so is the structure of every plant ; so is even the vilest weed that grows upon the road side. Contrivances, therefore, infinite in number, infinite also in variety, are all directed to beneficial purposes, and, in a vast plurality of instances, execute their purpose. In our own bodies only reflect how many thousand things must go right for us to be an hour at ease. Yet at all times multitudes are so ; and are so without being sensible how great a thing it is. Too much, or too little of sensibility, or of action, in any one of the almost numberless organs, or of any part of the numberless organs, by which life is sustained, may be productive of extreme anguish, or of lasting infirmity. A particle, smaller than an atom in a sunbeam, may, in a wrong place, be the occasion of the loss of limbs, of senses, or of life. Yet under all this continual jeopardy, this momentary liability to danger and disorder, we are preserved. It is not possible, therefore, that this state could be designed as a state of misery, because the great tendency of the designs which we see in the universe, is to counteract, to prevent, to guard against it. We know enough of nature to be assured, that misery universal, irremediable, inexhaustible misery, was in the Creator's power, if he had willed it. Forasmuch therefore as the result is so much otherwise, we are certain that no such purpose dwelt in the divine mind.

But since, amidst much happiness, and amidst contrivances *for* happiness, so far as we can judge (and of many we can judge), misery, and very considerable portions of it do exist, it becomes a natural inquiry, to what end this mixture of good and evil is properly

adapted. And I think the Scriptures place before us, not only the true (for, if we believe the Scriptures, we must believe it to be *that*), but the most rational and satisfactory answer which can be given to the inquiry ; namely, that it is intended for a state of trial and probation. For it appears to me capable of proof, both that no state but one, which contained in it an admixture of good and evil, would be suited to this purpose ; and also that our present state, as well in its general plan as in its particular properties, serves this purpose with peculiar propriety.

A state, totally incapable of misery, could not be a state of probation. It would not be a state in which virtue or vice could even be exercised at all ; I mean that large class of virtues and vices, which we comprehend under the name of social qualities. The existence of these depends upon the existence of misery, as well as of happiness in the world, and of different degrees of both : because their very nature and difference consists in promoting or preventing, in augmenting or diminishing, in causing, aggravating, or relieving the wants, sufferings, and distresses of our fellow-creatures. Compassion, charity, humanity, benevolence, nor even justice, could have any place in the world, if there were not human conditions to excite them ; objects and sufferings upon which they might operate ; misery, as well as happiness, which might be affected by them.

Nor would, in my opinion, the purposes of trial be sufficiently provided for, by a state in which happiness and misery regularly followed virtue and vice : I mean, in which there was no happiness but what was merited by virtue, no misery but what was brought on by vice. Such a state would be a state of retribution, not a state of probation. It may be our state hereafter ; it may

be a better state, but it is not a state of probation; it is not the state through which it is fitting we should pass before we enter into the other. For when we speak of a state of probation, we speak of a state in which the character may both be put to the proof, and also its good qualities be confirmed and strengthened, if not formed and produced, by having occasions presented in which they may be called forth and required. Now, beside that the social qualities which have been mentioned would be very limited in their exercise, if there was no evil in the world but what was plainly a punishment (for though we might pity, and even that would be greatly checked, we could not actually succour or relieve, without disturbing the execution, or arresting, as it were, the hand of justice); beside this difficulty, there is another class of most important duties which would be in a great measure excluded. They are the severest, the sublimest, perhaps the most meritorious, of which we are capable: I mean patience and composure under distress, pain, and affliction; a steadfast keeping up of our confidence in God, and our dependence upon his final goodness, even at the time that every thing present is discouraging and adverse; and, what is no less difficult to retain, a cordial desire for the happiness and comfort of others, even then, when we are deprived of our own. I say, that the possession of this temper is almost the perfection of our nature. But it is then only possessed, when it is put to the trial: tried at all it could not have been in a life made up only of pleasure and gratification. Few things are easier than to perceive, to feel, to acknowledge, to extol the goodness of God, the bounty of Providence, the beauties of nature, when all things go well; when

our health, our spirits, our circumstances, conspire to fill our hearts with gladness, and our tongues with praise. This is easy : this is delightful. None but they who are sunk in sensuality, sottishness, and stupefaction, or whose understandings are dissipated by frivolous pursuits ; none but the most giddy and insensible can be destitute of these sentiments. But this is not the trial, or the proof. It is in the chambers of sickness ; under the stroke of affliction ; amidst the pinchings of want, the groans of pain, the pressures of infirmity ; in grief, in misfortune ; through gloom and horror, that it will be seen whether we hold fast our hope, our confidence, our trust in God ; whether this hope and confidence be able to produce in us resignation, acquiescence, and submission. And as those dispositions, which perhaps form the comparative perfection of our moral nature, could not have been exercised in a world of unmixed gratification, so neither would they have found their proper office or object in a state of strict and evident retribution ; that is, in which we had no sufferings to submit to, but what were evidently and manifestly the punishment of our sins. A mere submission to punishment, evidently and plainly such, would not have constituted, at least would very imperfectly have constituted, the disposition which we speak of, the true resignation of a Christian.

It seems, therefore, to be argued with great probability, from the general economy of things around us, that our present state was meant for a state of probation : because positively it contains that admixture of good and evil which ought to be found in such a state to make it answer its purpose, the production, exercise, and improvement of virtue : and because negatively it could not be intended either for a state of absolute hap-

piness, or a state of absolute misery, neither of which it is.

We may now also observe in what manner many of the evils of life are adjusted to this particular end, and how also they are contrived to soften and alleviate themselves and one another. — It will be enough at present, if I can point out how far this is the case in the two instances, which, of all others, the most nearly and seriously affect us, death and disease. The events of life and death are so disposed, as to beget, in all reflecting minds, a constant watchfulness. “What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch :” Hold yourselves in a constant state of preparation : “Be ready, for ye know not when your Lord cometh.” Had there been assigned to our lives a certain age or period, to which all, or almost all, were sure of arriving ; in the younger part, that is to say, in nine-tenths of the whole of mankind, there would have been such an absolute security as would have produced, it is much to be feared, the utmost neglect of duty, of religion, of God, of themselves ; whilst the remaining part would have been too much overcome with the certainty of their fate, would have too much resembled the condition of those who have before their eyes a fixed and appointed day of execution. The same consequence would have ensued if death had followed any known rule whatever. It would have produced security in one part of the species, and despair in another. The first would have been in the highest degree dangerous to the character ; the second insupportable to the spirits. The same observation we are entitled to repeat concerning the two cases of sudden death, and of death brought on by long disease. If sudden deaths never occurred, those who found themselves free from disease would be in perfect

safety: they would regard themselves as out of the reach of danger. With all apprehensions, they would lose all seriousness and all restraint: and those persons who the most wanted to be checked, and to be awakened to a sense of the consequences of virtue and vice, the strong, the healthy, and the active, would be without the greatest of all checks, that which arises from the constant liability of being called to judgement. If there were no sudden deaths, the most awful warning which mortals can receive would be lost; that consideration which carries the mind the most forcibly to religion, which convinces us that it is indeed our proper concern, namely, the precariousness of our present condition, would be done away. On the other hand, if sudden deaths were too frequent, human life might become too perilous: there would not be stability and dependence either upon our own lives, or the lives of those with whom we are connected, sufficient to carry on the regular offices of human society. In this respect, therefore, we see much wisdom. Supposing death to be appointed as the mode (and some mode there must be) of passing from one state of existence to another, the manner in which it is made to happen conduces to the purposes of warning and admonition, without overthrowing the conduct of human affairs.

Of sickness, the moral and religious use will be acknowledged, and, in fact, is acknowledged, by all who have experienced it; and they who have not experienced it, own it to be a fit state for the meditations, the offices, of religion. The fault, I fear, is, that we refer ourselves too much to that state. We think of these things too little in health, because we shall necessarily have to think of them when we come to die. This is a great fault: but then it confesses, what is un-

doubtedly true, that the sick bed and the death bed shall inevitably force these reflections upon us. In that it is right, though it be wrong in waiting till the season of actual virtue and actual reformation be past, and when, consequently, the sick bed and the death bed can bring nothing but uncertainty, horror, and despair. But my present subject leads me to consider sickness, not so much as a preparation for death, as the trial of our virtue; of virtues the most severe, the most arduous, perhaps the best pleasing to Almighty God; namely, trust and confidence in him, under circumstances of discouragement and perplexity. To lift up the feeble hands, and the languid eye: to draw and turn with holy hope to our Creator, when every comfort forsakes us, and every help fails; to feel and find in him, in his mercies, his promises, in the works of his providence, and still more in his word, and in the revelation of his designs by Jesus Christ, such rest and consolation to the soul, as to stifle our complaints, and pacify our murmurs; to beget in our hearts tranquillity and confidence; in the place of terror and consternation, and this, with simplicity and sincerity, without having, or wishing to have, one human witness to observe or know it, is such a test and trial of faith and hope, of patience and devotion, as cannot fail of being in a very high degree well-pleasing to the Author of our nature, the guardian, the inspector, and the rewarder of our virtues. It is true in this instance, as it is true in all, that whatever tries our virtue, strengthens and improves it. Virtue comes out of the fire purer and brighter than it went into it. Many virtues are not only proved, but produced by trials: they have properly no existence without them. "We glory," saith St. Paul,

“ in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.”

But of sickness we may likewise remark, how wonderfully it reconciles us to the thoughts, the expectation, and the approach of death ; and how this becomes, in the hand of Providence, an example of one evil being made to correct another. Without question, the difference is wide between the sensations of a person who is condemned to die by violence, and of one who is brought gradually to his end by the progress of disease ; and this difference sickness produces. To the Christian, whose mind is not harrowed up by the memory of unrepented guilt, the calm and gentle approach of his dissolution has nothing in it terrible. In that sacred custody, in which they that sleep in Christ will be preserved, he sees a rest from pain and weariness, from trouble and distress. Gradually withdrawn from the cares and interests of the world ; more and more weaned from the pleasures of the body, and feeling the weight and pressure of its infirmities, he may be brought almost to desire, with St. Paul, to be no longer absent from Christ ; knowing, as he did, and as he assures us, 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.”



## VI.

OUR DEAREST INTERESTS TO BE PARTED WITH  
RATHER THAN ENDANGER OUR DUTY.

MATTHEW V. 29.

*If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

I SHALL first set about to explain these words, which may seem a little difficult to understand ; then consider the advice they contain ; and lastly, the reason that is given for it.

Now the word “ offend,” in this expression, “ If thy right eye offend thee,” signifies corrupt, seduce, tempt to sin. If thy right eye *tempt thee to sin*, pluck it out ; otherwise what has the eye to do with being cast into hell, or how should the plucking it out save the whole body from being cast into hell ? I suppose likewise, that the right eye in this verse, and the right hand in the verse following, is said of any thing we set our hearts upon, or take delight in. The right eye and the right hand are mentioned as being most dear to us, most precious for their use and strength, and so properly represent to us some of our pleasures, habits, or gains, which become almost as dear to us, and as difficult to part with. The body being cast into hell, signifies our being condemned at the day of judgement

to the punishment of hell ; so that our Saviour's admonition is this, that whatever in any manner draws us into vice, however unwilling we be to part with it, must nevertheless be given up and quitted, rather than suffer it to endanger our salvation. A rule perfectly reasonable in itself, as any man can see and own upon the bare mention of it : a rule it is of great consequence to be observed, and yet in fact and in practice very little, if at all, regarded ; for where shall you find a man sacrificing an advantage or pleasure, any profit or amusement he is engaged in, to his virtue ? Men have a different way of satisfying themselves. Provided a pleasure, situation, or profession be not in itself, strictly speaking, criminal, whatever crimes it may lead to, or tempt them to, they *venture* upon it ; they see no reason for avoiding it, and when they are engaged in it, they find the comfort in vice so strong, that there is no power in them to withstand it ; they soon begin to hope that God, who knoweth whereof we are made, will make allowance for their frailties and infirmities, and will not require more purity and exactness than such a man in such a situation is capable of.

Now our Lord's rule would have taught them another doctrine, and a different train of arguing. It does not suppose that what we are required to give up is of itself sinful ; but provided it draw or lead us into temptation or into sin, the text tells us, *that* is reason enough for avoiding or resigning it, nay, insists in effect upon our parting with it ; for without so doing, we shall not find the strength or violence of the temptation it brings, an excuse for the vice it tempts us into. The right eye and the right hand are of their own nature to be retained, are what God has given us, and must be supposed to mean, what is in its own na-

ture allowable and innocent ; yet when this right hand and eye offend, that is, seduce, corrupt, tempt us to sin, they are nevertheless to be cut off and plucked out, otherwise the whole body will be cast into hell. It will not serve us to plead that we were led away by that which was most dear and natural to us, and, in other respects, most beneficial and advantageous. We were bound, our Saviour tells us, to part with it, whatever it cost us. So that on all occasions, before we urge or expect to avail ourselves of this plea, of this strength of temptation, it behoves us to weigh well, whether there be no way *of avoiding* it, if we cannot resist it ; if there be any such way, we are thus to avoid it, cost it what it will, be it ever so inconvenient or mortifying so to do. This is what our Saviour in the text commands us.

This much may serve to explain our Saviour's direction. As to the application of it, every one must apply it for himself, to his own particular case ; and there are few that have not, one way or other, a case to apply it to. By way of making what has been said more plain, let one or two examples be taken to show the force and use of the precept before us.

Suppose now in our calling, or business, or profession, there be some underhand, unlawful gains or practices, about which we cannot satisfy ourselves, but which we have ever been accustomed to, and which, moreover, are so common in our way of life and occupation, that we cannot carry it on to any tolerable advantage without them, what is to be done ? If we will believe our Saviour, and go by *his* rule, the advantage we gain by these practices, be it ever so considerable, and the calling too, if it be not worth the following without these advantages, must be given up. Here is a right

eye to be plucked out, and a right hand to be cut off, and it matters not what we lose, or how loath we are to lose it. The way of life may not be unlawful in itself, nor reckoned so; yet if it have certain temptations to dishonesty, and if we, from habit, education, or any other reason, cannot withstand them, nothing remains but to get free from them, and betake ourselves to a course of life, if not so beneficial, more innocent and safe.

Or, secondly, it may happen that the situation we are placed in exposes us too much to the vices of drunkenness or debauchery; that is, affords temptations and opportunities, more than, with our propensities to those vices, we can withstand, or actually do withstand. The same rule obtains in this case as in the last; that is, we must not attempt to set up these temptations, or the violence of them, as an excuse for our compliance, so long as we had it in our power to get out of the way of such temptations. It is to be feared that many, instead of avoiding or abandoning a situation for the reasons mentioned, on the contrary seek and court such on this very account, in order to find the gratification which their vices and follies present to them: so opposite is the practice of mankind and their duty.

Another thing, which it is oftentimes necessary to give up on this ground, and what is given up with more pain and unwillingness than almost any thing, is company, and sometimes friendships. We do not choose our companions or friends always for their virtues; nor, to say the truth, are men always agreeable in proportion to their virtues: so that it shall happen, that a very licentious unprincipled person may have found such means to delight and entertain us, to insinuate himself

into our affections, that we may perceive very great pleasure in his society. Now admitting it possible, that a man may preserve his own virtue uncorrupted by a course of intimacy with a profligate companion, it is but barely possible. This is what we remember St. Paul says, "Evil communications corrupt good manners. Be not deceived." Let friends, or gay associates, cry aloud; Eat and drink while we have life, for to-morrow we die: make use then of the time; for after we are dead, there is no more room for enjoyment—we become as we had never been born. Yet, says the Apostle, "Be not deceived." So here, whatever resolutions we may make, there are many unguarded seasons in a course of intimacy, when your friend will of course endeavour to bring you into some way of thinking and acting with himself; and you will find your horror and fear of vice decline and wear off by degrees, when it is made familiar to you in the example and conversation of your friend. Now if this be the case, and we shall find it so in fact, however we may reason about it, there seems to be nothing left for a man who pays a proper attention to his virtue, and to our rule in the text, but to renounce and break off all such acquaintance absolutely. This is hard and difficult, we say; but be it recollected, that Christ knew it to be so; for he takes his examples from things the most painful and severe. This instance, it is true, requires more than ordinary resolution, for we may have the censure of the world, as well as our own inclination to struggle with. But I can only say that they both are to be set at nought, when our duty and the salvation of our souls are at stake.

But we proceed to consider the reason our Saviour gives for this command. "It is profitable for thee

that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Every sound plan of religion, and consequently the plan of the Gospel, is only putting men in the best way of promoting their own happiness, and providing for their own interest. It is on our own account, for our own sakes, after all, that we are bound to perform the laws of our religion, because ourselves only will be the sufferers by the violation of them. For the present, possibly, we may have to undergo some mortification, or pain, or self-denial; and yet it is our real pleasure and happiness, upon the whole, that is aimed at by the prohibition. As we are obliged and willing to take a very bitter medicine, or suffer a very painful operation, not for the sake of tormenting ourselves for the present, but in order to amend our health for the future; so is the case with every thing we suffer, or every thing we give up on the score of religion: that is, it is with a view of being bettered and benefited by it at the conclusion. If we give up father, mother, and brother, and sister; or, as this expression further denotes, riches, and honour, and pleasures, and diversions, or any thing else we take delight in, it is to receive tenfold reward, and in the world to come life everlasting. The severest trials we are put upon, if we are to cut off our right hand or pluck out our right eye, (such is the instance before us,) it is that our whole body may not be cast into hell; it is to escape those punishments which will be, beyond all comparison, more grievous to be borne, than any thing we ever experienced. Certainly we *are* not, and possibly we *could* not have been made acquainted with the particular kind or state of happiness we are to enjoy, or the punishment we are to undergo, in the next world; but we may be sure it is in God's power to make them

both such as will far exceed any thing we can get or lose in this world, any pleasure that sin can give us, any pain that virtue costs us. This much is intimated, or rather plainly declared, by the words of the text, that what we shall suffer hereafter for our sins is as much beyond any thing we can suffer here by giving them up, as the destruction of the whole body is beyond the loss of a single limb. And then, surely, our Saviour had a right to charge us to suffer the one rather than suffer the other.

It is to be lamented that men cannot be brought to understand, that they are to act in the business of their religion only upon the same principles and grounds that they act upon in their own common concerns and transactions. A situation or pursuit, however pleasant or delightful at present, if we foresaw that it would lead to nothing but ruin and disgrace, we should quit most certainly in common prudence. In like manner, if we had made any advantages for the present, though apparently considerable; and if we observed that they were very uncertain advantages which the next day or even hour might take away, I suppose that we should prefer a smaller, but more regular return, which might be trusted to always. Now it is but this, and no more than this, that we are required to do by Christ's command. Sin, be it ever so pleasurable or ever so profitable, must not be long; its pleasures and its profits must end with our lives, generally much sooner: but who shall count, who shall say what or when will be the end of the misery it brings us to? If we gain the whole world and lose our own souls, you may remember who it is that hath said it profiteth nothing. Few, or rather, be it said, *none*, ever went through more for their religion than St. Paul; yet he could say, and he

had every reason to know, “ that his sufferings were not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed :” all the struggles, all the self-denial, all the pains we go through to preserve our virtue, will meet with, we may be assured, a proportionable reward, a far more exceeding weight of glory.

Upon the whole, then—to sum up the doctrine of the discourse,—if there be nothing in our business, condition, or manner of life, which tempts us to practise deceit, injustice, or any thing which we cannot reconcile to our consciences ; if it does not breed in us pride, covetousness, desire of worldly wealth, and the contempt of every thing beside ; if there be nothing in our way of life, company, or pleasures, which leads to drunkenness, revelling, or excess of any kind, we may think ourselves very happy, and have cause to be thankful. If there be any such occasions or temptations more than we can withstand, or in fact *do* withstand, it is the command of our Saviour—and the express command which none can alter—that we fly from them though it oblige us to suffer as much as the loss of a right hand or eye ; though we give up an advantage ever so great, or part with a pleasure we are ever so fond of.



## VII.

## THE TERRORS OF THE LORD.

MATT. XVI. 26.

*What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

THESE words ask a question, the most home to every man's concern of any that can possibly enter into his thoughts. What our Saviour meant to assert, though proposed to his hearers in the form of a question (which indeed was only a stronger and more affecting way of asserting it), is, that a man's soul, by which term is here meant his state after death, is so infinitely more important to him, so beyond and above any thing he can get, or any thing he can lose, any thing he can enjoy, or any thing he can suffer, on this side the grave, that nothing which the world offers can make up for the loss of it, or be a compensation when that is at stake. You say that this is very evident; I reply, that evident as it is, it is not thought of, it is not considered, it is not believed. The subject, therefore, is very proper to be set forth in those strong and plain terms which such a subject requires, for the purpose of obtaining for it some degree of that attention which each man's own deep interest in the event demands of him to give it.

There are two momentous ideas which are included in the expression, the loss of a man's soul; and these are the positive pain and sufferings which he will incur

after his death ; and the happiness and reward which he will forfeit. Upon both of these points we must go for information to the Scriptures. Nowhere else can we receive any. Now, as to the first point, which is, in other words, *the punishment of hell*, I do admit, that it is very difficult to handle this dreadful subject properly. And one cause, amongst others, of the difficulty is, that it is not for one poor sinner to denounce such appalling terrors, such tremendous consequences against another. Damnation is a word which lies not in the mouth of man, who is a worm, towards any of his fellow-creatures whatsoever : yet it is absolutely necessary that the threatenings of Almighty God be known and published. Therefore we begin by observing, that the accounts which the Scriptures contain of the punishment of hell are, for the most part, delivered in figurative or metaphorical terms, that is to say, in terms which represent things of which we have no notion, by a comparison with things of which we have a notion. Therefore take notice what those figures and metaphors are. They are of the most dreadful kind which words can express ; and, be they understood how they may, ever so figuratively, it is plain that they convey, and were intended to convey, ideas of horrible torment. They are such as these, “ being cast into hell, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched.” It is “ burning the chaff with unquenchable fire.” It is “ going into fire everlasting, which is prepared for the devil and his angels.” These are heart-appalling expressions ; and were undoubtedly intended by the person who used them (who was no other than our Lord Jesus Christ himself) to describe terrible endurings ; positive, actual pains of the most horrible kinds. I have said, that the punishment of hell is thus

represented to us in figurative speech. I now say, that, from the nature of things, it could hardly have been represented to us in any other. It is of the very nature of pain, that it cannot be known without being felt. It is impossible to give to any one an exact conception of it without his actually tasting it. Experience alone teaches its acuteness and intensity. For which reason, when it was necessary that the punishment of hell should be set forth in Scripture for our warning, and set forth to terrify us from our sins, it could only be done, as it has been done, by comparing it with sufferings, of which we can form a conception, and making use of terms drawn from these sufferings. When words less figurative, and more direct, but at the same time more general, are adopted, they are not less strong, otherwise than as they are more general. “Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” These are Saint Paul’s words. It is a short sentence, but enough to make the stoutest heart tremble; for, though it unfold no particulars, it clearly designates positive torment. The day of judgement itself, so far as it respects the wicked, is expressly called “a day of wrath.” The Lord Jesus, as to them, shall be revealed in flaming fire. How terrible a fate it must be to find ourselves at that day the objects of God’s wrath, the objects upon whom his threats and judgements against sin are now to be executed, the revelation of his righteous judgement and of his unerring truth to be displayed, may be conceived in some sort, by considering what stores of inexhaustible misery are always in his power. With our present constitutions, if we do but touch the smallest part of our bodies, if a nerve in many places goes wrong, what torture we endure! Let any man, who has felt, or rather whilst he

is feeling, the agony of some bodily torment, only reflect, what a condition that must be, which had to suffer this *continually*, which night and day was to undergo the same, without prospect of cessation or relief: and then ask, for what he would knowingly bring himself into this situation; what pleasure, what gain would be an inducement? Let him reflect also, how bitter, how grinding an aggravation of his sufferings, as well as of his guilt, it must be, that he has wilfully and forewarned brought all this upon himself. May it not be necessary, that God should manifest his truth by executing his threats? may it not be necessary, that he should at least testify his justice by placing a wide difference between the good and the bad? between virtue, which he loves, and vice, which he abhors? which difference must consist in the different state of happiness and of misery in which the good and bad are finally placed. And may we not be made deserved sacrifices to this dispensation?

Now if any one feel his heart struck with the terrors of the Lord, with the consideration of this dreadful subject, and with the declarations of Scripture relating thereto, which will all have their accomplishment; let him be entreated, let him be admonished, to hold the idea, tremendous as it is, fully in his view, till it has wrought its effect, that is, till it has prevailed with him to part with his sins; and then we assure him, that to alarm, fright, and horror, will succeed peace, and hope, and comfort, and joy in the Holy Ghost. There is another way of treating the matter, and that is, to shake off the idea if we can; to drown it in intemperance; to overpower it with worldly business; to fly from it in all directions, but mostly in that which carries us to hurrying, tumultuous diversions, to criminal in-

dulgences, or into gross sensuality. Now of this course of proceeding it is certain, that, if it lay the mind in any degree at ease in this life, it is at the expense of the inevitable destruction of our souls in the next; which is enough to say against it: but in truth it answers even its present purpose very imperfectly. It is a way of getting rid of the matter, with which even we ourselves are not satisfied. We are sensible that it is a false, treacherous, hollow way of acting towards our own souls. We have no trust in what we are doing. It leaves no peace, no hope, no comfort, no joy.

But to return to the direct subject of our discourse. The Scriptures uniformly represent the wicked as not only suffering positive misery, but also as having lost, by their wickedness, the happiness of heaven, and as being sensible of their loss. They are repeatedly described as *cast out*, or as *shut out*, into outer darkness; whilst the good are entering into the joy of their Lord. This imports a knowledge of their own exclusion. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man being in torments, is made to see Lazarus at rest. This teaches us, that the wicked will so far be informed of the state of the good, as to perceive and bewail, with unutterable anguish and regret, their own sad fate in being refused and rejected, when, had they acted differently, they would have been admitted to it. This is, strictly speaking, losing a man's soul: it is losing that happiness which his soul might have attained, and for which it was made. And here comes the bitter addition of their calamity, that, being lost, it cannot be recovered. The heaven we hear of in Scripture, and the hell we hear of in Scripture, are a heaven and a hell depending upon our behaviour in this life. So they are all along spoken of. "Indignation, wrath,

tribulation, and anguish upon every soul of man that *doeth evil*;" meaning evidently the evil done by him in this life; no other evil was in the apostle's thoughts. Or again, more expressly, "we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." "The things done in the body," are the things taken into the account.

Now, by the side of this immense consequence of saving or of losing our immortal souls, place any difference that the things of this life can make to us; place riches and poverty, grandeur and humility, success or misfortune; place, more especially, the difference between possessing and sacrificing an unlawful gratification; between compassing and renouncing an unjust purpose; making or giving up an unfair gain; in a word, between the pleasures and temptations of vice, and the self-denials of virtue; and what do they amount to? The objects themselves are nothing, when put in competition with heaven and hell. Were it true, which it is not, that real, solid, inward happiness was proportioned either to outward circumstances, or the indulgences of our appetites and passions; that the good things, as they are called, and pleasures of life were as satisfactory to the possessor, as they are, for the most part, deceitful and disappointing; still their duration is nothing. The oldest men, when they cast back their eyes on their past life, see it in a very narrow compass. It appears no more than a small interval cut out of eternal duration, both before and after it; when compared with that duration, as nothing. But we must add to this two other questions. Can life be counted upon to last to what is called old age? No man, who

observes the deaths that take place in his neighbourhood, or amongst his acquaintance, will so compute. Or, secondly, do the pleasures of sin last as long as our lives? We may answer, *never*: with the single dreadful exception of the sinner being cut off in his prime. Whoever looks for permanent happiness from the pleasures of sin will find himself miserably mistaken. They are short even compared with our short lives; subject to casualties and disasters without number; transitory, not only as the things of this world are transitory, but in a much greater degree. It will be said, however, that though this observation may be true of the pleasures of sin, yet an advantage gained by sin, that is, by unrighteous, unconscientious means, may, nevertheless, remain an advantage as long as we live. This may sometimes be the case; and such advantage may be so long enjoyed, if that can be enjoyed which has a fearful expectation and looking for of judgment annexed to it. But what is the term of that enjoyment compared with the sequel? It is a moment, the twinkling of an eye, compared with a day; an hour compared with a year; a single day with a long life. It is less than these: for all these comparisons are short of the truth. Well, therefore, doth our Saviour ask, “What doth a man profit if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” That world, when gained, he could not keep: nor, if he could, would it make him happy.

But our Saviour delivered his powerful admonition, not so much for his disciples to reason upon, as to carry into practice: that is, that his words might strike into their souls upon those occasions (which are but too many), when the business, the bustle, or the allurements of the world are in danger of shutting out futurity

from their thoughts. These are the times for calling to mind our Saviour's question. Whenever, therefore, we are driving on in the career of worldly prosperity; meeting with success after success; fortunate, rich, and flourishing; when every thing appears to thrive and smile around us; but *conscience*, in the mean time, little heeded and attended to; the justice, the integrity, the uprightness of our ways, and of our dealings, seldom weighed and scrutinized by us; religion very much, or entirely perhaps, out of the question with us; soothed and buoyed up with that self-applause, which success naturally begets; in this no very uncommon state of soul, it will be well if we hear our Saviour's voice asking us, what does all this prosperity signify? if it do not lead to heaven what is it worth? when the scene is shifted, if nothing but death and darkness remain behind? much more if God Almighty be all this while offended by our forgetfulness both of his mercies and his laws, our neglect of his service, our indevotion, our thoughtlessness, our disobedience, our love of the world to the exclusion of all consideration of Him; if we be assured, and if, in reality, it be the case, that this displeasure shall infallibly overtake us at our death;—what, in truth, under all this appearance of advantage, are we getting or gaining? The world may amuse us with names and terms of felicitation, with their praises or their envy; but wherein are we the better in the amount and result of substantial happiness? We have got our aim, and what is the end of it? Death is preparing to level us with the poorest of mankind; and after that, a fearful looking for and expectation of judgement; no well-founded hopes of happiness beyond the grave; and we drawing sensibly nearer to that grave every year. This is the sum of the account. Or,



which is another case no less apposite to our present argument, is it some sensual pleasure that tempts us, some wicked enjoyment that has taken such hold of our passions, that we are ready to rush upon it, whatever be the consequence? If we gain our object, if we possess our wishes, we are happy: but what if we lose our own souls? What if we find ourselves condemned men, for hardily venturing upon crimes, which will, and which we were forewarned that they would, render us the objects of God's final indignation and displeasure? Will any gratifications which sin affords be a recompense or a consolation? Are they so even for the diseases, shame, and ruin, which they often bring upon men in this world? Ask those who are so ruined or so diseased. How much less, then, for the gnawings of that worm which dieth not; the burnings of that fire which will not be quenched! In hopeless torment will it assuage our sufferings, or mitigate the bitterness of our self-accusation, to know that we have brought ourselves into this state for some transient pleasure, which is gone, lost, and perished for ever? Oh that we had thought of these things before, as we think of them now! that we had not been infidels, as touching our Lord's declaration! that we had believed in him; and that, believing that he had a perfect knowledge of the future fate of mankind, and of the truth of what he taught, we had listened in time to his admonition!

Universally the true occasion for remembering and applying the passage of Scripture before us is, when we are deliberating concerning the conduct we are to pursue, in the contests which arise between temptation and duty, between the flesh and the world, or between both united and our own souls. Be the temptation what it will, either in kind or strength, this is the

thought to be ever set against it, that if we give way, we give way in exchange for our own souls ; that the perdition of the soul is set forth in Scripture in terms most tremendous, but not more tremendous than true ; that the sinner, the man involved in unrepented, unforsaken sins, can never know how soon he may be reduced to this state.

## VIII.

## THE LOVE OF GOD.

1 JOHN IV. 19.

*We love him, because he first loved us.*

RELIGION may, and it can hardly, I think, be questioned but that it sometimes does, spring from terror, from grief, from pain, from punishment, from the approach of death : and, provided it be sincere, that is, such as either actually produces, or as would produce, a change of life, it is genuine religion, notwithstanding the bitterness, the violence, or, if it must be so called, the baseness and unworthiness, of the motive from which it proceeds. We are not to narrow the promises of God : and acceptance is promised to sincere penitence, without specifying the cause from which it originates, or confining it to one origin more than another. There are, however, higher, and worthier, and better motives, from which religion may begin in the heart ; and on this account especially are they to be deemed better motives, that the religion which issues from them has a greater probability of being sincere. I repeat again, that sincere religion, from any motive, will be effectual ; but there is a great deal of difference in the probability of its being sincere, according to the different cause in the mind from which it sets out.

The purest motive of human action is the love of God. There may be motives stronger and more ge-

neral, but none so pure. The religion, the virtue, which owes its birth in the soul to this motive, is always genuine religion, always true virtue. Indeed, speaking of religion, I should call the love of God not so much the ground-work of religion, as religion itself. So far as religion is disposition, it is religion itself. But though of religion it be more than the ground-work, yet, being a disposition of mind, like other dispositions, it is the ground-work of action. Well might our blessed Saviour preach up, as he did, the love of God. It is the source of every thing which is good in man. I do not mean that it is the only source, or that goodness can proceed from no other, but that of all principles of conduct it is the safest, the best, the truest, the highest. Perhaps it is peculiar to the Jewish and Christian dispensations (and, if it be, it is a peculiar excellency in them) to have formally and solemnly laid down this principle, as a ground of human action. I shall not deny, that elevated notions were entertained of the Deity by some wise and excellent Heathens: but even these did not, that I can find, so inculcate the love of that Deity, or so propose and state it to their followers, as to make it a governing, actuating principle of life amongst them. This did Moses, or rather God by the mouth of Moses, expressly, formally, solemnly. This did Christ, adopting, repeating, ratifying, what the law had already declared; and not only ratifying, but singling it out from the body of precepts which composed the old institution, and giving it a pre-eminence to every other.

Now this love, so important to our religious character, and, by its effect upon that, to our salvation, which is the end of religion; this love, I say, is to be engendered in the soul, not so much by hearing the

words of others, or by instruction from others, as by a secret and habitual contemplation of God Almighty's bounty, and by a constant referring of our enjoyments and our hopes to his goodness. This is in a great degree a matter of habit; and, like all good habits, particularly mental habits, is what every person must form in himself and for himself by endeavour and perseverance. In this great article, as well as in others which are less, every man must be the author to himself of his train of thinking, be it good or bad. I shall only observe, that when this habit, or, as some would call it, this turn and course of thought, is once happily generated, occasions will continually arise to minister to its exercise and augmentation. A night's rest, or a comfortable meal, will immediately direct our gratitude to God. The use of our limbs, the possession of our senses, every degree of health, every hour of ease, every sort of satisfaction, which we enjoy, will carry our thoughts to the same object. But if our enjoyments raise our affections, still more will our hopes do the same; and, most of all beyond comparison, those hopes which religion inspires. Think of man, and think of heaven; think what he is, and what it is in his power hereafter to become; think of this again and again; and it is impossible, but that the prospect of being so rewarded for our poor labours, so resting from our past troubles, so forgiven for our sins repented of, must fill our hearts with the deepest thankfulness: and thankfulness is love. Towards the author of an obligation which is infinite, thankfulness is the only species of love that can exist.

But, moreover, the love of God is specifically represented in Scripture as one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The love of God shed abroad in the heart is

described as one of the works of the Spirit upon the souls of Christians. Now whatever is represented in Scripture to be the gift of the Spirit, is to be sought for by earnest and peculiar prayer. That is the practical use to be made of, and the practical consequence to be drawn from such representations; the very purpose probably for which they were delivered; the mere point of doctrine being seldom that in which Scripture declarations rest. Let us not fail therefore; let us not cease to entreat the Father of mercies, that the love of him may be shed abroad in our hearts continually. It is one of the things in which we are sure that our prayers are right in their object; in which also we may humbly hope, that, unless obstructed by ourselves, they will not be in vain.

Nor let it be said that this aid is superfluous, forasmuch as nature herself has provided sufficient means for exciting this sentiment. This is true with respect to those who are in the full, or in any thing near the full, enjoyment of the gifts of nature. With them I do allow that nothing but a criminal stupefaction can hinder the love of God from being felt. But this is not the case with all; nor with any at all times. Afflictions, sickness, poverty, the maladies and misfortunes of life, will interrupt and damp this sensation, so far as it depends upon our actual experience of God's bounty. I do not say that the evils of life *ought* to have this effect: taken in connexion with a future state, they certainly ought not; because, when viewed in that relation, afflictions and calamities become trials, warnings, chastisements, and when sanctified by their fruits, when made the means of weaning us from the world, bringing us nearer to God, and of purging away that dross and defilement which our souls have contracted,

are in truth amongst the first of favours and of blessings. Nevertheless, as an apostle himself confesses, they are for a season grievous ; they are disheartening ; and they are too apt to produce an unfavourable effect upon our gratitude. Wherefore it is upon these occasions most especially, that the aid of God's Spirit may be required to maintain in our souls the love of God.

Let those, therefore, who are conscious to themselves that they have not the love of God within them as they ought to have it, endeavour to acquire and to increase this holy principle by seriousness of mind, by habitual meditation, by devout reading, devout conversation, devout society. These are all aids and helps towards inducing upon the mind this most desirable, nay, rather let me call it, this *blessed* frame and temper, and of fixing us in it : and forasmuch as it is declared in Scripture to be shed abroad in the heart by the Spirit of God, let us labour in our prayers for this best gift.

The next consideration upon the subject is, the fruit and effect of this disposition upon our lives. If it be asked how does the love of God operate in the production of virtuous conduct ; I shall answer, that it operates exactly in the same manner as affection towards a parent or gratitude towards a human benefactor operates, by stirring up a strong rebuke in the mind upon the thought of offending him. This lays a constant check upon our conduct. And this sensation is the necessary accompaniment of love ; it cannot, I think, be separated from it. But it is not the whole of its influence. Love and gratitude towards a benefactor not only fill us with remorse and with internal shame, whenever, by our wilful misbehaviour, we have given cause to that benefactor to be displeased with us ; but also prompt us with a desire upon all occasions of doing

what we believe he wills to be done, which, with respect to God, is in other words a desire to serve him. Now this is not only a restraint from vice, but an incitement to action. Instructed, as in Christian countries mankind generally are, in the main articles of human duty, this motive will seldom mislead them.

In one important respect the love of God excels all moral principles whatever; and that is, in its comprehensiveness. It reaches every action. It includes every duty. You cannot mention another moral principle which has this property in the same perfection. For instance, I can hardly name a better moral principle than humanity. It is a principle which every one commends, and justly: yet in this very article of comprehensiveness it is deficient, when compared with the love of God. It will prompt us undoubtedly to do kind, and generous, and compassionate things towards our friends, our acquaintance, our neighbours, and towards the poor. In our relation to, and in our intercourse with, mankind, especially with those who are dependent upon us, or over whom we have power, it will keep us from hardness, and rigour, and cruelty. In all this it is excellent. But it will not regulate us, as we require to be regulated, in another great branch of Christian duty, self-government and self-restraint. We may be exceedingly immoral and licentious in sinful indulgences without violating our principle of humanity; at least, without specifically violating it, and without being sensible of violating it. And this is by no means an uncommon case or character, namely, humanity of temper subsisting along with the most criminal licentiousness, and under a total want of personal self-government. The reason is, that the principle of conduct, though excellent as far as it goes, fails in com-



prehensiveness. Not so with the love of God. He, who is influenced by that, feels its influence in all parts of duty, upon every occasion of action, throughout the whole course of conduct.

The thing with most of us to be examined into and ascertained is, whether it indeed guide us at all; whether it be within us an efficient motive. I am far from taking upon me to say that it is essential to this principle to exclude all other principles of conduct, especially the dread of God's wrath and of its tremendous consequences; or that a person, who is deterred from evil actions by the dread of God's wrath, is obliged to conclude, that because he so much dreads God, he cannot love him. I will not venture to say any such thing. The Scripture, it is true, speaking of the love of God, hath said, that "perfect love casteth out fear;" but it hath not said that in the soul of man this love is ever perfect: what the Scripture hath thus declared of perfect love is no more than what is just. The love of God, were it perfect, that is to say, were it such as his nature, his relation, his bounty to us deserves; were it adequate either to its object or to our obligation; were it carried up as high as in a perfectly rational and virtuous soul it might be carried, would, I believe, absorb every other motive and every other principle of action whatever, even the fear of God amongst the rest. This principle, by its nature, *might* gain a complete possession of the heart and will, so that a person acting under its influence would take nothing else into the account, would reflect upon no other consequence or consideration whatever. Possibly, nay probably, this is the condition of some higher orders of spirits, and may become ours by future improvement, and in a more exalted state of existence: but it cannot, I am

afraid, be said to be our condition now. The love of God subsists in the heart of good men as a powerful principle of action : but it subsists there in conjunction with other principles, especially with the fear of him. All goodness is in a certain degree comparative ; and I think, that he may be called a good man in whom this principle dwells and operates at all. Wherefore to obtain ; when obtained, to cultivate, to cherish, to strengthen, to improve it, ought to form the most anxious concern of our spiritual life. He that loveth God keepeth his commandments ; but still the love of God is something more than keeping the commandments. For which reason we must acquire, what many, it is to be feared, have even yet to begin, a habit of contemplating God in the bounties and blessings of his creation. I think that religion can hardly subsist in the soul without this habit in some degree. But the greater part of us, such is the natural dulness of our souls, requires something more exciting and stimulating than the sensations which large and general views of nature or of providence produce ; something more particular to ourselves, and which more nearly touches our separate happiness. Now of examples of this kind, namely, of direct and special mercies towards himself, no one, who calls to mind the passages and providences of his life, can be destitute. There is one topic of gratitude falling under this head, which almost every man, who is tolerably faithful and exact in his self-recollections, will find in events upon which he has to look back ; and it is this : how often have we been spared, when we might have been overtaken and cut off in the midst of sin ! Of all the attributes of God, *forbearance*, perhaps, is that which we have most to acknowledge. We cannot want occasions to bring the remembrance

of it to our thoughts. Have there not been occasions, in which, ensnared in vice, we might have been detected and exposed; have been crushed by punishment or shame; have been irrecoverably ruined?—occasions in which we might have been suddenly stricken with death, in a state of soul the most unfit for it that was possible? That we were none of these, that we have been preserved from these dangers, that our sin was not our destruction, that instant judgement did not overtake us, is to be attributed to the long suffering of God. Supposing, what is undoubtedly true, that the secrets of our conduct were known to him at the time, it can be attributed to no other cause. Now this is a topic which can never fail to supply subjects of thankfulness, and of a species of thankfulness which must bear with direct force upon the regulation of our conduct. We were not destroyed when we might have been destroyed, and when we merited destruction; we have been preserved for further trial. This is, or ought to be, a touching reflection. How deeply, therefore, does it behove us not to trifle with the patience of God, not to abuse this enlarged space, this respited, protracted season of repentance, by plunging afresh into the same crimes, or other, or greater crimes? It shows that we are not to be wrought upon by mercy; that our gratitude is not moved; that things are wrong within us; that there is a deplorable void and chasm in our religious principles, the love of God not being present in our hearts.

But to return to that with which we set out; religion may spring from various principles, begin in various motives. It is not for us to narrow the promises of God which belong to sincere religion, from whatever cause it originates. But of these principles,

the purest, the surest, is the love of God, forasmuch as the religion which proceeds from it is sincere, constant, and universal. It will not, like fits of terror and alarm (which yet we do not despise) produce a temporary religion. The love of God is an *abiding* principle. It will not, like some other (and these also good and laudable principles of action, as far as they go), produce a partial religion. It is *co-extensive* with all our obligations. Practical Christianity may be comprised in three words; *devotion, self-government, and benevolence*. The love of God in the heart is a fountain, from which these three streams of virtue will not fail to issue. The love of God also is a guard against error in conduct, because it is a guard against those evil influences which mislead the understanding in moral questions. In some measure, it supplies the place of every rule. He who has it truly within him, has little to learn. Look steadfastly to the will of God, which he who loves God necessarily does; practise what you believe to be well pleasing to him; leave off what you believe to be displeasing to him; cherish, confirm, strengthen, the principle itself which sustains this course of external conduct, and you will not want many lessons; you need not listen to any other monitor.

## IX.

SERIOUSNESS IN RELIGION INDISPENSABLE  
ABOVE ALL OTHER DISPOSITIONS.

1 PETER IV. 7.

— *Be ye, therefore, sober, and watch unto prayer.*

THE first requisite in religion is seriousness. No impression can be made without it. An orderly life, so far as others are able to observe us, is now and then produced by prudential motives, or by dint of habit; but without seriousness, there can be no religious principle at the bottom, no course of conduct flowing from religious motives; in a word, there can be no religion. This cannot exist without seriousness upon the subject. Perhaps a teacher of religion has more difficulty in producing seriousness amongst his hearers, than in any other part of his office. Until he succeed in this, he loses his labour: and when once, from any cause whatever, a spirit of levity has taken hold of a mind, it is next to impossible to plant serious considerations in that mind. It is seldom to be done, except by some great shock or alarm, sufficient to make a radical change in the disposition; and which is God's own way of bringing about the business.

One might have expected that events so awful and tremendous, as death and judgement; that a question so deeply interesting, as whether we shall go to heaven or to hell, could in no possible case, and in no consti-

tution of mind whatever, fail of exciting the most serious apprehension and concern. But this is not so. In a thoughtless, a careless, a sensual world, many are always found who can resist, and who do resist, the force and importance of all these reflections; that is to say, they suffer nothing of the kind to enter into their thoughts. There are grown men and women, nay, even middle aged persons, who have not thought seriously about religion an hour, nor a quarter of an hour, in the whole course of their lives. This great object of human solicitude affects not them in any manner whatever.

It cannot be without its use to inquire into the causes of a levity of temper, which so effectually obstructs the admission of every religious influence, and which I should almost call unnatural.

Now there is a numerous class of mankind, who are wrought upon by nothing but what applies immediately to their *senses*; by what they see, or by what they feel; by pleasures or pains, or by the near prospect of pleasures and pains which they actually experience or actually observe. But it is the characteristic of religion to hold out to our consideration consequences which we do not perceive at the time. That is its very office and province. Therefore if men will restrict and confine all their regards and all their cares to things which they perceive with their outward senses; if they will yield up their understandings to their senses, both in what these senses are fitted to apprehend, and in what they are not fitted to apprehend, it is utterly impossible for religion to settle in their hearts, or for them to entertain any serious concern about the matter. But surely this conduct is completely irrational, and can lead to nothing but ruin. It proceeds upon the supposition, that there

is nothing above us, about us, or future, by which we can be affected, but the things which we see with our eyes or feel by our touch. All which is untrue. "The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead;" which means, that the order, contrivance, and design, displayed in the creation, prove with certainty, that there is more in nature than what we really see; and that amongst the invisible things of the universe, there is a Being, the author and origin of all this contrivance and design; and, by consequence, a being of stupendous power, and of wisdom and knowledge incomparably exalted above any wisdom or knowledge which we see in man; and that he stands in the same relation to us as the maker does to the thing made. The things which are seen are not made of the things which do appear. This is plain: and this argument is independent of Scripture and revelation. What further moral or religious consequences properly follow from it, is another question; but the proposition itself shows, that they who cannot, and they who will not, raise their minds above the mere information of their senses, are in a state of gross error as to the real truth of things, and are also in a state to which the faculties of man ought not to be degraded. A person of this sort may, with respect to religion, remain a child all his life. A child naturally has no concern but about the things which directly meet its senses; and the person we describe is in the same condition.

Again; there is a race of *giddy, thoughtless* men and women, of young men and young women more especially, who look no further than the next day, the next week, the next month; seldom or ever so far as the

next year. Present pleasure is every thing with them. The sports of the day, the amusements of the evening, entertainments and diversions, occupy all their concern; and so long as these can be supplied in succession, so long as they can go from one diversion to another, their minds remain in a state of perfect indifference to every thing except their pleasures. Now what chance has religion with such dispositions as these? Yet these dispositions, begun in early life, and favoured by circumstances, that is, by affluence and health, cleave to a man's character much beyond the period of life in which they might seem to be excusable. Excusable did I say? I ought rather to have said that they are contrary to reason and duty, in every condition and at every period of life. Even in youth, they are built upon falsehood and folly. Young persons, as well as old, find that things do actually come to pass. Evils and mischiefs, which they regarded as distant, as out of their view, as beyond the line and reach of their preparations or their concern, come, they find, to be actually felt. They find that nothing is done by slighting them beforehand; for, however neglected or despised, perhaps ridiculed and derided, they come not only to be things present, but the very things, and the only things, about which their anxiety is employed; become serious things indeed, as being the things which now make them wretched and miserable. Therefore a man must learn to be affected by events which appear to lie at some distance, before he will be seriously affected by religion.

Again; the general course of *education* is much against religious seriousness, even without those who conduct education foreseeing or intending any such effect. Many of us are brought up with this world set



before us, and nothing else. Whatever promotes this world's prosperity is praised; whatever hurts and obstructs and prejudices this world's prosperity is blamed: and there all praise and censure end. We see mankind about us in motion and action, but all these motions and actions directed to worldly objects. We hear their conversation, but it is all the same way. And this is what we see and hear from the first. The views which are continually placed before our eyes regard this life alone and its interests. Can it then be wondered at that an early worldly-mindedness is bred in our hearts, so strong as to shut out heavenly-mindedness entirely? In the contest which is always carrying on between this world and the next, it is no difficult thing to see what advantage this world has. One of the greatest of these advantages is, that it pre-occupies the mind: it gets the first hold and the first possession. Childhood and youth, left to themselves, are necessarily guided by sense: and sense is all on the side of this world. Meditation brings us to look towards a future life; but then meditation comes afterwards: it only comes when the mind is already filled and engaged and occupied, nay often crowded and surcharged with worldly ideas. It is not only, therefore, fair and right, but it is absolutely necessary, to give to religion all the advantage we can give it by dint of education; for all that can be done is too little to set religion upon an equality with its rival, and such a rival as the world. A creature which is to pass a small portion of its existence in one state, and that state to be preparatory to another, ought, no doubt, to have its attention constantly fixed upon its ulterior and permanent destination. And this would be so, if the question between them come fairly before the mind. We should listen to the Scriptures; we

should embrace religion; we should enter into every thing which had relation to the subject, with a concern and impression, even far more than the pursuits of this world, eager and ardent as they are, excite. But the question between religion and the world does not come fairly before us. What surrounds us is this world; what addresses our senses and our passions is this world; what is at hand, what is in contact with us, what acts upon us, what we act upon, is this world. Reason, faith, and hope, are the only principles to which religion applies, or possibly can apply: and it is reason, faith, and hope, striving with sense, striving with temptation, striving for things absent against things which are present. That religion, therefore, may not be quite excluded and overborne; may not quite sink under these powerful causes; every support ought to be given to it, which can be given by education, by instruction, and, above all, by the example of those, to whom young persons look up, acting with a view to a future life themselves.

Again; it is the nature of worldly business of all kinds, especially of much *hurry or over-employment, or over-anxiety in business*, to shut out and keep out religion from the mind. The question is, whether the state of mind which this cause produces, ought to be called a want of *seriousness* in religion. It becomes coldness and indifference towards religion; but is it properly a want of seriousness upon the subject? I think it is; and in this way. We are never serious upon any matter which we regard as trifling. This is impossible. And we are led to regard a thing as trifling, which engages no portion of our habitual thoughts, in comparison with what other things do.

We measure the importance of things, not by what,

or according to what they are in truth, but by and according to the space and room which they occupy in our minds. Now our business, our trade, our schemes, our pursuits, our gains, our losses, our fortunes, possessing so much of our minds, whether we regard the hours we expend in meditating upon them, or the earnestness with which we think about them ; and religion possessing so little share of our thought either in time or earnestness ; the consequence is, that worldly interest comes to be the serious thing with us, religion comparatively the trifle. Men of business are naturally serious ; but all their seriousness is absorbed by their business. In religion they are no more serious than the most giddy characters are ; than those characters are, which betray a levity in all things.

But further ; the world, even in its innocent pursuits and pleasures, has a tendency unfavourable to the religious sentiment. But were these all it had to contend with, the strong application which religion makes to the thoughts whenever we think of it at all, the strong interest which it presents to us, might enable it to overcome and prevail in the contest. But there is another adversary to oppose, much more formidable ; and that is *sensuality* ; an addiction to *sensual* pleasures. It is the flesh which lusteth against the spirit ; that is the war which is waged within us. So it is, no matter what may be the cause, that sensual indulgences, over and above their proper criminality, as sins, as offences against God's commands, have a specific effect upon the heart of man in destroying the religious principle within him ; or still more surely in preventing the formation of that principle. It either induces an open profaneness of conversation and behaviour, which scorns and contemns religion ; a kind of profligacy,

which rejects and sets at nought the whole thing ; or it brings upon the heart an averseness to the subject, a fixed dislike and reluctance to enter upon its concerns in any way whatever. That a resolved sinner should set himself against a religion which tolerates no sin, is not to be wondered at. He is against religion, because religion is against the course of life upon which he has entered, and which he does not feel himself willing to give up. But this is not the whole, nor is it the bottom of the matter. The effect we allude to is not so reasoning or argumentative as this. It is a specific effect upon the mind. The heart is rendered unsusceptible of religious impressions, incapable of a serious regard to religion. And this effect belongs to sins of sensuality more than to other sins. It is a consequence which almost universally follows from them.

Again ; the want of due seriousness in religion is almost sure to be the consequence of the absence or disuse of religious ordinances and exercises. I use two terms ; *absence* and *disuse*. Some have never attended upon any religious ordinance, or practised any religious exercises, since the time they were born ; some a very few times in their lives. With these it is the *absence* of religious ordinances and exercises. There are others (and many we fear of this description), who, whilst under the guidance of their parents, have frequented religious ordinances, and been trained up to religious exercises, but who, when they came into more public life, and to be their own masters, and to mix in the pleasures of the world, or engage themselves in its business and pursuits, have forsaken these duties in whole or in a great degree. With these it is the *disuse* of religious ordinances and exercises. But I must also explain what I mean by *religious ordinances* and *exerc-*

*cises.* By *religious ordinances* I mean the being instructed in our catechism in our youth ; attending upon public worship at church ; the keeping holy the Lord's day regularly and most particularly, together with a few other days in the year, by which some very principal events and passages of the Christian history are commemorated ; and at its proper season the more solemn office of receiving the Lord's supper. These are so many rites and ordinances of Christianity ; concerning all which it may be said, that with the greatest part of mankind, especially of that class of mankind which must, or does, give much of its time and care to worldly concerns, they are little less than absolutely necessary ; if we judge it to be necessary to maintain and uphold any sentiment, any impression, any seriousness about religion in the mind at all. They are necessary to preserve in the thoughts a *place* for the subject ; they are necessary that the train of our thoughts may not even be closed up against it. Were all days of the week alike, and employed alike ; was there no difference or distinction between Sunday and work-day ; was there not a church in the nation ; were we never from one year's end to another called together to participate in public worship ; were there no set forms of public worship ; no particular persons appointed to minister and officiate, indeed no assemblies for public worship at all ; no joint prayers ; no preaching ; still religion, in itself, in its reality and importance, in its end and event, would be the same thing as what it is ; we should still have to account for our conduct ; there would still be heaven and hell, salvation and perdition ; there would still be the laws of God, both natural and revealed ; all the obligation which the authority of a Creator can impose upon a creature ; all the gratitude which is due

from a rational being to the Author and Giver of every blessing which he enjoys ; lastly, there would still be the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. All these things would, with or without religious ordinances, be equally real, and existing, and valid ; but men would not think equally about them. Many would entirely and totally neglect them. Some there would always be of a more devout, or serious, or contemplative disposition, who would retain a lively sense of these things under all circumstances and all disadvantages, who would never lose their veneration for them, never forget them. But from others, from the careless, the busy, the followers of pleasure, the pursuers of wealth or advancement, these things would slip away from the thoughts entirely.

Together with *religious ordinances* we mentioned *religious exercises*. By the term *religious exercises*, I in particular mean private prayer, whether it be at set times, as in the morning and evening of each day ; or whether it be called forth by occasions, as when we are to form some momentous decision, or enter upon some great undertaking ; or when we are under some pressing difficulty or deep distress, some exeruciating bodily pain or heavy affliction ; or, on the other hand, and no less properly, when we have lately been receiving some signal benefit, experiencing some signal mercy ; such as preservation from danger, relief from difficulty or distress, abatement of pain, recovery from sickness : for by prayer, let it be observed, we mean devotion in general ; and thanksgiving is devotion as much as prayer itself. I mean private prayer, as here described ; and I also mean, what is perhaps the most natural form of private prayer, short ejaculatory extemporaneous addresses to God, as often as either the reflections which rise up in our minds,

let them come from what quarter they may, or the objects and incidents which seize our attention, prompt us to utter them ; which, in a religiously disposed mind, will be the case, I may say, every hour, and which ejaculation may be offered up to God in any posture, in any place, or in any situation. Amongst religious exercises, I also reckon family prayer, which unites many of the uses both of public worship and private prayer. The reading of religious books is likewise to be accounted a religious exercise. Religious meditation still more so ; and more so for this reason, that it implies and includes that most important duty, self-examination ; for I hold it to be next to impossible for a man to meditate upon religion, without meditating at the same time upon his own present condition with respect to the tremendous alternative which is to take place upon him after his death.

These are what we understand by religious exercises ; and they are all so far of the same nature with religious ordinances, that they are aids and helps of religion itself ; and I think that religious seriousness cannot be maintained in the soul without them.

But again ; a cause which has a strong tendency to destroy religious seriousness, and which almost infallibly prevents its formation and growth in young minds, is *levity in conversation* upon religious subjects, or upon subjects connected with religion. Whether we regard the practice with respect to those who use it, or to those who hear it, it is highly to be blamed, and is productive of great mischief. In those who use it, it amounts almost to a proof that they are destitute of religious seriousness. The principle itself is destroyed in them, or was never formed in them. Upon those who hear, its effect is this. If they have concern about religion, and the disposition towards religion which

they ought to have, and which we signify by this word *seriousness*, they will be inwardly shocked and offended by the levity with which they hear it treated. They will, as it were, resent such treatment of a subject, which by them has always been thought upon with awe, and dread, and veneration. But the pain with which they were at first affected goes off by hearing frequently the same sort of language; and then they will be almost sure, if they examine the state of their minds as to religion, to feel a change in themselves for the worse. This is the danger to which those are exposed, who had before imbibed serious impressions. Those who had not, will be prevented, by such sort of conversation, from ever imbibing them at all; so that its influence is in all cases pernicious.

The turn which this levity usually takes, is in jests and raillery upon the opinions, or the peculiarities, or the persons of men of particular sects, or who bear particular names; especially if they happen to be more serious than ourselves. And of late this loose, and I can hardly help calling it profane humour, has been directed chiefly against the followers of *Methodism*. But against whomsoever it happens to be pointed, it has all the bad effects both upon the speaker and the hearer which we have noticed; and as in other instances, so in this, it is very much misplaced. In the first place, were the doctrines and sentiments of those who bear this name ever so foolish and extravagant (I do not say that they are either) this proposition I shall always maintain to be true, viz. that the wildest opinion that ever was entertained in matters of religion, is more rational than unconcern about these matters. Upon this subject nothing is so absurd as indifference; no folly so contemptible as thoughtless-



ness and levity. In the next place, do Methodists deserve this treatment? Be their particular doctrines what they may, the professors of these doctrines appear to be in earnest about them; and a man who is in earnest in religion cannot be a bad man, still less a fit subject for derision. I am no Methodist myself. In their leading doctrines I differ from them. But I contend, that sincere men are not, for these, or indeed, any doctrines, to be made laughing-stocks to others. I do not bring in the case of Methodists in this part of my discourse, for the purpose of vindicating their tenets, but for the purpose of observing (and I wish that the observation may weigh with all my readers) that the custom of treating their characters and persons, their preaching or their preachers, their meetings or worship, with *scorn*, has the pernicious consequence of destroying our own seriousness, together with the seriousness of those who hear or join in such sort of conversation; especially if they be young persons: and I am persuaded that much mischief is actually done in this very way.

A phrase much used upon these occasions, and frequent in the mouth of those who speak of such as in religious matters are more serious than themselves, is, "that they are righteous over-much." These, it is true, are scripture words; and it is that circumstance which has given currency to the expression: but in the way and sense in which they are used, I am convinced that they are exceedingly misapplied. The text occurs once in the Bible, and only once. It is in the book of Ecclesiastes, 7th chap. and 16th verse. It is not very easy to determine what is meant by it in the place in which it is found. It is a very obscure passage. It seems to me most probable, that it relates to an ex-

ternal affectation of righteousness, not prompted by internal principle ; or rather to the assuming the character of righteousness, merely to vaunt or show our superiority over others ; to conceitedness in religion : in like manner as the caution delivered in the same verse, “ be not overwise,” respects the ostentation of wisdom, and not the attainment itself. So long as we mean by righteousness, a sincere and anxious desire to seek out the will of God, and to perform it, it is impossible to be “ righteous over-much.” There is no such thing in the nature of righteousness ; nor was it, nor could it be, the intention of any passage in the Bible, to say that there is, or to authorize us in casting over-righteousness as a reproach or a censure upon any one.

In like manner it has been objected, that so much regard, or as the objectors would call it, *over-regard* for religion, is inconsistent with the interest and welfare of our families, and with success and prosperity in our worldly affairs. I believe that there is very little ground for this objection in fact, and even as the world goes : in reason and principle there is none. A good Christian divides his time between the duties of religion, the calls of business, and those quiet relaxations which may be innocently allowed to his circumstances and condition, and which will be chiefly in his family or amongst a few friends. In this plan of life there is no confusion or interference of its parts ; and unless a man be given to sloth and laziness, which are what religion condemns, he will find time enough for them all. This calm system may not be sufficient for that unceasing eagerness, hurry, and anxiety about worldly affairs, in which some men pass their lives ; but it is sufficient for every thing which reasonable prudence requires : and it is perfectly consistent with usefulness in our stations, which is a

main point. Indeed, compare the hours which serious persons spend in religious exercises and meditations, with the hours which the thoughtless and irreligious spend in idleness and vice and expensive diversions, and you will perceive on which side of the comparison the advantage lies, even in this view of the subject.

Nor is there any thing in the nature of religion to support the objection. In a certain sense it is true, what has been sometimes said, that religion ought to be the rule of life, not the business : by which is meant, that the subject matter even of religious duties lies in the common affairs and transactions of the world. Diligence in our calling is an example of this ; which, however, keeps both a man's head and hands at work upon business merely temporal ; yet religion may be governing him here meanwhile. God may be feared in the busiest scenes.

In addition to the above, there exists another prejudice against religious seriousness, arising from a notion very commonly entertained, viz. *that religion leads to gloom and melancholy*. This notion, I am convinced, is a mistake. Some persons are constitutionally subject to melancholy, which is as much a disease in them, as the ague is a disease ; and it may happen that such men's melancholy shall fall upon religious ideas, as it may upon any other subject which seizes their dis-tempered imagination. But this is not *religion* leading to melancholy. Or it sometimes is the case that men are brought to a sense of religion by calamity and affliction, which produce at the same depression of spirits. But neither here is religion the cause of this distress or dejection, or to be blamed for it. These cases being excepted, the very reverse of what is alleged against religion is the truth. No man's

spirits were ever hurt by doing his duty. On the contrary, one good action, one temptation resisted and overcome, one sacrifice of desire or interest purely for conscience's sake, will prove a cordial for weak and low spirits beyond what either indulgence or diversion or company can do for them. And a succession and course of such actions and self-denials, springing from a religious principle and manfully maintained, is the best possible course that can be followed as a remedy for sinkings and oppressions of this kind. Can it then be true, that religion leads to melancholy? Occasions arise to every man living; to many, very severe as well as repeated occasions, in which the hopes of religion are the only stay that is left him. Godly men have that within them which cheers and comforts them in their saddest hours: ungodly men have that which strikes their heart, like a dagger, in its gayest moments. Godly men discover, what is very true, but what, by most men is found out too late, namely, that a good conscience, and the hope of our Creator's final favour and acceptance, are the only solid happiness to be attained in this world. Experience corresponds with the reason of the thing. I take upon me to say, that religious men are generally cheerful. If this be not observed, as might be expected, supposing it to be true, it is because the cheerfulness which religion inspires does not show itself in noise, or in fits and starts of merriment, but is calm and constant. Of this the only true and valuable kind of cheerfulness (for all other kinds are hollow and unsatisfying), religious men possess not less but a greater share than others.

Another destroyer of religious seriousness, and which is the last I shall mention, is a certain fatal turn which some minds take, namely, that when they find

*difficulties* in or concerning religion, or any of the tenets of religion, they forthwith plunge into irreligion ; and make these difficulties, or any degree of uncertainty which seems to their apprehension to hang over the subject, a ground and occasion for giving full liberty to their inclinations, and for casting off the restraints of religion entirely. This is the case with men, who, at the best, perhaps, were only balancing between the sanctions of religion and the love of pleasure or of unjust gain, but especially the former. In this precarious state, any objection, or appearance of objection, which diminishes the force of the religious impression, determines the balance against the side of virtue, and gives up the doubter to sensuality, to the world, and to the flesh. Now, of all ways which a man can take, this is the surest way to destruction ; and it is completely irrational. I say it is completely irrational ; for when we meditate upon the tremendous consequences which form the subject of religion, we cannot avoid this reflection, that any degree of probability whatever, I had almost said any degree of possibility whatever, of religion being true, ought to determine a rational creature so to act as to secure himself from punishment in a future state, and the loss of that happiness which may be attained. Therefore he has no pretence for alleging uncertainty as an excuse for his conduct, because he does not act in conformity with that in which there is no uncertainty at all. In the next place, it is giving to apparent difficulties more weight than they are entitled to. I only request any man to consider, first, the necessary allowances to be made for the short-sightedness and the weakness of the human understanding ; secondly, the nature of those subjects concerning which religion treats, so remote

from our senses, so different from our experience, so above and beyond the ordinary train and course of our ideas ; and then say, whether difficulties, and great difficulties also, were not to be expected ; nay further, whether they be not in some measure subservient to the very purpose of religion. The reward of everlasting life, and the punishment or misery of which we know no end, if they were present and immediate, could not be withstood, and would not leave any room for liberty or choice. But this sort of force upon the will is not what God designed ; nor is suitable indeed to the nature of free, moral, and accountable agents. The truth is, and it was most likely beforehand that it would be so, that amidst some points which are dark, some which are dubious, there are many which are clear and certain. Now, I apprehend, that, if we act faithfully up to those points concerning which there is no question, most especially if we determine upon and choose our rule and course of life according to those principles of choice which all men whatever allow to be wise and safe principles, and the only principles which are so ; and conduct ourselves steadfastly according to the rule thus chosen, the difficulties which remain in religion will not move or disturb us much ; and will, as we proceed, become gradually less and fewer. Whereas, if we begin with objections ; if all we consider about religion be its difficulties ; but, most especially, if we permit the suggestion of difficulties to drive us into a practical rejection of religion itself, and to afford us (which is what we wanted,) an excuse to ourselves for casting off its restraints ; then the event will be, that its difficulties will multiply upon us ; its light grow more and more dim, and we shall settle in the worst and most hopeless of all conditions ;

the last condition, I will venture to say, in which any man living would wish his son, or any one whom he loved, and for whose happiness he was anxious, to be placed; a life of confirmed vice and dissoluteness; founded in a formal renunciation of religion.

He that has to preach Christianity to persons in this state, has to preach to stones. He must not expect to be heard, either with complacency, or seriousness, or patience, or even to escape contempt and derision. Habits of thinking are fixed by habits of acting; and both too solidly fixed to be moved by human persuasion. God in his mercy, and by his providences, as well as by his Spirit, can touch and soften the heart of stone. And it is seldom perhaps, that, without some strong, and, it may be, sudden impressions of this kind, and from this source, serious sentiments ever penetrate dispositions hardened in the manner which we have here described.

## X.

## TASTE FOR DEVOTION.

JOHN IV. 23, 24.

*But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

A TASTE and relish for religious exercise, or the want of it, is one of the marks and tokens by which we may judge whether our heart be right towards God or not. God is unquestionably an object of devotion to every creature which he has made capable of devotion; consequently, our minds can never be right towards him, unless they be in a devotional frame. It cannot be disputed, but that the Author and Giver of all things, upon whose will and whose mercy we depend for every thing we have, and for every thing we look for, ought to live in the thoughts and affections of his rational creatures. "Through thee have I been holden up ever since I was born: thou art he that took me from my mother's womb: my praise shall be always of thee." If there be such things as first sentiments towards God, these words of the Psalmist express them. That devotion to God is a duty, stands upon the same proof as that God exists. But devotion is an act of the mind strictly. In a certain sense, duty to a fellow-creature may be discharged if the outward act be performed,



because the benefit to him depends upon the act. Not so with devotion. It is altogether the operation of the mind. God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit, that is, in mind and thought. The devotion of the mind may be, will be, ought to be, testified and accompanied by outward performances and expressions: but, without the mind going along with it, no form, no solemnity can avail, as a service to God. It is not so much a question under what mode men worship their Maker; but this is the question, whether their mind, and thoughts, and affections, accompany the mode which they adopt or not. I do not say, that modes of worship are indifferent things; for certainly one mode may be more rational, more edifying, more pure than another; but they are indifferent, in comparison with the question, whether the heart attend the worship, or be estranged from it.

These two points, then, being true; first, that devotion is a duty; secondly, that the heart must participate to make any thing we do devotion; it follows, that the heart cannot be right toward God, unless it be possessed with a taste and relish for his service, and for what relates to it.

Men may, and many undoubtedly do, attend upon acts of religious worship, and even from religious motives, yet, at the same time, without this taste and relish of which we are speaking. Religion has no savour for them. I do not allude to the case of those who attend upon the public worship of the church from compliance with custom, out of regard to station, for example's sake merely, from habit merely; still less to the case of those who have particular worldly views in so doing. I lay the case of such persons, for the present, out of the question; and I consider only the case of those,

who, knowing and believing the worship of God to be a duty, and that the wilful neglect of this, as of other duties, may incur future punishment, do join in worship from a principle of obedience, from a consideration of those consequences which will follow disobedience; from the fear indeed of God, and the dread of his judgements (and so far from motives of religion), yet without any taste or relish for religious exercise itself. That is the case I am considering. It is not for us to presume to speak harshly of any conduct, which proceeds, in any manner, from a regard to God, and the expectation of a future judgement. God, in his Scriptures, holds out to man terrors, as well as promises; punishment after death, as well as reward. Undoubtedly he intended those motives which he himself proposes, to operate and have their influence: Wherever they operate, good ensues; very great and important good, compared with the cases in which they do not operate; yet not all the good we would desire, not all which is attainable, not all which we ought to aim at, in our Christian course. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but calling it the beginning, implies that we ought to proceed further; namely, from his fear to his love.

To apply this distinction to the subject before us:—the man who serves God from a dread of his displeasure, and therefore in a certain sense by constraint, is, beyond all comparison, in a better situation, as touching his salvation, than he who defies this dread, and breaks through this constraint. He, in a word, who obeys, from whatever motive his obedience springs, provided it be a religious motive, is of a character, as well as in a condition, infinitely preferable to the character and condition of the man whom no motives whatever can

induce to perform his duty. Still it is true, that if he feels not within himself a taste and relish for the service which he performs (to say nothing of the consideration how much less acceptable his service may be), and for devotion itself, he wants one satisfactory evidence of his heart being right towards God. A further progress in religion will give him this evidence, but it is not yet attained: as yet, therefore, there is a great deficiency.

The taste and relish for devotion, of which we are speaking, is what good men in all ages have felt strongly. It appears in their history: it appears in their writings. The book of Psalms in particular, was, great part of it, composed under the impression of this principle. Many of the Psalms are written in the truest spirit of devotion; and it is one test of the religious frame of our own minds, to observe whether we have a relish for these compositions; whether our hearts are stirred as we read them; whether we perceive in them words alone, a mere letter, or so many grateful, gratifying sentiments towards God, in unison with what we ourselves feel, or have before felt. And what we are saying of the book of Psalms, is true of many religious books that are put into our hands, especially books of devotional religion: which, though they be human compositions, and nothing more, are of a similar cast with the devotional writings of Scripture, and excellently calculated for their purpose\*. We read of aged persons,

\* Amongst these I particularly recommend the prayers and devotions annexed to the *New Whole Duty of Man*. Bishop Burnet, in speaking of such kind of books, very truly says, "By the frequent reading of these books, by the relish that one has in them, by the delight they give, and the effects they produce, a man will plainly

who passed the greatest part of their time in acts of devotion, and passed it with enjoyment. “Anna, the prophetess, was of great age, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers, night and day.” The first Christians, so far as can be gathered from their history in the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, as well as from the subsequent accounts that are left of them, took great delight in exercises of devotion. These seemed to form, indeed, the principal satisfaction of their lives in this world. “Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread,”—that is, celebrating the holy communion, “from house to house, they eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God.” In this spirit Christians set out, finding the greatest gratification they were capable of, in acts and exercises of devotion. A great deal of what is said in the New Testament by St. Paul in particular, about “rejoicing in the Lord, rejoicing in the Holy Ghost, rejoicing in hope, rejoicing in consolation, rejoicing in themselves, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” refer to the pleasure and the high and spiritual comfort which they found in religious exercises. Much, I fear, of this spirit is fled. There is a coldness in our devotions, which argues a decay of religion amongst us. Is it true that men, in these days, perform religious exercises as frequently as they ought, or as those did who have gone before us in the Christian course? That is one question to be asked. But there is also another question of still greater

perceive whether his soul is made for divine matters, or not; what suitableness there is between him and them, and whether he is yet touched with such a sense of religion, as to be capable of dedicating himself to it.”

importance, viz. do they find in these performances that gratification which the first and best disciples of the religion actually found—which they ought to find, and which they would find, did they possess the taste and relish concerning which we are discoursing, and which if they do not possess, they want one great proof of their heart being right towards God?

If the spirit of prayer, as it is sometimes called, if the taste and relish for devotion, if a devotional frame of mind be within us, it will show itself in the turn and cast of our meditations, in the warmth, and earnestness, and frequency of our secret applications to God in prayer; in the deep, unfeigned, heart-piercing, heart-sinking sorrow of our confessions and our penitence; in the sincerity of our gratitude and of our praise; in our admiration of the divine bounty to his creatures; in our sense of particular mercies to ourselves. We shall pray much in secret. We shall address ourselves to God of our own accord, in our walks, our closet, our bed. Form, in these addresses, will be nothing. Every thing will come from the heart. We shall feed the flame of devotion by continually returning to the subject. No man who is endued with the taste and relish we speak of, will have God long out of his mind. Under one view or other, God cannot be long out of a devout mind. "Neither was God in all his thoughts," is a true description of a complete dereliction of religious principle; but it can, by no possibility, be the case with a man, who has the spirit of devotion, or any portion of that spirit, within him.

But it is not in our private religion alone, that the effect and benefit of this principle are perceived. The true taste and relish we so much dwell upon, will bring a man to the public worship of God; and, what is more,

will bring him in such a frame of mind as to enable him to join in it with effect ; with effect as to his own soul ; with effect as to every object, both public and private, intended by public worship. Wanderings and forgetfulness, remissions and intermissions of attention, there will be ; but these will be fewer and shorter, in proportion as more of this spirit is prevalent within us ; and *some* sincere, some hearty, some deep, some true, and, as we trust, acceptable service will be performed, before we leave the place ; some pouring forth of the soul unto God in prayer and in thanksgiving ; in prayer, excited by wants and weaknesses ; I fear also, by sins and neglects without number ; and in thanksgivings, such as mercies, the most undeserved, ought to call forth from a heart, filled, as the heart of man should be, with a thorough consciousness of dependency and obligation.

Forms of public worship must, by their very nature, be in a great degree general ; that is, must be calculated for the average condition of human and of Christian life : but it is one property of the devotional spirit which we speak of, to give a particularity to our worship, though it be carried on in a congregation of fellow Christians, and expressed in terms which were framed and conceived for the use of all. And it does this, by calling up recollections which will apply most closely, and bring home most nearly to ourselves, those terms and those expressions. For instance, in public worship, we thank God in general terms, that is, we join with the congregation in a general thanksgiving ; but a devout man brings to church the recollection of special and particular mercies, particular bounties, particular providences, particular deliverances, particular relief recently experienced, specially and critically granted in the moment of want or danger, or eminently and super-

eminently vouchsafed to us individually. These he bears in his thoughts; he applies as he proceeds; that which was general, he makes close and circumstantial; his heart rises towards God, by a sense of mercies vouchsafed to himself. He does not, however, confine himself to those favours of Providence, which he enjoys above many others, or more than most others; he does not dwell upon distinctions alone; he sees God in all his goodness, in all his bounty. Bodily ease, for instance, is not less valuable, not less a mercy, because others are at ease, as well as himself. The same of his health, the use of his limbs, the faculties of his understanding. But what I mean is, that, in his mind, he brings to church mercies, in which he is interested, and that the most general expressions of thankfulness attach with him upon particular recollections of goodness, particular subjects of gratitude; so that the holy fervour of his devotion is supported; never wants, nor can want, materials to act upon. It is the office, therefore, of an internal spirit of devotion to make worship personal. We have seen that it will be so with thanksgiving. It will be the same likewise with every other part of divine worship. The confession of sins in our liturgy, and perhaps in all liturgies, is general; but our sins, alas! are particular: our conscience not only acknowledges a deplorable weakness and imperfection in the discharge of our duty, but is stung also with remembrances and compunctions, excited by particular offences. When we come, therefore, to confess our sins, let memory do its office faithfully. Let these sins rise up before our eyes. All language is imperfect. Forms, intended for general use, must consist of general terms, and are so far inadequate. They *may* be rehearsed by the lips with very little of application to our own case. But this

*will* never be so, if the spirit of devotion be within us. A devout mind is exceedingly stirred, when it has sins to confess. None but a hardened sinner can even think of his sins without pain. But when he is to lay them, with supplications for pardon, before his Maker; when he is to expose his heart to God; it will always be with powerful inward feelings of guilt and calamity. It hath been well said of prayer, that prayer will either make a man leave off sinning, or sin will make him leave off prayer. And the same is true of confession. If confession be sincere, if it be such as a right capacity for devotion will make it to be, it will call up our proper and particular sins so distinctly to our view, their guilt, their danger, their end; whither they are carrying us; in what they will conclude; that, if we can return to them again without molestation from our conscience, then religion is not within us. If we have approached God in his worship so ineffectually as to ourselves, it is because we have not worshipped him in spirit; we may say of all we have done, "we drew near with our lips, but our hearts were far from him."

What we have said concerning thanksgiving and confession, is likewise true of prayer universally. The spirit of devotion will apply our prayers to our wants. In forms of worship, be they ever so well composed, it is impossible to exhibit human wants otherwise than in general expressions. But devotion will apply them. It will teach every man, in the first place, to know how indigent, how poor a creature, without a continued exercise of mercy and supply of bounty from God, he would be; because, when he begins to enumerate his wants, he will be astonished at their multitude. What are we, any of us, but a complication of wants, which we have not in ourselves the power of supplying? But,



beside those numerous wants, and that common helplessness, in which we all partake, every man has his own sore, his own grief, his own difficulties ; every man has some distress, which he is suffering, or fearing. Nay, were worldly wishes satisfied, was worldly prosperity complete, he has always what is of more consequence than worldly prosperity to pray for ; he has always his sins to pray against. Where temporal wants are few, spiritual wants are often the most and the greatest. The grace of God is always wanted. His governing, his preventing, his inspiring, his assisting grace is always wanted. Here, therefore, is a subject for prayer, were there no other ; a subject personally and individually interesting in the highest degree ; a subject, above all others, upon which the spirit of devotion will be sure to fix.

I assign, therefore, as the first effect of a right spirit of devotion, that it gives particularity to all our worship. It applies, and it appropriates. Forms of worship may be general, but a spirit of devotion brings them home and close to each and every one.

One happy consequence of which is, that it prevents the tediousness of worship. Things which interest us are not tedious. If we find worship tedious, it is because it does not interest us as it ought to do. We must allow (experience compels us to allow) for wanderings and inattentions, as amongst the infirmities of our infirm nature. But, as I have already said, even these will be fewer and shorter, in proportion as we are possessed of the spirit of devotion. Weariness will not be perceived, by reason of that succession of devout feelings and consciousnesses which the several offices of worship are calculated to excite. If our heart be in the business, it will not be tedious. If, in thanksgiving, it be lifted up by

a sense of mercies, and a knowledge from whom they proceed, thanksgiving will be a grateful exercise, and not a tedious form. What relates to our sins and wants, though not of the same gratifying nature, though accompanied with deep, nay, with afflicting cause of humiliation and fear, must, nevertheless, be equally interesting, or more so, because it is of equal concernment to us, or of greater. In neither case, therefore, if our duty be performed as it ought to be, will tediousness be perceived.

I say, that the spirit of devotion removes from the worship of God the perception of tediousness, and with that also every disposition to censure or cavil at particular phrases or expressions used in public worship. All such faults, even if they be real, and such observations upon them, are absorbed by the immense importance of the business in which we are engaged. Quickness in discovering blemishes of this sort is not the gift of a pious mind; still less either levity or acrimony in speaking of them.

Moreover, the spirit of devotion reconciles us to *repetitions*. In other subjects repetition soon becomes tiresome and offensive. In devotion it is different. Deep, earnest, heart-felt devotion, naturally vents itself in repetition. Observe a person racked by excruciating bodily pain; or a person suddenly struck with the news of some dreadful calamity; or a person labouring under some cutting anguish of soul; and you will always find him breaking out into ejaculations, imploring from God support, mercy, and relief, over and over again, uttering the same prayer in the same words. Nothing, he finds, suits so well the extremity of his sufferings, the urgency of his wants, as a continual recurrence to the same cries, and the same call for divine aid. Our Lord himself, in

his last agony, affords a high example of what we are saying. Thrice he besought his heavenly Father; and thrice he used the same words. Repetition, therefore, is not only tolerable in devotion, but it is natural: it is even dictated by a sense of suffering, and an acuteness of feeling. It is coldness of affection which requires to be enticed and gratified by continual novelty of idea, or expression, or action. The repetitions and prolixity of pharisaical prayers, which our Lord censures, are to be understood of those prayers which run out into mere formality and into great length; no sentiment or affection of the heart accompanying them; but uttered as a task, from an opinion (of which our Lord justly notices the absurdity), that they should really be heard for their much speaking. Actuated by the spirit of devotion, we can never offend in this way; we can never be the object of this censure.

Lastly, and what has already been intimated, the spirit of devotion will cause our prayers to have an effect upon our practice. For example: if we repeated the *confession* in our liturgy with a true penitential sense of guilt upon our souls, we should not, day after day, be acknowledging to God our transgressions and neglects, and yet go on exactly in the same manner, without endeavouring to make them less and fewer. We should plainly perceive that this was doing nothing towards salvation; and that, at this rate, we may be sinning and confessing all our lives. Whereas, was the right spirit of confessional piety, viz. thoughtfulness of soul, within us at the time, this would be the certain benefit, especially in the case of an often-repeated sin, that the mind would become more and more concerned, more and more filled with compunction and remorse, so as to be forced into amendment. Even the most

heart-felt confession might not immediately do for us all that we could wish : yet, by perseverance in the same, it would certainly in a short time produce its desired effect. For the same reason, we should not time after time *pray* “ that we might thenceforward,” viz. after each time of so praying, “ lead godly, righteous and sober lives,” yet persist, just as usual, in ungodliness, unrighteousness, and intemperance. The thing would be impossible, if we prayed as we ought. So likewise, if real thankfulness of heart accompanied our *thanksgivings*, we should not pray in vain, “ that we might show forth the praises of God, not only with our lips, but in our lives.” As it is, thousands repeat these words without doing a single deed for the sake of pleasing God, exclusive of other motives, or refraining from a single thing they like to do out of the fear of displeasing him. So again, every time we hear the third service at church, we pray “ that God would incline our hearts to keep his commandments ;” yet immediately, perhaps, afterwards, allow our hearts and inclinations to wander, without control, to whatever sinful temptation entices them. This, I say, all proceeds from the want of earnestness in our devotions. Strong devotion is an antidote against sin.

To conclude : a spirit of devotion is one of the greatest blessings, and, by consequence, the want of it one of the greatest misfortunes, which a Christian can experience. When it is present, it gives life to every act of worship which we perform ; it makes every such act interesting and comfortable to ourselves. It is felt in our most retired moments, in our beds, our closets, our rides, our walks. It is stirred within us, when we are assembled with our children and servants in family prayer. It leads us to church, to the congre-

gation of our fellow Christians there collected ; it accompanies us in our joint offices of religion in an especial manner ; and it returns us to our homes holier, and happier, and better ; and lastly, what greatly enhances its value to every anxious Christian, it affords to himself a proof that his heart is right towards God : when it is followed up by a good life, by abstinence from sin, and endeavours after virtue, by avoiding evil and doing good, the proof and the satisfaction to be drawn from it are complete.

## XI.

## PRAYER IN IMITATION OF CHRIST

LUKE v. 16.

*And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.*

THE imitation of our Saviour is justly held out to us, as a rule of life; but then there are many things in which we cannot imitate him. What depends upon his miraculous character must necessarily surpass our endeavours, and be placed out of the reach of our imitation. This reason makes those particulars, in which we *are* able to follow his example, of great importance to be observed by us; because it is to these that our hopes of taking him for our pattern, of treading in his footsteps, are necessarily confined.

Now, our Lord's piety is one of these particulars. We *can*, if we be so minded, pray to God, as he did. We can aim at the spirit, and warmth, and earnestness, of his devotions; we can use, at least, those occasions, and that mode of devotion, which his example points out to us.

It is to be remarked, that a fulness of *mental devotion* was the spring and source of our Lord's visible piety. And this state of mind we must acquire. It consists in this; in a habit of turning our thoughts towards God, whenever they are not taken up with some particular engagement. Every man has some subject or other, to which his thoughts turn, when they are not

particularly occupied. In a good Christian this subject is God, or what appertains to him. A good Christian, walking in his fields, sitting in his chamber, lying upon his bed, is thinking of God. His meditations draw, of their own accord, to that object, and then his thoughts kindle up his devotions; and devotion never burns so bright, or so warm, as when it is lighted up from within. The immensity, the stupendous nature of the adorable Being who made, and who supports, every thing about us, his grace, his love, his condescension towards his reasonable and moral creatures, that is, towards men; the good things which he has placed within our reach, the heavenly happiness which he has put it in our power to obtain; the infinite moment of our acting well and right, so as not to miss of the great reward, and not only to miss of our reward, but to sink into perdition; such reflections will not fail of generating devotion, of moving within us either prayer, or thanksgiving, or both. This is mental devotion. Perhaps the difference between a religious and an irreligious character, depends more upon this mental devotion, than upon any other thing. The difference will show itself in men's lives and conversation, in their dealings with mankind, and in the various duties and offices of their station: but it originates and proceeds from a difference in their internal habits of mind, with respect to God; in the habit of thinking of him in private, and of what relates to him; in cultivating these thoughts, or neglecting them; inviting them, or driving them from us; in forming, or in having formed a habit and custom, as to this point, unobserved and unobservable by others (because it passes in the mind, which no one can see); but of the most decisive consequence to our spiritual

character and immortal interests. This mind was in Christ—a deep, fixed, and constant piety. The expressions of it we have seen in all the forms, which could bespeak earnestness and sincerity; but the principle itself lay deep in his divine soul. The expressions likewise were occasional, more or fewer, as occasions called, or opportunities offered; but the principle fixed and constant, uninterrupted, unremitted.

But again; our Lord, whose mental piety was so unquestionable, so ardent, and so unceasing, did not, nevertheless, content himself with that. He thought fit, we find, at sundry times, and, I doubt not, also, very frequently, to draw it forth in actual prayer, to clothe it with words, to betake himself to visible devotion, to retire to a mountain for this express purpose, to withdraw himself a short distance from his companions, to kneel down, to pass the whole night in prayer, or in a place devoted to prayer. Let all, who feel their hearts impregnated with religious fervour, remember this example—remember that this disposition of the heart ought to vent itself in actual prayer. Let them not either be afraid nor ashamed, nor suffer any person, nor any thing, to keep them from this holy exercise. They will find the devout dispositions of their souls strengthened, gratified, confirmed. This exhortation may not be necessary to the generality of pious tempers. They will naturally follow their propensity, and it will naturally carry them to prayer. But some, even good men, are too abstracted in their way of thinking upon this subject. They think, that since God seeth and regardeth the heart, if their devotion be *there*, if it be within, all outward signs and expressions of it are superfluous. It is enough to answer, that our blessed Lord did not



so think. He had all the fulness of devotion in his soul; nevertheless, he thought it not superfluous to utter and pronounce audible prayer to God; and not only so, but to retire and withdraw himself from other engagements; nay even from his most intimate and favoured companions, expressly for this purpose.

Again; our Lord's retirement to prayer appears commonly to have followed some signal act and display of his divine powers. He did every thing to the glory of God; he referred his divine powers to his Father's gift; he made them the subject of his thankfulness, inasmuch as they advanced his great work; he followed them by his devotions. Now every good gift cometh down from the Father of light. Whether they be natural, or whether they be supernatural, the faculties which we possess are by God's donation. Wherefore, any successful exercise of these faculties, any instance in which we have been capable of doing something good, properly and truly so, either for the community which is best of all, for our neighbourhood, for our families, nay even for ourselves, ought to stir and awaken our gratitude to God, and to call forth that gratitude into actual devotion; at least, this is to imitate our blessed Lord, so far as we can imitate him at all: it is adopting, into our lives, the principle which regulated his.

Again; it appears, on one occasion at least, that our Lord's retirement to prayer was preparatory to an important work, which he was about to execute. The manner in which St. Luke states this instance is thus: "And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God; and when it was day, he called unto

him his disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." From this statement I infer, that the night, passed by our Lord in prayer, was preparatory to the office which he was about to execute. And surely an important office it was; important to him; important to his religion; important to the whole world. Nor let it be said, that our Lord, after all, in one instance at least, was unfortunate in his choice. Of the twelve one was a traitor. That choice was not error. A remarkable prophecy was to be fulfilled, and other purposes were to be answered, of which we cannot now speak particularly. "I know," says our Lord, "whom I have chosen." But let us confine ourselves to our observation. It was a momentous choice: it was a decision of great consequence; and it was accordingly, on our Lord's part, preceded by prayer; not only so, but by a night spent in prayer. "He continued all night in prayer to God;" or, if you would rather so render it, *in a house, set apart for prayer to God*. Here, therefore, we have an example given us, which we both *can* imitate, and ought to imitate. Nothing of singular importance—nothing of extraordinary moment, either to ourselves or others, ought to be resolved upon, or undertaken, without prayer to God—without previous devotion. It is a natural operation of piety to carry the mind to God, whenever any thing presses and weighs upon it. They, who feel not this tendency, have reason to accuse and suspect themselves of want of piety. Moreover, we have for it the direct example of our Lord himself. I believe also, I may add, that we have the example and practice of good men, in all ages of the world.

Again; we find our Lord resorting to prayer in his

last extremity; and with an earnestness, I had almost said, a vehemence of devotion, proportioned to the occasion. The terms in which the evangelists describe our Lord's devotion in the garden of Gethsemane, the evening preceding his death, are the strongest terms that could be used. As soon as he came to the place, he bid his disciples pray. When he was at the place, he said unto them, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." This did not content him: this was not enough for the state and sufferings of his mind. He parted even from them. He withdrew about a stone's cast, and kneeled down. Hear how his struggle in prayer is described. Three times he came to his disciples, and returned again to prayer; thrice he kneeled down, at a distance from them, repeating the same words. Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly: drops of sweat fell from his body, as if it had been great drops of blood; yet in all this, throughout the whole scene, the constant conclusion of his prayer was, "Not my will, but thine be done." It was the greatest occasion that ever was: and the earnestness of our Lord's prayer, the devotion of his soul, corresponded with it. Scenes of deep distress await us all. It is in vain to expect to pass through the world without falling into them. We have, in our Lord's example, a model for our behaviour, in the most severe and most trying of these occasions. Afflicted, yet resigned; grieved and wounded, yet submissive; not insensible of our sufferings, but increasing the ardour and fervency of our prayer in proportion to the pain and acuteness of our feelings!

But whatever may be the fortune of our lives, one great extremity, at least, the hour of approaching death, is certainly to be passed through. What ought then

to occupy us? what can then support us? Prayer. Prayer, with our blessed Lord himself, was a refuge from the storm; almost every word he uttered, during that tremendous scene, was prayer: prayer the most earnest, the most urgent; repeated, continued, proceeding from the recesses of his soul; private, solitary: prayer for deliverance; prayer for strength; above every thing, prayer for resignation.

## XII.

## THE STIRRING OF CONSCIENCE.

## EPHESIANS II. 1.

*And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.*

THE quickening or stirring of conscience within us, is sometimes the first sign of a renewed and regenerated soul. There have been disputes concerning this principle of conscience, its origin, nature, extent; but all sides agree in one thing, namely, that it may be dead for a time in the human breast without any energy or activity whatsoever.

The causes of this torpor and deadness, or rather the circumstances under which it is found, have been often assigned. In many cases, I am afraid, it takes place so early in life, that the person can hardly be said to have ever known what the remonstrances and admonitions of conscience were. His conscience may be said to be dead-born. He remembers not the time when he found any check concerning any action which he set himself to do. If there was any pleasure or gratification in view; if there was any thing to be got by the action; that was all he considered about it: its being right and its being wrong formed no part of his deliberation, nor was he put upon asking this question by any thing which he felt within him. This state of complete depravity is the effect of a totally neglected

education, and of being at the same time thrown, when very young, amongst profligate examples.

Neither of these causes is sufficient to produce the effect by itself; but both causes, acting in conjunction, may produce it. If good principles have been early instilled by means of a virtuous, or any thing like a virtuous education, there will be some conscience left, there will be a conscience perceived, let the person so brought up fall into what society or amongst what examples he may. His conscience may not carry him safe through these dangers, may not have preserved him from vice and wickedness (that is a different question); but a conscience will be there, will be felt.

Again: Let the education, that is, *any precise* and particular instruction, have been ever so much or so culpably neglected, yet let even that rude uninstructed mind come amongst examples of goodness, or even keep clear of dissolute and profligate examples, and *conscience will be heard*. Examples themselves are education; good and virtuous examples the best of all education; even innocent and harmless society will produce (or, however, suffer) the natural growth and production of conscience in minds the most ignorant. But when a mind, perfectly ignorant, uninstructed, and uneducated, falls at first into debauched and profligate society, then it is possible that conscience may *never* spring up—its influence over the heart may *never* have a commencement. This cruel ease can never happen but in the instance of parents who are wicked themselves, and undesignedly perhaps, but very effectually, communicate their wickedness betimes to their children; or in the instance of children deprived from the beginning of a parent's care, and not only so, but from the beginning also thrown into bad hands, and into

bad society. It is of these instances we were speaking, when we said that there are many unhappy persons in the world, who never remember the time when they were sensible of any feeling or compunction of conscience within them—of any distinction indeed between right and wrong.

But, secondly, I will now suppose a more general, and a more natural state, that of a conscience really formed in the breast, and, in some degree at least, performing its office. This once living conscience may, by various means, be reduced back to a state of death and insensibility; nay, it often *is* so. Almost any course of sin will do it, as to that sin. Men always *enter* upon sinful courses under strong temptation: they may go on in them afterwards under less; but the temptation which first seduces them into vice is usually strong. There is a conscience at first repelling, remonstrating, rebuking; but then there is a violent temptation to be opposed. Conscience is overcome: it resists afterwards with less force, and is again overcome: its remonstrances are now weaker—they are not heard; being heard, they are set aside. This takes place repeatedly and frequently, with a constant abatement and diminution of strength and force on the part of conscience. The sin, after this, is committed, and conscience is silent. This is the regular effect of any course of sin, as to *that* sin. Let any habitual sinner compare himself at one time with himself at another time; his former sensations, his remorse, his uneasiness, his scruples, his fears, when he first entered upon a course of sin, with his sensations, or rather, with his want of sensations, now that he has for some time been confirmed in it—let him make this comparison, and

say whether the case be not with him as we have described it.

But the misfortune goes farther: *any course of sin whatever* weakens the power of conscience not only as to that sin, but as to all. Either the person reflects that it is to no purpose to guard against other sins, whilst he knowingly, constantly, and wilfully goes on in this; or else the principle itself of conscience, by being so often overpowered and beaten back in this instance, has lost its spring and energy in all instances. Almost all, even the greatest sinners, have begun with some particular vice. The first encroachment upon innocence and upon conscience was made by some single species of offence to which they were tempted; but the rottenness spread. A general and complete depravity of character may grow, and often does grow, out of one species of transgression; because conscience, which has been put to silence, not by one or two oppositions, but by a course of opposition to its remonstrances, ceases to execute its office within that man's breast; so that a conscience which was once alive may be reduced to a state of death and insensibility.

There are passages of Scripture which expressly relate to this state, and to a recovery and restoration from it, and which ought therefore to be remembered; and in the first place comes our text, and what follows it. "And you hath he *quicken*ed, *who were* DEAD in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and



were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even *when we were dead in sins*, hath quickened us together with Christ." Eph. ii. 1. And the same idea is repeated, Col. iii. 3.

There is also another remarkable text in the same epistle, v. 14. which has relation to the same subject, "wherefore he saith, awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The place in which this text is found, and the subject concerning which St. Paul is in that place discoursing, show sufficiently that the sleep here meant was the sleep of the conscience. "Awake thou that sleepest;" rouse thyself from that state of moral and religious insensibility in which thou liest, "arise from the dead," from being dead in sin and trespasses; so deeply sunk in evil courses as to have become altogether without perception or consciousness of their guilt or danger, which is being dead in this respect.

Speaking of a particular case in his epistle to Timothy, St. Paul saith, "she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth;" that is to say, is going on without taking heed to that living principle of conscience which forms our spiritual life. This is very true; and it is more general than St. Paul here has occasion to state it. He that liveth in pleasure, engrossed and taken up with the thoughts and pursuits of pleasure, is *dead* whilst he liveth; has no time, no inclination, no disposition for listening to any dictates of religion or of conscience. With respect to these, therefore, he is dead; his conscience is dead within him; his neglected, opposed, unavailing, rejected conscience, speaks no more, no more renews efforts which have now been long and totally disregarded. It is silent, and it is the silence of death.

Now this is a state of the soul, which of all others, perhaps, most requires the assistance of God's Holy Spirit. This, in some measure, is intimated by the very term, and metaphor, and comparison which are made use of, that of *death*. A dead man cannot raise himself to life again; it must be by an energy from without; by the help and power of some other than himself that life is recovered, if it be recovered at all. In like manner, the voluntary powers, *without being aided and strengthened* by the influence of God's Holy Spirit, may be entirely unable to restore a dead conscience to its office in the human breast.

What is intimated by the language and manner of speaking, on the subject in Scripture, is confirmed by our own consciousness, and by our experience. *Nothing is so hard to be accomplished as reformation; nothing so difficult as to change the heart*: nothing in this world so arduous as to rouse a dead and sleeping conscience, to bring back lost principles, to rectify depraved affections, to break vicious habits; more especially, vicious habits of mind and thought. Vicious habits of action, though difficult, are more easy to be managed than vicious habits of mind and thought. In proportion to the difficulty is the necessity for help. In proportion to the difficulty, must we have recourse to his all powerful help, with whom all things are possible, all things are easy. "Who then shall be saved?" was the Apostle's question. "With God all things are possible," was our Lord's answer.

What then is the practical use of these reflections? What are the fit sentiments to entertain, the fit conduct to pursue?

We know that conscience *may* be silent and dead: is it silent and dead in *us*? *We know* that it *may* be

so weak and feeble, that in point of fact, it does not govern our lives at all. Is this our case? If it be, we have a great work to go through before we can be in a state to form any reasonable hopes of salvation; namely, the restoring conscience to its office and its energy. The first thing to be done towards it is to sue earnestly for the help of God Almighty's spirit: that is the first thing. Our prayers obtaining, and our endeavours sincerely co-operating with that help, will carry us through the work; nothing else will.

Secondly, when we find the whisperings of conscience renewed; when we find sensations of religion, after a long absence and forgetfulness, returning; when we find spiritual emotions, unfound and unfelt before, or, if formerly felt, long disused; when we find the quickening and stirring of good principles and good thoughts within us, then may we be assured that the work is *begun*. We may then take comfort: we have much cause for rejoicing: we are in the hands of God: we experience the first sign at least of a renewed, regenerated soul. It is our business to rejoice in it, to cherish it most carefully.

The *first* sign, I said—but it must still depend upon ourselves. From what we perceive, we have good reason to hope that power is given us from above, if we will use it. Whilst we were without all thought, all concern, all fear, all anxiety about our religious state, we were in the worst of all possible conditions, we were in the condition which the Scripture calls being *dead in sin*. That is not our condition now. We trust that we are quickened—that we are raised again to a spiritual life by the operation of God's spirit.

But what is the duty belonging to this situation, supposing us to be right in our judgement? “Work

out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do." This is the text for us to meditate deeply upon: this text describes our duty. St. Paul, who wrote it, so far from thinking that any promise, any assurance, any perception of the assistance of God's spirit, was a reason for negligence, remissness, want of firmness, and care and perseverance on our part, makes it the very ground of his exhortation to exert ourselves to the uttermost. We are not only to work, but to work out, that is, to *persist to the end* in working, our salvation; and why? why particularly? even because "it is God that worketh in us." For this is the argument: spare no efforts, no endeavours on your part, that you may not lose, that you may not forfeit, that you may not miss of the incalculable benefit of that spiritual succour which God in his mercy is now vouchsafing unto you—of that regeneration which is now beginning.

## XIII.

## ON INSËNSIBILITY TO OFFENCES.

PSALM XIX. 12, 13.

*Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults. Keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me.*

THESE words express a rational and affecting prayer, according to the sense which they carry with them at first sight, and without entering into any interpretation of them whatsoever. Who is there, that will not join heartily in this prayer? for who is there that has not occasion to pray against his sins? We are *laden* with the weight of our sins. "The remembrance of them is grievous to us; the burden of them is intolerable." But beyond this, these same words, when they come to be fully understood, have a still stronger meaning, and still more applicable to the state and condition of our souls; which I will endeavour to set before you.

You will observe the expression, "my secret faults: O cleanse thou me from my *secret* faults." Now the question is, to whom are these faults a secret? to myself, or to others? whether the prayer relates to faults which are concealed from mankind, and are in that sense secret; or to faults which are concealed from the offender himself, and are therefore secret, in the most

full and strict sense of which the term is capable? Now, I say, that the context, or whole passage taken together, *obliges* us to understand the word *secret* in this latter sense. For observe two particulars. The first verse of the text runs thus: "Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults." Now, to give a connexion to the two parts of this verse, it is necessary to suppose, that one reason, for which it was so difficult for any man to know how oft he offended was, that many of his faults were *secret*; but in what way and to whom secret? to himself undoubtedly: otherwise the secrecy could have been no reason or cause of that difficulty. The merely being concealed from others would be nothing to the present purpose: because the most concealed sins, in that sense, are as well known to the sinner himself, as those which are detected or most open; and therefore such concealment would not account for the sinner's difficulty in understanding the state of his soul and of his conscience. To me it appears very plain, that the train of the Psalmist's thoughts went thus:—He is led to cast back his recollection upon the sins of his life; he finds himself, as many of us must do, lost and bewildered in their number and frequency; because, beside all other reasons of confusion, there were many which were unnoticed, unreckoned, and unobserved. Against this class of sins, which, for this reason, he calls his secret faults, he raises up his voice to God in prayer. This is evidently, as I think, the train and connexion of thought; and this requires, that the secret faults here spoken of be explained of such faults as were secret to the person himself. It makes no connexion, it carries with it no consistent meaning, to interpret them of those faults which were concealed

from others. This is one argument for the exposition contended for; another is the following. You will observe in the text that two kinds of sins are distinctly spoken of under the name of "secret faults, and presumptuous sins." The words are "O cleanse thou me from my secret faults; keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins." Now it will not do to consider these secret faults as merely concealed faults; because they are not necessarily distinguished from, nor can be placed in opposition to, presumptuous sins. The Psalmist is here addressing God; he is deeply affected with the state of his soul, and with his sins, considered in relation to God. Now, with respect to God, there may be, and there often is, as much presumption, as much daring, in committing a concealed sin, as in committing a sin which is open to the world. The circumstance of concealment, or detection, makes no difference at all in this respect; and therefore they could not properly be placed in different classes; nor would it be natural so to place them: but offences which escape the sinner's own notice at the time, may certainly be distinguished from those which are committed with a high hand, with a full knowledge of the guilt, and defiance of the consequences; and that is, as I believe, the distinction here intended: and the one the Psalmist called his secret faults, the other his presumptuous sins. Upon the whole, therefore, I conclude, that the secret sins against which the Psalmist prayed, were sins secret to himself.

But here, therefore, comes the principal question—How there *can* be any sins of this sort? how that can be a sin, which is neither observed, nor known to be so by the person who commits it? And then there

comes also a second consideration, which is, if there be such, what ought to be done with respect to them? Now, as well upon the authority of the text, as upon what is the real case with human nature, when that case is rightly understood, I contend, first, that there are many violations of God's laws, which the men who are guilty of them, are not sensible of at the time; and yet, secondly, such, as that their want of being sensible of them, does not excuse, or make them cease to be sins. All this, in truth, is no other than the regular effect of sinful habits. Such is the power of custom over our consciences, that there is, perhaps, hardly any bad action which a man is capable of committing, that he may not commit so often, as to become unconscious of its guilt, as much as of the most indifferent thing which he does. If some very great and atrocious crimes may be thought exceptions to this observation, and that no habit or custom can by any possibility reconcile them to the human conscience; it is only because they are such as cannot, from their very nature, be repeated so often by the same person, as to become familiar and habitual: if they could, the consequence would be the same; they would be no more thought of by the sinner himself, than other habitual sins are. But great, outrageous crimes, against life, for instance, and property, and public safety, may be laid out of the question, as not falling, I trust and believe, within the case of any one who hears me; and as in no case whatever capable of being so common, as to be fair experiments of the strength of our observation. These are not what compose our account with God. A man may be (as indeed most men are) quite free from the crimes of murder, robbery, and the like, and yet be *far* from the



kingdom of God. I fear it may be said of most of us, that the class of sins which compose our account with God, are habitual sins ; habitual *omissions*, and habitual *commissions*. Now it is true of both these, that we may have continued in them so long, they may have become so familiar to us by repetition, that we think nothing at all of them. We may neglect any duty, till we forget that it is one ; we may neglect our prayers ; we may neglect our devotion ; we may neglect every duty towards God, till we become so unaccustomed and unused to them, as to be insensible that we are incurring any omission, or contracting, from that omission, any guilt which can hurt ; and yet we may be, in truth, all the while “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath.” How many thousands, for instance, by omitting to attend the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, have come not to know, that it forms any part of Christian obligation. And long disuse and discontinuance would have the same effect upon any other duty, however plain might be the proof of it, when the matter came to be considered.

It is not less so with sins of commission. Serious minds are shocked with observing with what complete unconcern and indifference many forbidden things are practised. The persons who are guilty of them do not, by any mark or symptom whatever, appear to feel the smallest rebuke of conscience, or to have the least sense of either guilt, or danger, or shame, in what they do ; and it not only appears to be so, but it is so. They are, in fact, without any notice, consciousness, or compunction upon the subject. These sins, therefore, if they be such, are secret sins to them. But are they not therefore sins? That becomes the next great

question. We must allow, because fact proves it, that habit and custom can destroy the sense and perception of sin. Does the act then, in that person, cease to be any longer a sin? This must be asserted by those who argue, that nothing can be a sin but what is known and understood, and also felt and perceived, to be so, by the sinner himself at the time; and who, consequently, deny that there are any secret sins, in our sense of that expression. Now mark the consequences which would follow such an opinion. It is then the timorous *beginner* in wicked courses who alone is to be brought to account. Can such a doctrine be maintained? Sinners are called upon by preachers of the Gospel, and over and over again called upon, to compare themselves with themselves; themselves at one time with themselves at another; their former selves, when they first entered upon sinful allowances, and their present selves, since they have been confirmed in them—with what fear, and scruple, and reluctance, what sense and acknowledgement of wrong, what apprehension of danger, against what remonstrance of reason, and with what opposition and violence to their religious principle, they first gave way to temptation—with what ease, if ease it may be called, at least with what hardness and unconcern, they now continue in practices which they once dreaded—in a word, what a change, as to the particular article in question at least, has taken place in their moral sentiments! Yet, notwithstanding this change in *them*, the reason, which made what they are doing a sin, remains the same that it was at first: at first they saw great force and strength in that reason; at present they see none; but, in truth it is all the while the same. Unless, there-

fore, we choose to say, that a man has only to harden himself in his sins (which thing perseverance will always do for him); and that with the sense he takes away the guilt of them; and that the only sinner is the conscious, trembling, affrightened, reluctant sinner; that the confirmed sinner is not a sinner at all;—unless we will advance this, which affronts all principles of justice and sense, we must confess that secret sins are both possible and frequent things: that with the *habitual* sinner, and with every man, in so far as he is, and in that article in which he is, an habitual sinner, this is almost sure to be the case.

What, then, are the reflections suitable to such a case? First, to join most sincerely with the Psalmist in his prayer to God, “O cleanse thou me from my secret faults.” Secondly, to see, in this consideration, the exceedingly great danger of evil habits of all kinds. It is a dreadful thing to commit sins without knowing it, and yet to have those sins to answer for. That is dreadful; and yet it is no other than the just consequences and effect of sinful habits. They destroy in us the perception of guilt: that experience proves. They do not destroy the guilt itself: that no man can argue, because it leads to injustice and absurdity.

How well does the Scripture express the state of an habitual sinner, when he calls him “*dead* in trespasses and sins!” His conscience is dead: that, which ought to be the living, actuating, governing principle of the whole man, is dead within him—is extinguished by the power of sin reigning in his heart. He is incapable of perceiving his sins, whilst he commits them with greediness. It is evident that a vast alteration must take place in such a man, before he be brought into the way

of salvation. It is a great change from innocence to guilt, when a man falls from a life of virtue to a life of sin. But the recovery from it is much greater; because the very secrecy of our sins to ourselves, the unconsciousness of them, which practice and custom, and repetition and habit, have produced in us, is an almost insurmountable hinderance to an effectual reformation.

## XIV.

## A SENSE OF SIN TO BE KEPT UP IN OUR MINDS.

## PSALM XL. 15.

*For innumerable troubles are come about me ; my sins have taken such hold upon me that I am not able to look up ; yea, they are more in number than the hairs of my head, and my heart hath failed me.*

A CONVICTION of sin is oftentimes the beginning of religion in the heart. It is oftentimes a source of anguish and despair. Yet, with all its bitterness and all its danger, it produces a frame of mind more hopeful as to salvation than insensibility. I do not mean that it is more hopeful than the reasonable satisfaction and assurance which arises in the heart from the recollection of a well-spent life, or even of sincere, broken, and imperfect endeavours after such a life ; but it is more comfortable than unconcernedness, for that has no recollection to build upon. It is the property of a man (and, God knows, there are millions such), who, when danger is at hand, seeks security by shutting his eyes against danger.

Now all who feel within themselves a strong conviction of their sin, I desire they will go to the text I have read to you. It describes their case ; it exposes their feeling and their sufferings, and it leads them into the right direction. The words of the text bear about them the marks and tokens of reality. It seems im-

possible to entertain a doubt but that the person who wrote them was at that time labouring and struggling under powerful workings and impressions of conscience ; under a deep sense of guiltiness before God, and of the shame and misery, self-condemnation and debasement, which belong to such a condition when it is perceived. Perhaps it is more than we ought to presume, and more than the truth, that this person was a greater sinner than the generality of men. It might be only that he perceived his condition ; and there is as much difference between the man who does, and the man who does not perceive his situation, as between two sinners of very unequal magnitude.

Let us now see how the inward compunctions and stirrings of the writer's conscience operated ; what thoughts it raised in him, what expressions it drew from him.

First, He is covered not only with remorse and fear, but with confusion. " My sins have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up." It is a strong, significant expression, " have taken such hold upon me," for they do indeed take hold ; they seize the mind. The remembrance of sin, with the reflections which belong to it, possesses, where it enters, the whole soul ; and it ought to do so. As they take hold of the thoughts, so they do of the spirits. Men are disturbed in their spirits by the evils of life : but sin, when understood, makes the evils of life nothing ; it displaces them, by presenting something more near to us than they are. The force with which sin perceived, sin understood, seizes the spirits and the thoughts, is well expressed by the Psalmist, when he tells of their taking hold of him. " And they overwhelm him with shame and confusion." It was not the shame of men,

for his sins might be unknown to them: it was not *that* sort of confusion which he alludes to, but it was shame and confusion before God. And this very often exists in reality; nay, so much so, that the man who has never felt it ought to doubt with himself whether religion be indeed within him. It is a different thing from the shame of men: it is a secret humiliation and debasement, when we call to mind our behaviour, as towards God. The Publican in the Gospel would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven. He felt his humiliation and self-debasement; yet was it entirely between his God and him. The Pharisee saw him afar off, but it is not said that he saw the Pharisee, or that he was moved by the presence of men, or by any consideration of the presence of men: nay, the contrary must be taken for granted, to give proper force and significance to the parable. It must be taken on the Publican's part, to have been a secret and close communication with his Maker.

Now observe the progress of the Psalmist's meditations: "My sins have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up;" and why? You hear the reason: "They are more in number, than the hairs of my head." *This is to perceive sin.* When we begin to see our sins as they are, they crowd and multiply upon us beyond number. An ordinary mind, or a man in an ordinary state of mind, bears nothing, possibly, in his memory as touching his sins, but a few flagitious, very vicious actions, if he has in the course of his life been guilty of any. But these cannot, in the worst men, be said to be more in number than the hairs of his head. It is only when a man comes to think more deeply and closely upon the subject, that he is made to perceive the number of his sins, and understand them,

as the Psalmist did. Let us place fairly and fully before our eyes the laws of God. Let us call to mind, not slightly, but thoroughly, our thoughts, our affections, our desires, and passions; what has passed within, as well as what hath passed without us: and lastly, our words, and actions, and conduct; not in a few great instances of flagrant offences, which may, indeed, or may not be really more sinful, but are more strikingly such, because coming under human laws and opinions. I say, let us not confine our attention to these, which we are apt to do; but direct it to the examination of our conduct in its ordinary course. Let us do this, and we shall see that our sins are more in number than the hairs of our head. For example: What is it which we owe to God, which we know to be due to him? "To love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our strength." Have we done so? Have not, on the contrary, our lives been a constant failure of duty in this very article? Wherein have we come up to this rule? Wherein have we not come short of it? Yet it is both our rule and our reason. The rule carries our obligation no farther than reason carries it. Such a being, such a benefactor as God is, is entitled to our love, and to be loved with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our strength. Deficiencies, therefore, in this respect, are sins truly and actually such.

Then, as to mankind, our benevolence is to be as strong as our self-interest: we are to love our neighbour *as* ourselves. Self-interest is a motive of action usually strong and powerful enough; benevolence ought to be equally strong and powerful; it ought to be so: for that is the meaning of the rule. Yet is it so? is it any thing like it? Here, therefore, we must see in ourselves a humiliating deficiency of duty.



Again : look to the ten commandments themselves : look not to their letter, but their spirit ; look to them as expounded, in some instances, by our Lord himself in his sermon upon the mount, and consequently as justly admitting the same exposition in other instances ; look to their comprehension and extent, to what has been well called their *spirituality* ; and then bring your conduct to the touchstone, that is to say, the test and criterion of rectitude, and we shall want little to convince us of the multitude of our sins, to humble us under the hand of God. It makes no difference, that others have as much cause for as much self-accusation as we have, or some more, and even greater ; it makes, in reality, no difference in the case. We ought to recollect this in particular, because we are ever ready to think it does. But we must look to ourselves alone. We must make no comparison, except *that* between our conduct and our duty. This comparison being honestly made, our failings and offences will appear numerous beyond calculation. And can this be thought upon without concern—a deep and fixed concern ? What says the Psalmist ? “ My heart hath failed me ; ” and contemplation of his sins made his heart sink within him. If it be not so with us, is it that our sins are less and fewer, or is it not that we care less about them ? We do not choose to review or contemplate them at all. When we find ourselves in danger, we wish to become insensible of it. We have it in our power to turn away our thoughts and attentions from subjects that we dislike ; and we exercise this power with respect to our sins. If it were not so, it would be with us as it was with the Psalmist—“ our heart would fail us ; ” the number and vileness of our sins, our failure of duty to God, our transgressions of the purity of his laws, our

deficiency to man for God's sake, would overpower us.

But, thirdly, what was the turn and direction of thought which these reflections produced in the mind of the Psalmist? It was a flying to God Almighty for aid and mercy: "Withdraw not thou thy mercy from me, O Lord. O Lord, let it be thy pleasure to deliver me; make haste, O Lord, to help me." He felt that his situation demanded mercy and assistance,—mercy that would spare,—mercy that would forbear to inflict the punishment due to past sins; and assistance to be delivered from their power for the future. And there was no time to be lost: "Make haste, O Lord, to help me." The bonds and burden of his sins were what he groaned under. The deliverance, therefore, which he meant, was the deliverance from that burden and from those bonds. The help he called for, was divine aid in working that deliverance.

Now if this turn and direction of thought was rightly and properly produced in the Psalmist's mind by the recollection of his sins, much more do they befit a Christian; because Christ, the author and high-priest of our religion, came expressly into the world to save sinners, to enable them to turn to God, and to call upon them to do so.

If the sinner under the law, which the Psalmist was, could cry out for mercy, much more the sinner under grace. If the Psalmist could hope for aid and help to be delivered from sin, much more the Christian for the aid and help which is promised of the Holy Ghost. But then, this recourse to God by Christ, this prayer and supplication, must be sincere. Without sincerity no good can be expected from the prayer; and if it be sincere, it must necessarily import and include a reso-

lution against sin. For no man can pray sincerely against sin, while he is wilfully and voluntarily indulging himself in it. It is contradictory and impossible, equally under the law as under the Gospel, equally under one dispensation as another, under the law as under the Gospel. Can we wonder that nothing comes of such prayers? But if we truly withstand our sins, let them have been what they will, aid, and help, and mercy may be asked for. Indeed they will be asked for, and sought with earnest strivings and contentions of the spirit in prayer. In every heart, touched as the Psalmist's was with the perception of sin, feelings will produce prayers: and, blessed be God, we have in Christ the best assurance that the thing *asked, so asked*, will be obtained.

## XV.

(PART I.)

TO THINK LESS OF OUR VIRTUES, AND MORE OF  
OUR SINS.

PSALM LI. 3.

*My sin is ever before me.*

THERE is a propensity in the human mind, very general and very natural, yet at the same time, unfavourable in a high degree to the Christian character; which is, that, when we look back upon our lives, our recollection dwells too much upon our virtues; our sins are not, as they ought to be, before us; we think too much of our good qualities, or good actions, too little of our crimes, our corruptions, our fallings off and declension from God's laws, our defects, and weaknesses. These we sink and overlook, in meditating upon our good properties. This, I allow, is natural; because, undoubtedly, it is more agreeable to have our minds occupied with the cheering retrospect of virtuous deeds, than with the bitter, humiliating remembrance of sins and follies. But, because it is natural, it does not follow that it is good. It may be the bias and inclination of our minds; and yet neither right, nor safe. When I say that it is wrong, I mean, that it is not the true Christian disposition: and when I say that it is dangerous, I have a view to its effects upon our salvation.

I say, that it is not the true Christian disposition : for, first, how does it accord with what we read in the Christian Scriptures, whether we consider the precepts, which are found there, applicable to the subject, or the conduct and example of Christian characters ?

Now, one precept, and that of Christ himself, you find to be this : “ Ye, when ye shall have done all those things, which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants ; we have done that which was our duty to do.” Luke xvii. 10. It is evident, that this strong admonition was intended, by our Saviour, to check in his disciples an overweening opinion of their own merit. It is a very remarkable passage. I think none throughout the New Testament more so. And the intention, with which the words were spoken, was evidently to check and repel that opinion of merit, which is sure to arise from the habit of fixing our contemplation so much upon our good qualities, and so little upon our bad ones. Yet this habit is natural, and was never prohibited by any teacher, except by our Saviour. With him it was a great fault, by reason of its inconsistency with the favourite principle of his religion, humility. I call humility not only a duty, but a principle. Humble-mindedness is a Christian principle, if there be one ; above all, humble-mindedness towards God. The servants, to whom our Lord’s expression refers, were to be humble-minded, we may presume, towards one another ; but towards their Lord, the only answer, the only thought, the only sentiment, was to be, “ We are unprofitable servants.” And who were they, that were instructed by our Lord to bear constantly this reflection about with them ? Were they sinners, distinctively so called ? Were they grievous, or notorious sinners ? Nay, the very contrary ; they were persons, “ who had done all those things that were commanded them !”

This is precisely the description which our Lord gives us of the persons to whom his lesson was directed. Therefore you see, that an opinion of merit is discouraged, even in those who had the best pretensions to entertain it; if any pretensions were good. But an opinion of merit, an overweening opinion of merit, is sure to grow up in the heart, whenever we accustom ourselves to think much of our virtues, and little of our vices. It is generated, fostered, and cherished, by this train of meditation we have been describing. It cannot be otherwise. And if we would repress it; if we would correct ourselves in this respect; if we would bring ourselves into a capacity of complying with our Saviour's rule, we must alter our turn of thinking; we must reflect more upon our sins, and less upon our virtues. Depend upon it, that we shall view our characters more truly, we shall view them much more safely, when we view them in their defects, and faults, and infirmities, than when we view them only, or principally, on the side of their good qualities; even when these good qualities are real. I suppose, and I have all along supposed, that the good parts of our characters, which, as I contend, too much attract our attention, are, nevertheless real; and I suppose this, because our Saviour's parable supposes the same.

Another great Christian rule is, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philip. ii. 12.) These significant words, "fear and trembling," do not accord with the state of a mind which is all contentment, satisfaction, and self-complacency; and which is brought into that state by the habit of viewing and regarding those good qualities, which a person believes to belong to himself, or those good actions which he remembers to have performed. The precept much better accords with a mind anxious, fearful, and appre-

hensive ; and made so by a sense of sin. But a sense of sin exists not, as it ought to do, in that breast which is in the habit of meditating chiefly upon its virtues. I can very well believe, that two persons of the same character in truth, may, nevertheless, view themselves in very different lights, according as one is accustomed to look chiefly at his good qualities, the other chiefly at his transgressions and imperfections ; and I say, that this latter is the disposition for working out salvation agreeably to Saint Paul's rule and method ; that is, " with fear and trembling : " the other is not.

But further ; there is, upon this subject, a great deal to be learnt from the examples which the New Testament sets before us. Precepts are short, necessarily must be so ; take up but little room ; and, for that reason, do not always strike with the force, or leave the impression, which they ought to do : but *examples* of character, when the question is concerning character, and what is the proper character, have more weight and body in the consideration, and take up more room in our minds than precepts. Now, from one end of the New Testament to the other, you will find the evangelical character to be *contrition*. You hear little of virtue or righteousness ; but you hear perpetually of the forgiveness of sins. With the first Christian teachers, " repent, repent," was the burden of their exhortations ; the almost constant sound of their voice. Does not this strain of preaching show, that the preachers wished all who heard them to think much more of offences than of merits ? Nay, further, with respect to themselves, whenever this contemplation of righteousness came in their way, it came in their way only to be renounced, as natural, perhaps, and also grateful to human feelings, but as inconsistent and irreconcilable

with the Christian condition. It might do for a heathen, but it was the reverse of every thing that is Christian.

The turn of thought which I am recommending, or rather, which I find it necessary to insist upon, as an essential part of the Christian character, is strongly seen in one particular passage of Saint Paul's writings; namely, in the third chapter to the Philippians. "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." These were points which, at that time of day, were thought to be grounds of confidence and exultation. But this train of thought no sooner rises in his mind, than the apostle *checks* it, and turns from it to an anxious view of his own deficiencies. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." These are the words of an anxious man. "Not," then he proceeds, "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." In this passage, you see, that, withdrawing his mind from all notions of perfection, attainment, accomplishment, security, he fixes it upon his deficiencies. Then he tells you, that *forgetting*, that is, expressly putting out of his mind and his thought, the progress and ad-



vance which he had already made, he casts his eyes and attention upon those qualities in which he was short and deficient, upon what remained for him yet to do. And this I take to be the true Christian way of proceeding. “Forget those things that are behind;” put out of your thoughts the attainments and progress you have already made, in order to see fully your defects and imperfections.

In another passage, found in a chapter with which all are acquainted, [the fifteenth of the first epistle to the Corinthians] our apostle, having occasion to compare his situation with that of the other apostles, is led to say: “I laboured more abundantly than they all.” Saint Paul’s labours in the Gospel, labours which consumed his whole life, were surely what he might reflect upon with complacency and satisfaction. If such reflections were proper in any case, they were proper in his. Yet observe how they are checked and qualified. The moment he had said, “I laboured more abundantly than they all,” he added, as it were, correcting himself for the expression, “Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me.” He magnifies not himself, but the grace of God, which was with him. In the next place, you will observe, that, though the consciousness of his labours, painful, indefatigable labours, and meritorious labours, if ever man’s were so—I say, that, though the consciousness of these was present to his mind at the time, yet it did not hinder him from feeling, with the deepest abasement and self-degradation, his former offences against Christ, though they were offences which sprang from error. “I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God; but, by the grace of God, I am what I am.” The faults of his life

were uppermost in his mind. No mention, no recollection of his services, even when he did happen to recollect them, shut out, even for a single moment, the deep memory of his offences, or covered or concealed them from his view.

In another place, the same apostle, looking back upon the history of his singular and eventful life, exhibits himself to his converts, as how? not as bringing forward his merit, pleading his services, or claiming his reward: but as nothing other, nothing more, than a monument and example of God Almighty's mercy. Sinners need not despair of mercy, when so great a sinner as himself obtained it. Hear his own words: "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." 1 Timothy, i. 16. What could be more humble or self-depressing than this acknowledgement? yet this was Saint Paul's.

The eleventh chapter of the second epistle to the Corinthians, and also the twelfth, ought to be read by you on this occasion. They are very remarkable chapters, and very much to our present purpose. It had so happened, that some hostile, and, as it should seem, some false teachers, had acquired a considerable influence and ascendancy in the church which Saint Paul had planted. To counteract which influence it became necessary for him to assert his character, to state his pretensions to credit and authority amongst them at least, and in comparison with those who were leading them astray. He complies with the occasion; and he does accordingly set forth and enumerate his pretensions. But I entreat you to observe, with how many apologies, with what reluctance, and under what

strong protestations, he does it ; showing, most manifestly, how contrary it was to his habit, his judgement, and to the inclination of his mind to do so. His expressions are such as these : “ Would to God ye could bear with me a little in *my folly* ; and, indeed, bear with me.” What was his folly ? the recital, he was about to give, of his services and pretensions. Though compelled by the reason you have heard, to give it, yet he calls it folly to do so. He is interrupted as he proceeds, by the same sentiment ; “ That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but, as it were, foolishly in this confidence of boasting.” And again, referring to the necessity, which drew from him this sort of language ; “ I am become,” says he, “ a *fool* in glorying ; ye have compelled me.”

But what forms, perhaps, the strongest part of the example is, that the apostle considers this tendency to boast and glory, though it was in his gifts, rather than his services, as one of his dangers, one of his temptations, one of the propensities which he had both to guard and struggle against, and, lastly, an inclination, for which he found an antidote and remedy in the dispensations of Providence towards him. Of his gifts, he says, considering himself as nothing, as entirely passive in the hands of God, “ of such a one,” of a person to whom such gifts and revelations as these have been imparted, “ I will glory ; yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.” Then he goes on : “ Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.”

After what you have heard, you will not wonder, that this same Saint Paul should pronounce himself to be

“the chief of sinners.”—“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief.” 1 Tim. i. 15. His sins were uppermost in his thoughts. Other thoughts occasionally visited his mind: but the impression which these had made was constant, deep, fixed, and indelible.

If, therefore, you would imitate Saint Paul in his turn and train of religious thought; if you would adopt his disposition, his frame, his habit of mind, in this important exercise; you must meditate more upon your sins, and less upon your virtues.

Again; and which is another strong scriptural reason for the advice I am giving, the habit of viewing and contemplating our own virtues has a tendency in opposition to a fundamental duty of our religion, the entertaining of a due and grateful sense of the mercy of God in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. The custom of thought, which we dissuade, is sure to generate in us notions of merit; and that, not only in comparison with other men, which is by no means good, or likely to produce any good effect upon our disposition, but also in relation to God himself; whereas the whole of that sentiment, which springs up in the mind, when we regard our characters in comparison with those of other men, if tolerated at all, ought to sink into the lowest self-abasement, when we advance our thoughts to God, and the relation in which we stand to him. Then is all boasting, either in spirit or by words, to be done away. The highest act of faith and obedience, recorded in Scripture, was Abraham's consent to sacrifice his son, when he believed that God required it. It was the severest trial that human nature could be put upon; and, therefore, if any man, who ever lived, were authorized to boast of his obedience, it was Abraham

after this experiment. Yet what says Saint Paul. “ If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory ; *but not before God.*” No man’s pretensions to glory were greater, yet, before God, they were nothing. “ By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, lest any man should boast.” Eph. ii. 8, 9. Here you perceive distinctly, that, speaking of salvation, with reference to its cause, it is by grace ; it is an act of pure favour ; it is not of yourselves ; it is the gift of God ; it is not of works ; and that this representation was given, lest any man should boast, that is, expressly for the purpose of beating down and humbling all sentiments of merit or desert in what we do ; lest they induce us, as they will induce us, to think less gratefully, or less piously, of God’s exceeding love and kindness towards us. There is no proportion between even our best services and that reward, which God hath in reserve for them that love him. Why then are such services to be so rewarded ? It is the grace of God ; it is the riches of his grace ; in other words, his abounding kindness and favour ; it is his love ; it is his mercy. In this manner the subject is constantly represented in Scripture : and it is an article of the Christian religion. And to possess our minds with a sense, an adequate sense, so far as it is possible to be so, of this truth, is a duty of the religion. But to be ruminating and meditating upon our virtues, is not the way to acquire that sense. Such meditations breed opinions of merit and desert ; of presumption, of pride, of superciliousness, of self-complacency ; tempers of mind, in a word, not only incompatible with humility, but also incompatible with that sense of divine love and mercy towards us, which lies at the root of all true religion, is the source and fountain of all true piety.

You have probably heard of the term self-righteousness: you find it much in the writings and discourses of a particular class of Christians, and always accompanied with strong and severe expressions of censure and reprobation. If the term mean the habit of contemplating our virtues, and not our vices; or a strong leaning and inclination thereto, I agree with those Christians in thinking, that it is a disposition, a turn of mind to be strongly resisted, and restrained, and repressed. If the term mean any other way of viewing our own character, so as to diminish or lower our sense of God Almighty's goodness and mercy towards us, in making us the tender of a heavenly reward, then also I agree with them in condemning it, both as erroneous in its principle, and highly dangerous in its effects. If the term mean something more than, or different from, what is here stated, and what has been enlarged upon in this discourse, then I profess myself not to understand its meaning.

## XVI.

(PART II.)

TO THINK LESS OF OUR VIRTUES, AND MORE OF  
OUR SINS.

PSALM LI. 3.

*My sin is ever before me.*

To think well is the way to act rightly: because thought is the source and spring of action. When the course and habit of thinking is wrong, the root is corrupt; “and a corrupt tree bringeth not forth good fruit:” do what you will, if the root be corrupt, the fruit will be corrupt also. It is not only true, that different actions will proceed from different trains of thought; but it is also true, that the same actions, the same external conduct, may be very different in the sight of God, according as it proceeds from a right or a wrong, a more or less proper principle and motive, a more or less proper disposition. Such importance is attached to the disposition; of such great consequence is it that our disposition in religious matters be what it should be. By disposition is meant, the bent or tendency of our inclinations; and by disposition is also meant, the train and habit of our thoughts, two things which are always nearly connected. It is the latter sense, however, in which I use the word; and the particular lesson which I am inculcating, for the conduct of our thoughts, is to think more of our sins, and less of our

virtues. In a former discourse, I showed, that there are strong and positive Scripture precepts, a due regard to which accords with the state of mind of him who fixes his attention upon his sins and defects, and by no means with his state of mind who hath fixed his attention chiefly upon his virtues: secondly, that Scripture examples, that of St. Paul most particularly, teach us to *renounce* the thoughts of our virtues, and to entertain deeply and constantly the thoughts of our sins; thirdly, that the habit here reproved is inconsistent with a due sense of the love of God in the redemption of the world. I am now to offer such further reasons as appear to support the rule I have laid down.

And, first, there is no occasion whatever to meditate upon our virtues and good qualities. We may leave them to themselves. We need not fear that they will either be forgotten or undervalued. "God is not unrighteous to forget your works and labour of love:" Heb. vi. 10. He will remember them; we need not. They are set down in his book; not a particle will be lost. Blessed are they who have much there; but we need not count them up in our recollection; for, whatever our virtues are or were, we cannot make them better by thinking of them afterwards. We may make them better in future by thinking of their imperfections, and by endeavouring to encounter, to lessen, or remove those imperfections hereafter; but then this is to think, not upon our virtues, but upon our imperfections. Thinking upon our virtues, as such, has no tendency to make them better, be they what they will. But it is not the same with our sins. Thinking upon these afterwards may make a very great alteration in them, because it may lead to an effectual repentance. As to the act itself, what is past cannot be recalled; what is done



cannot be undone: the mischief may possibly be irrevocable and irreparable. But as to the sin, it is different. Deep, true, sincere penitence may, through the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, do away that. And such penitence may be the fruit of meditation upon our sins—cannot possibly come without it. Nay, the act itself may be altered. It is not always that an injury is irreparable. Wrong indeed has been received at our hands; but restitution and compensation may be in our power. When they are so, they are the surest proofs of penitence. No penitence is sincere without them, if they be practicable. This benefit to those whom we have injured, and an infinitely greater benefit to ourselves than to them, may be the effect of seeing our sins in their true light; which that man never does, who thinks only, or chiefly, or habitually, upon his virtues. Can a better reason be given for meditating more upon our sins, and less upon our virtues, than this; that one train of thought may be profitable to salvation, the other is profitable for nothing?

It is an exceedingly good observation, that we may safely leave our virtues and good qualities to themselves. And, besides the use we have made of it in showing the superfluity, as well as the danger of giving in to the contemplation of our virtues, it is also a quieting and consoling reflection for a different, and, in some degree, an opposite description of character, that is to say, for tender and timorous consciences. Such are sometimes troubled with doubts and scruples about even their good actions. Virtue was too easy for them, or too difficult; too easy and pleasant to have any merit in it; or difficult by reason of fleshly, selfish, or depraved propensities, still existing unsubdued, still struggling in their unregenerated hearts. These are natural, and, as

I have sometimes known them, very distressing scruples. I think that observations might be offered to remove the ground of them altogether: but what I have at present to suggest is, that the very act of reflection, which leads to them, is unnecessary, provided you will proceed by our rule, viz. to leave your virtues, such as they are, to themselves; and to bend the whole force of your thought towards your sins, towards the conquest of these.

But it will be said, are we not to taste the comforts of religion? Are we not to be permitted, or rather ought we not to be encouraged, to relish, to indulge, to enjoy these comforts? And can this be done without meditating upon our good actions?

I answer, that this can be done without meditating upon our good actions. We need not seek the comforts of religion in this way. Much we need not *seek* them at all; they will visit us of their own accord, if we be serious and hearty in our religion. A well-spent life will impart its support to the spirits without any endeavour, on our part, to call up our merits to our view, or even allowing the idea of merit to take possession of our minds. There will, in this respect, always be as much difference as there ought to be between the righteous man and the sinner (or, to speak more properly, between sinners of different degrees), without taking pains to draw forth in our recollection instances of our virtue, or to institute a comparison between ourselves and others, or certain others of our acquaintance. These are habits, which I hold to be unchristian and wrong; and that the true way of finding and feeling the consolations of religion is by progressively conquering our sins. Think of these; contend with these; and, if you contend with sincerity, and with effect, which is

the proof indeed of sincerity, I will answer for the comforts of religion being your portion. What is it that disturbs our religious tranquillity? What is it that embitters or impairs our religious comfort, damps and checks our religious hopes, hinders us from relishing and entertaining these ideas, from turning to them, as a supply of consolation under all circumstances? What is it but our sins? Depend upon it, that it is sin, and nothing else, which spoils our religious comfort. Cleanse your heart from sin, and religion will enter in, with all her train of hopes and consolations. For proof of this, we may, as before, refer to the examples of Scripture Christians. They rejoiced in the Lord continually. "The joy of faith," Phil. i. 25. "Joy in the Holy Ghost," Rom. xiv. 17, was the word in their mouths, the sentiment of their hearts. They spake of their religion, as of a strong consolation, as of the "refuge, to which they had fled, as of the hope of which they had laid hold, of an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast:" Heb. vi. 18, 19. Their promise from the Lord Jesus Christ was, "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you:" John xvi. 22. Was this promise fulfilled to them? read Acts, xiii. 52. "They were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost." "The kingdom of God," saith Saint Paul, "is joy in the Holy Ghost:" Rom. xiv. 17. So that Saint Paul, you hear, takes his very description and definition of Christianity from the joy which is diffused over the heart; and Saint Paul, I am very confident, described nothing but what he felt. Yet Saint Paul did not meditate upon his virtues: nay, expressly renounced that sort of meditation. His meditations, on the contrary, were fixed upon his own unworthiness, and upon the exceeding, stupendous mercy of God towards him,

through Jesus Christ his Saviour : at least, we have his own authority for saying, that, in his Christian progress, he never looked back ; he forgot that which was behind, whatever it might be, which he had already attained ; he refused to remember it, he put it out of his thoughts. Yet, upon this topic of religious joy, hear him again ; “ we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ ;” Rom. v. 11, and once more, “ the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace :” Gal. v. 22. These last are three memorable words, and they describe, not the effects of ruminating upon a man’s own virtues, but the fruit of the Spirit.

But it is not one apostle in whom we find this temper of mind ; it is in them all. Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Peter thus addresses his converts, “ whom, having not seen, ye love ; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory :” 1 Peter, i. 8. This joy covered even their persecutions and sufferings : “ wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now, for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” 1 Peter, i. 6, meaning persecutions. In like manner Saint James saith, “ count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, that is, persecutions ;” and why ? “ knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience :” James, i. 4. Let no one, after these quotations, say, that it is necessary to fix our attention upon the virtues of our character, in order to taste the comforts of religion. No persons enjoyed these comforts in so great perfection as the Christians whom we read of in Scripture, yet no persons thought so little of their own virtues. What they continually thought upon was the abounding love of Christ towards them, “ in that, whilst they were yet sinners, he died for them,” and the

tender and exceeding mercies of God in pardon of their sins, through Christ. From this they drew their consolation ; but the ground and origin of this train of thought was, not the contemplation of virtue, but the conviction of sin.

But again ; the custom of viewing our virtues has a strong tendency to fill us with fallacious notions of our own state and condition. One almost constant deception is this, viz. that in whatever quality we have pretensions, or believe that we have pretensions, to excel, that quality we place at the head of all other virtues. If we be charitable, then “charity covereth a multitude of sins.” If we be strictly honest, then strict honesty is no less than the bond which keeps society together ; and, consequently, is that without which other virtues would have no worth, or rather no existence. If we be temperate and chaste, then self-government being the hardest of all duties, is the surest test of obedience. Now every one of these propositions is true ; but the misfortune is, that only one of them is thought of at the time, and that the one which favours our own particular case and character. The comparison of different virtues, as to their price and value, may give occasion to many nice questions ; and some rules might be laid down upon the subject ; but I contend, that the practice itself is useless, and not only useless, but delusive. Let us leave, as I have already said, our virtues to themselves, not engaging our minds in appreciating either their intrinsic or comparative value ; being assured that they will be weighed in unerring scales. Our business is with our sins.

Again ; the habit of contemplating our spiritual acquirements, our religious or moral excellencies, has, very usually, and, I think, almost unavoidably, an un-

favourable effect upon our disposition towards other men. A man who is continually computing his riches, almost in spite of himself, grows proud of his wealth. A man who accustoms himself to read, and inquire, and think a great deal about his family, becomes vain of his extraction : he can hardly help becoming so. A man who has his titles sounding in his ears, or his state much before his eyes, is lifted up by his rank. These are effects which every one observes ; and no inconsiderable degree of the same effect springs from the habit of meditating upon our virtues. Now humble-mindedness is a Christian duty, if there be one. It is more than a duty ; it is a principle. It is a principle of our religion ; and its influence is exceedingly great, not only upon our religious, but our social character. They who are truly humble-minded have no quarrels, give no offence, contend with no one in wrath and bitterness ; still more impossible is it for them to *insult* any man, under any circumstances. But the way to be humble-minded is the way I am pointing out, viz. to think less of our virtues, and more of our sins. In reading the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, if we could suppose them to be real characters, I should say of them, that the one had just come from ruminating upon his virtues, the other from meditating upon his sins. And mark the difference ; first, in their behaviour ; next, in their acceptance with God. The Pharisee all loftiness, and contemptuousness, and recital, and comparison, full of ideas of merit, views the poor publican, although withdrawn to a distance from him, with eyes of scorn. The publican, on the contrary, enters not into competition with the Pharisee, or with any one. So far from looking round, he durst not so much as *lift up* his eyes ; but casts himself, hardly indeed presumes

to cast himself, not upon the justice, but wholly and solely upon the mercies of his Maker: "God be merciful to me a sinner." We know the judgement which our Lord himself pronounced upon the case: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." Luke, xviii. 14. The more, therefore, we are like the publican, and the less we are like the Pharisee, the more we come up to the genuine temper of Christ's religion.

Think, then, less of your virtues; more of your sins. Do I hear any one answer, I have no sins to think upon; I have no crimes which lie upon my conscience? I reply, that this may be true with respect to some, nay, with respect to many persons, according to the idea we commonly annex to the words, sins and crimes; meaning thereby acts of gross and external wickedness. But think further; enlarge your views. Is your obedience to the law of God what it ought to be, or what it might be? The first commandment of that law is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Is there, upon the subject of this commandment, no matter for thought, no room for amendment? The second commandment is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Is all with us, as it should be, here? Again, there is a *spirituality* in the commands of Christ's religion, which will cause the man who obeys them truly, not only to govern his actions, but his words: not only his words, but his inclinations and his dispositions, his internal habits, as well as external life. "Ye have heard that it hath been said of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, He that looketh on a woman to lust after her," that is, he who voluntarily indulges, and entertains in his mind an unlawful

desire, "hath committed adultery with her already in his heart,"—is, by the very entertainment of such ideas, instead of striving honestly and resolutely to banish them from his mind, or to take his mind off from them, a sinner in the sight of God. Much the same kind of exposition belongs to the other commandments; not only is murder forbidden, but all unreasonable, intemperate, anger and passion; not only stealing, but all hard and unfair conduct, either in transacting business with those who are upon a level with us, or, where it is more to be feared, towards those who are in our power. And do not these points open to us a field of inquiry, how far we are concerned in them? There may not be what, strictly speaking, can be called an act or deed, which is scandalously bad; yet the current of our imaginations, the bent of our tempers, the stream of our affections, may all, or any of them, be wrong, and may be requiring, even at the peril of our salvation, stronger control, a better direction.

Again; there may not be any action, which, singly and separately taken, amounts to what would be reckoned a crime; yet there may be actions, which we give into, which even our own consciences cannot approve; and these may be so frequent with us, as to form a part of the course and fashion of our lives.

Again; it is possible, that some of the miscarriages in conduct, of which we have to accuse ourselves, may be imputable to inadvertency or surprise. But could these miscarriages happen so often as they do, if we exercised that vigilance in our Christian course, which not only forms a part of the Christian character, but is a sure effect of a sincere faith in religion, and a corresponding solicitude and concern about it?

Lastly, unprofitableness itself is a sin. We need not



do mischief in order to commit sin ; uselessness, when we might be useful, is enough to make us sinners before God. The fig-tree in the Gospel was cut down, not because it bore sour fruit, but because it bore none. The parable of the talents (Matt. xxv. 14.) is pointed expressly against the simple neglect of faculties and opportunities of doing good, as contradistinguished from the perpetration of positive crimes. Are not all these topics fit matters of meditation, in the review of our lives? Upon the whole, when I hear a person say he has no sins to think upon, I conclude that he has not thought seriously concerning religion at all.

Let our sins, then, be ever before us : if not our crimes, (of which it is possible, that, according to the common acceptance of that word, we may not have many to remember) let our omissions, deficiencies, failures, our irregularities of heart and affection, our vices of temper and disposition, our course and habit of giving into smaller offences, meaning, as I do mean, by *offences*, all those things which our consciences cannot really approve ; our slips, and inadvertencies, and surprises, much too frequent for a man in earnest about salvation : let these things occupy our attention ; let this be the bent and direction of our thoughts ; for they are the thoughts which will bring us to God evangelically ; because they are the thoughts which will not only increase our vigilance, but which must inspire us with that humility as to ourselves, with that deep, and abiding, and operating, sense of God Almighty's love and kindness and mercy towards us, in and through Jesus Christ our Saviour, which it was one great aim and end of the Gospel, and of those who preached it, to inculcate upon all who came to take hold of the offer of grace.

## XVII.

## SALVATION FOR PENITENT SINNERS.

LUKE VII. 47.

*Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much.*

IT has been thought an extravagant doctrine, that the greatest sinners were sometimes nearer to the kingdom of heaven than they whose offences were less exorbitant, and less conspicuous : yet, I apprehend, the doctrine wants only to be rationally explained, to show that it has both a great deal of truth, and a great deal of use, in it ; that it may be an awakening religious proposition to some, whilst it cannot, without being wilfully misconstrued, delude or deceive any.

Of all conditions in the world, the most to be despaired of, is the condition of those who are altogether insensible and unconcerned about religion ; and yet they may be, in the mean time, tolerably regular in their outward behaviour ; there may be nothing in it to give great offence ; their character may be fair ; they may pass with the common stream, or they may even be well spoken of ; nevertheless, I say, that, whilst this insensibility remains upon their minds, their condition is more to be despaired of, than that of any other person. The religion of Christ does not in any way apply to them : they do not belong to it ; for are they to be saved by performing God's will ? God is not in their thoughts ; his will is not before their eyes. They may

do good things, but it is not from a principle of obedience to God that they do them. There may be many crimes, which they are not guilty of; but it is not out of regard to the will of God, that they do not commit them. It does not, therefore, appear, what just hopes they can entertain of heaven, upon the score of an obedience which they not only do not observe, but do not attempt to observe. Then, secondly, if they are to hope in Christ for a forgiveness of their imperfections, for acceptance, through *him*, of broken and deficient services, the truth is, they have recourse to no such hope; beside, it is not imperfection with which they are charged, but a total absence of principle. A man who never strives to obey—never indeed bears that thought about him, must not talk of the imperfection of his obedience: neither the word, nor the idea, pertains to him; nor can *he* speak of broken and deficient services, who in no true sense of the term hath ever served God at all. I own, therefore, I do not perceive what rational hopes religion can hold out to insensibility and unconcernedness; to those who neither obey its rules, nor seek its aid; neither follow after its rewards, nor sue,—I mean, in spirit and sincerity, sue,—for its pardon. But how, it will be asked, can a man be of regular and reputable morals, with this religious insensibility: in other words, with the want of vital religion in his heart? I answer, that it can be in this way. A general regard to character, knowing that it is an advantageous thing to possess a good character; or a regard generated by natural and early habit; a disposition to follow the usages of life, which are practised around us, and which constitute decency; calm passions, easy circumstances, orderly companions, may, in a multitude

of instances, keep men within rules and bounds, without the operation of any religious principle whatever.

There is likewise another cause, which has a tendency to shut out religion from the mind, and yet hath at the same time a tendency to make men orderly and decent in their conduct : and that cause is business. A close attention to business is very apt to exclude all other attentions ; especially those of a spiritual nature, which appear to men of business shadowy and unsubstantial, and to want that present reality and advantage which they have been accustomed to look for, and to find, in their temporal concerns : and yet it is undoubtedly true, that attention to business frequently and naturally produces regular manners. Here, therefore, is a case, in which decency of behaviour shall subsist along with religious insensibility, forasmuch as one cause produces both—an intent application to business.

Decency, order, regularity, industry, application to our calling, are all good things ; but then they are accompanied with this great danger, viz. that they may subsist without any religious influence whatever ; and that, when they do so, their tendency is to settle and confirm men in religious insensibility. For finding things go on very smoothly, finding themselves received and respected without any religious principle, they are kept asleep, as to their spiritual concerns, by the very quietness and prosperity of things around them. “ There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” It is possible to slumber in a fancied security, or rather in an unconsciousness of danger, a blindness to our true situation, a thoughtlessness or stupefaction concerning it, even at the time when we are in the utmost peril of

salvation ; when we are descending fast towards a state of perdition. It is not the judgement of an erroneous conscience : that is not the case I mean. It is rather a want of conscience, or a conscience which is never exerted ; in a word, it is an indifference and insensibility concerning religion, even in the midst of seeming and external decency of behaviour, and soothed and lulled by this very circumstance. Now it is not only within the compass of possibility, but it frequently, nay, I hope, it *very* frequently comes to pass, that open, confessed, acknowledged, sins sting the sinner's conscience : that the upbraidings of mankind, the cry, the clamour, the indignation, which his wickedness has excited, may at length come home to his own soul ; may compel him to reflect, may bring him, though by force and violence, to a sense of his guilt, and a knowledge of his situation. Now I say, that this sense of sin, by whatever cause it be produced, is better than religious insensibility. The sinner's penitence is more to be trusted to, than the seemingly righteous man's security. The one is roused—is roused from the deep forgetfulness of religion, in which he had hitherto lived. Good fruit, even fruit unto life everlasting, may spring from the motion which is stirred in his heart. The other remains, as to religion, in a state of torpor. The thing wanted, as the quickening principle, as the seed and germ of religion in the heart, is compunction, conviction of sin, of danger, of the necessity of flying to the Redeemer and to his religion in good earnest. “ They were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ? ” This was the state of mind of those who first heard the Gospel : and this is the state of mind still to be brought about, before the Gospel be

heard with effect. And sin will sometimes do it, when outward righteousness will not: I mean by outward righteousness, external decency of manners, without any inward principle of religion whatever. The sinner may return and fly to God, even because the world is against him. The visibly righteous man is in friendship with the world: and the "friendship of the world is enmity with God," whensoever, as I have before expressed it, it soothes and lulls men in religious insensibility.

But how, it will be said, is this? Is it not to encourage sin? Is it not to put the sinner in a more hopeful condition than the righteous? Is it not, in some measure, giving the greatest sinner the greatest chance of being saved? This may be objected: and the objection brings me to support the assertion in the beginning of my discourse, that the doctrine proposed cannot, without being wilfully misconstrued, deceive or delude any. First, you ask, is not this to encourage sin? I answer, it is to encourage the sinner who repents; and, if the sinner repent, why should he not be encouraged? But some, you say, will take occasion, from this encouragement, to plunge into sin. I answer, that then they wilfully misapply it: for if they enter upon sin intending to repent afterwards, I take upon me to tell them, that no true repentance can come of such intention. The very intention is a fraud: instead of being the parent of true repentance, it is itself to be repented of bitterly. Whether such a man ever repent or not is another question, but no sincere repentance can issue, or proceed, from this intention. It must come altogether from another quarter. It will look back, when it does come, upon that previous intention with hatred and horror, as upon a plan, and scheme,

and design to impose upon and abuse the mercy of God. The moment a plan is formed of sinning with an intention afterwards to repent, at that moment the whole doctrine of grace, of repentance, and of course this part of it amongst the rest, is wilfully misconstrued. The grace of God is turned into lasciviousness. At the time this design is formed, the person forming it is in the bond of iniquity, as Saint Peter told Simon he was—in a state of imminent perdition; and this design will not help him out of it. We say, that repentance is sometimes more likely to be brought about in a confessed, nay, in a notorious and convicted sinner, than in a seemingly regular life: but it is of *true* repentance that we speak, and no true repentance can proceed from a previous intention to repent, I mean an intention previous to the sin. Therefore no advantage can be taken of this doctrine to the encouragement of sin, without wilfully misconstruing it.

But then you say, we place the sinner in a more hopeful condition than the righteous. But who, let us inquire, are the righteous we speak of? Not they, who are endeavouring, however imperfectly, to perform the will of God; not they, who are actuated by a principle of obedience to him; but men, who are orderly and regular in their visible behaviour without an internal religion. To the eye of man they appear righteous. But if they do good, it is not from the love or fear of God, or out of regard to religion that they do it, but from other considerations. If they abstain from sin, they abstain from it out of different motives from what religion offers; and so long as they have the acquiescence and approbation of the world, they are kept in a state of sleep; in a state, as to religion, of total negligence and unconcern. Of these righteous

men there are many; and, when we compare their condition with that of the open sinner, it is to rouse them, if possible, to a sense of religion. A wounded conscience is better than a conscience which is torpid. When conscience begins to do its office, they will feel things changed within them mightily. It will no longer be their concern to keep fair with the world, to preserve appearances, to maintain a character, to uphold decency, order, and regularity in their behaviour; but it will be their concern to obey God, to think of him, to love him, to fear him; nay, to love him with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their soul, with all their strength; that is, to direct their cares and endeavours to one single point, his will: yet their visible conduct may not be much altered; but their internal motives and principle will be altered altogether.

This alteration must take place in the heart, even of the seemingly righteous. It may take place also in the heart of the sinner; and, we say (and this is, in truth, the whole which we say), that a conscience pricked by sin is sometimes, nay oftentimes, more susceptible of the impressions of religion, of true and deep impressions, than a mind which has been accustomed to look only to the laws and customs of the world, to conform itself to those laws, and to find rest and satisfaction in that peace, which not God, but the world gives.



## XVIII.

USE AND ABUSE OF THE MERCY OF GOD IN THE  
REDEMPTION OF MANKIND BY CHRIST.

ECCLES. v. 5, 6.

*Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin unto sin; and say not, his mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins; for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners.*

I KNOW not so much good advice drawn up in so little compass any where as in the chapter which we have quoted; nor of that advice, any part so important as that which I have read to you in the text. We are all naturally inclined to lean and presume much upon the mercy of God; and this presumption cannot be combated by any general arguments, because the foundation of it is right. It is certainly true, that the frame of nature, the multitude which we see of contrivances, evident contrivances, and provisions for the happiness of sensitive beings, bespeak the good will and kindness of the Creator; and of that good will, a plain and obvious part and consequence is, condescension to our infirmities, and mercy to our faults. It is not only rational, but unavoidable to expect this. The language of Scripture, if we go to that for information, comes up in this respect to the intimations of nature. Throughout the whole book, God is described as loving, affectionate, patient, compassionate, and long suffering

to his human creation : so that when we conceive of God as a merciful being, we think of him very truly. But then the question is, in what manner, and to what extent, we may apply this consideration to our own conduct.

First, then, when we apply it to console ourselves under any imperfection of character, owing to invincible weaknesses either of body or mind, we apply it rightly. God has not fixed a certain measure or standard of virtue, which every person of every sort and degree must come up to, in order to be saved ; that were not the part of a merciful judge. He proportions his demands of duty to our several capacities, justly estimated, and faithfully exerted. It may be true, that he who has employed extraordinary endowments well, will be recompensed with a higher reward than he who has employed inferior endowments well ; but still one as well as the other will be rewarded. He who had doubled the ten talents which were entrusted to him was set over ten cities ; whilst he who had doubled the five talents was set over five cities ; but both were rewarded, both also highly rewarded, though differently. Therefore, any inferiority to others in our natural abilities, any difficulties or disadvantages we labour under, which others do not labour under, need not discomfort us at all. They are made up to us by God's mercy, who will finally accommodate his judgement to those difficulties and disadvantages so far as they are real. And the same allowance, which we hope will be vouchsafed to our constitutional infirmities (so far as they are both real infirmities and invincible infirmities), will also be extended to the difficulties we labour under, by reason of the circumstances and condition in which we are placed ; whether these difficulties be ignorance for want

of education and opportunity; or prejudice by reason of a wrong education, and a dependance upon those into whose hands we were committed; or error or superstition arising from these causes: for all such defects, so long as they are, properly speaking, involuntary, and not brought on or increased by our own act, we humbly rely upon the mercies of God, and we are not going too far in our reliance.

Secondly: When for any sin into which we have been unhappily betrayed—yet without a *course* and *habit* of sinning in the same manner, or at least without a regular *plan* of a sinful life—we trust for pardon in God's mercy through Christ, our trust is well founded. This is the very case, as I apprehend, which St. John had in his thoughts, when he tells us, that “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, and he is the propitiation for our sins.” “If any man sin” (that is, if any man be accidentally betrayed into single instances of sin without a *plan* or system of sinning), we have Jesus Christ interceding for our forgiveness.

Thirdly: When our past life has not only been chequered by casual omissions and commissions, but has been stained and polluted even by habits of licentiousness, or by a course of unjust and iniquitous conduct; still, if we look up to God's mercy, only so as to quicken and inspirit us to a speedy and resolute breaking off of our vices, I believe and trust that we do not abuse that mercy, let our past case or our past conduct have been ever so bad.

The true and sound distinction which we should continually bear in our mind, is no other than this—whilst we think of God's mercy only with a view to sins which are past strictly and exclusively, then it can hardly happen but that we shall judge rightly of it, and

according to truth ; but when we think of it with relation to our future sins, then we are in very great danger of mistaking and of misapplying it ; and the mistake may have, indeed necessarily must have, the most dreadful effects upon our final welfare.

I cannot mark this distinction more strongly, than by desiring you to compare attentively what is said in the text with what is said by St. John in the passage just now quoted from his Epistle. Both passages speak of *propitiation* ; that is, of the means whereby we may obtain pardon. Hear what St. John says of it : “ If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father ; and he is the propitiation for our sins.” Next hear what the text says of it : “ Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin unto sin.” You will observe, that one passage speaks in terms of encouragement ; the other in terms of warning. And the truth is, that one passage speaks in relation to sins which are past, strictly and exclusively ; the other speaks in relation to sins that are yet future. When St. John tells us, that “ if any man sin, we have in Jesus Christ an advocate and a propitiation,” he supposes a person to be reviewing his past life, to be distressed by the memory of his former sins ; and then he points out a relief and source of comfort to his distress, by telling him that he has with God an advocate and a propitiation for the sins under the sense and recollection of which he is sinking. When the author of Ecclesiasticus warns us solemnly “ concerning propitiation” (the same subject of which St. John speaks), by bidding us “ not to be without fear to add sin unto sin, and not to say, his mercy is great, he will be pacified for the multitude of our sins ;”—and when he farther reminds us, that “ wrath as well as mercy came from him ;”—he applies his

advice to a different supposition : he supposes a person to be doubting and deliberating with himself concerning his future conduct ; either concerning some particular sin which he is tempted to commit, or concerning the general course of his future behaviour ; and he charges such an one against bringing into the deliberation the account or consideration of God's mercy, so as to encourage himself thereby in giving way to the temptation by which he is urged. By this view of the subject the two passages are rendered consistent, and the important distinction upon the subject rendered visible.

We may proceed, therefore, to describe the cases in which we misapply the consideration of God's mercy, and act in opposition to the council delivered in the text.

First, then, we misapply the matter, when the thoughts of God's mercy beget in us ease under our past sins, and this ease makes us less afraid of repeating them. In minds not sufficiently thoughtful, if you in any way take away or diminish the terror or pain which they suffer from what they have done, you in the same proportion render them apt and willing to do the same thing again. But it is only so with minds which are not sufficiently thoughtful : in a mind seriously disposed, and which rightly considers its situation, the contrary effect will take place ; the sense of past forgiveness will produce gratitude ; gratitude will produce love ; and love will increase, not diminish, the dread of offending anew. Suppose a malefactor under sentence of death, looking for nothing but the execution of that sentence, should receive assurance, or even hopes of pardon ; no doubt this intelligence would take off much of the load which weighed down his spirits—much of the pain of

his condition : but ought this relief and alleviation to make him go and be as wicked as ever? If it did so, no one would say that he was an object of clemency or mercy, let the clemency and mercy of the prince be in themselves ever so great. Wherefore, I repeat, that whenever the ease and comfort which we draw from the contemplation of God's mercy, in respect to past sins, is carried forward to the future, so as to make us with more readiness give way to temptation, it is grievously and dangerously abused.

But, secondly, the method above described is an indirect method of applying the mercy of God to the encouragement of our sins, that is to say, the consideration of God's mercy renders us easy under the past ; and ease under past transgressions, serves to make us less scrupulous and difficult in complying with returning temptations. But there is also a more direct way in which we carry our presumption upon God's mercy to the deceiving of our consciences ; and that is, when we argue with ourselves in this manner ; when in deliberating concerning any particular sins which we are induced to commit, we say within ourselves, if God be so gracious, forgiving, and merciful, as religion teaches us that he is, he will not be extreme to condemn me for this single offence—this one addition to the number of my sins. Now this is what may be called *sinning upon a plan*, and making the goodness of God the foundation of the plan ; which is a very different case from resorting to the mercies of God in the case of past sins. Suppose a prince of the mildest and most placable character should be informed concerning a malefactor, that he had committed the crime of which he was accused, expressly depending upon forgiveness before-

hand, would not this be a reason for withholding the mercy which had been thus perverted? It certainly would.

Again, thirdly, this reliance beforehand goes sometimes to a greater extent. It goes the length of keeping men in a course of sins; because so often as men think of their condition, the first thing that fills their thoughts, is the abounding inexhaustible mercy of God: and the first effect of that meditation is, that if it so abound, and be so inexhaustible, they may still hope for salvation, although they go on to continue their pleasures and their practices. Now I will tell you what is properly meant by calling God's mercy abounding and inexhaustible. This is meant by it—that whatever be the quantity, or amount, or kind, or degree of our past offences, if we sincerely and truly repent and cease from them, their former enormity need not make us despair of pardon: but it relates solely to the past—it has nothing to do with the future, because it is then only applicable, when a reformation for the future takes place. Extensive as that mercy is, the case of a person intending to continue in sin does not come within it; that intention totally excludes the application.

Upon the whole, the brief statement of the case is this. It is certainly true that God is merciful, but we are not authorised to use or apply the consideration of God's mercy any otherwise than to guard us against despair for our past sins, to quicken and incite us to reformation for the future, and to support and comfort us when we feel that reformation in ourselves beginning. If we go farther than this, and think of God's mercy when we are deliberating concerning some sin which we are about to commit, either concerning our continuance in some old, or entrance upon

some new, course of sin, we are sure to think of it improperly, and to build hopes and conclusions upon it which we are not authorised to entertain. I know nothing which can be a more powerful preservative against this turn of mind, and this fatal delusion, than the wise and solemn warning of the text: "Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin to sin, and say not his mercy is great, he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins; for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners."



## XIX.

## OF THE DOCTRINE OF CONVERSION.

## MATTHEW IX. 13.

*I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*

IT appears from these words, that our Saviour in his preaching held in view the character and spiritual situation of the persons whom he addressed, and the differences which existed amongst men in these respects ; and that he had a regard to these considerations, more especially in the preaching of repentance and conversion. Now I think, that these considerations have been too much omitted by preachers of the Gospel since, particularly in this very article ; and that the doctrine itself has suffered by such omission.

It has been usual to divide all mankind into two classes, the *converted* and the *unconverted* ; and, by so dividing them, to infer the necessity of conversion to every person whatever. In proposing the subject under this form, we state the distinction, in my opinion, too absolutely, and draw from it a conclusion too universal : because there is a class and description of Christians, who, having been piously educated, and having persevered in those pious courses into which they were first brought, are not conscious to themselves of ever having been without the influence of religion ; of ever having lost sight of its sanctions ; of ever having

renounced them ; of ever, in the general course of their conduct, having gone against them. These cannot properly be reckoned either converted or unconverted. They are not *converted*, for they are not sensible of any such religious alteration having taken place with them, at any particular time, as can properly be called a conversion. They are not *unconverted*, because that implies a state of reprobation, and because, if we call upon them to be converted (which if they be unconverted we ought to do), they will not well understand what it is we mean them to do ; and, instead of being edified, they may be both much and unnecessarily disturbed, by being so called upon.

There is, in the nature of things, a great variety of religious condition. It arises from hence, that exhortations, and calls, and admonitions, which are of great use and importance in themselves, and very necessary to be insisted upon, are, nevertheless, not wanted by all—are not equally applicable to all, and to some are altogether inapplicable. This holds true of most of the topics of persuasion or warning, which a Christian teacher can adopt. When we preach against presumption, for instance, it is not because we suppose that all are presumptuous ; or that it is necessary for all, or every one, to become more humble, or diffident, or apprehensive, than he now is : on the contrary, there may amongst our hearers be low, and timorous, and dejected spirits, who, if they take to themselves what we say, may increase a disposition which is already too much ; or be at a loss to know what it is herein that he would enjoin upon them. Yet the discourse and the doctrine may, nevertheless, be very good ; and, for a great portion of our congregation, very necessary. The like, I think, is the case with the doctrine of con-

version. If we were to omit the doctrine of conversion, we should omit a doctrine, which, to many, must be the salvation of their souls. To them, all calls without this call, all preaching without this doctrine, would be in vain ; and it may be true, that a great part of our hearers are of this description. On the other hand, if we press and insist upon conversion, as indispensable to all for the purpose of being saved, we should mislead some, who would not apprehend how they could be required to turn, or be converted, to religion, who were never, that they knew, either indifferent to it, or alienated from it.

In opposition, however, to what is here said, there are who contend, that it is necessary for every man living to be converted, before he can be saved. This opinion undoubtedly deserves serious consideration, because it founds itself upon Scripture, whether rightly or erroneously interpreted is the question. The portion of Scripture upon which they who maintain the opinion chiefly rely, is our Saviour's conversation with Nicodemus, recorded in the third chapter of St. John's Gospel. Our Saviour is there stated to have said to Nicodemus, " Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ;" and afterwards, as a confirmation, and, in some sort, an exposition, of his assertion, to have added, " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is inferred from this passage, that *all persons whatever* must undergo a conversion, before they be capable of salvation : and it cannot be said that this is a forced or strained inference ; but the question before us at present is, is it a necessary inference ? I am not unwilling to admit, that this short, but very remarkable, conversation, is fairly interpreted of the gift of the

Spirit, and that, when this Spirit is given, there is a new birth, a regeneration; but I say, that it is nowhere determined at what time of life, or under what circumstances, this gift is imparted: nay, the contrary is intimated by comparing it to the blowing of the wind, which, in its mode of action, is out of the reach of our rules and calculations: "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The effect of this uncertainty is, that we are left at liberty to pray for spiritual assistance; and we do pray for it, in all stages, and under all circumstances of our existence. We pray for it, in baptism, for those who are baptized; we teach those who are catechized, to pray for it in their catechism: parents pray for its aid and efficacy to give effect to their parental instructions, to preserve the objects of their love and care from sin and wickedness, and from every spiritual enemy: we pray for it, particularly in the office of confirmation, for young persons just entering into the temptations of life. Therefore spiritual assistance may be imparted at any time, from the earliest to the latest period of our existence; and whenever it is imparted, there is that being born of the Spirit to which our Saviour's words refer. And, considering the subject as a matter of experience, if we cannot ordinarily distinguish the operations of the Spirit from those of our own minds, it seems to follow, that neither can we distinguish when they commence; so that spiritual assistance may be imparted, and the thing designated by our Lord's discourse satisfied, without such a sensible conversion, that a person can fix his memory upon some great and general change wrought in him at an assignable time.

The consciousness of a great and general change may be the fact with many. It may be essentially necessary to many. I only allege, that it is not so to all, so that every person, who is not conscious of such a change, must set himself down as devoted to perdition.

This, I repeat, is all I contend for; for I by no means intend to say that any one is without sin, and in that sense not to stand in need of conversion; still less, that any sin is to be allowed, and not, on the contrary, strenuously and sincerely resisted and forsaken. I only maintain, that there may be Christians, who are, and have been, in such a religious state, that no such thorough and radical change as is usually meant by conversion, is or was necessary for them; and that they need not be made miserable by the want of consciousness of such a change.

I do not, in the smallest degree, mean to undervalue, or speak lightly of such changes, whenever or in whomsoever they take place: nor to deny that they may be sudden, yet lasting (nay, I am rather inclined to think that it is in this manner that they frequently do take place); nor to dispute what is upon good testimony alleged concerning conversion brought about by affecting incidents of life; by striking passages of Scripture; by impressive discourses from the pulpit; by what we meet with in books; or even by single touching sentences or expressions in such discourses or books. I am not disposed to question these relations unnecessarily, but rather to bless God for such instances, when I hear of them, and to regard them as merciful ordinations of his providence.

But it will be said, that conversion implies a revolution of opinion. Admitting this to be so, such a change or revolution cannot be necessary to all, because

there is no system of religious opinions, in which some have not been brought up from the beginning of their lives. To change from error to truth in any great and important article of religious belief, deserves, I allow, the name of conversion ; but all cannot be educated in error, on whatever side truth be supposed to lie.

To me, then, it appears, that, although it cannot be stated with safety, or without leading to consequences which may confound and alarm many good men, that conversion is necessary to all, and under all circumstances ; yet I think, that there are two topics of exhortation, which together comprise the whole Christian life, and one or other of which belongs to every man living, and these two topics are *conversion* and *improvement*. When conversion is not wanted, improvement is.

Now this respective preaching of conversion or improvement, according to the respective spiritual condition of those who hear us, or read what we write, is authorized by the example of Scripture preaching, as set forth in the New Testament. It is remarkable, that, in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, we read incessantly of the preaching of repentance, which I admit to mean conversion. Saint John the Baptist's preaching set out with it : our Lord's own preaching set out with it. It was the subject which he charged upon his twelve apostles to preach. It was the subject which he sent forth his seventy disciples to preach. It was the subject which the first missionaries of Christianity pronounced and preached in every place which they came to, in the course of their progress through different countries. Whereas, in the epistles written by the same persons, we hear proportionably much less of repentance, and much more of advance,

proficiency, progress, and improvement in holiness of life; and of rules and maxims for the leading of a holy and godly life. These exhortations to continual improvement, to sincere, strenuous, and continual endeavours after improvement, are delivered under a variety of expressions, but with a strength and earnestness sufficient to show what the apostles thought of the importance of what they were teaching.

Now the reason of the difference is, that the preaching of Christ and his apostles, as recorded in the Gospels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, was addressed to Jews and Gentiles, whom they called upon to become disciples of the new religion. This call evidently implied repentance and conversion. But the epistles, which the apostles, and some of which the same apostles, wrote afterwards, were addressed to persons already become Christians; and to some who, like Timothy, had been such from their earliest youth. Speaking to these, you find, they dwell upon improvement, proficiency, continued endeavours after higher and greater degrees of holiness and purity, instead of saying so much about repentance and conversion. This conduct was highly rational, and was an adaptation of their instruction to the circumstances of the persons whom they addressed, and may be an example to us, in modelling our exhortations to the different spiritual conditions of our hearers.

Seeing, then, that two great topics of our preaching must always be conversion and improvement; it remains to be considered, who they are to whom we must preach *conversion*, and who they are to whom we must preach *improvement*.

First; Now of the persons in our congregations, to whom we not only may, but must, preach the doctrine

of conversion plainly and directly, are those who, with the name indeed of Christians, have hitherto passed their lives without any internal religion whatever; who have not at all thought upon the subject; who, a few easy and customary forms excepted (and which with them are mere forms), cannot truly say of themselves, that they have done one action, which they would not have done equally, if there had been no such thing as a God in the world; or that they have ever sacrificed any passion, any present enjoyment, or even any inclination of their minds, to the restraints and prohibitions of religion; with whom indeed religious motives have not weighed a feather in the scale against interest or pleasure. To these it is utterly necessary that we preach conversion. At this day we have not Jews and Gentiles to preach to; but these persons are really in as unconverted a state as any Jew or Gentile could be in our Saviour's time. They are no more Christians, as to any actual benefit of Christianity to their souls, than the most hardened Jew, or the most profligate Gentile was in the age of the Gospel. As to any difference in the two cases, the difference is all against them. These must be converted, before they can be saved. The course of their thoughts must be changed, the very principles upon which they act must be changed. Considerations, which never, or which hardly ever, entered into their minds, must deeply and perpetually engage them. Views and motives, which did not influence them at all, either as checks from doing evil, or as inducements to do good, must become the views and motives which they regularly consult, and by which they are guided: that is to say, there must be a revolution of principle: the visible conduct will follow the change; but there must be a revolution within.



A change so entire, so deep, so important as this, I do allow to be a conversion; and no one, who is in the situation above described, can be saved without undergoing it; and he must necessarily both be sensible of it at the time, and remember it all his life afterwards. It is too momentous an event ever to be forgot. A man might as easily forget his escape from a shipwreck. Whether it was sudden, or whether it was gradual, if it was effected (and the fruits will prove that), it was a true conversion: and every such person may justly both believe and say of himself, that he was converted at a particular assignable time. It may not be necessary to speak of his conversion, but he will always think of it with unbounded thankfulness to the Giver of all grace, the Author of all mercies, spiritual as well as temporal.

Secondly; The next description of persons, to whom we must preach conversion, properly so called, are those who *allow themselves* in the course and habit of some particular sin. With more or less regularity in other articles of behaviour, there is some particular sin, which they practise constantly and habitually, and allow themselves in that practice. Other sins they strive against; but in this they allow themselves. Now no man can go on in this course, consistently with the hope of salvation. Therefore it must be broken off. The essential and precise difference between a child of God and another is, not so much in the number of sins into which he may fall (though that undoubtedly be a great difference, yet it is not a precise difference; that is to say, a difference, in which an exact line of separation can be drawn), but the precise difference is, that the true child of God *allows himself* in no sin whatever. Cost what it may, he contends against, he combats, all

sin ; which he certainly cannot be said to do, who is still in the course and habit of some particular sin ; for as to that sin, he reserves it, he compromises it. Against other sins, and other sorts of sin, he may strive ; in this he allows himself. If the child of God sin, he does not allow himself in the sin ; on the contrary, he grieves, he repents, he rises again ; which is a different thing from proceeding in a settled self-allowed course of sinning. Sins which are compatible with sincerity are much more likely to be objects of God's forgiveness, than sins that are not so ; which is the case with allowed sins. Are there then some sins, in which we live continually ? some duties, which we continually neglect ? we are not children of God ; we are not sincere disciples of Christ. The allowed prevalence of any one known sin is sufficient to exclude us from the character of God's children. And we must be converted from that sin, in order to become such. Here then we must preach conversion. The habitual drunkard, the habitual fornicator, the habitual cheat must be converted. Now such a change of principle, of opinion, and of sentiment, as no longer to allow ourselves in that in which we did allow ourselves, and the actual sacrifice of a habit, the breaking off of a course of sinful indulgence, or of unfair gain, in pursuance of the new and serious views which we have formed of these subjects, is a conversion. The breaking off of a habit, especially when we had placed much of our gratification in it, is alone so great a thing, and such a step in our Christian life, as to merit the name of conversion. Then as to the time of our conversion, there can be little question about that. The drunkard was converted, when he left off drinking ; the fornicator, when he gave up his criminal indulgences, haunts, and

connexions; the cheat, when he quitted dishonest practices, however gainful and successful: provided, in these several cases, that religious views and motives influenced the determination, and a religious character accompanied and followed these sacrifices.

In these two cases, therefore, men must be converted, and live; or remain unconverted, and die. And the time of conversion can be ascertained. There must that pass within them at some particular assignable time, which is properly a conversion; and will, all their lives, be remembered as such. This description, without all doubt, comprehends great numbers; and it is each person's business to settle with himself, whether he be not of the number: if he be, he sees what is to be done.

But I am willing to believe, that there are very many Christians, who neither have in any part of their lives been without influencing principles, nor have at any time been involved in the habit and course of a particular known sin, or have allowed themselves in such course and practice. Sins, without doubt, they have committed, more than sufficient to humble them to the dust; but they have not, to repeat the same words again, lived in a course of any particular known sin, whether of commission or neglect; and by deliberation, and of aforethought, allowed themselves in such course. The *conversion*, therefore, above described, cannot apply to, or be required of, such Christians. To these we must preach, not conversion, but *improvement*. Improvement, continual improvement, must be our text, and our topic; improvement in grace; in piety, in disposition, in virtue. Now, I put the doctrine of *improvement*, not merely upon the consideration, which yet is founded upon express Scrip-

ture authority, that, whatever improvement we make in ourselves, we are thereby sure to meliorate our future condition, receiving at the hand of God a proportionable reward for our efforts, our sacrifices, our perseverance, so that our labour is never lost, is never, as Saint Paul expressly assures us, in vain in the Lord; though this, I say, be a firm and established ground to go upon, yet it is not the ground upon which I, at present, place the necessity of a constant progressive improvement in virtue. I rather wish to lay down upon the subject this proposition; namely, that continual improvement is essential in the Christian character, as an evidence of its sincerity; that, if what we have hitherto done in religion has been done from truly religious motives, we shall necessarily *go on*; that, if our religion be real, it cannot stop. There is no standing still: it is not compatible with the nature of the subject: if the principles which actuated us be principles of godliness, they must continue to actuate us; and, under this continued stimulus and influence, we must necessarily grow better and better. If this effect do not take place, the conclusion is, that our principles are weak, or hollow, or unsound. Unless we find ourselves grow better, we are not right. For example, if our transgressions do not become fewer and fewer, it is to be feared, that we have left off striving against sin, and then we are not sincere.

I apprehend, moreover, that with no man living can there be a ground for stopping, as though there was nothing more left for him to be done. If any man had this reason for stopping, it was the apostle Paul. Yet did he stop? or did he so judge? Hear his own account; "This I do, forgetting those things that are behind (those things whereunto I have already attained),

and looking forward to those things that are before (to still further improvement), I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." This was not stopping; it was pressing on. The truth is, in the way of Christian improvement, there is business for the best: there is enough to be done for all.

First; in this stage of the Christian life it is fit to suppose, that there are no enormous crimes, such as mankind universally condemn and cry out against, at present committed by us; yet less faults, still clearly faults, are not unfrequent with us, are too easily excused, too soon repeated. This must be altered.

Secondly; we may not avowedly be engaged in any course or habit of known sin, being at the time conscious of such sin; but we may continue in some practices which our consciences cannot, and would not, upon examination, approve, and in which we have allowed the wrongness of the practice to be screened from our sight by general usage, or by the example of persons of whom we think well. This is not a course to be proceeded in longer. Conscience, our own conscience, is to be our guide in all things.

Thirdly; we may not absolutely *omit* any duty to our own families, our station, our neighbourhood, or the public, with which we are acquainted; but might not these duties be more effectively performed, if they were gone about with more diligence than we have hitherto used? and might not further means and opportunities of doing good be found out, if we took sufficient pains to inquire and to consider?

Fourthly, again; even where less is to be blamed in our lives, much may remain to be set right in our hearts,

our tempers, and dispositions. Let our affections grow more and more pure and holy, our hearts more and more lifted up to God, and loosened from this present world ; not from its duties, but from its passions, its temptations, its over anxieties, and great selfishness ; our souls cleansed from the dross and corruption which they have contracted in their passage through it.

Fifthly ; it is no slight work to bring our *tempers* to what they should be ; gentle, patient, placable, compassionate ; slow to be offended, soon to be appeased ; free from envy, which, though a necessary, is a difficult, attainment ; free from bursts of anger ; from aversions to particular persons, which is hatred ; able heartily to rejoice with them that do rejoice ; and, from true tenderness of mind, weeping, even when we can do no more, with them that weep ; in a word, to put on charity with all those qualities with which Saint Paul hath clothed it, 1 Cor. xiii. which read for this purpose.

Sixthly ; whilst any good can be done by us, we shall not fail to do it ; but even when our powers of active usefulness fail, which not seldom happens, there still remains that last, that highest, that most difficult, and, perhaps, most acceptable, duty, to our Creator, resignation to his blessed will in the privations, and pains, and afflictions, with which we are visited ; thankfulness to him for all that is spared to us, amidst much that is gone ; for any mitigation of our sufferings, any degree of ease, and comfort, and support, and assistance, which we experience. Every advanced life, every life of sickness or misfortune, affords materials for virtuous feelings. In a word, I am persuaded, that there is no state whatever of Christian trial, varied and various as

it is, in which there will not be found both matter and room for *improvement*; in which a true Christian will not be incessantly striving, month by month, and year by year, to grow sensibly better and better; and in which his endeavours, if sincere, and assisted, (as, if sincere, they may hope to be assisted) by God's grace, will not be rewarded with success.

## XX.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

(PART I.)

HEBREWS IX. 26.

*Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

THE salvation of mankind, and most particularly in so far as the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are concerned in it, and whereby he comes to be called our Saviour and our Redeemer, ever has been, and ever must be, a most interesting subject to all serious minds.

Now there is one thing in which there is no division or difference of opinion at all ; which is, that the death of Jesus Christ is spoken of, in reference to human salvation, in terms and in a manner, in which the death of no person whatever is spoken of besides. Others have died martyrs, as well as our Lord. Others have suffered in a righteous cause as well as he ; but that is said of him, and of his death and sufferings, which is not said of any one else. An efficacy and a concern are ascribed to them, in the business of human salvation, which are not ascribed to any other.

What may be called the first Gospel declaration upon this subject, is the exclamation of John the Baptist, when he saw Jesus coming unto him : “ Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the



world." I think it plain, that when John called our Lord the Lamb of God, he spoke with a relation to his being sacrificed, and to the effect of that sacrifice upon the pardon of human sin: and this, you will observe, was said of him, even before he entered upon his office. If any doubt could be made of the meaning of the Baptist's expression, it is settled by other places, in which the like allusion to a Lamb is adopted; and where the allusion is specifically applied to his death, considered as a sacrifice.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the following words of Isaiah are, by Philip the evangelist, distinctly applied to our Lord, and to our Lord's death. "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened he not his mouth; in his humiliation his judgement was taken away, and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth:" therefore it was to his death, you see, that the description relates. Now, I say, that this is applied to Christ most distinctly; for the pious eunuch, who was reading the passage in his chariot, was at a loss to know to whom it should be applied. "I pray thee," saith he to Philip, "of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other man?" And Philip, you read, taught him that it was spoken of Christ. And I say, secondly, that this particular part and expression of the prophecy being applied to Christ's death, carries the whole prophecy to the same subject: for it is undoubtedly one entire prophecy: therefore the other expressions, which are still stronger, are applicable as well as this. "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed; the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us

all." There is a strong and very apposite text of Saint Peter's, in which the application of the term "Lamb" to our Lord, and the sense, in which it is applied, can admit of no question at all. It is in the 1st chapter of the 1st epistle, the 18th and 19th verses: "Forasmuch as ye know, that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a *lamb* without blemish and without spot." All the use I make of these passages is to show, that the prophet Isaiab, six hundred years before his birth; Saint John the Baptist, upon the commencement of his ministry; Saint Peter, his friend, companion, and apostle, after the transaction was over, speak of Christ's death, under the figure of a *lamb* being sacrificed: that is, as having the effect of a sacrifice, the effect in kind, though infinitely higher in degree, upon the pardon of sins, and the procurement of salvation; and that this is spoken of the death of no other person whatever.

Other plain and distinct passages, declaring the efficacy of Christ's death, are the following: Hebrews, ix. 26. "Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." And in the xth chap. 12th ver. "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down on the right hand of God, for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." I observe again, that nothing of this sort is said of the death of any other person: no such efficacy is imputed to any other martyrdom. So likewise, in the following text, from the Epistle to the Romans: "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us; much more then being now justi-

fied by his blood we shall be saved from wrath through him ; for 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." "Reconciled to God by the death of his Son ;" therefore that death had an efficacy in our reconciliation ; but reconciliation is preparatory to salvation. The same thing is said by the same apostle in his Epistle to the Colossians : "He has reconciled us to his Father in his cross, and in the body of his flesh through death." What is said of reconciliation in these texts, is said in other texts of sanctification, which also is preparatory to salvation. Thus Hebrews, x. 10. "we are sanctified:" how? namely, "by the offering of the body of Christ once for all:" so again in the same epistle, "the blood of Jesus is called the blood of the covenant by which we are sanctified."

In these and many more passages, that lie spread in different parts of the New Testament, it appears to be asserted, that the death of Christ had an efficacy in the procurement of human salvation. Now these expressions mean something : mean something substantial. They are used concerning no other person, nor the death of any other person whatever. Therefore Christ's death was something more than a confirmation of his preaching ; something more than a pattern of a holy and patient, and perhaps voluntary, martyrdom ; something more than necessarily antecedent to his resurrection, by which he gave a grand and clear proof of human resurrection. Christ's death was all these, but it was something more ; because none of these ends, nor all of them, satisfy the text you have heard—come up to the assertions and declarations which are delivered concerning it.

Now allowing the subject to stop here ; allowing

that we know nothing, nor can know any thing concerning it, but what is written ; and that nothing more is written, than that the death of Christ had a real and essential effect upon human salvation ; we have certainly before us a doctrine of a very peculiar, perhaps I may say, of a very unexpected kind, in some measure hidden in the councils of the divine nature, but still so far revealed to us, as to excite two great religious sentiments, admiration and gratitude.

That a person of a nature different from all other men ; nay superior, for so he is distinctly described to be, to all created beings, whether men or angels ; united with the Deity as no other person is united ; that such a person should come down from heaven, and suffer upon earth the pains of an excruciating death, and that these his submissions and sufferings should avail and produce a great effect in the procurement of the future salvation of mankind, cannot but excite wonder. But it is by no means improbable on that account : on the contrary it might be reasonably supposed beforehand, that if any thing was disclosed to us touching a future life, and touching the dispensations of God to men, it would be something of a nature to excite admiration. In the world in which we live, we may be said to have some knowledge of its laws, and constitution, and nature : we have long experienced them : as also of the beings with whom we converse, or amongst whom we are conversant, we may be said to understand something : at least they are familiar to us : we are not surprised with appearances which every day occur. But of the world and the life to which we are destined, and of the beings amongst whom we may be brought, the case is altogether different. Here is no experience to explain things ; no use or familiarity

to take off surprise, to reconcile us to difficulties, to assist our apprehension. In the new order of things, according to the new laws of nature, every thing will be suitable; suitable to the beings who are to occupy the future world; but that suitability cannot, as it seems to me, be possibly perceived by us, until we are acquainted with that order and with those beings. So that it arises, as it were, from the necessity of things, that what is told us by a divine messenger of heavenly affairs, of affairs purely spiritual, that is, relating purely to another world, must be so comprehended by us, as to excite admiration.

But secondly; partially as we may, or perhaps must, comprehend this subject, in common with all subjects which relate strictly and solely to the nature of our future life, we may comprehend it quite sufficiently for one purpose; and that is gratitude. It was only for a moral purpose that the thing was revealed at all: and that purpose is a sense of gratitude and obligation. This was the use which the apostles of our Lord, who knew the most, made of their knowledge. This was the turn they gave to their meditations upon the subject; the impression it left upon their hearts. That a great and happy Being should voluntarily enter the world in a mean and low condition, and humble himself to a death upon the cross, that is, to be executed as a malefactor, in order, by whatever means it was done, to promote the attainment of salvation to mankind, and to each and every one of themselves, was a theme they dwelt upon with feelings of the warmest thankfulness; because they were feelings proportioned to the magnitude of the benefit. Earthly benefits are nothing compared with those which are heavenly. That *they* felt from the bottom of their souls. That, in my opinion,

we do not feel as we ought. But feeling this, they never ceased to testify, to acknowledge, to express the deepest obligation, the most devout consciousness of that obligation, to their Lord and Master; to him whom, for what he had done and suffered, they regarded as the finisher of their faith, and the author of their salvation.

## XXI.

THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST CONSISTENT WITH THE NECESSITY OF A GOOD LIFE: THE ONE BEING THE CAUSE, THE OTHER THE CONDITION, OF SALVATION.

(PART II.)

ROMANS VI. 1.

*What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.*

THE same Scriptures, which represent the death of Christ as having that which belongs to the death of no other person, namely, an efficacy in procuring the salvation of man, are also constant and uniform in representing the necessity of our own endeavours, of our own good works, for the same purpose. They go further. They foresaw that in stating, and still more when they went about to extol and magnify, the death of Christ, as instrumental to salvation, they were laying a foundation for the opinion, that men's own works, their own virtue, their personal endeavours, were superseded and dispensed with. In proportion as the sacrifice of the death of Christ was effectual, in the same proportion were these less necessary: if the death of Christ was sufficient, if redemption was complete, then were these not necessary at all. They foresaw that some would draw this consequence from their doctrine, and they provided against it.

It is observable, that the same consequence might be deduced from the goodness of God in any way of representing it: not only in the particular and peculiar way in which it is represented in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, but in any other way. Saint Paul, for one, was sensible of this; and, therefore, when he speaks of the goodness of God even in general terms, he takes care to point out the only true turn which ought to be given to it in our thoughts—"Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" as if he had said,—With thee, I perceive, that the consideration of the goodness of God leads to the allowing of thyself in sin: this is not to know what that consideration ought in truth to lead to: it ought to lead thee to repentance, and to no other conclusion.

Again; when the apostle had been speaking of the righteousness of God displayed by the wickedness of man, he was not unaware of the misconstruction to which this representation was liable, and which it had, in fact, experienced: which misconstruction he states thus,—“We be slanderously reported, and some affirm, that we say, let us do evil that good may come.” This insinuation, however, he regards as nothing less than an unfair and wilful perversion of his words, and of the words of other Christian teachers: therefore he says concerning those who did thus pervert them, “their condemnation is just:” they will be justly condemned for thus abusing the doctrine which we teach. The passage, however, clearly shows, that the application of their expressions to the encouragement of licentiousness of life was an application contrary to their intention; and, in fact, a perversion of their words.



In like manner in the same chapter our apostle had no sooner laid down the doctrine, that “a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law,” than he checks himself, as it were, by subjoining this proviso: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law:” Whatever he meant by his assertion concerning faith, he takes care to let them know he did not mean this, “to make void the law,” or to dispense with obedience.

But the clearest text to our purpose is that, undoubtedly, which I have prefixed to this discourse. Saint Paul, after expatiating largely upon the “grace,” that is, the favour, kindness, and mercy of God, the extent, the greatness, the comprehensiveness of that mercy, as manifested in the Christian dispensation, puts this question to his reader—“What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” which he answers by a strong negative—“God forbid.” What the apostle designed in this passage is sufficiently evident. He knew in what manner some might be apt to construe his expressions: and he anticipates their mistake. He is beforehand with them, by protesting against any such use being made of his doctrine; which, yet he was aware, might by possibility be made.

By way of showing scripturally the obligation and the necessity of personal endeavours after virtue, all the numerous texts which exhort to virtue, and admonish us against vice, might be quoted; for they are all directly to the purpose: that is, we might quote every page of the New Testament. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven.” “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” In both these texts the rewards attends the *doing*: the promise is annexed to

works. Again; “ To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and immortality, eternal life : but unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man *that doeth evil.*” Again; “ Of the which,” namely, certain enumerated vices, “ I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they, which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” These are a few amongst many texts of the same effect, and they are such as can never be got over. Stronger terms cannot be devised than what are here used. Were the purpose, therefore, simply to prove from Scripture the necessity of virtue, and the danger of vice, so far as salvation is concerned, these texts are decisive. But when an answer is to be given to those, who so interpret certain passages of the apostolic writings, especially the passages which speak of the efficacy of the death of Christ, or draw such inferences from these passages, as amount to a dispensing with the obligations of virtue; then the best method of proving, that theirs cannot be a right interpretation, nor theirs just inferences, is, by showing, (which fortunately we are able to do,) that it is the very interpretation, and these the very inferences, which the apostles were themselves aware of, which they provided against, and which they protested against. The four texts, quoted from the apostolic writings in this discourse, were quoted with this view: and they may be considered, I think, as showing the minds of the authors upon the point in question more determinately, than any general exhortation to good works, or any general denunciation against sin could do. I assume, therefore, as a proved point, that whatever was said by the apostles concerning the efficacy of the death of Christ was said by them under an apprehension,

that they did not thereby in any manner relax the motives, the obligation, or the necessity of good works. But still there is another important question behind ; namely, whether, notwithstanding what the apostles have said, or may have meant to say, there be not, in the nature of things, an invincible inconsistency between the efficacy of the death of Christ, and the necessity of a good life ; whether those two propositions can, in fair reasoning, stand together ; or whether it does not necessarily follow, that if the death of Christ be efficacious, then good works are no longer necessary ; and, on the other hand, that, if good works be still necessary, then is the death of Christ not efficacious.

Now, to give an account of this question, and of the difficulty which it seems to present, we must bear in mind, that in the business of salvation there are naturally and properly two things, viz. the cause and the condition ; and that these two things are different. We should see better the propriety of this distinction, if we would allow ourselves to consider well *what salvation is* : what the being *saved* means. It is nothing less than, after this life is ended, being placed in a state of happiness exceedingly great, both in degree and duration ; a state, concerning which the following things are said : “ the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.” “ God hath in store for us such things as pass man’s understanding.” So that, you see, it is not simply escaping punishment, simply being excused or forgiven, simply being compensated or repaid for the little good we do, but it is infinitely more. Heaven is infinitely greater than mere compensation, which natural religion itself might lead us to expect. What do the Scriptures call it ? “ Glory, honour,

immortality, eternal life." "To them that seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." Will any one then contend, that salvation in this sense, and to this extent; that heaven, eternal life, glory, honour, immortality; that a happiness such as that there is no way of describing it, but by saying that it surpasses human comprehension, that it casts the sufferings of this life at such a distance, as not to bear any comparison with it—will any one contend, that this is no more than what virtue deserves, what, in its own proper nature, and by its own merit, it is entitled to look forward to, and to receive? The greatest virtue that man ever attained has no such pretensions. The best good action that man ever performed has no claim to this extent, or any thing like it. It is out of all calculation, and comparison, and proportion above, and more than, any human works can possibly deserve.

To what then are we to ascribe it, that endeavours after virtue should procure, and that they will, in fact, procure, to those who sincerely exert them, such immense blessings? To what, but to the voluntary bounty of Almighty God, who, in his good pleasure, hath appointed it so to be? The benignity of God towards man hath made him this inconceivably advantageous offer. But a most kind offer may still be a conditional offer. And this, though an infinitely gracious and beneficial offer, is still a conditional offer, and the performance of the conditions is as necessary, as if it had been an offer of mere retribution. The kindness, the bounty, the generosity of the offer, do not make it the less necessary to perform the conditions, but more so. A conditional offer may be infinitely kind on the part of the benefactor who makes it, may be infinitely beneficial to those to whom it is made.

If it be from a prince or governor, it may be infinitely gracious and merciful on his part ; and yet, being conditional, the condition is as necessary, as if the offer had been no more than that of scanty wages by a hard taskmaster.

In considering this matter *in general*, the whole of it appears to be very plain ; yet, when we apply the consideration to religion, there are two mistakes into which we are very liable to fall. The first is, that when we hear so much of the exceedingly great kindness of the offer, we are apt to infer, that the conditions, upon which it was made, will not be exacted. Does that at all follow ? Because the offer, even with these conditions, is represented to be the fruit of love and mercy, and kindness, and is in truth so, and is most justly so to be accounted, does it follow that the conditions of the offer are not necessary to be performed ? This is one error, into which we slide, against which we ought to guard ourselves most diligently : for it is not simply false in its principle, but most pernicious in its application ; its application always being to countenance us in some sin which we will not relinquish. The second mistake is, that, when we we have performed the conditions, or think that we have performed the conditions, or when we endeavour to perform the conditions, upon which the reward is offered, we forthwith attribute our obtaining the reward to this our performance or endeavour, and not to that which is the beginning and foundation and cause of the whole, the true and proper cause, namely, the kindness and bounty of the original offer. This turn of thought, likewise, as well as the former, it is necessary to warn you against. For it has these consequences : it damps our gratitude to God, it takes off our attention from Him.

Some, who allow the *necessity* of good works to salvation, are not willing that they should be called *conditions* of salvation. But this, I think, is a distinction too refined for common Christian apprehension. If they be necessary to salvation, they are conditions of salvation, so far as I can see. It is a question, however, not now before us.

But to return to the immediate subject of our discourse. Our observations have carried us thus far; that in the business of human salvation there are two most momentous considerations, the *cause* and the *conditions*, and that these considerations are distinct. I now proceed to say, that there is no inconsistency between the efficacy of the death of Christ and the necessity of a holy life (by which I mean sincere endeavours after holiness); because the first, the death of Christ, relates to the cause of salvation; the second, namely, good works, respects the conditions of salvation; and that the cause of salvation is one thing, the conditions another.

The cause of salvation is the free will, the free gift, the love and mercy of God. That alone is the source and fountain and cause of salvation, the origin from which it springs, from which all our hopes of attaining to it are derived. This cause is not in ourselves, nor in any thing we do, or can do, but in God, in his good will and pleasure. It is, as we have before shown, in the graciousness of the original offer. Therefore, whatever shall have moved and excited and conciliated that good will and pleasure, so as to have procured that offer to be made, or shall have formed any part or portion of the motive from which it was made, may most truly and properly be said to be efficacious in human salvation.

This efficacy is in Scripture attributed to the death of Christ. It is attributed in a variety of ways of expression, but this is the substance of them all. He is "a sacrifice, an offering to God; a propitiation; the precious sacrifice foreordained; the lamb slain from the foundation of the world; the lamb which taketh away the sin of the world. We are washed in his blood; we are justified by his blood; we are saved from wrath through him; he hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." All these terms, and many more that are used, assert in substance the same thing, namely the efficacy of the death of Christ in the procuring of human salvation. To give to these expressions their proper moment and import, it is necessary to reflect, over and over again, and by reflection to impress our minds with a just idea, what and how great a thing salvation is; for it is by means of that idea alone, that we can ever come to be sensible, how unspeakably important, how inestimable in value, any efficacy, which operates upon that event, must be to us all. The highest terms in which the Scriptures speak of that efficacy are not too great: cannot be too great; because it respects an interest and an event, so vast, so momentous, as to make all other interests, and all other events, in comparison contemptible.

The sum of our argument is briefly this. There may appear, and to many there has appeared, to be an inconsistency or incompatibility between the efficacy of the death of Christ, and the necessity of sincere endeavours after obedience. When the subject is properly examined, there turns out to be no such incompatibility. The graciousness of an offer does not diminish the necessity of the condition. Suppose a prince to pro-

mise to one of his subjects, upon compliance with certain terms, and the performance of certain duties, a reward in magnitude and value out of all competition beyond the merit of the compliance, beyond the desert of the performance ; to what shall such a subject ascribe the happiness held out to him ? He is an ungrateful man, if he attribute it to any cause whatever, but to the bounty and goodness of his prince in making him the offer ; or if he suffer any consideration, be it what it will, to interfere with, or diminish, his sense of that bounty and goodness. Still it is true, that he will not obtain what is offered, unless he comply with the terms. So far his compliance is a condition of his happiness. But the grand thing is the offer being made at all. That is the ground and origin of the whole. That is the *cause* ; and is ascribable to favour, grace, and goodness, on the part of the prince, and to nothing else. It would, therefore, be the last degree of ingratitude in such a subject, to forget his prince, while he thought of himself ; to forget the *cause*, whilst he thought of the condition ; to regard every thing promised as merited. The generosity, the kindness, the voluntariness, the bounty of the original offer, come by this means to be neglected in his mind entirely. This, in my opinion, describes our situation with respect to God. The love, goodness, and grace of God, in making us a tender of salvation, and the effects of the death of Christ, do not diminish the necessity or the obligation of the condition of the tender, which is a sincere endeavour after holiness ; nor are, in any wise, inconsistent with such obligation.



## XXII.

THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST CONSISTENT WITH THE NECESSITY OF A GOOD LIFE; THE ONE BEING THE CAUSE, THE OTHER THE CONDITION, OF SALVATION.

(PART III.)

ROMANS VI. 1.

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.*

IN the last discourse I said that good works are the *condition* of salvation; not the *cause*: that the *cause* is no other than the gratuitous abounding mercy of Almighty God. Now, though this position was attempted to be established for the purpose of checking such a notion of merit and pretensions in ourselves as might tend to lessen in our minds the consideration of that goodness and love to which we are above all measure indebted, and by which we are above all degrees obliged—though, I say, it was there advanced for the sake of this application, and no other, yet the proposition may be again taken up as introductory to a *second* important argument, namely, the discussion of the question, which every Christian must have heard of, between good works and faith.

Remarking the great stress that is laid upon faith in Scripture, and the high and strong terms in which it is

spoken of in certain passages of St. Paul's Epistles in particular, some persons, though they agreed with us in stating good works to be the condition of salvation, had at the same time alleged faith to be the cause. Now that is not so. Faith is no more the cause of salvation than good works are. The proper cause is distinct from either, being exclusively and solely the grace or voluntary bounty of Almighty God. Therefore it is misrepresenting the matter to advance faith into a different predicament, as I may say, from good works, by calling it the *cause*, and good works the *condition* of salvation. In truth, they are neither of them the *cause*. They are both of the same nature; they both hold the same place in our consideration; by which I mean to signify, that so far as either of them are necessary, they are of importance and efficacy as *conditions* only. This, I think, ought to be carefully observed; for it puts us into the true way both of comprehending and of trying the question between them; which question, though in substance one, is capable of being submitted to examination under three forms.

Whether faith alone be the condition of salvation? Whether good works alone be that condition? Whether faith and good works be the condition, neither of them being, without the other, sufficient?

Now, independently of Scripture texts, I know not that any one would ever have thought of making faith alone, meaning by faith the belief of certain religious propositions, to be the condition of salvation; because it would have occurred to every one, who reflected upon the subject, that at any rate faith could only be classed amongst other virtues and good qualities, and not as that which superseded all. Be its excellency, or value, or obligation ever so great, it is still a quality of our moral

nature, capable of degrees, and liable to imperfections, as our other moral qualities are. Those, therefore, who contend for the sufficiency of faith alone, must found their doctrine, and we will do them the justice to allow, that they do found their doctrine, upon certain strong texts of Scripture. The texts upon which they rely are principally taken from the writings of St. Paul; and they are these:—"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed on Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." "That no man is justified by the law, in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith." "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." These, no doubt, are strong texts, and it will not be wondered at, that in conjunction with other inducements, they have led many serious persons to lay such a stress upon them, as to exclude good works from being considered even as a condition of salvation; and a few perhaps to take refuge in this doctrine, as a ground of hope under a life of continued sins. I say that these inferences are not to be wondered at, if the texts be taken by themselves. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture; particular texts with other particular texts; and especially with the

main tenor of the whole. The doctrine even of Transubstantiation has a text to stand upon; which, taken alone, and interpreted literally, is very strong in its favour; but collated with other texts, and explained according to certain reasonable rules of interpretation, the passage is capable of being disposed of without forcing upon us any doctrine like that which had been deduced from it. Now, proceeding in this manner with the texts above cited, concerning the efficacy of faith, we take upon us to say, that whatever the writer of them meant by these expressions, he did not mean to lay it down as an article to be received by his disciples, that a man leading a wicked life, without change and without repentance, will nevertheless be saved at the last by his belief of the doctrines of the Christian religion; still less did he mean to encourage any one to go on in a course of sin, expressly and intentionally comforting and protecting himself by this opinion. I repeat, that he, the Apostle, could not mean to say this; because if he did, he would say what is expressly and positively contradicted by other texts of at least equal authority with his own; he would say what is contradicted by the very drift and design of the Christian constitution; and would say, lastly, what is expressly denied and contradicted by himself.

First, he would say what is contradicted by other texts of Scripture, and those of the very highest authority. For instance, what words can be plainer, more positive, or more decisive of this point than our Saviour's own? "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven." There can be no doubt but that they who are here introduced as crying out to Jesus Christ,

“ Lord, Lord,” are supposed to believe in him ; yet neither their devotion, nor their faith which prompted it, were sufficient to save them. Nay, farther ; our Lord, in the same passage, proceeds to tell his hearers, that many will say to him in that day, “ Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works ? ” It cannot be questioned but that they who do these things in Christ’s name believe in Christ. Yet what will be their reception ? “ I will profess unto you I never knew you.” And who are they who shall be thus repulsed and rejected ? No others than the workers of iniquity. “ Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.” The difference between doing good and doing evil according to another declaration of our Saviour, is no less than this : “ They that have done good shall come forth unto the resurrection of life ; they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” Can a greater distinction be made, or expressed in words more plain ? All the preceptive part of our Lord’s teaching, especially his whole sermon upon the mount, may be alleged on the same side of the argument. And to substitute belief in the place of the duties there enjoined, or as an expiation for the offences there forbidden, even when persevered in, would in effect set aside the authority of the lawgiver. Why did our Lord command and forbid these things (or indeed any thing), if he did not require obedience as a condition of salvation ? Again, every thing which we read concerning repentance implies the necessity of good works to salvation, and the inconsistency of bad works with salvation : for repentance is a change from one to the other, and can be required upon no other supposition than this. But of repentance we hear con-

tinually in the New Testament, and from the first to the last of the great mission of which it contains the history. John the Baptist began with it before our Saviour's own ministry commenced, and as the introduction to that ministry. His call to the Jews who resorted to his preaching was to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That practical virtue made an essential part of what he meant by repentance is not left to be collected from the mere import of the word or nature of the subject, which yet might show it sufficiently, but is expressly by himself declared, "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance;"—and when particular classes of men come to inquire of their teacher what they should do, his answer was a warning against those particular sins to which persons of their class and character were most liable, which is his own application of his own principle, and is, so far as the instances go, a direct and clear exposition of his meaning. All proves that a moral change, a moral improvement, practical sins, and practical virtues, and a turning from one to the other, was what he included in the awful admonition which he sounded in the ears of mankind. What his forerunner began with our Lord followed up, in the same sense, and with the same design. "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel." As our Lord preached repentance himself, nay, made it the burden of his preaching, so he sent out his Apostles to do the very same. He called the twelve, you read, and began to send them out two by two. And, thus sent, what were they to do? "They went out and preached, that every man should repent."

After our Lord's departure from the world, the Apostles carried on exactly the same plan of religious instruction. They had learnt their lesson too well and too deeply to change its essential part. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent." This is the explicit language the Apostle held upon the subject of repentance; which, as hath already been observed, has a precise reference to a good and bad life; and these texts deliver no other judgement concerning the matter than what their great teacher had pronounced before. By comparing Saint Paul's words with other Scriptures, we cannot overlook that well-known text of Saint James: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and not works; can faith save him?" Saint James doth not here suppose the man hypocritically, and for some sinister purpose, to pretend to believe what he does not believe. The illustration which follows plainly supposes the belief to be real, for he compares it to the case of the devils, who believe and tremble. Now we are to remember that Saint James's words are Scripture, as well as Saint Paul's. Here, therefore, is a text, which precisely, and in the most pointed terms, contradicts the sense which the Solifidians put upon Saint Paul's words.

Again, a sense which virtually sets aside the obligation and the necessity of good works cannot be the true sense of Saint Paul's words, because it is contrary to at least one declared end of Christianity itself. The office and design of the Christian revelation is set forth in the following texts: "The grace of God that

bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." By the phrase, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation," is undoubtedly meant Christianity. Then for what purpose hath it appeared? To do what was it published? The text goes on to tell us, namely, that it should teach us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. That was his object, or at least one of his objects, and the mean towards it was to teach us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Our Saviour himself had before told his disciples, "that he came to call sinners to repentance;" and repentance, as already hath been noticed, bears a necessary relation to good works and bad works. Agreeably hereunto, the benefit and blessing of Christianity, as a revelation, is described by the Apostle Peter to consist in its converting efficacy; for addressing the Jews upon a very signal occasion, and a very short time after our Lord's ascension, when every thing was fresh in his thoughts, he speaks thus: "Unto you first, God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

The question, you remember, is what Saint Paul meant, or rather, strictly speaking, what he did *not* mean, in the several texts that have been cited in this discourse, and which are usually cited by those who may be called the advocates of faith, in contradistinction to good works. Now, although it may be a reasonable



method of showing that a man's words are not to be taken in the sense which the letter and terms of the sentence may seem, at first sight at least, to convey, in order to prove that such sense is inconsistent with what is delivered by authority as great as his own, or greater, and inconsistent also with the main drift and purpose of that very institution, in the administration of which, and as forming part of which, the texts in question were written—although these points may be fairly brought forward in argument, yet the straight and clear way of showing, in any case of difficulty, in what sense a writer intended that his words should be understood, or rather in what sense he did *not* mean them to be taken, is to look to what himself has elsewhere said upon the same subject, and more especially to what he has said in the same writing. For though a man may advance what is contrary to sound reason, what is contrary to other authority, nay, what is contrary to his own professions at other times, and in other writings, yet surely his words ought not to be interpreted, if there be any fair way of avoiding it, in such a manner as to make him contradict himself in the same discourse.

Now, pursuing this line of observation, we have to remark, first, that in the very same epistle to the Romans in which Saint Paul says, that “the just shall live by faith,”—not only in the same epistle, but in the same sentence, Saint Paul tells us that the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. By quoting, therefore, the old prophet's expression, “shall live by faith,” he cannot mean to say that faith, accompanied with ungodliness and unrighteousness, would end in salvation. That indeed would be to say, not that the “just,” but that the unjust, shall live by

faith. It would be to say what his next words unsay, and contradict. The most therefore that this text, "the just shall live by faith," can amount to is, that though good works be necessary and be performed, yet, after all, it is not by them, otherwise than as they are the proof of faith, but by that faith itself, that the just shall live. Again: though it be true that Saint Paul in this epistle concludes "that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law," yet in the same epistle he had before told us, that "God will render to every man according to his deeds; to them, who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jews first, and also of the Gentiles." Therefore, his expression concerning faith, in the third chapter of this epistle, though strong, must not be so construed as to make the author assert the direct contrary of what he had asserted just before in the second chapter. Again: four chapters of this very epistle, viz. from the twelfth to the fifteenth inclusive, are occupied in delivering moral precepts. Let no one therefore say that moral precepts are indifferent, or that moral practice, *i. e.* the conduct which these precepts enjoin and enforce, is unnecessary—I mean in the judgement of the writer whose authority is here pleaded. Nor is it possible to reconcile with this opinion the two following texts, taken out of the same epistle: "The wages of sin is death;" chap. vi. verse 23. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live;" chap. viii. verse 13.

The same species of observation applies to the epistle to the Galatians ; in which epistle, it is true, that the Apostle hath used concerning faith these very strong terms : “ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ ; that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Nevertheless, in another place of this same epistle, we have the following plain, clear, and circumstantial denunciation : “ The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these—Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like ; of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” No words can be more positive than these, and the last words are the most positive of all, “ shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Sinners like these may have been justified in a certain sense ; they may have been saved in a certain sense ; that is, they may have been brought into a state of justification or salvation for the present ; but they shall not be finally happy, “ they shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

In the epistle to the Ephesians, we acknowledge the same observation, namely, that the Apostle hath spoken strong things concerning faith ; yet hath at the same time, and in the same writing, most absolutely insisted upon a virtuous life, and most positively declared that a life of sin will end in perdition. Concerning faith, he hath said this : “ By grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift

of God : not of works, lest any man should boast." Concerning a life of sin, he makes this declaration. After having enumerated certain species of sins, he adds these cautionary words, which show his opinion as manifestly as words can show it : " Let no man deceive you with vain words ; for because of these things, even the sinful practices before recited, cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

To conclude : What the Apostle might particularly mean by the several expressions concerning faith, which have been quoted, is another question ; but that he did not mean to state or teach that a life of endeavour after virtue, if that be what we understand by good works, could be dispensed with ; or that a life of continued unrepented sin would end in salvation by means, or for the sake of any belief in Christ's religion, I think most evident, and would be so, although we were not able to settle, to our satisfaction, the first question, namely, what it was he did mean. I say, the negative proposition is most evident, unless we can be brought to suppose, that Saint Paul delivered a doctrine contrary to that of our Saviour and of the other Apostles, destructive of one declared end of the christian institution itself (and the end and design of any system of laws is to control the interpretation of particular parts) ; and lastly, what is most improbable of all, at the same time and in the same manner, directly repugnant to what he himself has solemnly asserted and delivered at other times and in other places.

## XXIII.

THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST CONSISTENT WITH THE NECESSITY OF A GOOD LIFE; THE ONE BEING THE CAUSE, THE OTHER THE CONDITION, OF SALVATION.

(PART IV.)

ROMANS VI. 1.

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.*

THAT Saint Paul, in the texts which are usually quoted upon this question from his epistles, did not mean to say, that faith, accompanied with wickedness of life, would end in salvation, may be considered, I think, as proved. The next inquiry is, if he did not mean this, what did he mean? His words we cannot alter: and what other sense can we fairly put upon them, so as to excuse or avoid the sense which we disclaim? Now it is but justice to every writer to suppose, that he writes to be understood by those to whom his writing is immediately addressed, and that he has in view the circumstances and situation of the persons whom he directly accosts, much more than the circumstances and situation of those who may come to read what he has written, in some remote age and distant country. There are no ancient writings in which this allowance is more wanted than in those of Saint Paul, nor in any part of his writings more than

in that which forms the subject of our present discourse. Saint Paul's writings were addressed to Christians : but who in those days were Christians? They were in general, if not altogether, persons, not as we are, born and bred up in the religion, but they were persons who, having been born and bred up heathens or Jews, when arrived at years of judgement and discretion, and exercising that judgement and discretion, had voluntarily, and from conviction, quitted their native religion, become believers in Jesus Christ, and openly taken upon themselves the profession of this, now a new system of faith and conduct. This conversion had been with them a most momentary change. It was the grand æra and event of their lives as to spiritual matters : and no wonder their teachers should be industrious in pointing out to them the advantages, the effects, and the obligation of this change. Now it appears to have been a doctrine of Christianity taught both by Saint Paul and the other preachers of the religion, asserted, or rather assumed, in their writings, and frequently referred to therein,—that, amongst other effects and advantages of their becoming Christians, this was one, namely, that the sins of which they had been guilty before their conversion were thereupon forgiven ; and which sins being so forgiven, they, by their conversion, and at the time of their conversion, stood in the sight of God (whatever their former lives had been) as just persons, no less so, than if they had led lives of righteousness from their birth ; that is, in one word, they were justified.

But the forgiveness here spoken of, namely, the forgiveness of prior sins upon this faith and conversion, and the justification implied in that forgiveness, was undoubtedly an advantage annexed by the mercy of

God to their faith and conversion, and not the effect of any pretensions they had, or might suppose themselves to have, from either their situation or behaviour prior to their conversion. Therefore, supposing this to be the sense of the word justification, viz. the remission of all the sins they had committed before their conversion to Christianity, it was literally and strictly true what Saint Paul tells these Christians, in his epistle to the Romans, that they were justified by faith without the works of the law, even supposing "the works of the law" to comprise all the duties of the moral law; and I think it very probable, that this is what Saint Paul meant by justification in that remarkable text, and which is one of the strongest on that side of the question. And I think so for two reasons. In the fifth chapter of the epistle, and the first verse, which connects itself with the text under consideration (the intermediate chapter being employed in a digressive illustration of the subject, drawn from the history of Abraham), I say, in the beginning of the fifth chapter, Saint Paul evidently speaks of their being justified, as of a thing that was past. Whatever it was, it had already taken place: they were already justified; for he speaks thus of it: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." If then their justification had already taken place, when did it take place? What time can be assigned to it but the time of their conversion, according to the sense we contend for? A second fair ground for believing that this was the Apostle's meaning is, that it best suited with his argument. His argument was to prove, that the Gentiles were as properly admissible into the Christian dispensation as the Jews; a question at that time hotly contested, though now

laid asleep. To make out this point, he shows that the justification, *i. e.* the pardon of prior sins, which conversion to Christianity brought with it, was neither in Jew nor Gentile attributable to their former behaviour, or to any thing which that behaviour could merit ; but was, in both the one and the other, the pure and free effect and gift of God's mercy,—was grace,—was favour ; and being so, that one sort of men, as well as the other, was capable of receiving it, and of participating in all the fruits and privileges which belonged to it. It was a thing which, upon the ground of prior merit, the Jew could not claim ; which, upon the ground of pure favour, the Gentile might expect as well as he. Therefore, the purpose of the Apostle's argument is satisfied, and the argument itself made most clear, by limiting his sense of justification to what passed upon the act of conversion ; and it is by this interpretation alone that we can fairly avoid, in this passage, the sense which those put upon it, who contend against the proper necessity of good works ; for we cannot, I think, in this passage, understand by faith that operative, productive faith which includes good works. Nor can we understand by the works of the law the rites only, and peculiar ordinances of the Jewish law. We cannot understand by faith that which includes and necessarily supposes works, because then the Apostle could not have talked of faith *without* works ; whereas he says, that “ we are justified by faith *without* the works of the law.” We cannot restrain the expression, “ the works of the law,” to the positive precepts of the Jewish law, because we must suppose that Saint Paul's conclusion was coextensive with his reasoning ; and his reasoning evidently applies and relates to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, to those who had no proper concern in the



Jewish law, as well as to those who had. "We have before proved," says he, "both of Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." This was the common situation of both; and to this, their common situation, must be applied what he afterwards says concerning justification. It hath likewise been truly I think observed, that the laws must here mean the moral law; because only three verses afterwards, and continuing, as must be presumed, the same idea, he adds, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." But in no sense, to be sure, could it be said that the ritual or ceremonial law of the Jews, as a distinct and separate thing from the moral law, was established by the preachers of faith, or by this their reasoning upon it.

There is another strong text in St. Paul's Epistles, which allows of nearly the same exposition. The Apostle tells the Ephesians (chap. ii. verse 8), "By grace ye are saved through faith." Being "saved" means being put into the way and course of being saved, which was done for them at their conversion, when they became believers in Christ; and therefore it was through faith. The expression, being saved, when applied to those who are yet living, can only mean being put into a way or course of being saved; final salvation itself, or, in other words, being received into heaven, only taking place after death. Now the being saved in this sense, namely, the being put into a way or course of salvation, by no means dispenses with the necessity of a good life; because the final salvation, the aim and end of the whole, will still of necessity depend upon their keeping in that way, and pursuing that course. By a bad life they go out of the way into which they had been brought, desert the course upon

which they had entered, and therefore lose heaven at last ; and all this consistently with St. Paul's words to the Ephesians, as thus interpreted.

The third chapter of the Galatians is another scripture which has been much relied upon on the other side of the question. To the apparent difficulties arising out of this chapter, I should be inclined to apply a somewhat different solution from that which we last gave. I think that in this chapter the term faith means a productive faith ; and I think also, that the works of the law mean circumcision and the other rites of the Jewish law. As to the first point, St. Paul, in the ninth verse of this chapter, says, " They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Now common sense obliges us to suppose, that the faith of those concerning whom he says, " they that be of faith," was of like kind with the faith of Abraham, so that they might partake of the blessing along with him ; but St. James, you know, hath asserted, and shown indeed, that the faith of Abraham was faith efficacious to the production of good works. Then, as to the second point, the works of the law, of which St. Paul appears in this epistle to lower the value, are explained by him in the ninth and tenth verses of the fourth chapter, and so explained, as to show that they were ritual works which he was thinking off: " But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage ? Ye observe days and months, and times and years." The truth was, that in St. Paul's absence, his Galatian converts had been going fast into Judaism, which he considered as an undoing of every thing which he had done amongst them ; and which conduct of theirs drew from

him some very strong expressions ; yet none, I think, but what may be fairly understood without supposing him to dispense with the necessity of a virtuous conduct.

Justification is properly distinguished from sanctification. Justification, in the scripture sense of it, is the pardon of sins, prior to a certain period : sanctification is holiness of life subsequent to that period ; or more strictly speaking, these words express what God does for us in these different stages of our Christian life. Justification is altogether his, because pardon is by its very nature the subject of favour. Sanctification, to say the least of it, is indebted to the support and assistance of his spirit. There is, therefore, an intelligible difference between justification and sanctification, and this is included in the term : for, as it respects us, it would be called sanctity ; as it respects God's assistance, it is called sanctification. But, as hath been said before, they are both necessary. A man may be justified, that is, may have his sins forgiven up to a certain period ; yet if he be not also sanctified, if, after that period, he relapse into and go on in unrepented wickedness, he will perish notwithstanding his justification. On the other hand, sanctification itself would not avail, without having a preceding justification to rest upon. Good behaviour, from a certain period, has not in itself any proper virtue or quality such as to atone for bad behaviour before that period. By the grace of God it hath this effect, but not by its proper nature, any more than the regular paying off of our debts, after a certain period, will discharge or cancel those which were contracted before that period. Wherefore there must be a remission of prior sins, or in other words, justification, in order that a subsequent good life, or sanctity, or sanctification, may avail us at the last.

It may be true, that, according to this representation, the terms justification, faith, and works of the law are not every where used in scripture in exactly the same sense. Thus, although justification be generally used to express the pardon of sins that are passed, with a reference to some certain period, commonly that of their becoming believers in Christ, yet one or two passages are found, in which the word denotes our final destiny at the day of judgement. This, I think, is the sense of the word in that text of St. Paul, wherein he declares that not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law, are justified; and most unquestionably it bears this sense in that discourse of our Saviour, in which he tells his hearers, "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned:?" for this declaration is equivalent to another, which our Saviour delivers at the same time, namely, that for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgement. So again, although in the texts which have been quoted from the epistle to the Galatians, it appears highly probable that, under the word faith, St. Paul had in contemplation an efficacious faith; and that by the works of the law he meant particularly the rites and ordinances of the Jewish law, the view with which he wrote that epistle naturally and necessarily suggesting these ideas to his thoughts; yet in the epistle to the Romans, penned with a somewhat different aspect, and under a different impression, especially in that famous text, "Therefore we conclude that man is justified by faith without the works of the law," I think he meant by faith, the simple act of believing, and by the works of the law, the practice of those duties which are enjoined by its precepts, moral as well as ritual; and

that the true interpretation of the text turns upon the word *justification*, which does not here signify finding acceptance, but the pardon of all sins committed before conversion. Therefore, there is some latitude to be allowed in the exposition of these terms as they occur in different places.

It may be also further true, that some passages of St. Paul's epistles are not according to the interpretation which we have put upon them, so applicable to us (or as some may think, so useful, or instructive, or affecting) as they are under a different exposition. Is it to be wondered at, that portions of ancient writings are not in all points, and in all their expressions, so applicable to us at this day, as they were to the persons to whom they were immediately addressed? Is it not true rather, that this is no more than the necessary consequence of those changes which have taken place in the circumstances of Christian life? But we are not to put a different sense upon words from that which was intended, in order to make them more closely applicable to our own case: or to make them, as we may suppose, more edifying; for there is no real edification separate from truth. That great revolution which had taken place in the lives of the Christians of Saint Paul's time, upon their becoming Christians, at a ripe age, together with the almost entire change both of opinions and of conduct, which accompanied that event, does not take place in the ordinary life of a Christian at this day; whereby it comes to pass, that such of Saint Paul's expressions as refer particularly to that change will not admit of the same proper application to us as it did to them. This, no doubt, constitutes a considerable difference; and without having some regard to this

difference, we may fall into error in interpreting divers passages of scripture.

Nevertheless, we are not to dismiss every text which we cannot at first sight explain, with the short answer, that it relates to the first Christians, and not to us. This is a negligent and unworthy way of treating subjects of such deep importance,—it often proceeds from rashness, or indolence, or religious indifference, and will lead into mistakes of an opposite kind. We are to ascertain, by a serious examination of the text before us, and the place in which it is found, what the actual difference is between the case of the early Christians, and our own, and how far that difference clears up the particular meaning; whilst at the same time, in a more general yet fair construction, much substantial truth may be left, in which we ourselves are interested. If this be so, we are to apply what is applicable. And perhaps there are few portions of Scripture, in which, proceeding in this manner, we shall not find something that touches our own case most nearly. For instance, and to return to the question now under consideration, every man who reforms his life; who hath found in himself a general change of his behaviour; and who feels this change, both in the state of his mind and the course of his behaviour, will find a strong similitude between his own case and that of the first Christian converts; and I think that he is well warranted in hoping that the justification, the pardon of the past, which in Saint Paul's epistles is expressly attributed to their *conversion*, will be extended to his *reformation*, and upon the same condition, namely, of his persisting steadily in his new course; for, though the change in him be called *reformation*, and in them was *conversion*,

reformation is in truth the substance of conversion ; it being to no purpose to go from one religion to another, even from a false to a true religion, if we carry our vices along with us. Again, he who breaks off any particular sin from a religious motive, and without hypocrisy, such alteration being the effect upon his heart of his faith in Christ, has reason to apply to himself the doctrine of justification by faith, so far as to support and comfort himself with the expectation, that in the sight of God, he is justified from the sin which he hath so forsaken ; by which is meant, that his former transgressions of that kind are blotted out. This, however, has nothing to do with the case of him, who is merely changing one species of sin for another, according as a different time of life, a different state of fortune, a difference of place, possession, or society, may offer different temptations : for in that sort of change there is no repentance, no reformation, no proof or example of the efficacy or operation of Christian faith ; but a mere following of the inclination, which is uppermost at the time. There is no justification by faith, when there is no faith operating, and consequently none in the case here described. But wherever there is a resolute resistance of temptation, a resolute breaking off of sinful habits, from and by virtue of the strength and force of religious motives within us, there is a working energetic faith, and there is that justification by faith which is so much spoken of in Saint Paul's epistles. So that though there were circumstances of the age in which these epistles were written, which concerned the doctrine — which circumstances do not subsist now — it is far from being true that the doctrine itself is either barren or unimportant, or such as may be overlooked or neglected.

To conclude : The grand question is, what will save us at last. And this, so far as our present argument is concerned, divides itself into three—will faith and works together save us? will faith without works save us? will works without faith save us? Now that faith in Jesus Christ, accompanied by a good life proceeding from that faith, will infallibly lead to salvation, neither admits, nor ever hath admitted, of any controversy whatever. Upon this point all parties are agreed. And this point is sufficient for the sincere Christian. He may entertain the other questions as matters of very interesting meditation ; but for himself, whilst he believes in Christ's religion, and earnestly and honestly strives to obey its laws, according to the utmost of his power and knowledge, he has no personal cause of doubt or distrust from either of them. The chief thing he has to look to is humility ;—the want of which may vitiate all his other good qualities. The chief thing he has to guard against, is a false and presumptuous opinion of his good works ; so as to found upon them, in his own mind, a secret claim upon heaven as of justice due to his merits, instead of gratefully referring himself, and all his hopes, to the free bounty and infinite love of God in Christ, displayed by offering him such a reward upon such terms.

The second question is, will faith save us without works ; or, to put the same question in another form, will faith end in salvation, though accompanied by a life of wickedness? Doctrines certainly have been, and are held, which lead to this conclusion, yet the conclusion itself is seriously maintained by few ; for, however in terms the doctrine of salvation by faith without works may appear to agree with certain expressions of Saint Paul's Epistles, yet, when it comes to be offered



as a rule of practice, it shows its own inconsistency with every property and character of true religion so strongly, that the practical inference is always denied. It is generally avoided by putting such a construction upon the word faith, as to prevent any licentious deductions being drawn from the doctrine of justification by faith ; so that, to the question just now stated, “ will faith end in salvation, though it be accompanied with wickedness of life,” the answer usually given is, that true faith never can be accompanied by wickedness of life. It is not necessary to go over the subject again, for the purpose of inquiring whether it be applicable to all the texts of Scripture to which it is applied, or only to some of them ; for, I trust, we have shown upon the whole, that the sense, which the doctrine of justification by faith without works, rigorously taken, would put upon Saint Paul’s expressions, can never have been the sense which Saint Paul himself intended : amongst other strong reasons, chiefly for this, that it is in contradiction with his own repeated declarations, and even with declarations delivered in the very writings in which the contested expressions are found. And I trust also we have shown (what undoubtedly it might be required of us to show), that these are interpretations fairly assignable to Saint Paul’s words, which stand clear of the doctrine in its rigorous, or, as it is sometimes called, its Calvinistic sense.

The third question is, will good works save us without faith ? Now, this is a question of circumstances—and the principal circumstance to be attended to is, whether our want of faith be our own fault. It is certainly true, that want of faith may proceed from, and be a proof of a wrong and a bad disposition of mind, of such a disposition of mind as no good thing can come

from. This, perhaps, was both very generally and in a very high degree the case with the Jews in our Saviour's time, and with many of those to whom the Apostles preached; because they had evidences afforded them, which ought to have convinced them, and which would have convinced them, had it not been that they gave themselves up to their prejudices, to their vicious propensities, and to wrong habits of thinking. And this their situation and opportunities will account for some of those strong denunciations against want of faith, which are found in Scripture addressed to the unbelievers of those times. "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." And, to a certain extent, the same reason may be alleged concerning many of those by whom, in after ages, the Gospel is rejected, after being fairly proposed to them. Now, in this case, good works without faith will not save a man; because, in truth, the works are not good, which flow from that disposition which occasion the want of faith. The works may be good, that is, may be useful as to their consequences and effects upon others; but this is not enough for the salvation of the person who performs them. They must also flow from a good disposition, which in the case supposed they could not do; for that good disposition would, along with the works, have produced faith.

On the other hand, cases undoubtedly may be supposed, and cases occur in innumerable instances, in which the want of faith cannot be attributed to the fault of the unbeliever. Whole nations and countries have never yet heard of the name of Christ. In countries in which he has been preached, multitudes have been debarred, by invincible impediments, from coming to the knowledge of his religion. To multitudes of

others it has never been preached or proposed truly or fairly. In these and the like cases it is not for us to say, that men will be destroyed for their want of faith. The Scripture has not said so, but the contrary. The Scripture appears to intimate that which, so far as we can apprehend, is most agreeable to the divine equity, that such persons shall respectively be judged according to the law and rule with which they were, or (if it had not been their own fault) they might have been acquainted—whether that were simply the law of nature, or any addition made to it by credible revelations. This is generally understood to be the meaning of that passage in the second chapter of Saint Paul's epistle to the Romans, in which he declares, that “as many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.” To which he adds, that “when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the works of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.” Which two texts, taken together, intimate, as I have said, that in the assignment both of punishment and reward, respect will be had to the law or rule of action with which they were acquainted, so that those who acted conscientiously by that rule would be accepted; those who wilfully went against the dictates of their own conscience would be regarded as transgressors before God, be their condition, as to religious knowledge and information, what it would.

In order to understand that this doctrine does not detract from the value of Christianity so much as, at

first sight, it may seem to do, two considerations are to be attended to, as possessing a material influence upon the subject. One is, that this gracious dispensation which comprises all mankind, which so condescends to their several difficulties and disadvantages, and is so indulgent to human blindness and wickedness, is procured to the world through the intervention, the mission, death, and mediation of Jesus Christ. Christ is the instrument of salvation to all who are saved. The obedient Jew, the virtuous heathen, are saved through him. They do not know this, nor may it be necessary they should. Yet it may be true in fact. That is one important consideration. The other is, that we are expressly taught in Scripture, that there are divers degrees of happiness even in heaven. Which being so, it is not unreasonable to expect that faithful followers of Christ will be advanced to higher rewards than others. This opinion is not repugnant to any ideas we form of distributive justice, and is scriptural.

Still, however, this speculation, though we cannot, I think, easily shut it out from our thoughts, does not touch our own proper concern. Our concern is solely with the question how a Christian can be saved. And in this question we rest upon one single conclusion; viz. that there is no safe reliance upon any thing but upon sincere endeavours after Christian obedience; and that a Christian's obedience consists in relinquishing his own sins, and practising his own duties.

## XXIV.

## ALL STAND IN NEED OF A REDEEMER.

(PART V.)

HEBREWS IX. 26.

*Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

IN former discourses upon this text I have shown, first, that the Scriptures expressly state the death of Jesus Christ as having an efficacy in the procurement of human salvation, which is not attributed to the death or sufferings of any other person, however patiently undergone, or undeservedly inflicted: and secondly, that this efficacy is quite consistent with our obligation to obedience; that good works still remain the condition of salvation, though not the cause; the cause being the mercy of Almighty God through Jesus Christ. There is no man living, perhaps, who has considered seriously the state of his soul, to whom this is not a consoling doctrine, and a grateful truth. But there are some situations of mind which dispose us to feel the weight and importance of this doctrine more than others. These situations I will endeavour to describe; and, in doing so, to point out how much more satisfactory it is to have a Saviour and Redeemer, and the mercies of our Creator excited towards us, and com-

municated to us by and through that Saviour and Redeemer, to confide in and rely upon, than any grounds of merit in ourselves.

First, then, souls which are really labouring and endeavouring after salvation, and with sincerity—such souls are every hour made sensible, deeply sensible, of the deficiency and imperfection of their endeavours. Had they no ground, therefore, for hope, but *merit*, that is to say, could they look for nothing more than what they should strictly *deserve*, their prospect would be very uncomfortable. I see not how they could look for *heaven* at all. They may form a conception of a virtue and obedience which might seem to be entitled to a high reward; but when they come to review their own performances, and to compare them with that conception; when they see how short they have proved of what they ought to have been, and of what they might have been, how weak and broken were their best offices; they will be the first to confess, that it is infinitely for their comfort that they have some other resource than their own righteousness. One infallible effect of sincerity in our endeavours is to beget in us a knowledge of our imperfections. The careless, the heedless, the thoughtless, the nominal Christian, feels no want of a Saviour, an intercessor, a mediator, because he feels not his own defects. Try in earnest to perform the duties of religion, and you will soon learn how incomplete your best performances are. I can hardly mention a branch of our duty, which is not liable to be both impure in the motive, and imperfect in the execution; or a branch of our duty in which our endeavours can found their hopes of acceptance upon any thing but extended mercy, and the efficacy of those

means and causes, which have procured it to be so extended.

In the first place, is not this the case with our acts of piety and devotion? We may admit, that pure and perfect piety has a natural title to reward at the hand of God. But is ours ever such? To be pure in its motive, it ought to proceed from a sense of God Almighty's goodness towards us, and from no other source, or cause, or motive whatsoever. Whereas even pious, comparatively pious men, will acknowledge, that authority, custom, decency, imitation, have a share in most of their religious exercises, and that they cannot warrant any of their devotions to be entirely independent of these causes. I would not speak disparagingly of the considerations here recited. They are oftentimes necessary inducements, and they may be means of bringing us to better; but still it is true, that devotion is not pure in its origin, unless it flow from a sense of God Almighty's goodness, unmixed with any other reason. But if our worship of God be defective in its principle, and often debased by the mixture of impure motives, it is still more deficient, when we come to regard it in its performances. Our devotions are broken and interrupted, or they are cold and languid. Worldly thoughts intrude themselves upon them. Our worldly heart is tied down to the earth. Our devotions are unworthy of God. We lift not up our hearts unto him. Our treasure is upon earth, and our hearts are with our treasure. That heavenly-mindedness which ought to be inseparable from religious exercises does not accompany ours; at least not constantly. I speak not now of the hypocrite in religion, of him who only makes a show of it. His case comes not within our present consideration. I speak of those who are sin-

cere men. These feel the imperfection of their services, and will acknowledge that I have not stated it more strongly than what is true. Imperfection cleaves to every part of it. Our thankfulness is never what it ought to be, or any thing like it; and it is only when we have some particular reason for being pleased that we are thankful at all. Formality is apt continually to steal upon us in our worship; more especially in our public worship: and formality takes away the immediate consciousness of what we are doing: which consciousness is the very life of devotion; all that we do without it being a dead ceremony.

No man reviews his services towards God, his religious services, but he perceives in them much to be forgiven, much to be excused; great unworthiness as respecting the object of all worship; much deficiency and imperfection to be passed over, before our service can be deemed in its nature an acceptable service. That such services, therefore, should, in fact, be allowed and accepted, and that to no less an end and purpose than the attainment of heaven, is an act of abounding grace and goodness in Him who accepts them: and we are taught in Scripture, that this so much wanted grace and goodness abounds towards us through Jesus Christ; and particularly through his sufferings, and his death.

But to pass from our acts of worship, which form a particular part only of our duty to God; to pass from these to our general duty, what, let us ask, is that duty? What is our duty towards God? No other, our Saviour himself tells us, than "to love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind:" Luke, x. 27. Are we conscious of such love, to such a degree? If we are not, then, in a most fundamental duty, we fail of being what we ought



to be. Here, then, as before, is a call for pardoning mercy on the part of God ; which mercy is extended to us by the intervention of Jesus Christ : at least so the Scriptures represent it.

In our duties towards one another, it may be said, that our performances are more adequate to our obligation, than in our duties to God ; that the subjects of them lie more level with our capacity ; and there may be truth in this observation. But still I am afraid, that both in principle and execution our performances are not only defective, but defective in a degree which we are not sufficiently aware of. The rule laid down for us is this, “ to love our neighbour *as ourselves.*” Which rule, in fact, enjoins, that our benevolence be as strong as our self-interest : that we be as anxious to do good, as quick to discover, as eager to embrace, every opportunity of doing it, and as active and resolute, and persevering in our endeavours to do it, as we are anxious for ourselves, and active in the pursuit of our own interest. Now is this the case with us ? Wherein it is not, we fall below our rule. In the apostles of Jesus Christ, to whom this rule was given from his own mouth, you may read how it operated : and their example proves, what some deny, the possibility of the thing ; namely, of benevolence being as strong a motive as self-interest. They firmly believed, that to bring men to the knowledge of Christ’s religion was the greatest possible good that could be done unto them—was the highest act of benevolence they could exercise. And, accordingly, they set about this work, and carried it on with as much energy, as much ardor, as much perseverance, through as great toils and labours, as many sufferings and difficulties, as any person ever pursued a scheme for their own interest, or for the

making of a fortune. They could not possibly have done more for their own sakes than what they did for the sake of others. They literally loved their neighbours as themselves. Some have followed their example in this; and some have, in zeal and energy, followed their example in other methods of doing good. For I do not mean to say, that the particular method of usefulness, which the office of the apostles cast upon them, is the only method, or that it is a method even competent to many. Doing good, without any selfish worldly motive for doing it, is the grand thing: the mode must be regulated by opportunity and occasion. To which may be added, that in those, whose power of doing good, according to any mode, is small, the principle of benevolence will at least restrain them from doing harm. If the principle be subsisting in their hearts, it will have this operation at least. I ask therefore again, as I asked before, are we as solicitous to seize opportunities, to look out for and embrace occasions, of doing good, as we are certainly solicitous to lay hold of opportunities of making advantage to ourselves, and to embrace all occasions of profit and self-interest? Nay, is benevolence strong enough to hold our hand, when stretched out for mischief? Is it always sufficient to make us consider what misery we are producing, whilst we are compassing a selfish end, or gratifying a lawless passion of our own? Do the two principles of benevolence and self-interest possess any degree of parallelism and equality in our hearts, and in our conduct? If they do, then so far we come up to our rule. Wherein they do not, as I said before, we fall below it.

When not only the generality of mankind, but even those who are endeavouring to do their duty, apply the standard to themselves, they are made to learn the

humiliating lesson of their own deficiency. That such our deficiency should be overlooked, so as not to become the loss to us of happiness after death ; that our poor, weak, humble endeavours to comply with our Saviour's rule should be received and not rejected ;—I say, if we hope for this, we must hope for it, not on the ground of congruity or desert, which it will not bear, but from the extreme benignity of a merciful God, and the availing mediation of a Redeemer. You will observe that I am still, and have been all along, speaking of *sincere* men, of those who are in earnest in their duty, and in religion : and I say, upon the strength of what has been alleged, that even these persons, when they read in Scripture of the riches of the goodness of God, of the powerful efficacy of the death of Christ, of his mediation and continual intercession, know and feel in their hearts that they stand in need of them all.

In that remaining class of duties, which are called duties to ourselves, the observation we have made upon the deficiency of our endeavours applies with equal or with greater force. More is here wanted than the mere command of our actions. The heart itself is to be regulated ; the hardest thing in the world to manage. The affections and passions are to be kept in order : constant evil propensities are to be constantly opposed. I apprehend, that every sincere man is conscious how unable he is to fulfil this part of his duty, even to his own satisfaction : and if our conscience accuse us, “ God is greater than our conscience, and knoweth all things.” If we see our sad failings, He must.

God forbid that any thing I say, either upon this, or the other branches of our duty, should damp our endeavours. Let them be as vigorous and as steadfast as they can. They will be so if we are sincere ; and

without sincerity there is no hope ; none whatever. But there will always be left enough, infinitely more than enough, to humble self-sufficiency.

Contemplate, then, what is placed before us : heaven. Understand what heaven is : a state of happiness after death : exceeding what, without experience, it is impossible for us to conceive, and unlimited in duration. This is a reward infinitely beyond any thing we can pretend to, as of right, as merited, as due. Some distinction between us and others, between the comparatively good and the bad, might be expected : but, on these grounds, not such a reward as this, even were our services, I mean the service of sincere men, perfect. But such services as ours, in truth, are, such services as, in fact, we perform, so poor, so deficient, so broken, so mixed with alloy, so imperfect both in principle and execution, what have they to look for upon their own foundation ? When, therefore, the Scriptures speak to us of a redeemer, a mediator, an intercessor for us ; when they display and magnify the exceedingly great mercies of God, as set forth in the salvation of man, according to any mode whatever which he might be pleased to appoint, and therefore in that mode which the Gospel holds forth ; they teach us no other doctrine than that to which the actual deficiencies of our duty, and a just consciousness and acknowledgement of these deficiencies, must naturally carry our own minds. What we feel in ourselves corresponds with what we read in Scripture.

## XXV \*.

MISAPPREHENSION OF THE NATURAL EFFICACY  
OF REPENTANCE.

HEBREWS IX. 26.

*Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

THE little that we have to hope for on the ground of right, or desert, or claim, and consequently the much in which we are indebted to spontaneous goodness and mercy, and the much we stand in need of other application and other intercession than our own, of a saviour, a redeemer, and a mediator, I have, in a former discourse, endeavoured to show, from the extreme deficiency and imperfection of our services, even of such as are sincere in their duty.

The same conclusion also arises from the indignity and aggravation of our sins. I think it to be true that we are fully sensible neither of one nor of the other; neither of the imperfection of our services, nor the malignity of our sins; otherwise our recourse to Jesus Christ would be stronger and more earnest than it is.

There is another point also nearly connected with these, in which we take up an opinion without foundation, and that is, the *natural* efficacy of repentance in obtaining the pardon of sins.

\* This, and two preceding sermons, which were for some reason omitted in the edition printed at Sunderland, have been restored to the order plainly pointed out by their author.

I am at present to treat of the malignity and aggravation of our sins, under the circumstances in which they are usually committed.

First, our sins are sins against knowledge. I ask of no man more than to act up to what he knows: by which I do not mean to say that it is not every man's obligation, both to inform his understanding, and to use his understanding about the matter; in other words, to know all he can concerning his duty; but I mean to say that, in fact, the question seldom comes to *that*—in fact, the man acts not up to what he does know—his sins *are against his knowledge*. It will be answered, that this may well be supposed to be the case with persons of education and learning, but is it the case with the poor and ignorant? I believe it to be the case with all. Is there a man who hears me that can say he acts up to what he knows? Does any one feel that to be his case? If he does, then he may reasonably plead his ignorance, his want of education, his want of instruction, his want of light and knowledge, for not acting better than he does, for not acting as he would have acted if these advantages had been vouchsafed to him. But he must first act up to what he does know, before he can fairly use this plea—before he can justly complain that he knows no more. Our sins are against knowledge. The real truth is—and it comprehends both the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned—the real truth I say is, that we not only sin, but sin against our own knowledge. There may be nicer cases, and more dubious points, which a man, informed and instructed in religion and morality, would perceive to be wrong—which a man, ignorant and un-informed, would not discover to be so; and there may be many such cases; but what I contend is, that the

question never comes to that. There are plain obligations which the same men *transgress*. There are confessed and acknowledged duties which they neglect. There are sins and crimes committed, which they know to be sins and crimes at the time. Therefore, since they act contrary to what they know, small as their knowledge is, is it in reason to be expected that they would not act contrary to what they know, if that knowledge was increased? Alas! in computing the number, and weight, and burden of our sins, we need only take into the account the *sins which we know*. They are more than enough to humble us to the earth upon the ground of *merit*: they are more than enough to banish that consideration: they are more than enough to humble every one of us to the dust.

Secondly: our sins are against gratitude. Whom do we offend by our sins? A parent. Him who is much more to us than a parent—a benefactor; the first, the greatest, the best of our benefactors—Him who, in fact, hath given us all that we have. If we have had any enjoyment in life, it is his bounty. If we have any thing to hope for, it is from his kindness. It is his act and doing alone that we are at all, or in any respect, superior to, or different from, the earth under our feet. It is his will which hath raised us into animated sensitive beings: it is still farther his will which hath made us intelligent rational agents. “In him we live, and move, and have our being.” These words are often repeated to us with little impression; but they contain solid, physical, and philosophical truths. He is the author of our being, and of every blessing which belongs to it—directly or indirectly, he is the author of them all. He is the constant preserver of our existence, the constant bestower of the good which we

receive, or ever shall receive from existence. It is impossible to sin knowingly without offending this benefactor; that is, we know at the time that we offend him. Were we not justified, therefore, in asserting that our sins are *sins against gratitude*? “He that loveth me keepeth my commandments.” He that loveth God keepeth his commandments. No proposition can be more true, for it means, that he who feels as much gratitude towards his Maker as he ought to feel, must be kept by that gratitude from wilfully offending him; which the transgression of his commandments infallibly does. Yet we sin; under all these circumstances of aggravation, we still sin: sin in us is exceedingly sinful—yet we sin. When the Scripture talks, therefore, of sin requiring atonement and expiation, and of the death and sufferings of Christ as of great and mighty efficacy thereto, does it talk of more than what we should judge to be necessary for us, considering what sin is?

Thirdly, our sins are sins against forbearance. Is there one of us who might not have been cut off, and called to judgment in the midst of his sins? To the forbearance alone of God we owe that we were not so. We must recollect that there have been with us times and circumstances, when it had been most unhappy for us if we had been seized by death, or visited by punishment—when it had been a fearful thing indeed if our Lord had come. When, therefore, with these recollections upon our mind, we nevertheless continue to sin, it is rightly said that we sin against forbearance, which is a great aggravation. It is expressly taught in Scripture, by St. Paul in particular, that the long suffering of God is calculated to work upon the heart of man. If it do *not* therefore so work—if it do *not* operate as a principle and motive of amendment, then



it brings us exactly under the description which St. Paul has left us of contumacy in sin ; that is, “ we *despise*,” such is St. Paul’s word, “ the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering”—disregarding the design of this forbearance and long suffering ; which conduct, as the same St. Paul pronounces, is no other than “ treasuring up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath.”

These are characters which belong to sin as such ; and every known sin is under the condemnation of these reasons. They are general reasons, not to say universal. But beside these, almost every particular sin has its particular aggravation ; particular as to the person who commits it, particular as to those against whom it is committed, particular in its circumstances, and in its consequences. Did we deal with ourselves according to truth, or did we deal with ourselves half so acutely as we treat other concerns, these circumstances would rise up to our recollection. They would help the argument ; they would help, along with more general religious reasons, to impress us with a sense of the malignity of sin—a sense which few have as they ought to have, though perhaps none want it entirely—and also the utter improbability that we should be able by repentance to atone for such malignity. Undoubtedly the sinner’s refuge is repentance ; it is all which the sinner can do : but still, as touching salvation, we ascribe an efficacy to repentance which does not belong to it, or rather, we get into a way of looking upon that as the natural fruit and consequence of repentance which is no such thing, but which is the consequence of repentance only by the appointment and mercy of God through Jesus Christ. The same thing may be said of repentance which has been said of good works ;

it is the *condition*, not the *cause*, of salvation. It is the condition ; for there is no salvation for unrepented sin, for unrepenting sinners. It is *not*, nevertheless, the *cause* ; for of itself it would have no such effect as to procure salvation ; it has no right or title to look for any such thing. This matter is not well understood ; yet it easily may be. There never was a malefactor brought before a judge who did not *repent* : yet does that save him, even when it is most sincere ? Does the judge go about to inquire whether the criminal before him repented, or whether his repentance be sincere ? He makes not that inquiry, because repentance will not save the malefactor from the denounced punishment of his offence. It is not therefore of the nature of repentance, it is not appertaining to its nature as such, to save even from punishment ; no, not when it is most sincere : but *our* salvation, the salvation which we look for in Christ Jesus, comprehends much more than being saved from punishment ; it includes the happiness of heaven, the reward of an immortal soul—above all price, and beyond all comparison the greatest thing we can gain. Can this, then, naturally belong to repentance, when even being saved from punishment does not ? Simply to be saved from punishment is not the natural effect of repentance ; for, in point of fact, it does not do it. How, then, to entitle us to the supremest of all gifts, the greatest of all blessings ; how can *that* be ascribed to repentance, as by its own operation, and of its own nature ? Observe, therefore, repentance has this to do with salvation : it is an *essential condition* ; we cannot be saved without it ; but then as to its being the *cause* of our salvation, or of salvation flowing or following from it, as its natural fruit, its due reward, its proper effect and consequence, it is no such thing. On

this ground it resembles any other of our good works. It stands upon no other : I mean, it does not supersede at all the agency, the want, the efficacy of a Redeemer.

Observe, that I am speaking only of that repentance which is sincere. Of a planned, concerted, prefixed repentance, I account nothing ; because it is impossible it should ever be sincere. Observe also, that whatever has been said of the imperfection of our good works may be said against the imperfection of our repentance ; it seldom attains to what it should be, as any one duty which we perform. But this also lies out of the question. For the present we contend, that even suppose it be proper, it has no necessary tendency to do away punishment ; for in fact, it has not this effect, even in this world. If it cannot of itself do away punishment, it is impossible it can deserve heaven : if it cannot do the less, it cannot do the greater. When we refer, therefore, our salvation, which is the attainment of heaven, to some other and higher cause than either our virtue, or innocence, or our penitence, we judge not either superstitiously or enthusiastically upon the subject, but according to the truth of the case, rightly understood.

Something beyond ourselves is the cause of our salvation, is wanting even according to sound principles of natural religion. When we read in Scripture of the free mercy of God enacted towards us by the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ, then we read of a cause beyond ourselves, and that is the very thing which was wanted to us.

## XXVI.

## OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE IN GENERAL.

## IN THREE PARTS.

## (PART I.)

## 1 COR. III. 16.

*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

THERE are ways of considering the subject of spiritual influence, as well as a want of considering it, which lay it open to difficulties and to misconceptions. But if the being liable to misapprehension and to misrepresentation be thought an objection to any doctrine, I know of no doctrine which is not liable to the same; nor any which has not, in fact, been loaded, at various times, with great mistakes.

One difficulty, which has struck the minds of some, is, that the doctrine of an influencing Spirit, and of the importance of this influence to human salvation, is an *arbitrary* system; making every thing to depend, not upon ourselves, nor upon any exertion of our own, but upon the gift of the Spirit.

It is not for us, we allow, to canvass the gifts of God; because we do not, and it seems impossible that we should, sufficiently understand the motive of the giver. In more ordinary cases, and in cases more

level to our comprehension, we seem to acknowledge the difference between a *debt* and a *gift*. A *debt* is bound, as it were, by known rules of justice: a *gift* depends upon the motive of the giver, which often can be known only to himself. To judge of the propriety either of granting or withholding that to which there is no claim (which is, in the strictest sense, a favour, which, as such, rests with the donor to bestow as to him seemeth good), we must have the several motives, which presented themselves to the mind of the donor, before us. This, with respect to the Divine Being, is impossible. Therefore we allow, that, either in this, or in any other matter, to canvass the gifts of God is a presumption not fit to be indulged. We are to receive our portion of them with thankfulness. We are to be thankful, for instance, for the share of health and strength which is given us, without inquiring why others are healthier and stronger than ourselves. This is the right disposition of mind, with respect to all the benefactions of God Almighty towards us.

But unsearchable does not mean arbitrary. Our necessary ignorance of the motives which rest and dwell in the Divine mind in the bestowing of his grace, is no proof that it is not bestowed by the justest reason. And with regard to the case at present before us, viz. the gifts and graces of the Spirit, the charge against it, of its being an arbitrary system, or in other words, independent of our own endeavours, is not founded in any doctrine or declaration of Scripture. It is not arbitrary in its origin, in its degree, or in its final success.

First, it is not arbitrary in its origin: for you read that it is given to prayer. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much

more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it?" But whether we will ask it or not, depends upon ourselves. It is proposed, you find, as a subject for our prayers: for prayer, not formal, cold, heartless, transitory, but prayer from the soul, prayer earnest and persevering; for this last alone is what the Scripture means by prayer. In this, therefore, it cannot be said to be arbitrary, or independent of our endeavours. On the contrary, the Scripture exhorts us to a striving in prayer for this best of all gifts.

But, it will be asked, is not the very first touch of true religion upon the soul, sometimes at least, itself the action of the Holy Spirit—this, therefore, must be prior to our praying for it? And so it may be, and not yet be arbitrarily given. The religious state of the human soul is exceedingly various. Amongst others, there is a state in which there may be good latent dispositions, suitable faculties for religion, yet no religion. In such a state, the spark alone is wanting. To such a state, the elementary principle of religion may be communicated, though not prayed for. Nor can this be said to be arbitrary. The Spirit of God is given where it is wanted; where, when given, it would produce its effect: but that state of heart and mind, upon which the effect was to be produced, might still be the result of moral qualification, improvement, and voluntary endeavour. It is not, I think, difficult to conceive such a case as this.

Nevertheless it may be more ordinarily true, that the gift of the Spirit is holden out to the struggling, the endeavouring, the approaching Christian. When the penitent prodigal was yet a great way off, his father saw him. This parable was delivered by our

Lord expressly to typify God's dealing with such sinners as are touched with a sense of their condition. And this is one circumstance in it to be particularly noticed. God sees the returning mind—sees every step and every advance towards him, “though we be yet a great way off”—yet at a great distance; though much remains to be done, and to be attained, and to be accomplished. And what he sees, he helps. His aid and influence are assisting to the willing Christian, truly and sincerely willing, though yet in a low and imperfect state of proficiency; nay, though in the outset, as it were, of his religious progress. “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart;” Psalm xxxiv. 18. But in all this there is nothing arbitrary.

Nor, secondly, is the operation of the Spirit arbitrary in its degree. It has a rule, and its rule is this: “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath.” Now of this rule, which is expressed under some, but under no great difference of phrase, in all the first three Gospels, I have first to observe, that though it carry the appearance of harshness and injustice, it is neither the one nor the other, but is correctly and fundamentally just. The meaning is, that whosoever uses, exercises, and improves the gifts which he has received, shall continue to receive still larger portions of these gifts; nay, he who has already received the largest portion, provided he adequately and proportionably uses his gifts, shall also in future receive the largest portion. More and more will be added to him that has the most: whilst he who neglects the little which he has, shall be deprived even of that. That this is the

sound exposition of these texts is proved from hence, that one of them is used as the application of the parable of the talents, concerning the meaning of which parable there can be no doubt at all: for there, he who had received, and, having received, had duly improved, ten talents, was placed over ten cities; and of him the expression in question is used—"whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." On the contrary, he who had received one talent, and had neglected what he had received, had it taken from him; and of him the other part of the expression is used—"whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. But there is a point still remaining, *viz.* whether this Scripture rule be applicable to spiritual gifts. I answer that it is so applied, more especially to spiritual knowledge, and the use which we make thereof: "Take heed how ye hear: unto you that hear shall more be given; for he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." So stands the passage in Mark; and substantially the same, that is, with a view to the same application, the passage stands in Matthew and Luke. I consider it, therefore, to be distinctly asserted, that this is the rule with regard to spiritual knowledge. And I think the analogy conclusive with regard to other spiritual gifts. In all which there is nothing arbitrary.

Nor, thirdly, is it arbitrary in its final success. "Grieve not the Spirit of God." Therefore he may be grieved. "And hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace," Heb. x. 29. Therefore he may be despised. Both these are leading texts upon the subject. And so is the following—"And his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain," 1 Cor. xv. 10. There-



fore it might have been in vain. The influence, therefore, of the Spirit, may not prevail, even as the admonitions of a friend, the warnings of a parent, may not prevail, may not be successful, may not be attended to; may be rejected, may be resisted, may be despised, may be lost. So that both in its gift, in its degree, operation, and progress, and, above all, in its final effect, it is connected with our own endeavours; it is not arbitrary. Throughout the whole, it does not supersede, but co-operate with ourselves.

But another objection is advanced, and from an opposite quarter. It is said, that if the influence of the Spirit depend, after all, upon our endeavours, the doctrine is nugatory: it comes to the same thing, as if salvation was put upon ourselves and our own endeavours alone, exclusive of every further consideration, and without referring us to any influence or assistance whatever. I answer, that this is by no means true: that it is not the same thing either in reality, or in opinion, or in the consequences of that opinion.

Assuredly it is not the same thing in reality. Is it the same thing, whether we perform a work by our own strength, or by obtaining the assistance and co-operation of another? Or does it make it the same thing, that this assistance is to be obtained by means which it is in our own choice to use or not? Or because, when the assistance is obtained, we may, or may not, avail ourselves of it: or because we may, by neglecting, lose it? After all, they are two different things, performing a work by ourselves, and performing it by means of help.

Again; It is not the same thing in the opinions, and sentiments, and dispositions which accompany it. A person who knows or believes himself to be beholden

to another for the progress and success of an undertaking, though still carried on by his own endeavours, acknowledges his friend and his benefactor ; feels his dependency and his obligation ; turns to him for help and aid in his difficulties ; is humble under the want and need, which he finds he has, of assistance ; and, above all things, is solicitous not to lose the benefit of that assistance. This is a different turn of mind, and a different way of thinking, from his, who is sensible of no such want ; who relies entirely upon his own strength ; who, of course, can hardly avoid being proud of his success, or feeling the confidence, the presumption, the self-commendation, and the pretensions, which, however they might suit with a being who achieves his work by his own powers, by no means, and in no wise, suit with a frail constitution, which must ask and obtain the friendly aid and help of a kind and gracious benefactor, before he can proceed in the business set out for him, and which it is of unspeakable consequence to him to execute somehow or other.

It is thus in religion. A sense of spiritual weakness and of spiritual wants, a belief that divine aid and help are to be had, are principles which carry the soul to God ; make us think of him, and think of him in earnest ; convert, in a word, morality into religion ; bring us round to holiness of life, by the road of piety and devotion ; render us humble in ourselves, and grateful towards God. There are two dispositions which compose the true Christian character ; humility as to ourselves, affection and gratitude as to God : and both these are natural fruits and effects of the persuasion we speak of. And what is of the most importance of all, this persuasion will be accompanied

with a corresponding fear, lest we should neglect, and, by neglecting, lose this invaluable assistance.

On the one hand, therefore, it is not true, that the doctrine of an influencing Spirit is an arbitrary system, setting aside our own endeavours. Nor, on the other hand, is it true, that the connecting it with our own endeavours, as obtained through them, as assisting them, as co-operating with them, renders the doctrine unimportant, or all one as putting the whole upon our endeavours without any such doctrine. If it be true, in fact, that the feebleness of our nature requires the succouring influence of God's Spirit in carrying on the grand business of salvation; and in every state and stage of its progress, in conversion, in regeneration, in constancy, in perseverance, in sanctification; it is of the utmost importance that this truth be declared, and understood, and confessed, and felt: because the perception and sincere acknowledgement of it will be accompanied by a train of sentiments, by a turn of thought, by a degree and species of devotion, by humility, by prayer, by piety, by a recourse to God in our religious warfare, different from what will, or perhaps can, be found in a mind unacquainted with this doctrine; or in a mind rejecting it, or in a mind unconcerned about these things one way or other.

## XXVII.

## ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT.

(PART II.)

1 COR. III. 16.

*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

It is undoubtedly a difficulty in the doctrine of spiritual influence, that we do not so perceive the action of the Spirit, as to distinguish it from the suggestions of our own minds. Many good men acknowledge, that they are not conscious of any such immediate perceptions. They, who lay claim to them, cannot advance, like the apostles, such proofs of their claim as must necessarily satisfy others, or, perhaps, secure themselves from delusion. And this is made a ground of objection to the doctrine itself. Now, I think, the objection proceeds upon an erroneous principle, namely, our expecting more than is promised. The agency and influence of the Divine Spirit are spoken of in Scripture, and are promised: but it is nowhere promised that its operations shall be always *sensible*, viz. distinguishable at the time from the impulses, dictates, and thoughts, of our own minds. I do not take upon me to say that they are never so: I only say that it is not necessary, in the nature of things, that they should

be so : nor is it asserted in the Scripture that they are so ; nor is it promised that they will be so.

The nature of the thing does not imply or require it : by which I mean, that, according to the constitution of the human mind, as far as we are acquainted with that constitution, a foreign influence or impulse may act upon it, without being distinguished in our perception from its natural operations, that is, without being perceived at the time. The case appears to me to be this : The order in which ideas and motives rise up in our minds is utterly unknown to us, consequently it will be unknown when that order is disturbed, or altered, or affected : therefore it may be altered, it may be affected, by the interposition of a foreign influence, without that interposition being perceived.

Again ; and in like manner, not only the *order* in which thoughts and motives rise up in our minds is unknown to ourselves, but the causes also are unknown, and are incalculable, upon which the vividness of the ideas, the force and strength and impression of the motives, which enter into our minds, depend. Therefore that vividness may be made more or less, that force may be increased or diminished, and both by the influence of a spiritual agent, without any distinct sensation of such agency being felt at the time. Was the case otherwise ; was the order, according to which thoughts and motives rise up in our minds, fixed, and being fixed, known : then I do admit the order could not be altered or violated, nor a foreign agent interfere to alter or violate it, without our being immediately sensible of what was passing. As, also, if the causes, upon which the power and strength of either good or bad motives depend, were ascertained, then it would likewise be ascertained when this force was ever increased or dimi-

nished by external influence and operation : then it might be true, that external influence could not act upon us without being perceived. But in the ignorance under which we are concerning the thoughts and motives of our minds, when left to themselves, we must, naturally speaking, be, at the time, both ignorant and insensible of the presence of an interfering power : one ignorance will correspond with the other : whilst, nevertheless, the assistance and benefit derived from that power may, in reality, be exceedingly great.

In this instance, philosophy, in my opinion, comes in aid of religion. In the ordinary state of mind, both the presence and the power of the motives which act upon it, proceed from causes of which we know nothing. This, philosophy confesses and indeed teaches. From whence it follows, that, when these causes are interrupted or influenced, that interruption and that influence will be equally unknown to us. Just reasoning shows this proposition to be a consequence of the former. From whence it follows again, that immediately and at the time perceiving the operation of the Holy Spirit, is not only not necessary to the reality of these operations, but that it is not consonant to the frame of the human mind that it should be so. I repeat again, that we take not upon us to assert that it is never so. Undoubtedly God can, if he please, give that tact and quality to his communications, that they shall be perceived to be divine communications at the time. And this probably was very frequently the case with the prophets, with the apostles, and with inspired men of old. But it is not the case naturally ; by which I mean, that it is not the case according to the constitution of the human soul. It does not appear by experience to be the case usually. What would be the

effect of the influence of the Divine Spirit being always or generally accompanied with a distinct notice, it is difficult even to conjecture. One thing may be said of it, that it would be putting us under a quite different dispensation. It would be putting us under a miraculous dispensation: for the agency of the Spirit in our souls distinctly perceived is, properly speaking, a miracle. Now miracles are instruments in the hand of God of signal and extraordinary effects, produced upon signal and extraordinary occasions. Neither internally nor externally do they form the ordinary course of his proceeding with his reasonable creatures.

And in this there is a close analogy with the course of nature, as carried on under the divine government. We have every reason which Scripture can give us for believing that God frequently interposes to turn and guide the order of events in the world, so as to make them execute his purpose: yet we do not so perceive these interpositions, as, either always or generally, to distinguish them from the natural progress of things. His providence is real, but unseen. We distinguish not between the acts of God and the course of nature. It is so with the spirit. When, therefore, we teach that good men may be led, or bad men converted, by the Spirit of God, and yet they themselves not distinguish his holy influence; we teach no more than what is conformable, as, I think, has been shown, to the frame of the human mind, or rather to our degree of acquaintance with that frame: and also analogous to the exercise of divine power in other things: and also necessary to be so; unless it should have pleased God to put us under a quite different dispensation, that is, under a dispensation of constant miracles.

I do not apprehend that the doctrine of spiritual

influence carries the agency of the Deity much farther than the doctrine of providence carries it : or, however, than the doctrine of prayer carries it. For all prayer supposes the Deity to be intimate with our minds.

But if we do not know the influence of the Spirit by a distinguishing perception at the time, by what means do we know any thing of it at all? I answer by its *effects*, and by those alone. And this I conceive to be that which our Saviour said to Nicodemus : “ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit : ” that is, thou perceivest an effect, but the cause which produces that effect operates in its own way, without thy knowing its rule or manner of operation. With regard to the cause, “ thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. ” A change or improvement in thy religious state is necessary. The agency and help of the Spirit in working that change, or promoting that improvement, are likewise necessary.

“ Except a man be born of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ” But according to what particular manner, or according to what rule, the Spirit acts, is as unknown to us as the causes are which regulate the blowing of the wind, the most incalculable and unknown thing in the world. Its origin is unknown ; its mode is unknown ; but still it is known in its effects. And so it is with the Spirit. If the change have taken place ; if the improvement be produced and be proceeding ; if our religious affairs go on well, then have we ground for trust, that the enabling, assisting Spirit of God is with us ; though we have no other knowledge or perception of the matter than what this affords.



Perhaps there is no subject whatever, in which we ought to be so careful not to go before our guide, as in this of spiritual influence. We ought neither to expect more than what is promised, nor to take upon ourselves to determine what the Scriptures have not determined. This safe rule will produce both caution in judging of ourselves, and moderation in judging, or rather a backwardness in taking upon us to judge, of others. The modes of operation of God's Spirit are probably extremely various and numerous. This variety is intimated by our Saviour's comparing it with the blowing of the wind. We have no right to limit it to any particular mode, forasmuch as the Scriptures have not limited it: nor does observation enable us to do it with any degree of certainty.

The conversion of a sinner, for instance, may be sudden, nay, may be instantaneous, yet be both sincere and permanent. We have no authority whatever to deny the possibility of this. On the contrary, we ought to rejoice, when we observe in any one even the appearance of such a change. And this change may not only by possibility be sudden, but sudden changes may be more frequent than our observations would lead us to expect. For we can observe only effects, and these must have time to show themselves; whilst the change of heart may be already wrought. It is a change of heart which is attributable to the Spirit of God, and this may be sudden. The fruits, the corresponding effects, external reformation, and external good actions, will follow in due time. "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh; and will give them an heart of flesh:" Ezekiel, xi. 19. These words may well describe God's dealings with his moral creatures, and the operations of his grace. Then

follows a description of the effects of these dealings, of these operations, of that grace, viz. “that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances and do them;” which represents a permanent habit and course of life (a thing of continuance) resulting from an inward change which ought to be a thing produced at once.

In the mean time it may be true, that the more ordinary course of God’s grace is gradual and successive; helping from time to time our endeavours, succouring our infirmities, strengthening our resolutions; “making with the temptation a way to escape;” promoting our improvement, assisting our progress; warning, rebuking, encouraging, comforting, attending us, as it were, through the different stages of our laborious advance in the road of salvation.

And as the operations of the Spirit are indefinite, so far as we know, in respect of time, so are they likewise in respect of mode. They may act, and observation affords reason to believe that they do sometimes act, by adding force and efficacy to instruction, advice, or admonition. A passage of Scripture sometimes strikes the heart with wonderful power—adheres, as it were, and cleaves to the memory, till it has wrought its work. An impressive sermon is often known to sink very deep. It is not, perhaps, too much to hope, that the Spirit of God should accompany his ordinances, provided a person bring to them seriousness, humility, and devotion. For example, the devout receiving of the holy sacrament may draw down upon us the gift and benefit of divine grace, or increase our measure of it. This, as being the most solemn act of our religion, and also an appointment of the religion itself, may be properly placed first; but every species

of prayer, provided it be earnest ; every act of worship, provided it be sincere, may participate in the same effect ; may be to us the occasion, the time, and the instrument of this greatest of all gifts.

In all these instances, and in all, indeed, that relates to the operations of the Spirit, we are to judge, if we will take upon us to judge at all (which I do not see that we are obliged to do), not only with great candour and moderation, but also with great reserve and caution ; and as to the modes of Divine grace, or of its proceedings in the hearts of men, as of things undetermined in Scripture and indeterminable by us. In our own case, which it is of infinitely more importance to each of us to manage rightly, than it is to judge even truly of other men's, we are to use perseveringly, every appointed, every reasonable, every probable, every virtuous endeavour to render ourselves objects of that merciful assistance, which undoubtedly and confessedly we much want, and which, in one way or other, God, we are assured, is willing to afford.

## XXVIII.

## ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT.

(PART III.)

1 COR. III. 16.

*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God ; and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ?*

As all doctrine ought to end in practice, and all sound instruction lead to right conduct, it comes, in the last place, to be considered, what obligations follow from the tenet of an assisting grace and spiritual influence ; what is to be done on our part in consequence of holding such a persuasion ; what is the behaviour corresponding and consistent with such an opinion. For we must always bear in mind, that the grace and Spirit of God no more take away our freedom of action, our personal and moral liberty, than the advice, the admonitions, the suggestions, the reproofs, the expostulations, the counsels of a friend or parent would take them away. We may act either right or wrong, notwithstanding these interferences. It still depends upon ourselves which of the two we will do. We are not machines under these impressions : nor are we, under the impression of the Holy Spirit. Therefore there is a class of duties relating to this subject, as much as any other, and more, perhaps, than any other, important.

And, first, I would apply myself to an objection which belongs to this, namely, the practical part of the

subject: which objection is, that the doctrine of spiritual influence, and the preaching of this doctrine, causes men to attend chiefly to the feelings within them; to place religion in feelings and sensations, and to be content with such feelings and sensations, without coming to active duties and real usefulness; that it tends to produce a contemplative religion, accompanied with a sort of abstraction from the interests of this world, as respecting either ourselves or others; a sort of quietism and indifference which contributes nothing to the good of mankind, or to make a man serviceable in his generation; that men of this description sit brooding over what passes in their hearts, without performing any good actions, or well discharging their social or domestic obligations, or indeed guarding their outward conduct with sufficient care.

Now if there be any foundation in fact for this charge, it arises from some persons holding this doctrine defectively; I mean from their not attending to one main point in the doctrine, which is, that the promise is not to those who *have* the Spirit, but to those who are *led* by the Spirit; not to those who are favoured with its suggestions, but to those who give themselves up to *follow*, and do actually *follow*, these suggestions. Now though a person, by attending to his feelings and consciousnesses, may persuade himself that he has the Spirit of God; yet if he stop and rest in these sensations without consequential practical exertions, it can by no possibility be said of him, nor, one would think, could he possibly bring himself to believe, that he is *led* by the Spirit, that he *follows* the Spirit: for these terms necessarily imply something *done* under that influence; necessarily carry the thoughts to a course of conduct entered into and pursued in obedience to, and by virtue

of, that influence. Whether the objection here noticed has any foundation in the conduct of those who hold the doctrine of which we treat, I am uncertain; accounts are different: but at any rate the objection lies, not against the doctrine, but against a defective apprehension of it. For, in confirmation of all which we have said, we may produce the example of Saint Paul. No one carried the doctrine of spiritual influence higher than he did, or spoke of it so much; yet no character in the world could be farther than his was from resting in feelings and sensations. On the contrary, it was all activity and usefulness. His whole history confirms what he said of himself, that “in labours,” in positive exertions, both of mind and body, he was “above measure.” It will be said, perhaps, that these exertions were in a particular way, viz. in making converts to his opinions: but it was the way in which, as he believed, he was promoting the interest of his fellow-creatures in the greatest degree possible for him to promote it; and it was the way also which he believed to be enjoined upon him by the express and particular command of God. Had there been any other method, any other course and line of beneficent endeavours, in which he thought he could have been more useful, and had the choice been left to himself (which it was not), the same principle, the same eager desire of doing good, would have manifested itself with equal vigour in that other line. His sentiments and precepts corresponded with his example: “Do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of Christ.” Here *doing* is enjoined. Nothing less than doing can satisfy this precept. Feelings and sensations will not, though of the best kind. “Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour with his hands, that he may have

to give to him that needeth." This is carrying active beneficence as far as it can go. Men are commanded to relieve the necessities of their poor brethren out of the earnings of their manual labour, nay, to labour for that very purpose: and their doing so is stated as the best expiation for former dishonesties, and the best proof how much and how truly they are changed from what they were. "Let him that ruleth, do it with diligence." This is a precept which cannot be complied with without activity. These instructions could not come from a man who placed religion in feelings and sensations.

Having noticed this objection (for it well deserved notice), I proceed to state the particular duties which relate to the doctrine of spiritual assistance. And the first of these duties is to *pray for it*. It is by prayer that it is to be sought; by prayer that it is to be obtained. This the Scriptures expressly teach. "How much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" The foundation of prayer, in all cases, is a sense of want. No man prays in earnest or to any purpose for what he does not feel that he wants. Know then and feel the weakness of your nature. Know the infinite importance of holding on, nevertheless, in a course of virtue. Know these two points thoroughly, and you can stand in need of no additional motive (indeed none can be added), to excite in you strong unwearied supplications for divine help: not a cold asking for it in any prescribed form of prayer, but cryings and supplications for it, strong and unwearied. The description, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, of our Lord's own devotion, may serve to describe the devotion of a Christian, praying, as he ought, for the Spirit; that is, praying from a deep

understanding of his own condition, a conviction of his wants and necessities. "He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death; and was heard in that he feared." This is devotion in reality.

There are occasions also, which ought to call forth these prayers with extraordinary and peculiar force.

Is it superstition? is it not, on the contrary, a just and reasonable piety to implore of God the guidance of his Holy Spirit, when we have any thing of great importance to decide upon, or to undertake; especially any thing by which the happiness of others, as well as our own, is likely to be affected?

It would be difficult to enumerate the passages and occasions of a man's life, in which he is particularly bound to apply to God for the aid and direction of his Spirit. In general, in every *turn*, as it may be called, of life; whenever any thing critical, any thing momentous, any thing which is to fix our situation and course of life; most especially any thing which is likely to have an influence upon our moral conduct and disposition, and thereby affect our condition, as candidates for heaven, and as the religious servants of God, is to be resolved upon; *there* and *then* ought we to say our prayers; most ardently supplicating from our Creator and Preserver the grace and guidance of his Holy Spirit.

Is it not, again, a time for calling earnestly for the Spirit of God, and for a greater measure of that Spirit, if he be pleased to grant it to us, when we are recovering from some sin into which we have been betrayed? This case is always critical. The question now is, whether we shall fall into a settled course of sinning, or whether we shall be restored to our former, and to better than



our former endeavours to maintain the line of duty. That, under the sting and present alarm of our conscience, we have formed resolutions of virtue for the future, is supposed : but whether these resolutions will stand, is the point now at issue. And in this peril of our souls we cannot be too earnest or importunate in our supplications for divine succour. It can never come to our aid at a time when we more want it. Our fall proves our weakness. Our desire of recovery proves, that, though fallen, we may not be lost. This is a condition which flies to aid and help, if aid and help can be had : and it is a condition to which the promised support of the Spirit most peculiarly applies. On such an occasion, therefore, it will be sought with struggles and strong contention of mind, if we be serious in these matters. So sought, it will be obtained.

Again : is it not always a fit subject of prayer, that the Holy Spirit would inform, animate, warm, and support our *devotions*? Saint Paul speaks of the co-operation of the Spirit with us in this very article. “ Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities ; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.” The specific help here described is to supply our ignorance. But the words speak also generally of helping our infirmities ; meaning, as the passage leads us to suppose, the infirmities which attend our devotion. Now these infirmities are not only ignorance, but coldness, wanderings, absence ; for all which a remedy is to be sought in the aid and help of the Spirit.

Next in order of time to praying for the Spirit of God, but still superior to it in importance, is *listening*

and *yielding ourselves* to his suggestions. This is the thing in which we fail.

Now, it being confessed that we cannot ordinarily distinguish at the time the suggestions of the Spirit from the operations of our minds, it may be asked, how are we to listen to them? The answer is, by attending *universally* to the admonitions within us. Men do not listen to their consciences. It is through the whisperings of conscience that the Spirit speaks. If men then are wilfully deaf to their consciences, they cannot hear the Spirit. If hearing, if being compelled to hear, the remonstrances of conscience, they nevertheless decide, and resolve, and determine to go against them; then they grieve, then they defy, then they do despite, to the Spirit of God. In both cases, that is, both of neglecting to consult, and of defying, when they cannot help feeling, the admonitions which rise up within them, they have this judgement hanging over their heads: "He that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." He that misuses or abuses the portion and measure of spiritual assistance which is afforded him, shall lose even that.

The efficacy of the Spirit is to be judged of by its fruits. Its immediate effects are upon the disposition. A visible outward conduct will ensue; but the true seat of grace and of spiritual energy is in the heart and inward disposition. Whenever, therefore, we find religious carelessness succeeded within us by religious seriousness; conscience, which was silent or unheard, now powerfully speaking and obeyed; sensuality and selfishness, the two grand enemies of salvation, the two great powers of darkness, which rule the natural man, when we find even these giving way to the inward

accusing voice of conscience ; when we find the thoughts of the mind drawing or drawn more and more towards heavenly things ; the value and interest of these expectations plainer to our view, a great deal more frequent than heretofore in our meditations, and more fully discerned ; the care and safety of our souls rising gradually above concerns and anxieties about worldly affairs ; when we find the force of temptation and of evil propensities, not extinct, but retreating before a sense of duty ; self-government maintained ; the interruptions of it immediately perceived, bitterly deplored, and soon recovered ; sin rejected and repelled ; and this not so much with increase of confidence in our strength, as of reliance upon the assisting grace of God ; when we find ourselves touched with the love of our Maker, taking satisfaction in his worship and service ; when we feel a growing taste and relish for religious subjects and religious exercises ; above all, when we begin to rejoice in the comfort of the Holy Ghost ; in the prospect of reaching heaven ; in the powerful aids and helps which are given us in accomplishing this great end, and the strength, and firmness, and resolution, which, so helped and aided, we experience in our progress : when we feel these things, then may we, without either enthusiasm or superstition, humbly believe, that the Spirit of God hath been at work within us. External virtues, good actions will follow, as occasions may draw them forth : but it is *within* that we must look for the change which the inspiration of God's Spirit produces.

With respect to positive external good actions, we have said that they must depend in some measure upon occasions, and abilities, and opportunities, and that they must wait for opportunities ; but, observe, it is not so

with the breaking off of our sins, be they what they will. That work must wait for nothing. Until that be effected, no change is made. No man, going on in a known sin, has any right to say, that the Spirit of God has done its office within him. Either it has not been given to him, or, being given, it has been resisted, despised, or, at least, neglected. Such a person has either yet to obtain it by prayer, or, when obtained, to avail himself duly of its assistance. Let him understand this to be his condition.

The next duty, or rather disposition, which flows from the doctrine of spiritual influence, is *humility*. There never was a truer saying, than that pride is the adversary of religion, lowliness and humility the tempers for it. Now religious humility consists in the habit of referring every thing to God. From one end of the New Testament to the other, God is set forth and magnified in his agency and his operations. In the greatest of all businesses, the business of salvation, He is operating, and we co-operating with him. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" and why? "for it is God that worketh in us to will and to do, according to his good pleasure." He is not superseding our endeavours (the very contrary is implied by commanding us to exert them), but still nothing is done without him. If we have moral strength, we are strong in the inward might of the Holy Ghost: consequently all boasting, all vanity, all self-sufficiency, all despising of others, on the score of moral and religious inferiority, are excluded. Without the grace of God, we might have been as the worst of them. There is, in the nature of things, one train of sentiment belonging to him who has achieved a work by his own might, and power, and prowess; and another to him who had been

fain to beg for succour and assistance, and by that assistance alone has been carried through difficulties, which were too great for his own strength and faculties. This last is the true sentiment for us. It is not for a man, whose life has been saved in a shipwreck by the compassionate help of others; it is not for a man, so saved, to boast of his own alertness and vigour; though it be true, that, unless he had exerted what power and strength he was possessed of, he would not have been saved at all.

Lastly, this doctrine shuts the door against a most general, a most specious, and a most deceiving excuse for our sins; which excuse is, that we have striven against them, but are overpowered by our evil nature, by that nature which the Scriptures themselves represent as evil: in a word, that we have done what we could. Now until, by supplication and prayer, we have called for the promised assistance of God's Spirit, and with an earnestness, devotion, perseverance, and importunity, proportioned to the magnitude of the concern; until we have rendered ourselves objects of that influence, and yielded ourselves to it, it is not true "that we have done all that we can." We must not rely upon that excuse; for it is not true in fact. If, experiencing the depravity and imbecility of our nature, we see in this corruption and weakness an excuse for our sins, and taking up with this excuse, we surrender ourselves to them; if we give up, or relax in, our opposition to them, and struggles against them, at last consenting to our sins, and falling down with the stream, which we have found so hard to resist; if things take this turn with us, then are we in a state to be utterly, finally, and fatally undone. We have it in our power to shut our eyes against the danger; we

naturally shall endeavour to make ourselves as easy and contented in our situation as we can : but the truth, nevertheless, is, that we are hastening to certain perdition. If, on the contrary, perceiving the feebleness of our nature, we be driven by the perception, as Saint Paul was driven, to fly for deliverance from our sins to the aid and influence and power of God's Spirit, to seek for divine help and succour, as a sinking mariner calls out for help and succour, not formally, we may be sure, or coldly, but with cries and tears and supplications, as for life itself : if we be prepared to cooperate with this help, with the holy working of God's grace within us ; then may we trust, both that it will be given to us (yet in such manner as to God shall seem fit, and which cannot be limited by us) ; and also that, the portion of help which is given being duly used and improved (not despised, neglected, put away), more and more will be continually added, for the ultimate accomplishment of our great end and object, the deliverance of our souls from the captivity and the consequences of sin.

## XXIX.

## SIN ENCOUNTERED BY SPIRITUAL AID.

IN THREE PARTS.

(PART I.)

ROMANS VII. 24.

*O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from  
the body of this death !*

BEFORE we can explain what is the precise subject of this heavy lamentation, and what the precise meaning of the solemn question here asked, we must endeavour to understand what is intended by the expression, "the body of this death," or as some render it, "this body of death."

Now let it be remembered, that death, in Saint Paul's epistles, hardly ever signifies a natural death, to which all men of all kinds are equally subjected ; but it means a spiritual death, or that perdition and destruction to which sin brings men in a future state. "The wages of sin is death ;" not the death which we must all undergo in this world, for that is the fate of righteousness as well as sin ; but the state, whatever it be, to which sin and sinners will be consigned in the world to come. Not many verses after our text, Saint Paul says, carnal-mindedness is death : "to be carnally minded is death," leads, that is, inevitably to that future destruction which awaits the sinful indulgence of car-

nal propensities, and which destruction is, as it were, death to the soul. The book of Revelation, alluding to this distinction, speaks expressly of a *second death*, in terms very fit to be called to mind in the consideration of our present text. "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written, according to their works: and the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell (which last word denotes here simply the place of the dead, not the place of punishment) delivered up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works: and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire;" (that is, natural death, and the receptacle of those who died, were thenceforth superseded). *This is the second death.* "And whatsoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." This description, which is exceedingly awful, is given in the last three verses of the 20th chapter. In reference to the same event, this book of Revelation had before told us, viz. in the 2d chapter and 11th verse, that he who overcometh shall not be hurt of the *second death*; and in like manner in the above-quoted 20th chapter: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in this resurrection: on such the second death hath no power." Our Lord himself refers to this death in those never to be forgotten words which he uttered, "He that liveth, and believeth in me, shall not die eternally." Die he must, but not eternally; die the first death, but not the second. It is undoubtedly, therefore, the second death, which Saint Paul meant by the word death, when he wrote down the sentence, "the body



of this death :” and the second death is the punishment, perdition, and destruction, which the souls of sinners will suffer in a future state. It is well worthy of observation, that this was indeed the only death which those who wrote the New Testament, and probably all sincere Christians of that age, regarded as important ; as the subject of their awe, and dread, and solicitude. The first death, the natural and universal decease of the body, they looked to simply as a change, a going out of one room into another ; a putting off one kind of clothing, and putting on a different kind. They esteemed it, compared with the other, of little moment or account. In this respect there is a wide difference between the Scripture apprehension of the subject and ours. We think entirely of the first death : they thought entirely of the second. We speak and talk of the death which we see : they spoke, and taught, and wrote of a death which is future to that. We look to the first with terror ; they to the second alone. The second alone they represent as formidable. Such is the view which Christianity gives us of these things, so different from what we naturally entertain.

You see then what death is in the Scripture sense, in Saint Paul’s sense. “ The body of this death.” The phrase and expression of the text cannot, however, mean this death itself, because he prays to be delivered from it : whereas from that death, or that perdition understood by it, when it once overtakes the sinner, there is no deliverance that we know of. The “ body,” then, “ of this death,” is not the death itself, but a state leading to and ending in the second death, namely, in misery and punishment, instead of happiness and rest, after our departure out of this world. And this state it is, from which Saint Paul,

with such vehemence and concern upon his spirits, seeks to be delivered.

Having seen the signification of the principal phrase employed in the text, the next, and the most important question is, to what condition of the soul, in its moral and religious concerns, the apostle applies it. Now in the verses preceding the text, indeed in the whole of this remarkable chapter, Saint Paul has been describing a state of struggle and contention with sinful propensities; which propensities, in the present condition of our nature, we all feel, and which are never wholly abolished. But our apostle goes further: he describes also that state of *unsuccessful* struggle and *unsuccessful* contention, by which many so unhappily fall. His words are these, “that which I do I allow not; for what I would, that I do not, but what I hate, that do I. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not; for the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

This account, though the style and manner of expression in which it is delivered be very peculiar, is, in its substance, no other than what is strictly applicable to the case of thousands. “The good that I would, I do not: the evil which I would not, that I do.” How many, who read this discourse, may say the same of themselves! as also, “what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that I do.” This then is the case which

Saint Paul had in view. It is a case, first, which supposes an informed and enlightened conscience,—“ I delight in the law of God.” “ I had not known sin but by the law.” “ I consent unto the law that it is good.” These sentiments could be uttered only by a man who was in a considerable degree, at least, acquainted with his duty, and who also approved of the rule of duty which he found laid down.

Secondly, the case before us also supposes an inclination of mind and judgement to perform our duty. “ When I *would* do good, evil is present with me : to *will* is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.”

Thirdly, it supposes this inclination of mind and judgement to be continually overpowered. “ I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members :” that is, the evil principle not only opposes the judgement of the mind, and the conduct which that judgement dictates (which may be the case with all), but in the present case subdues and gets the better of it. “ Not only wars against the law of my mind, but brings me into captivity.”

Fourthly, the case supposes a sense and thorough consciousness of all this ; of the rule of duty, of the nature of sin ; of the struggle ; of the defeat. It is a prisoner sensible of his chains. It is a soul tied and bound by the fetters of its sins, and knowing itself to be so. It is by no means the case of the ignorant sinner : it is not the case of an erring, mistaken conscience : it is not the case of a scared and hardened conscience. None of these could make the reflection or the complaint which is here described. “ The commandment, which was ordained unto life, *I* found to be

unto death. I am carnal, sold under sin. In me dwelleth no good thing. The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good; but sin, that it might appear sin (that it might be more conspicuous, aggravated, and inexcusable), works death in me by that which is good." This language by no means belongs to the stupefied, insensible sinner.

Nor, fifthly, as it cannot belong to an original insensibility of conscience, that is, an insensibility of which the person himself does not remember the beginning, so neither can it belong to the sinner who has got over the rebukes, distrusts, and uneasiness which sin once occasioned. True it is, that this uneasiness *may* be got over almost entirely; so that whilst the danger remains the same, whilst the final event will be the same, whilst the coming destruction is not less sure or dreadful, the uneasiness and the apprehension are gone. This is a case, too common, too deplorable, too desperate; but it is not the case of which we are now treating, or of which Saint Paul treated. Here we are presented throughout with complaint and uneasiness; with a soul exceedingly dissatisfied, exceedingly indeed disquieted and disturbed and alarmed with the view of its condition.

Upon the whole, Saint Paul's account is the account of a man in some sort struggling with his vices; at least, deeply conscious of what they are, whither they are leading him, where they will end; acknowledging the law of God, not only in words and speeches, but in his mind; acknowledging its excellency, its authority; wishing, also, and willing, to act up to it, but, in fact, doing no such thing; feeling, in practice, a lamentable inability of doing his duty, yet perceiving that it must be done. All he has hitherto

attained is a state of successive resolutions and relapses. Much is willed, nothing is effected. No furtherance, no advance, no progress, is made in the way of salvation. He feels, indeed, his double nature; but he finds that the law in his members, the law of the flesh, brings the whole man into captivity. He may have some better strivings, but they are unsuccessful. The result is that he obeys the law of sin.

This is the picture which our apostle contemplated, and he saw in it nothing but misery: "O wretched man that I am!" Another might have seen it in a more comfortable light. He might have hoped that the will would be taken for the deed; that, since he felt in his mind a strong approbation of the law of God, nay, since he felt a delight in contemplating it, and openly professed to do so, since he was neither ignorant of it, nor forgetful of it, nor insensible of its obligation, nor ever set himself to dispute its authority, nay, since he had occasionally likewise endeavoured to bring himself to an obedience to this law, however unsuccessful his endeavours had been; above all, since he had sincerely deplored and bewailed his fallings off from it, he might hope, I say, that his was a case for favourable acceptance.

Saint Paul saw it *not* in this light. He saw in it no ground of confidence or satisfaction. It was a state, to which he gives no better name than "the body of death." It was a state, not *in* which he hoped to be saved, but *from* which he sought to be delivered. It was a state, in a word, of bitterness and terror, drawing from him expressions of the deepest anguish and distress: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

## XXX.

EVIL PROPENSITIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE AID  
OF THE SPIRIT.

(PART II.)

ROMANS VII. 24.

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from  
the body of this death?*

HE who has not felt the weakness of his nature, it is probable, has reflected little upon the subject of religion. I should conjecture this to be the case.

But then, when men do feel the weakness of their nature, it is not always that this consciousness carries them into a right course; but sometimes into a course the very contrary of what is right. They may see in it, as hath been observed, and many do see in it, nothing but an excuse and apology for their sins. Since it is acknowledged that we carry about with us a frail, not to call it a depraved, corrupted nature, surely, they say, we shall not be amenable to any severities, or extremities of judgement, for delinquencies, to which such a nature must ever be liable; or, which is indeed all the difference there is between one man and another, for greater degrees or less, for more or fewer, of these delinquencies. The natural man takes courage from this consideration. He finds ease in it. It is an opiate to his fears. It lulls him into a forgetfulness of danger,

and of the dreadful end, if the danger be real. Then the practical consequence is, that he begins to relax even of those endeavours to obey God which he has hitherto exerted. Imperfect and inconstant as these endeavours were at best, they become gradually more languid and more unfrequent, and more insincere than they were before. His sins increase upon him in the same proportion: he proceeds rapidly to the condition of a confirmed sinner, either secret or open, it makes no difference, as to his salvation. And this descent into the depths of moral vileness and depravity began, in some measure, with perceiving and confessing the weakness of his nature; and giving to this perception that most erroneous, that most fatal turn, the regarding it as an excuse for every thing; and as dispensing even with the self-denials, and with the exertions of self-government, which a man had formerly thought it necessary to exercise, and in some sort, though in no sufficient sort, had exercised.

Now, I ask, was this *Saint Paul's* way of considering the subject? Was this the turn which *he* gave to it? Altogether the contrary. It was impossible for any Christian, of any age, to be more deeply impressed with a sense of the weakness of human nature than he was; or to express it more strongly than he has done in the chapter before us. But observe; feeling most sensibly, and painting most forcibly, the sad condition of his nature, he never alleges it as an excuse for sin: he does not console himself with any such excuse. He does not make it a reason for setting himself at rest upon the subject. He finds no relief to his fears in any such consideration. It is not with him a ground for expecting salvation: on the contrary, he sees it be a state

not leading to salvation ; otherwise, why did he seek so earnestly to be delivered from it ?

And how to be delivered ? that becomes the next question. In order to arrive at Saint Paul's meaning in this matter, we must attend with some degree of care not only to the text, but to the words which follow it. The 24th verse contains the question, " Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?" and then the 25th verse goes on, " I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Now there is good reason to believe that this 25th verse does not appear in our copies as it ought to be read. It is most probable, that the passage stood thus : the 24th verse asks, " Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?" Then the 25th verse answers, " The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Instead of the words, " I thank God," put the words " The grace of God," and you will find the sense cleared up by the change very much. I say, it is highly probable that this change exhibits what Saint Paul really wrote. In English there is no resemblance either in sound or writing between the two sentences, " I thank God," and " The grace of God ;" but in the language in which the epistle was written there is a very great resemblance. And, as I have said, there is reason to believe, that in the transcribing, one has been confounded with the other. Perhaps the substantial meaning may be the same whichever way you read the passage : but what is implied only in one way, is clearly expressed in the other way.

The question, then, which Saint Paul so earnestly and devoutly asks is, " Who shall deliver me from this body of death ?" from the state of soul which I feel, and which can only lead to final perdition ? And the au-



swer to the question is, "The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Can a more weighty question be asked? Can an answer be given which better deserves to be thoroughly considered?

The question is, Who shall deliver us? The answer: "The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The "grace of God" means the favour of God. At present, therefore, the answer stands in general terms. We are only informed, that we are rescued from this state of moral difficulty, of deep religious distress, by the favour of God, through Jesus Christ. It remains to be gathered, from what follows, in what particularly this grace or favour consists. Saint Paul, having asked the question, and given the answer in general terms, proceeds to enlarge upon the answer in these words: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." There is now no condemnation: but of whom, and to whom, is this spoken? It is to them who first are in Christ Jesus; who secondly walk not after the flesh; who thirdly walk after the Spirit.

And whence arises this alteration and improvement in our condition and our hopes; this exemption, or rather deliverance, from the ordinary state of man? Saint Paul refers us to the cause. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Which words can hardly bear any other signification than this, viz. "that the aid and operation of God's Spirit, given through Jesus Christ, hath subdued the power which sin had obtained, and once exercised over me." With this interpretation the whole sequel of Saint Paul's reasoning agrees. Every sentence almost that follows illustrates the interpretation, and proves it to be the true one. With

what, but with the operation and the co-operation of the the Spirit of God, as of a real, efficient, powerful, active Being, can such expressions as the following be made to suit? "If so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you." "By his Spirit that dwelleth in you." "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption." "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit." All which expressions are found in the eighth chapter, namely, the chapter following the text, and all, indeed, within the compass of a few verses. These passages either assert or assume the fact, namely, the existenc and agency of such a Spirit; its agency, I mean, in and upon the human soul. It is by the aid, therefore, of this Spirit, that the deliverance so earnestly sought for is effected; a deliverance represented as absolutely necessary to be effected in some way or other. And it is also represented as one of the grand benefits of the Christian dispensation. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." Which passage I expound thus: a mere law, that is, a rule merely telling us what we ought to do, without enabling us, or affording us any help or aid in doing it, is not calculated for such a nature as ours: "it is weak through the flesh:" it is ineffectual by reason of our natural infirmities. Then what the law, or a mere rule of rectitude (for that is what any law, as such, is), could not do, was done under the Christian dispensation. And how done? The righteousness of the law, that is, the righteousness

which the law dictated, and which it aimed, as far as it could, to procure and produce, is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; is actually produced and procured in us, who live under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit. By this Holy Spirit we have that assistance which the law could not impart; and without which, as a mere rule, though ever so good and right a rule, it was weak and insufficient, forasmuch as it had not force or strength sufficient to produce obedience in those who acknowledged its authority.

To communicate this so much wanted assistance was one end and effect of Christ's coming. So it is intimated by Saint Paul, "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did:" that is, God "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin," namely, sending him by reason or on account of sin, "condemned sin in the flesh;" vouchsafed, that is, spiritual aid and ability, by which aid and ability sin and the power of sin might be effectually opposed, encountered, and repelled.

## XXXI.

THE AID OF THE SPIRIT TO BE SOUGHT AND  
PRESERVED BY PRAYER.

(PART III.)

ROMANS VII. 24.

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from  
the body of this death?*

IF it be doctrinally true, that man in his ordinary state, in that state, at least, in which great numbers find themselves, is in a deplorable condition, a condition which ought to be a subject to him of great and bitter lamentation, viz. that in which his moral powers are ineffectual for his duty; in which he is able, perhaps, on most occasions, to perceive and approve of the rule of right; able, perhaps, to will it; able, perhaps, to set on foot unsuccessful, frustrated, and defeated endeavours after that will, but by no means able to pursue or execute it:—if it be also true, that strength and assistance may and can be communicated to this feeble nature, and that it is by the action of the Holy Spirit upon the soul that it is so communicated; that with this aid and assistance sin may be successfully encountered, and such a course of duty maintained as may render us accepted in Christ; and further, that to impart the above described assistance is one of the ends of Christ's coming, and one of the operations of his love towards mankind:—if, I say, these propositions be doctrinally true, then follow from

them these three practical rules : first, that we are to pray sincerely, earnestly, and incessantly for this assistance ; secondly, that by so doing we are to obtain it ; thirdly, that being obtained, we are to yield ourselves to its agency, to be obedient to its dictates.

First ; we are to pray sincerely, earnestly, and incessantly, for this assistance. A fundamental, and, as it seems to me, an unsurmountable text, upon this head, is our Saviour's declaration : Luke xi. 13. " If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ?" This declaration, besides expressing (which was its primary object) God's benignant, prompt, and merciful disposition towards us, which here, as in other places, our Saviour compares with the disposition of a parent towards his children—beside this, the text undoubtedly assumes the fact of there being a Holy Spirit, of its being the gift of God, of its being given to them that ask him ; that these things are all realities ; a real spiritual assistance, really given, and given to prayer. But let it be well observed, that whensoever the Scripture speaks of prayer, whensoever it uses that term, or other terms equivalent to it, it means prayer, sincere and earnest, in the full and proper sense of these words ; prayer proceeding from the heart and soul. It does not mean any particular form of words whatever ; it does not mean any service of the lips, any utterance or pronounciation of prayer, merely as such ; but supplication actually and truly proceeding from the heart. Prayer may be solemn without being sincere. Every decency, every propriety, every visible mark and token of prayer may be present, yet the heart not engaged. This is the requisite which must make prayer availing :

this is the requisite indeed which must make it that which the Scripture means whenever it speaks of prayer. Every outward act of worship, without this participation of the heart, fails ; not because men do not pray sincerely, but because, in Scripture sense, they do not pray at all.

If these qualities of internal seriousness and impression belong to prayer, whenever prayer is mentioned in Scripture, they seem more peculiarly essential in a case, and for a blessing, purely and strictly spiritual. We must pray with the Spirit, at least when we pray for spiritual succour.

Furthermore ; there is good authority in Scripture, which it would carry us too widely from our subject to state at present, for persevering in prayer, even when long unsuccessful. *Perseverance* in unsuccessful prayer is one of the doctrines and of the lessons of the New Testament.

But again : we must pray for the Spirit *earnestly* ; I mean with a degree of earnestness proportioned to the magnitude of the request. The earnestness with which we pray will always be in proportion to our sense, knowledge, and consciousness of the importance of the thing which we ask. This consciousness is the source and principle of earnestness in prayer ; and in this, I fear, we are greatly deficient. We do not possess or feel it in the manner in which we ought : and we are deficient upon the subject of spiritual assistance most particularly. I fear that many understand and reflect little upon the importance of what they are about, upon the exceedingly great consequence of what they are asking, when they pray to God, as we do in our liturgy, “ to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit ;” “ to make clean our hearts within us ;” “ not to

take his Holy Spirit from us ;” “ to give us increase of grace ;” “ to grant that his Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts.”

These are momentous petitions, little as we may perceive, or think, or account of them, at the time. It has been truly said, that we are hardly ever certain of praying aright, except when we pray for the Spirit of God. When we pray for temporal blessings, we do not know, though God does, whether we ask what is really for our good : when we ask for the assistance and sanctification of God’s Spirit in the work and warfare of religion, we ask for that which by its very nature is good, and which, without our great fault, will be good to us.

But secondly; we must obtain it. God is propitious. You hear that he has promised it to prayer ; to prayer really and truly such, to prayer, namely, issuing from the heart and soul ; for no other is ever meant. We are suppliants to our Maker for various and continual blessings ; for health, for ease ; it may be, for prosperity and success. There is, as hath already been observed, some degree of uncertainty in all these cases, whether we ask what is fit and proper to be granted ; or even what, if granted, would do us good. There is this, likewise, further to be observed, that they are what, if such be the pleasure of God, we can do without. But how incapable we are of doing without God’s Spirit, of proceeding in our spiritual course upon our own strength and our own resources, of finally accomplishing the work of salvation without it, the strong description which is given by Saint Paul may convince us, if our own experience had not convinced us before. Many of us, a large majority of us, either require, or have required, a great change, a moral regeneration. This

is to be effectuated by the aid of God's Spirit. Vitiated hearts will not change themselves; not easily, not frequently, not naturally, perhaps, not possibly. Yet, "without holiness no man shall see God." How then are the unholy to become holy? *Holiness* is a thing of the heart and soul. It is not a few forced, constrained actions, though good as actions, which constitute holiness. It must reside within us: it is a disposition of soul. To acquire, therefore, that which is not yet acquired, to change that which is not yet changed, to go to the root of the malady, to cleanse and purify the *inside* of the cup, the foulness of our mind, is a work of the Spirit of God within us. Nay more; many, as the Scripture most significantly expresses, are *dead* in sins and trespasses; not only committing sins and trespasses, but dead in them: that is, as insensible of their condition under them, as a dead man is insensible of his condition. Where this is the case, the sinner must, in the first instance, be roused and quickened to a sense of his condition; of his danger, his fate: in a word, he must by some means or other be brought to feel a strong compunction. This is also an office of the Spirit of God. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:" Eph. ii. 1. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light:" Eph. v. 14. Whether, therefore, we be amongst the dead in sin; or whether we be of the number of those, with whom, according to Saint Paul's description, to *will* is present, but how to perform that which is good they find not; who, though they approve the law of God, nay, delight in it, after the inward man—that is, in the answers of their conscience—are, nevertheless, *brought into captivity* to the law of sin, which is in their mem-



bers ; carnal, sold under sin ; doing what they allow not, what they hate ; doing not the good which they would, but the evil which they would not—whichever of these be our wretched estate, for such the apostle pronounces it to be, the grace and influence of God's Spirit must be obtained, in order to rescue and deliver us from it : and the sense of this want and of this necessity lies at the root of our devotions, when directed to this object.

To those who are in a better state than what has been here described little need be said, because the very supposition of their being in a better state includes that earnest and devout application by prayer for the continual aid, presence, and indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, which we state to be a duty of the Christian religion.

But, thirdly, the assistance of God's Spirit being obtained, we are to yield ourselves to its direction ; to consult, attend, and listen to its dictates, suggested to us through the admonitions of our conscience. The terms of Scripture represent the Spirit of God as an assisting, not a forcing power ; as not suspending our own powers, but animating them ; as imparting strength and faculty for our religious work, if we will use them ; but making it still depend upon ourselves whether we will use them or not. Agreeably hereunto St. Paul, you have heard, asserts, that there is no condemnation to them who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The promise is not to them who have the Spirit, but to them who walk after the Spirit. To walk after the flesh, is to follow the impulses of sensuality and selfishness wherever they lead us ; which is a voluntary act. To walk after the Spirit, is steadily and resolutely to obey good motions within us, whatever they cost us :

which also is a voluntary act. All the language of this remarkable chapter (Rom. vii.) proceeds in the same strain ; namely, that after the Spirit of God is given, it remains and rests with ourselves whether we avail ourselves of it or not. “ If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh ye shall live.” It is through the Spirit that we are enabled to mortify the deeds of the flesh. But still, whether we mortify them or not, is our act, because it is made a subject of precept and exhortation so to do. Health is God’s gift : but what use we will make of it, is our choice. Bodily strength is God’s gift : but of what advantage it shall be to us, depends upon ourselves. Even so, the higher gift of the Spirit remains a gift, the value of which will be exceedingly great, will be little, will be none, will be even an increase of guilt and condemnation, according as it is applied and obeyed, or neglected and withstood. The fourth chapter of Ephesians, verse 30, is a warning voice upon this subject. “ Grieve not the Spirit of God :” therefore he may be grieved : being given, he may be rejected ; rejected, he may be withdrawn.

St. Paul (Rom. viii.) represents the gift and possession of the Spirit in these words : “ Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you :” and its efficacy, where it is efficacious, in the following magnificent terms : “ If the Spirit of him that raised Christ from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” What, nevertheless, is the practical inference therefrom stated in the very next words ? “ Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live after the flesh, for if ye live after the flesh, ye shall

die :” consequently it is still possible, and plainly conceived, and supposed, and stated to be so, even after this communication of the spirit, to live, notwithstanding, according to the flesh : and still true, that, “ if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” “ We are debtors ;” our obligation, our duty imposed upon us by this gift of the Spirit, is no longer to live after the flesh ; but, on the contrary, through the Spirit so given, to do that which, without it, we could not have done, to “ mortify the deeds of the body.” Thus following the suggestions of the Spirit, ye shall live : for “ as many as are led by the Spirit of God,” as many as yield themselves to its guidance and direction, “ they are the sons of God.”

To conclude the subject. The difference between those who succeed, and those who fail in their Christian course, between those who attain, and those who do not attain salvation, is this : They may both feel equally the weakness of their nature, the existence and the power of evil propensities within them ; but the former, by praying with their whole heart and soul, and that perseveringly, for spiritual assistance, obtain it ; and, by the aid so obtained, are enabled to withstand, and do, in fact, withstand, their evil propensities ; the latter sink under them. I will not say that all are comprised under this description : for neither are all included in St. Paul’s account of the matter, from which our discourse set out ; but I think that it represents the general condition of Christians, as to their spiritual state, and that the greatest part of those who hear this discourse will find, that they belong to one side or other of the alternative here stated.

## XXXII.

## PRESERVATION AND RECOVERY FROM SIN.

## TITUS II. 11, 12.

*For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*

THERE are certain particular texts of Scripture which are of inestimable use ; for that in a few, short, clear words, they show us the sum of our duty. Such texts ought to be deeply infixed and imprinted upon our memories ; to be written, indeed, upon our hearts. The text, which I have read to you, is entitled to this distinction. No single sentence that ever was written down for the direction of mankind comprises more important truth in less room. The text gives us a rule of life and conduct ; and tells us, that to lay down for mankind this rule, and enforce it by the promise of salvation, was a great object of the Gospel being published in the world. The Gospel might include other objects, and answer other purposes ; but as far as related to the regulation of life and conduct, this was its object and its purpose. The rule, you hear, is, that, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. We must begin “by *denying* ungodliness and worldly lusts :” which means, that we must resist or

break off all sins of licentiousness, debauchery, and intemperance ; for these are what are specifically meant by worldly lusts. And these must be *denied* ; that is, they must either be withstood in the first instance, or the evil courses into which they have drawn us must be broken off.

When a rule of morals is plain and positive, it is seldom that there is any advantage in enlarging upon the rule itself. We only weaken it by dilating it. I shall employ, therefore, my present discourse in offering such heads of advice as may be likely, by God's blessing, to assist us in rendering obedience to the rule laid down for us ; an obedience upon which salvation depends.

First, then, I observe concerning licentious practices, that it is most practicable to be entirely innocent ; that it is a more easy thing to withstand them altogether, than it is to set bounds to their indulgence. This is a point not sufficiently understood ; though true, it is not believed. Men know not what they are doing when they enter upon vicious courses : what a struggle, what a contest, what misery, what torment they are preparing for themselves. I trust that there is hardly a man or woman living who enters into a course of sin with the design of remaining in it to the end ; who can brave the punishment of hell ; who intends to die in that state of sure perdition, to which a course of unrepented sin must bring him or her. No, that is not the plan even of the worst, much less of the generality, of mankind. Their plan is to allow themselves to a certain length, and there stop ; for a certain time, and then reform ; in such and such opportunities and temptations, but in no more. Now, to such persons and to such plans, I say this, that it would not have cost them one-tenth of the mortification, pain, and

self-denial, to have kept themselves at a distance from sin, that it must and will cost them to break it off: adding the further consideration, that, so long as men preserve their innocence, the consciousness of doing what is right is both the strongest possible support of their resolution, and the most constant source of satisfaction to their thoughts: but that when men once begin to give way to vicious indulgences, another state of things takes place in their breasts. Disturbance at the heart, struggles and defeats, resolutions and relapses, self-reproach and self-condemnation, drive out all quietness and tranquillity of conscience. Peace within is at an end. All is unsettled. Did the young and unexperienced know the truth of this matter; how much easier it is to keep innocency than to return to it; how great and terrible is the danger that they do not return to it at all; surely they would see, and see in a light strong enough to influence their determination, that to adhere inviolably to the rules of temperance, soberness and chastity, was their safety, their wisdom, their happiness. How many bitter thoughts does the innocent man avoid! Serenity and cheerfulness are his portion. Hope is continually pouring its balm into his soul. His heart is at rest, whilst others are goaded and tortured by the stings of a wounded conscience, the remonstrances and risings up of principles which they cannot forget; perpetually teased by returning temptations, perpetually lamenting defeated resolutions. "There is no peace unto the wicked, saith my God." There is no comfort in such a life as this, let a man's outward circumstances be what they will. Genuine satisfaction of mind is not attainable under the recurring consciousness of being immersed in a course of sin, and the still remaining prevalence of religious principles. Yet either this must be the

state of a sinner till he recover again his virtuous courses, or it must be a state infinitely worse ; that is, it must be a state of entire surrender of himself to a life of sin, which will be followed by a death of despair, by ruin final and eternal ; by the wrath of God ; by the pains of hell.

But, secondly, in what manner, and by what methods are sins to be broken off? for although the maxim which we have delivered be perfectly and certainly true, namely, that it is ease and happiness to preserve innocence entirely, compared with what it is to recover our innocence, or even to set bounds to guilt, yet it is a truth which all cannot receive. I do not mean that all will not acknowledge it, for I believe that those will be most ready to give their assent to it who feel themselves bound and entangled by the chain of their sin. But it is not applicable to every man's case ; because many having already fallen into vicious courses, have no longer to consider how much better, how much happier it would have been for them, to have adhered closely to the laws of virtue and religion at first, but how to extricate themselves from the bad condition in which they are placed at present. Now to expect to break off sin, in any manner, without pain and difficulty, is a vain expectation. It is to expect a moral impossibility. Such expectations ought not be held out, because they are sure to deceive ; and because they who act under such encouragement, finding themselves deceived, will never persist in their endeavours to any purpose of actual reformation. All mankind feel a reluctance to part with their sins. It must be so. It arises from the very nature of temptation, by which they are drawn into sin. Feeling then this strong reluctance, it is very natural for men to do what

great numbers do, namely, propose to themselves to part with their sins *by degrees*; thinking that they can more easily do it in this way than in any other. It presents to their view a kind of compromise; a temporary hope of enjoying, for the present at least, the criminal pleasures to which they have addicted themselves, or the criminal advantages they are making, together with the expectation of a final reform. I believe, as I have already said, that this is a course into which great numbers fall; and therefore it becomes a question of very great importance whether it be a safe and successful course or not. What I am speaking of is the trying to break off our sins by degrees. Now, in the first place, it is contrary to principle. A man is supposed to feel the guilt and danger of the practices which he follows. He must be supposed to perceive this, because he is supposed to resolve to quit them. His resolution is founded upon, springs from, this perception. Wherefore I say, that it is in contradiction to principle, to allow ourselves even once more to sin, after we have truly become sensible of the guilt, the danger, and the consequences of it. It is, from that time, known and wilful sin. I own I do not see how the plan of gradually diminishing a sinful habit can be consistent with, or can proceed from, sincere religious principles: for, as to what remains of the habit, it implies an express allowance of ourselves in sin, which is utterly inconsistent with sincerity. Whoever continues in the practice of any one known sin, in defiance of God's commands, cannot, so continuing, hope to find mercy: but with respect to so much of the habit as is yet allowed by him to remain, he is so continuing, and his continuance is part of his plan. These attempts, therefore, at gradual reformation, do not proceed from



a true vital religious principle : which principle, succoured by God's grace, is the only thing that can stand against sin strengthened by habit.

So I should reason upon the case, looking at it in its own nature. The next question is, How is it in fact? Is it in fact better? Is it in experience more successful than from its nature we should expect it to be? Now I am much afraid, that all the proof which can be drawn either from observation or consciousness is against it. Of other men we must judge by observation; of ourselves by consciousness. What happens then to gradual reformation? Perpetual relapses, perpetually defeated and weakened resolutions. The principle of resistance is weakened by every relapse. Did the mortification of a defeat incite and quicken men to stronger efforts, it would be well. But it has a contrary effect; it renders every succeeding exertion more feeble. The checked indulgences, which, in the progress of our fancied amendment, we allow ourselves, are more than sufficient to feed desire, to keep up the force and strength of temptation: nay, perhaps, the temptation acquires more force from the partial curb which we impose upon it. Then while the temptation remains with unabated, or perhaps augmented, strength, our resolution is suffering continual relaxation; our endeavours become unsatisfactory even to ourselves. This miserable struggle cannot be maintained long. Although nothing but persevering in it could save us, we do not persevere. Finding not ease, but difficulty, increased and increasing difficulty, men give up the cause: that is, they try to settle themselves into some mode of thinking which may quiet their consciences and their fears. They fall back to their sins: and when they find their consciences easier, they think their

guilt less, whereas it is only their conscience that is become more insensible, their reasoning more treacherous and deceitful. The danger is what it was, or greater; the guilt is so too. Would to God we could say, that gradual reforms were frequently successful. They are what men often attempt: they are, alas, what men usually fail in.

It is painful to seem to discourage endeavours of any kind after amendment: but it is necessary to advertise men of their danger. If one method of going about an important work be imposing in expectation, and yet, in truth, likely to end in ruin, can any thing be more necessary than to set forth this danger and this consequence plainly? This is precisely the case with gradual reforms. They do not very much alarm our passions; they soothe our consciences. They do not alarm our passions, because the absolute rupture is not to come yet. We are not yet entirely and totally to bid adieu to our pleasures and indulgences, never to enjoy or return to them any more. We only have in view to wean and withdraw ourselves from them by degrees; and this is not so harsh and formidable a resolution as the other. Yet it soothes our consciences. It presents the semblance and appearance of repenting and reforming. It confesses our sense of sin and danger. It takes up the purpose, it would fain encourage us with the hope, of delivering ourselves from this condition. But what is the result? Feeding in the mean time, and fomenting those passions which are to be controlled and resisted, adding, by every instance of giving way to them, fresh force and strength to habits which are to be broken off, our constancy is subdued before our work is accomplished. We continue yielding to the importunity of temptation. We have

gained nothing by our miserable endeavour, but the mortification of defeat. Our sins are still repeated. The state of our salvation is where it was. Oh! it is a laborious, a difficult, a painful work to shake off sin; to change the course of a sinful life; to quit gratifications to which we have been accustomed, because we perceive them to be unlawful gratifications; and to find satisfaction in others which are innocent and virtuous. If in one thing more than another we stand in need of God's holy succour and assistance, of the aid and influence of his blessed Spirit upon our souls, it is in the work of reformation. But can we reasonably expect it whilst we are not sincere? And I say again, that the plan of gradual reformation is in contradiction to principle, and so far insincere. Is there not reason to believe that this may in some measure account for the failure of these resolutions?

But it will be asked of us, what better plan have we to offer? We answer, to break off our sins *at once*. This is properly to *deny* ungodliness and worldly lusts. This is truly to do, what, according to the apostle, the grace of God teaches us to do. Acting thus, we may pray, we may humbly hope, for the assistance of God's Spirit in the work and struggle through which we have to go. And I take upon me to say, that all experience is in favour of this plan, in preference to that of a gradual reform; in favour of it, both with respect to ease and happiness. We do not pretend but that a conflict with desire must be supported, but that great resolution is necessary: yet we teach, that the pain of the effort is lessened by this method, as far as it can be lessened at all. Passions *denied*, firmly denied and resisted, and not kept up by occasional indulgences, lose their power of tormenting. Habits, absolutely and totally

disused, lose their hold. It is the nature of man. They then leave us at liberty to seek and to find happiness elsewhere, in better things ; to enjoy, as well as to practise, virtue ; to draw comfort from religion ; to dwell upon its hopes ; to pursue its duties ; to acquire a love, a taste, and a relish for its exercises and meditations.

One very general cause of entanglement in habits of sin, is the connexion which they have with our way of life, with our business, with the objects that are continually thrown in our way, with the practises and usages which prevail in the company we keep. Every condition of life has its particular temptation. And not only so, but when we have fallen into evil habits, these habits so mix themselves with our method of life, return so upon us at their usual times, and places, and occurrence of objects, that it becomes very difficult to break the habit without a general change of our whole system. Now I say, whenever this is a man's case, that he cannot shake off his sins without giving up his way of life, he must give up that also, let it cost what it will. For it is, in truth, no other sacrifice than what our Saviour himself in the strongest terms enjoins, when he bids his disciples to pluck out a right eye, or cut off a right hand (that is, surrender whatever is most dear or valuable to them), that they be not cast with all their members into hell fire. If a trade or business cannot be followed without giving into practices which conscience does not approve, we must relinquish the trade or business itself. If it cannot be followed without bringing us into the way of temptation to intemperance, more than we can withstand, or in fact do withstand, we must also relinquish it, and turn ourselves to some safer course. If the company we keep,

the conversation we hear, the objects that surround us, tend to draw us, and do in fact draw us, into debauchery and licentiousness, we must fly from the place, the company, and the objects, no matter with what reluctance we do so, or what loss and inconvenience we suffer by doing it. This may appear to be a hard lesson ; it is, nevertheless, what right reason dictates, and what, as hath\* already been observed, our Saviour himself enjoins, in terms made as strong and forcible as he could make them.

Sometimes men are led by prudential motives, or by motives of mere inclination, to change their employment, their habitation, or their station of life. These occasions afford excellent and invaluable opportunities for correcting and breaking off any vicious habits which we may have contracted. It is when many associations, which give strength to a sinful habit, are interrupted and dissolved by the change which has taken place, that we can best resolve to conquer the sin, and set out upon a new course and a new life. The man who does not take advantage of such opportunities when they arise has not the salvation of his soul at heart : nevertheless, they are not to be waited for.

But to those sudden changes which we recommend, will it be objected that they are seldom lasting ? Is this the fact ? Are they more liable to fail, than attempts to change gradually ? I think not. And there is always this difference between them. A sudden change is sincere at the time : a gradual change never is such truly and properly : and this is a momentous distinction. In every view, and in every allowance, and in every plea of human frailty, we must distinguish between what is consistent with sincerity, and what is not. And in these two methods of setting about a reformation, by

reason of their different character in this respect, the first may, though with fear and humility, expect the help of God's aiding Spirit, the other hardly can. For whilst not by surprise and unpremeditatedly we fall into casual sins, but whilst by plan and upon system we allow ourselves in licences, which, though not so many or so great as before, are still, whenever they are indulged, so many known sins; whilst, in a word, though we imagine ourselves to be in a progress of amendment, we yet deliberately continue to sin, our endeavours are so corrupted, I will not say by imperfection, but by insincerity, that we can hardly hope to call down upon them the blessing of Almighty God.

Reformation is never impossible; nor, in a strict sense, can it be said to be doubtful. Nothing is, properly speaking, doubtful, which it is in a man's power to accomplish; nothing is doubtful to us, but what is placed out of the reach of our will, or depends upon causes which we cannot influence: and this is not the case with reformation from sin. On the other hand, if we look to experience, we are compelled, though with grief of heart, to confess, that the danger is very great of a man, who is engaged in a course of sin, never reforming from his sin at all. Oh, let this danger be known! Let it stand, like a flaming sword, to turn us aside from the road to vice. Let it offer itself in its full magnitude. Let it strike, as it ought, the souls of those who are upon the brink, perhaps, of their whole future fate; who are tempted; and who are deliberating about entering upon some course of sin.

Let also the perception and convincement of this danger sink deep into the hearts of all who are in such a situation, as that they must either reform or perish. They have it in their power, and it must be now their

only hope, by strong and firm exertion, to make themselves an exception to the general lot of habitual sinners. It must be an exception. If they leave things to their course, they will share the fate in which they see others, involved in guilt like themselves, end their lives. It is only by a most strenuous effort they can rescue themselves from it. We apprize them, that their best hope is in a sudden and complete change, sincerely begun, faithfully persisted in ; broken, it is possible, by human frailty, but never changed into a different plan, never declining into a compromised, partial, gradual reform ; on the contrary, resumed with the same sincerity as that with which it set out, and with a force of resolution, and an earnestness of prayer, increased in proportion to the clearer view they have acquired of their danger and of their want.

## XXXIII.

RELIGION NOT A MERE FEELING, BUT AN  
ACTIVE PRINCIPLE.

MATT. VII. 21.

*Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

THESE words are addressed to mankind at large. They are not, like some of our Lord's discourses, relative to the particular circumstances of those who stood round him at the time. Christ here speaks to all his disciples, in whatever country of the world they may live, or in whatever age of the world they might come to the knowledge of his name. He speaks, in this text, as much to those who are assembled here in his worship, as to the very people who received the words from his mouth. The words themselves are the conclusion of our Saviour's celebrated sermon on the Mount, and they close that divine discourse most aptly and solemnly.

When the fame of our Lord's miracles had drawn great numbers after him from every quarter of the country, from Galilee you read, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan, he deemed that a fit opportunity to acquaint them with those great moral duties which they must discharge, if they meant to be saved by becoming his followers: for



which purpose he went up into a mountain, for the conveniency, it is probable, of their hearing and of his own retirement, and also in imitation, perhaps, of Moses, who delivered the blessings and curses of the old law from the summit of a hill. When the people in great multitudes were assembled round him, he pronounced that great lesson of duty, that summing up of weighty precepts, that statement of Christian morals, and of a right Christian disposition, which you read in the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of St. Matthew; and when he had finished the particular precepts he had given them, the several distinct commands which he enjoined upon his followers, he concluded with this reflection, which was applicable to them all, and was indeed the great point he wished to leave upon their minds, and not only upon theirs, but upon the hearts and souls of all who should afterwards profess his religion; “not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

It was very natural for those who attended our Lord to feel a glow of zeal and affection, to be transported with admiration, to cry out “Lord, Lord,” from the very fervency and ardour of their love and reverence, when they beheld the astonishing works which he wrought, and heard the words of salvation which flowed from his lips, or saw the sufferings which he underwent, or his meekness and resignation under them. It was natural for them, and the same thing is natural for us. When we meditate at all upon these subjects—when we turn our thoughts towards the great author and finisher of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ—when we reflect that he is our way and our life, that what we know concerning the life to come proceeds from

him, that our hopes of attaining it are through him, that he is our guide and our instructor, our redeemer and mediator, that he came to lead his followers to heaven, that he laid down his own life to give them eternal life, that he still sits at the right hand of God to interest in our behalf—when we reflect, I say, upon the infinite, unutterable importance of saving our souls, and what he has done, and continues to do towards it—we cannot help crying out, “ Lord, Lord ;” we cannot help feeling ourselves overwhelmed, as it were, with the vastness and immensity of the subject, and the deep obligation which we owe to the Saviour of the world. This sentiment is still more apt to come upon the mind when any worldly distress or affliction drives us to take refuge in religion—to fly for succour to God Almighty’s protection, and to the dispensation of his righteous will in another world—“ to take hold,” as St. Paul speaks, “ of the anchor of hope,” and the strong consolation which is ministered to us by the Gospel of Christ. It is upon these occasions that we find religion to be our only stay, trust in God to be the only firm ground we can set our foot upon. No wonder, therefore, if we be drawn almost involuntarily to cry out, “ Lord, Lord,”—that we are constrained by his love—that we feel our dependance upon him—that we are brought to understand, that to be saved in the day of judgement is that concern which wraps up all others—that there is none other name under heaven, whereby we can be saved, only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder, I say, that in moments like these our affection towards Christianity is increased, our thoughts serious, and our devotion sincere.

Sometimes also, without any external causes, or any

cause that we are acquainted with, strong impressions of futurity, awful apprehensions of our great change, come over the mind. The things of this world are diminished to nothing, when we place them by the side of that great event which will arrive, and in a short time, to all of us. Life appears what it is—a span; inconsiderable at the longest; liable every day to be put an end to: what shadows we pursue, what shadows we are! The unsatisfactoriness of all our worldly enjoyments, the uncertainty of all our worldly hopes, seizes the imagination with irresistible force. Here then again the soul turns to God. Beaten and repulsed from every other source of confidence and contentment, it seeks them in the future mercies of a faithful Creator.

Or again, it may and does happen, that a sudden glow, a certain warmth and elevation of heart, as to the concerns of religion, spring up at particular times in our breast; we cry “Lord, Lord!” with rapture—the promises, the views, the consolations of Christianity, fill our hearts; we rejoice (as Saint Paul, who felt much of this animation, expresses it) in the hope of our calling, and in the joy of the Holy Ghost.

Now concerning all these various states of mind and affection, the first thing to be said is, that they are all good. Whatever draws the soul to God, whether it be reflection upon the astonishing history of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ardour of his love, the patience of his sufferings, undertaken and undergone for our sakes; whether it be some outward visitation and discomfiture, some stroke of Providence, which brings us to ourselves, which makes us serious in the business of religion; whether it be some inward sinking and misgiving of the mind, some cloud which overcasts the spirits; or whether, on the contrary, we be raised and

lifted, as it were, towards heaven by the life and flow of our devotion, still all is good. We ought to regard and accept these stirrings and motions of the mind towards religion, from whatever cause they proceed, as favourable and hopeful intimations of a righteous principle forming within us. We are to invite, cherish, and cultivate them; wait and desire the return of them; above all, be thankful for them, and account even calamities as blessings, when they tend to make us religious. It is a sorrow not to be repented of, when it leads to salvation.

Nothing that our Lord says in the text ought by any means to be construed to the undervaluing or discouraging of devout feelings of any kind, or from any cause: but the great misfortune is, these thoughts are apt to be short-lived; they are wont to be soon forgotten, and forgotten entirely. In the night we cry, "Lord, Lord!" in the morning we return to our sins; that world, with its pleasures, and honours, and cares, and contentions which we lately thought so little worth our strife and our anxiety, courts us again with new temptations, and is pursued with fresh eagerness. That enduring, imperishable soul, the saving of which we judged the only concern we need to care about or to be afraid about, obtains not our consideration amongst the multitude of thoughts which crowd upon us; those prospects of everlasting happiness in heaven, which awhile ago opened so bright upon our view, are again shut out; some loose, sinful pursuit, some mean advantage, gets hold again of our hearts, and closes up that passage where religion was entering in. This is precisely the weakness which our Lord was aware of, and which the words of the text were intended to warn us against. To make good thoughts effectual to salvation, we must

so work them into the frame of the mind, so knit and weave them into the very substance of the heart and disposition, that they be no longer merely thoughts, or merely occasional; but they have a steady influence upon our behaviour, that they take hold of our conduct, that they be at hand to check and pluck us back when we would go about any wicked design, and that they be at hand also to remind us, and to put us forward when any good thing falls in our power to do.

This it is to become a Christian; and this indeed is the difficulty of the work. The passage from thought to action, from religious sentiments to religious conduct, seems a difficult attainment. I said before, the very beginnings are blessings. Holy thoughts, though occasional, though sudden, though brought on, it may be, by calamity and affliction, though roused in us we do not know how, are still the beginnings of grace. Let no man, therefore, despise serious thoughts; let no man scorn or ridicule them in others: least of all the man who has none himself; for there is still a wide difference between him who thinks, though *but* occasionally, of his duty and of his salvation, and him who never permits himself to entertain such thoughts at all. One, it is true, may be far from having completed his work: the other has not begun his. Those very meditations which he despises in other men, because he sees that they have not the influence which they ought to have upon their lives and conversation, are, nevertheless, what he himself must *begin* with, what he himself must come to, if ever he enter truly upon a Christian course. It is from good thoughts and good resolutions that the Christian character must set out; it is with these it must begin; it is by these it must be formed. We

cannot, however, always be thinking about religion. That is true : but the thing wanted of us, the thing necessary for us, the thing required in the text, is, not that religion be constantly in our thoughts, but that it have a constant influence upon our behaviour ; and that is a very intelligible distinction, and takes place in common life. Avarice and pecuniary gain shall have a constant influence upon a man's behaviour, that is, his actions shall constantly draw and tend to that point, and yet it may not be that his thoughts are always employed in calculating his profits or reckoning on his fortune. And that influence which a worldly principle often possesses, a religious principle may acquire. The making sure of heaven may be to one man as strong and steady a motive of action as the making a fortune is to another. Pleasing God by doing good to man, may be as fixed a point in the mind of a disciple of Jesus Christ, as the compassing some scheme of wealth or greatness is frequently to the children of this generation. The fear of offending our Maker may be as great and powerful a check upon a religious man's actions, as any consideration whatever can be in the pursuits of worldly prosperity. The matter, and what in a great measure forms the business, and the greatest difficulty of religion, is to bring our minds to this—that devout thoughts draw from us not only words, but actions ; not only make us call upon him, but *do* his will ; not only lift up our hearts to heaven in particular seasons of meditation, but that at all seasons they keep us back from sin.

This, then, is the sum of what we have delivered.—Do we find ourselves visited with pious affections, with serious and awful apprehensions of futurity, with devout

and holy thoughts of God, of Jesus Christ, and of our salvation, let us be thankful for them, as for the greatest of blessings.

But do we find these thoughts vanish, leaving no solid impression behind them ; or do we find that they do not at all break off our course and habits of sinning, or interrupt us in the wicked practices into which we have fallen, or rouse us from the moral sloth and unprofitableness in which we are sunk,—let us bring to remembrance this solemn text—“ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord ! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father.” By no means let us undervalue the good thoughts and good motions which we feel, or have felt, but it is necessary we should know that we are yet far short of the mark ; that something is done, and that of great importance, but that more is still wanting : that we must earnestly and laboriously strive so to fasten these good intimations upon the heart, so to imprint them deeply upon the soul, as that they may convert our behaviour, beget in us amendment, strengthen our resistance of temptation, break off our evil habits, and at length conquer every obstacle, and every adversary both spiritual and fleshly, which would stop and turn us out of our way in our progress to a heavenly reward.

## XXXIV.

## HOW VIRTUE PRODUCES BELIEF, AND VICE UNBELIEF.

JOHN VII. 17.

*If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.*

It does not, I think, at first sight appear, why our behaviour should influence our belief, or how any particular course of action, good or bad, should affect our assent to any particular propositions which are offered to us: for truth or probability can never depend upon our conduct: the credibility or incredibility of religion is the same, whether we act well or ill, whether we obey its laws or disobey them. Nor is it very manifest, how even our perception of evidence or credibility should be affected by our virtues or vices: because conduct is immediately voluntary, belief is not: one is an act of the will, under the power of motives; the other is an act of the understanding, upon which motives do not, primarily at least, operate, nor ought to operate at all. Yet our Lord, in the text, affirms this to be the case, namely, that our behaviour does influence our belief; and to have been the case from the beginning, that is, even during his own ministry upon earth. “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.” It becomes, therefore, a subject of serious and religious inquiry, how, why, and to what extent, the declaration of the text may be maintained.

Now the first and most striking observation is, that it



corresponds with experience. The fact, so far as can be observed, is as the text represents it to be. I speak of the general course of human conduct, which is the thing to be considered. Good men are generally believers: bad men are generally unbelievers. This is the general state of the case, not without exceptions; for, on the one hand, there may be men of regular external morals, who are yet unbelievers, because though immorality be one cause of unbelief, it is not the only cause: and, on the other hand, there are undoubtedly many, who, although they believe and tremble, yet go on in their sins, because their faith doth not regulate their practice. But, having respect to the ordinary course and state of human conduct, what our Saviour hath declared is verified by experience. He that doeth the will of God, cometh to believe that Jesus Christ is of God, namely, a messenger from God. A process, somehow or other, takes place in the understanding, which brings the mind of him who acts rightly to this conclusion. A conviction is formed, and every day made stronger and stronger. No man ever comprehended the value of Christian precepts, but by conducting his life according to them. When, by so doing, he is brought to know their excellency, their perfection, I had almost said their divinity, he is necessarily also brought to think well of the religion itself. Hear St. Paul:—"The night is far spent: the day is at hand: let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light; let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof:" Rom. xiii. 11. It is recorded of

this text, that it was the means of the conversion of a very eminent father of the church, St. Austin; for which reason I quote it as an instance to my present purpose, since I apprehend it must have wrought with him in the manner here represented. I have no doubt but that others have been affected in like manner by this or other particular portions of Scripture; and that still greater numbers have been drawn to Christianity by the general impression which our Lord's discourses, and the speeches and letters of his apostles, have left upon their minds. This is sometimes called the *internal evidence* of our religion; and it is very strong. But inasmuch as it is a species of evidence which applies itself to the knowledge, love, and practice of virtue, it will operate most powerfully where it finds these qualities, or even these tendencies and dispositions, subsisting. If this be the effect of virtuous conduct, and, in some proportion, the effect also of each separate act of virtue, the contrary effect must necessarily follow from a contrary course of behaviour. And perhaps it may assist us in unfolding the subject, to take up the inquiry in this order; because if it can be shown why, and in what manner, vice tends to obstruct, impair, and, at length, destroy our faith, it will not be difficult to allow, that virtue must facilitate, support, and confirm it: that, at least, it will deliver us, or keep us free, from that weight of prejudice and resistance which is produced in the mind by vice, and which acts against the reception of religious truth.

Now the case appears to me to be no other than this: a great many persons, before they proceed upon an act of known transgression, do expressly state to themselves the question, whether religion be true or not; and in order to get at the object of their desire

(for the real matter to be determined is, whether they shall have their desire gratified or not), in order, I say, to get at the pleasure in some cases, or in other cases the point of interest, upon which they have set their hearts, they choose to decide, and they do in fact decide with themselves, that these things are not so certain, as to be a reason for them to give up the pleasure which lies before them, or the advantage, which is now, and which may never be again, in their power to compass. This conclusion does actually take place, and, at various times, must almost necessarily take place, in the minds of men of bad morals. And now remark the effect which it has upon their thoughts afterwards. When they come at another future time to reflect upon religion, they reflect upon it as upon what they had before adjudged to be unfounded, and too uncertain to be acted upon, or to be depended upon; and reflections accompanied with this adverse and unfavourable impression naturally lead to infidelity. Herein, therefore, is seen the fallacious operation of sin; first, in the circumstances under which men form their opinion and their conclusions concerning religion; and secondly, in the effect which conclusions, which doubts so formed, have upon their judgement afterwards. First, what is the situation of mind in which they decide concerning religion? and what can be expected from such a situation? Some magnified and alluring pleasure has stirred their desires and passions. It cannot be enjoyed without sin. Here is religion, denouncing and forbidding it on one side: there is opportunity, drawing and pulling on the other. With this drag and bias upon their thoughts, they pronounce and decide concerning the most important of all subjects, and of all questions. If they should determine

for the truth and reality of religion, they must sit down disappointed of a gratification upon which they had set their hearts, and of using an opportunity which may never come again. Nevertheless they must determine one way or other. And this process, viz. a similar deliberation and a similar conclusion, is renewed and repeated, as often as occasions of sin offer. The effect, at length, is a settled persuasion against religion. For what is it, in persons who proceed in this manner, which rests and dwells upon their memories? What is it which gives to their judgement its turn and bias? It is these occasional decisions, often repeated; which decisions have the same power and influence over the man's after-opinion, as if they had been made ever so impartially, or ever so correctly: whereas, in fact, they are made under circumstances which exclude, almost, the possibility of their being made with fairness, and with sufficient inquiry. Men decide under the power and influence of sinful temptation; but, having decided, the decision is afterwards remembered by them, and grows into a settled and habitual opinion, as much as if they had proceeded in it without any bias or prejudice whatever.

The extent to which this cause acts, that is, the numbers who are included in its influence, will be further known by the following observation. I have said, that sinners oftentimes *expressly* state to themselves the question, whether religion be true or not; and that they state to themselves this question, at the time when they are about to enter upon some act of sin which religion condemns: and I believe the case so to be. I believe that this statement is often expressly made, and in the manner which I have represented. But there is also a tacit rejection of religion, which has nearly the same

effect. Whenever a man deliberately ventures upon an action which he knows that religion prohibits, he tacitly rejects religion. There may not pass in his thoughts every step which we have described, nor may he come expressly to the conclusion : but he acts upon the conclusion ; he practically adopts it. And the doing so will alienate his mind from religion as surely, almost, as if he had formally argued himself into an opinion of its untruth. The effect of sin is necessarily, and highly, and in all cases, adverse to the production and existence of religious faith. Real difficulties are doubled and trebled, when they fall in with vicious propensities ; imaginary difficulties are readily started. Vice is wonderfully acute in discovering reasons on its own side. This may be said of all kinds of vice : but, I think, it more particularly holds good of what are called licentious vices, that is, of vices of debauchery : for sins of debauchery have a tendency, which other species of sin have not so directly, to unsettle and weaken the powers of the understanding, as well as, in a greater degree, I think, than other vices, to render the heart thoroughly corrupt. In a mind so wholly depraved, the impression of any argument, relating to a moral or religious subject, is faint, and slight, and transitory. To a vitiated palate no meat has its right taste ; with a debauched mind no reasoning has its proper influence.

But secondly ; have we not also, from Scripture, reason to believe, that God's holy Spirit will be assisting to those who earnestly pray for it, and who sincerely prepare themselves for its reception ; and that it will be assisting to them in this matter of faith in religion ? The language of Scripture is, that God gives his holy Spirit to them that ask it ; and moreover, that to them

who use and improve it as they ought, it is given in more and more abundance. “He that hath, to him shall be given more. He that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath:” Matt. xiii. 12. He who is studious to improve his measure of grace, shall find that measure increased upon him. He who neglects or stifles, neglects through irreligion, carelessness, and heedlessness, buries in sensuality, or stifles by the opposition of sin, the portion of grace and assistance which is vouchsafed to him,—he, the Scripture says, will find that portion withdrawn from him. Now, this being the general nature and economy of God’s assisting grace, there is no reason why it should not extend to our faith, as well as to our practice; our perceiving the truth, as well as our obeying the truth, may be helped and succoured by it. God’s Spirit can have access to our understandings, as well as our affections. He can render the mind sensible to the impressions of evidence, and the power of truth. If creatures like us might take upon themselves to judge what is a proper object of divine help, it should seem to be a serious, devout, humble, and apprehensive mind, anxiously desiring to learn and know the truth; and, in order to know it, keeping the heart and understanding pure and prepared for that purpose; that is to say, carefully abstaining from the indulgence of passions, and from practices which harden and indispose the mind against religion. I say, a mind so guarding and qualifying itself, and imploring with devout earnestness and solicitude the aid of God’s holy Spirit in its meditations and inquiries, seems, so far as we can presume to judge, as meet an object of divine help and favour as any of which we can form an idea; and it is not for us to narrow the promises of God con-

cerning his assisting grace, so as, without authority, to exclude such an object from it.

From the doctrine, which has been thus concisely proposed, various important rules and reflections arise.

First; let not men, involved in sinful courses, wonder at the difficulties which they meet with in religion. It is an effect of sin, which is almost sure to follow. Sin never fails, both to magnify real difficulties, and to suggest imaginary ones. It rests and dwells upon objections, because they help the sinner, in some measure, to excuse his conduct to himself. They cause him to come to a conclusion, which permits the gratification of his passions, or the compassing of his purpose. Deep and various is the deceitfulness of sin, of licentious sins most particularly: for they cloud the understanding; they disqualify men for serious meditation of any kind; above all, for the meditation of religion.

Secondly; let them, who ask for more light, first take care to act up to the light which they have. Scripture and experience join their testimony to this point, namely, that they, who faithfully practise what they do know, and live agreeably to the belief which they have, and to the just and rational consequences of that belief, seldom fail to proceed further, and to acquire more and more confidence in the truth of religion; whereas, if they live in opposition to the degree of belief which they have, be it what it may, even it will gradually grow weaker and weaker, and, at length, die away in the soul.

Thirdly; let them, who are anxious to arrive at just sentiments of religion, keep their minds in a capable state; that is, free from the bias of former decisions made, or of former doubts conceived, at a time when

the power and influence of sinful temptation was upon them ; suggested, in fact, lest they should find themselves obliged to give up some gratification upon which they had set their hearts ; and which decisions, nevertheless, and doubts, have the same operation upon their judgements, as if they had been the result of the most pure and impartial reasoning. It is not peculiar to religion ; it is true of all subjects, that the mind is sure almost to be misled, which lies under a load of prejudice contracted from circumstances, in which it is next to impossible to weigh arguments justly, or to see clearly.

Fourthly ; let them, let all, especially those who find themselves in a dissatisfied state of mind, fly to prayer. Let them pray earnestly and incessantly for God's assisting grace and influence ; assisting, if it be his good pleasure, as well our minds and understandings in searching after truth, as our hearts and affections in obeying it. I say again, let us pray unceasingly for grace and help from the Spirit of God. When we pray for any worldly object, we may pray mistakenly. We may be ignorant of our own good ; we may err egregiously concerning it. But when we pray for spiritual aid and grace, we are sure that we pray for what we want ; for what, if granted, will be the greatest of all blessings. And we pray with hope, because we have this gracious assurance given us by the Lord himself of grace and mercy : " If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ?" Matt. vii. 11.



## XXXV.

## PURE RELIGION.

JAMES I. 27.

*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

NOTHING can be more useful than summary views of our duty, if they be well drawn and rightly understood. It is a great advantage to have our business laid before us altogether ; to see at one comprehensive glance, as it were, what we are to do, and what we are not to do. It would be a great ease and satisfaction to both, if it were possible, for a master to give his servant directions for his conduct in a single sentence, which he, the servant, had only to apply and draw out into practice, as occasions offered themselves, in order to discharge every thing which was required or expected from him. This, which is not practicable in civil life, is in a good degree so in a religious life ; because a religious life proceeds more upon principle, leaving the exercise and manifestation of that principle more to the judgement of the individual, than it can be left where, from the nature of the case, one man is to act precisely according to another man's direction.

But then, as I have said, it is essentially necessary, that these summaries be well drawn up, and rightly

understood ; because if they profess to state the whole of men's duty, yet, in fact, state it partially and imperfectly, all who read them are misled, and dangerously misled. In religion, as in other things, we are too apt of ourselves to substitute a part for the whole. Substituting a part for the whole is a grand tendency of human corruption, in matters both of morality and religion ; which propensity, therefore, will be encouraged, when that, which professes to exhibit the whole of religion, does not, in truth, exhibit the whole. What is *there* omitted, we shall omit ; glad of the occasion and excuse. What is not set down as our duty, we shall not think ourselves obliged to perform, not caring to increase the weight of our own burthen. This is the case whenever we use summaries of religion, which, in truth, are imperfect or ill drawn. But there is another case more common, and productive of the same effect, and that is, when we misconstrue these summary accounts of our duty : principally when we conceive of them as intending to express more than they were really intended to express. For then it comes to pass, that, although they be right and perfect as to what they were intended for, yet they are wrong and imperfect as to what we construe and conceive them for. This observation is particularly applicable to the text. Saint James is here describing religion not in its *principle*, but in its *effects* ; and these *effects* are truly and justly and fully displayed. They are by the Apostle made to consist of two large articles ; in succouring the distress of others, and maintaining our own innocency. And these two articles do comprehend the whole of the effects of true religion ; which were exactly what the Apostle meant to describe. Had Saint James intended to have set forth the motives and prin-

principles of religion, as they ought to subsist in the heart of a Christian, I doubt not but he would have mentioned love to God, and faith in Jesus Christ; for from these must spring every thing good and acceptable in our actions. In natural objects it is one thing to describe the root of a plant, and another its fruits and flowers; and if we think a writer is describing the roots and fibres, when, in truth, he is describing the fruit or flowers, we shall mistake his meaning, and our mistake must produce great confusion. So in spiritual affairs, it is one thing to set before us the *principle* of religion, and another the *effects* of it. These are not to be confounded. And if we apply a description to one which was intended for the other, we deal unfairly by the writer of the description, and erroneously by ourselves. Therefore, first, let no one suppose the love of God, the thinking of him, the being grateful to him, the fearing to disobey him, not to be necessary parts of true religion, because they are not mentioned in Saint James's account of true religion. The answer is, that these compose the principles of true religion; Saint James's account relates to the effects. In like manner concerning faith in Jesus Christ. Saint James has recorded his opinion upon that subject. His doctrine is, that the tree which bears no fruit cannot be sound at the root; that the faith which is unproductive is not the right faith: but then this is allowing (and not denying), that a right faith is the source and spring of true virtue: and had our apostle been asked to state the principle of religion, I am persuaded he would have referred us to a true faith. But that was not the inquiry: on the contrary, having marked strongly the futility of a faith which produced no good effects upon life and action, he proceeds in the text to tell us what

the effects are which it ought to produce ; and these he disposes into two comprehensive classes (but still meaning to describe the effects of religion, and not its root or principle), positive virtue and personal innocency.

Now, I say, that, for the purpose for which it was intended, the account given by Saint James is full and complete. And it carries with it this peculiar advantage, that it very specially guards against an error, natural, I believe, and common in all ages of the world ; which is, the making beneficence an apology for licentiousness ; the thinking that doing good occasionally may excuse us from strictness in regulating our passions and desires. The text expressly cuts up this excuse, because it expressly asserts both things to be necessary to compose true religion. Where two things are necessary, one cannot excuse the want of the other. Now, what does the text teach ? it teaches us what pure and undefiled religion is, in its effects and in its practice : and what is it ? “ to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Not simply to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction : that is not all ; that is not sufficient ; but likewise “ to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, is describing a class or species, or kind of virtue, by singling out one eminent example of it. I consider the apostle as meaning to represent the value, and to enforce the obligation of active charity, of positive beneficence ; and that he has done it by mentioning a particular instance. A stronger or properer instance could not have been selected : but still it is to be regarded as an instance, not as exclusive of other and similar instances, but as a specimen of these exer-

tions. The case before us, as an instance, is heightened by every circumstance which could give to it weight and priority. The Apostle exhibits the most forlorn and destitute of the human species, suffering under the severest of human losses; helpless children deprived of a parent, a wife bereaved of her husband, both sunk in affliction, under the sharpest anguish of their misfortunes. To visit, by which is meant to console, to comfort, to succour, to relieve, to assist such as these, is undoubtedly a high exercise of religion and benevolence, and well selected: but still it is to be regarded as an example, and the whole class of beneficent virtues as intended to be included. This is not only a just and fair, but a necessary construction: because, although the exercise of beneficence be a duty upon every man, yet the kind, the examples of it, must be guided in a great degree by each man's faculties, opportunities, and by the occasions which present themselves. If such an occasion as that which the text describes present itself, it cannot be overlooked without an abandonment of religion: but if other and different occasions of doing good present themselves, they also, according to the spirit of our Apostle's declaration, must be attended to, or we are wanting in the fruit of the same faith.

The second principal expression of the text, "to keep himself unspotted from the world," signifies the being clean and clear from the licentious practices to which the world is addicted. So that "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father" consists in two things; beneficence and purity: doing good and keeping clear from sin. Not in one thing, but in two things: not in one without the other, but in both. And this, in my opinion, is a great lesson and a most important doctrine.

I shall not, at present, consider the case of those who are anxious, and effectually so, to maintain their personal innocency without endeavouring to do good to others; because I really believe it is not a common case. I think that the religious principle which is able to make men confine their passions and desires within the bounds of virtue, is, with very few exceptions, strong enough, at the same time, to prompt and put them upon active exertions.

Therefore, I would rather apply myself to that part of the case which is more common, active exertions of benevolence accompanied with looseness of private morals. It is a very common character; but I say, in the first place, it is an inconsistent character: it is doing and undoing; killing and curing; doing good by our charity, and mischief by our licentiousness: voluntarily relieving misery with one hand, and voluntarily producing and spreading it with the other. No real advance is made in human happiness by this contradiction; no real betterness or improvement promoted.

But then, may not the harm a man does by his personal vices be much less than the good he does by his active virtues? This is a point, in which there is large room for delusion and mistake. Positive charity and acts of humanity are often of a conspicuous nature, naturally and deservedly engaging the praises of mankind, which are followed by our own. No one does, no one ought to speak against them, or attempt to disparage them: but the effect of vice and licentiousness is to be felt, not only in its immediate consequences, but in its remote and ultimate tendencies, which ought all to be included in the account. The mischief which is done by the example, as well as by the act, is seldom honestly

computed by the sinner himself. But I do not dwell further upon this comparison, because I insist, that no man has a right to make it ; no man has a right, whilst he is doing occasional good, and yet indulging his vices and his passions, to strike a balance, as it were, between the good and the harm. This is not Christianity. This is not pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father, let the balance lie on which side it will. But our text declares (and our text declares no more than what the Scriptures testify from one end to the other), that religion demands both. It demands active virtue, and it demands innocency of life. I mean it demands sincere and vigorous endeavours in the pursuit of active virtue, and endeavours equally sincere and firm in the preservation of personal innocence. It makes no calculation which is better ; but it requires both.

Shall it be extraordinary, that there should be men forward in active charity and in positive beneficence, who yet put little or no constraint upon their personal vices ? I have said that the character is common, and I will tell you why it is common. The reason is (and there is no other reason), that it is usually an easier thing to perform acts of beneficence, even of expensive and troublesome beneficence, than it is to command and control our passions ; to give up and discard our vices ; to burst the bonds of the habits which enslave us. This is the very truth of the case : so that the matter comes precisely to this point. Men of active benevolence, but of loose morals, are men who are for performing the duties which are easy to them, and omitting those which are hard. They may place their own character to themselves in what view they please : but this is the truth of the case, and let any one say, whether this be religion ; whether this be sufficient. The truly reli-

gious man, when he has once decided a thing to be a duty, has no farther question to ask ; whether it be easy to be done, or whether it be hard to be done, it is equally a duty. It then becomes a question of fortitude, of resolution, of firmness, of self-command, and self-government ; but not of duty or obligation ; these are already decided upon.

But least of all (and this is the inference from the text which I wish most to press upon your attention), least of all does he conceive the hope of reaching heaven by that sort of compromise, which would make easy, nay perhaps pleasant duties, an excuse for duties which are irksome and severe. To recur, for the last time, to the instance mentioned in our text, I can very well believe, that a man of humane temper shall have pleasure in visiting, when by visiting he can succour, the fatherless and the widow in their affliction : but if he believes Saint James, he will find that this must be joined to and accompanied with another thing, which is neither easy nor pleasant, nay, must always almost be effected with pain and struggle, and mortification and difficulty,—the “ keeping himself unspotted from the world.”



## XXXVI.

## THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

MATT. VI. 15.

*If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

THE forgiveness of injuries is commanded in Scripture, not simply as other duties are, but in a manner peculiar to itself; that is, as the absolute condition of obtaining forgiveness ourselves from God—a most awful consideration, and expressed in terms which cannot be mistaken or explained away—“if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses.” Words cannot be plainer or more positive. Nor is this all—for in the prayer which our Lord taught his disciples, and which from thence is called the Lord’s prayer, we are instructed to petition God to forgive us our trespasses, *as* we forgive them that trespass against us; which is as much as to acknowledge that so far from expecting forgiveness of our offences, we are not even to *ask* it upon any other terms than our forgiving the offences committed against us. Some wonder why this forgiving temper, which they reckon no better than tameness, or want of spirit, should be ranked so high by our Saviour, and hold so prominent a place amongst the duties of his religion—should be of more account with him than the most shining and splendid virtues.

But such people do not sufficiently consider the importance of this duty, or the difficulty of it. By its importance, I mean its use to mankind; for what are half the vexations of life, the uneasinesses in families, betwixt neighbours, and all the strife and contention we see in the world owing to, but to the want of it? and how are they to be healed and put a stop to, but by one of the parties at least setting an example of forgiveness? As long as each is determined to be even with his adversary, there can be no end of provocation or offence. Every retaliation is looked upon as a fresh affront, and requiring consequently a fresh act of revenge; so that upon this principle hatred must be immortal—an offence once given, or a quarrel once begun, must breed a train of perpetual ill turns; of constant spite and malice in the persons concerned. And this disposition is as painful to a man himself as it is mischievous to his adversary; for there is no enjoying any solid quiet, or comfort of heart, while a man hateth his brother—whilst he bears a grudge against, or is seeking to be revenged of any one. It likewise makes this a duty of greater real value, that it is very difficult. When we have received an injury or affront, we are naturally set on fire by it—we consider constantly how to be revenged upon our enemy, and make him, as we say, repent it. This is either natural, as I said, or become so by our education—fashion—habit. Now this propensity, which is one of the strongest belonging to us, must by degrees, and with great pains and reflection, be got the better of. And we have not only this to struggle with, but also the opinion of the world, which is apt to have a mighty influence upon us. Other virtues are a credit and an honour to a man, but this is not: on the contrary, the world are more

likely to reproach him as mean-spirited and cowardly for sitting down under an insult or affront, and tamely forgiving the author of it. As I said before, therefore, it is no wonder our Saviour should lay so much stress, and set so high a value, upon a duty which is so necessary to the peace and quietness of the world—which yet is so very difficult to be performed; and one which there is so little inducement to perform besides the considerations of religion.

To explain this duty farther, it may be necessary to mention some particulars which we may be apt to confound with it, but which are not any real parts of it. First, then, the forgiveness of offences should not imply that offences should not be punished when the public good requires it, that is, when the lawful punishment of the offence is necessary, either to correct and amend the delinquent himself, or others by his example. This duty only requires, that such offences should be punished and prosecuted out of a pure regard to the public safety, and to answer the ends of punishment, and not to gratify revenge. There is no moral similitude between what we make a man suffer out of a cool consideration and a sense of what is necessary, and what is done out of spite or anger. There is this solid difference betwixt the two states—the one will be as painful to us as the other is pleasant. The two things arise from quite different motives—are of a separate nature—and Christ's command, which respects the one, has nothing to do with the other; so that the magistrate may do his duty in punishing offenders, and private persons may do their duty in bringing public offenders to justice, without interfering with this command of our Saviour's. At the same time, however, it should be remarked and understood, that where no

substantial good end is to be answered by it—that is, where the offence is trivial or inadvertent, or where lenity will not be likely to invite the repetition of it, or encourage others in it—in such circumstances to pursue an offence with the utmost rigour and severity of the law savours more of private spite than public justice. Now if there be a mixture of private grudge in such severity, it is a breach of our Saviour's command, though there be law, perhaps, to colour and cover it.

Secondly; nor does this precept hinder us from applying, upon proper occasions, to the laws of our country to recover some right that is denied us, or satisfaction for some wrong that is done us; for there would be no living in the world, if the good must sit down under every wrong that the bad do them: this in the event would be putting the good in absolute slavery and subjection to the bad. But then to justify our conduct in this case, that is, to make it consistent with our Saviour's precepts, the right in question must be some serious right, of value worth the contest, and not merely to show that we are in the right and our adversary in the wrong, rather than for any thing that depends upon either. And likewise, when we are necessarily engaged in a contest of this kind, to proceed with calmness, civility, and good temper, which hurts no cause, and not with anger or passion; and also to accept the cheapest and most easy method that will answer the ends of justice; for what is beyond this must be merely to berate and distress our adversary; and springs, we may depend upon it, from malice and revenge at the bottom. In short, it is easy enough to distinguish in ourselves when we act in those contests, which are almost unavoidable, with a Christian spirit, and when otherwise. If we, instead of trying every

fair expedient to avoid and terminate the dispute amicably, are hastily engaged in it—if we go more for victory and triumph to depress and expose our adversary, than for any thing else—if we take delight in putting him to trouble, vexation, and expense, we are far, very far, let his conduct have been what it will, from acting in that mild relenting temper which our religion inculcates and insists upon.—Neither,

Thirdly ; when another has offended against us, are we bound to overlook his offence, or to continue to him the opportunity of repeating it. If, for instance, a person has cheated or deceived us, we are not obliged to trust him again ; because that would probably encourage him to persist in his bad practices, which is doing him as much harm as it can do us.—Nor,

Fourthly ; ought we so to forget men's bad behaviour, as to caress and countenance all characters alike—to preserve no respect or distinction for virtue—to testify no dislike or indignation against vice. Men, good as well as bad, act with some view to the opinion of the world and the loss of character ; the being ill received and looked upon is often the only punishment which the wicked fear : so that it seems to be necessary, in order to uphold and maintain the interests of virtue in the world, to treat the vicious differently from the virtuous—to withhold or withdraw our civilities or communications from such as would only disgrace the acquaintance of honest men. This sort of discipline is what St. Paul authorises, and even enjoins : “ I have written unto you not to *keep company*, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner ; with such an one, no not to eat.” But what we do on this score is easily distinguished from

what we do out of revenge, by this mark—that we should do the same had the person who offended us acted in like manner to any other; because if it be the guilt and not the injury which offended us, the offence will be the same whether we are the objects of it or another. These are the chief cases in which we can make others suffer for their faults, without disobeying our Saviour's command to forgive them.

With regard to the command itself, let it be observed, that it *certainly* extends not merely to trifling offences or imaginary affronts, but to real and actual injuries. Thy brother is supposed to have transgressed against thee—to have done thee wrong, and to have behaved ill; so that the common excuse, that your adversary began first, that he was in fault, or most to blame, is no excuse at all for quarrels and resentment: I mean, upon the principles of our Saviour's command.

This duty, the forgiveness of injuries, is rather in the nature of a disposition, than a single act; that is, does not so much consist in determining expressly to forgive this or that particular injury, as in working ourselves into such a softness and mildness of temper as easily and readily to forgive injuries. “Be ye kind,” says St. Paul, “one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another; even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you.” Is that fulfilled whilst we recompense evil for evil, and return railing for railing—seek and study only to be even with our adversary,—whilst we try to do him an ill turn when the opportunity comes in our way, and when we cannot bear the sight and the thoughts of him without pain—whilst we refuse to allow him the praise or merit really due to him—whilst we cannot see his success without mortification, or his misfortunes but

with secret pleasure? As long as we continue in this disposition, at least whilst we continue without endeavouring to correct it, we have not the spirit of Christ: we have not complied with his command.

There are several considerations which, properly attended to and applied, may help to mollify our hatred, and bring us by degrees to that tenderness of heart and temper which makes so great a part of a good Christian:—I will mention two. The first is, that the only way of overcoming evil is with good. The most generous and effectual method of subduing our adversary's animosity, and making him sensible of his error and unkindness, is to repay it with kindness and good offices on our part. He that requites one ill turn with another is only even with his adversary when he has done. He that forgives it is above him; and so his adversary himself will confess one time or another. And thus does St. Paul exhort us: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. If thine enemy hunger, give him meat; if he thirst, give him drink; so shalt thou heap coals of fire upon his head"—a singular expression, but very just and beautiful when rightly understood. It was the custom to melt down hard metals by heaping coals of fire upon the head of the vessel they were put into. And so St. Paul comes to speak of heaping coals of fire upon your adversary's head to melt his heart. But the great consideration of all, and which should never fail, one would think, to produce this forgiving temper within us, is that we stand in so much need of forgiveness ourselves. Imagine our own offences all disclosed and brought to light; imagine, again, ourselves obstinately persevering in revenge, in a denial of satisfaction, refusing to be intreated, disdainful to forgive, extreme to mark and to

resent what is done or said amiss ; imagine, I say, this, and you can hardly paint to yourself a greater instance of arrogance and absurdity. It must be intolerable, if any thing is, in the sight of God. This sentiment is described by our Saviour, in one of the finest parables in the whole book ; which I desire to leave upon your minds, as being what we should always bear about us—a lesson which it is a shame to be ignorant of ; and impossible, one would think, to forget. It is to be found in the latter part of the 18th chap. of St. Matthew.

“ The kingdom of heaven,” that is, God’s dealing with mankind under the Gospel, “ is,” says our Saviour, “ like unto a certain king which would take account of his servants ; and when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents ; but, forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants which owed him an hundred pence, and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest ; and his fellow-servant fell down at his feet and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all ;—and he would not, but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because



thou desiredst me, shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that he owed unto him." We can readily see the monstrous cruelty and ingratitude of the servant's behaviour—"Oughtest not thou also to have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee," is an expression that goes to the heart. We must agree also in the justice of his lord's conduct when he delivered him to the tormentors till he had paid all that was due to him. It is impossible not to own it is what he deserved, but our business with it is to see,—what also a little secret reflection will convince us of,—that this is no other than the case of each and every one of us who does not from the heart forgive his brother their trespasses.

## XXXVII.

## RECONCILEMENT OF DISPUTES.

## PROVERBS XVII. 14.

*The beginning of strife is, as when one letteth out water.  
Therefore leave off contention before it be meddled  
with.*

THERE is not found throughout the Book of Proverbs, or in any book indeed either of ancient or modern morality, a maxim which contains more of truth and wisdom, or which we see more frequently verified by instances of public and private misfortunes, than this of the text. The meaning is plain—as in a bank by which waters are confined, the first breach is generally small, easily prevented, or as easily repaired; but if the flood be suffered even for a short time to gain head and go on, the torrent soon gathers force and violence, continually working its passage wider, till it bears down every obstacle that opposes it, and overwhelms the country with deluge and ruins: admitting perhaps of no remedy which human art or strength can apply, or requiring operations so expensive as to impoverish all who are concerned in them,—so is it with the beginning of strife. Some small slight or neglect, some frivolous dispute, some affront scarcely perceptible, easily avoided, and at first as easily made up, commonly lays the foundation of those quarrels and animosities which, in private life, are sure to make those miserable who are

involved in them ; and when they fall out between persons or parties of powerful and extensive influence, are apt to fill a whole neighbourhood with rancour, calumny, and confusion. The breach at first might have been closed up with little cost or trouble. It is seldom that the occasion of the dispute is worth a thousandth part of the uneasiness which each side suffers by it ; or that there is any proportion between the importance of a quarrel and the heat with which it is carried on. A hasty, angry, or inadvertent word, or sometimes not so much as that, even a cold, suspicious, or unkind look, may be enough to give birth to a contention which in its progress and effects may involve a whole neighbourhood—may divide friends, disturb families, set up unnecessary parties and odious distinctions, put an end to all the comfortable intercourse of society ; and, what is much more to be lamented, to all charity and good-will and good offices one towards another. What does either side gain ? What do not both sides lose ? lose in the composure and tranquillity of their own minds, in the society of those about them, in the opportunities of performing and receiving kind offices, which render the journey of life easy and comfortable. As the causes of the bitterest quarrels are generally the most frivolous, so condescensions equally unimportant would in the early stages of the dispute generally close and heal them. A soft expression, a friendly countenance, a kind salutation, are all, probably, it would have cost to reconcile enmities which have since become fierce, implacable, and deep-rooted ; but we must not condescend—we must maintain our right—we must not be wanting to our dignity—we are ready to accept acknowledgement, but we will not yield or give way first ! We have declared our

resolution, and it were meanness to give it in ! Whilst both sides choose to argue thus, both sides may entertain an internal desire of reconciliation, and yet never be reconciled. The opportunity will soon be lost. The season of peace will soon be over. Offences are easily given, where both sides are on the watch to take them. Jealousy and suspicion are apt to convert undesigned words and actions into marks of what is already believed to be lurking within. One shyness is returned with another ; every return becomes a fresh injury, and every injury requires a fresh retaliation. The distance between the parties is rapidly increasing, till all connexion and communication becomes odious to both—they no more approach each other, and therefore have no more opportunity, if they sought it, of bringing one another back to their former friendship—they are alienated incurably, and for life. A riveted hostility takes place : mutual reproach and mutual railing, invective, slander, and backbiting, are sure to follow. It is become a gratification and a triumph in each to depress and mortify the other. Thus are two neighbours and two friends set down for life to torment each other and themselves,—not without almost constant disquietudé and heart-ache ; I may say also, with a constant violation of God Almighty's laws. Are not the evils and calamities of life enow ? Is not the distress we suffer from sickness, from the loss of friends, from unavoidable misfortunes sufficient, that we must aggravate and magnify it by quarrels amongst ourselves ? Disputes of real moment and of serious consequence will sometimes arise between parties peaceably and amicably inclined ; but such disputes, we may observe, are generally conducted with decency and with moderation. It is for small, and sometimes only ima-

ginary affronts, from minute, or perhaps only suspected incivilities; from contests about insignificant forms and ceremonies; from a passion to be thought greater than some other, whom we have taken it into our heads to view with eyes of rivalry and jealousy—it is from causes like these that the bitterest quarrels take their beginnings. It is haughtiness and impetuosity of temper from which dissensions usually commence; that is to say, a hasty, peevish, or captious pride begins them; and that stiffness which borrows the name of firmness, dignity, or consistency of character, but which is in truth, and which we should probably call in another, mere obstinacy and stubbornness, continues them. At least these are the infirmities of temper to which many are subject; and these are the infirmities which if “we would wish to see good days”—if we would wish “to pass the time of our sojourning here” in ease and quietness, we must endeavour to overcome.

If I can offer any brief rules, by which these endeavours may be assisted; by which we may learn, what is most to be desired, to avoid unnecessary quarrels; or, what holds the second place in usefulness, to soothe, to compose, and reconcile them,—I shall think I have made choice of a subject by the consideration of which we may all be benefited.

First; from what has been laid down concerning the usual progress of the malignant and vindictive passions, which are called into action in the course of a dispute, it is evident that our caution is best exercised at first. “Leave off contention before it be meddled with,”—refrain from all language and behaviour which is likely to beget enmity and dissension. You see the beginning of your quarrel, but not the end, the extent, or the consequences. A provoking word, in the heat of

passion and resentment, may be forcibly or shrewdly thrown out at the moment by the person who uses it, but it is sure to return upon his mind with bitterness and regret.

Secondly; a reflection which may put us on our guard against that promptness to take offence, and that precipitation in punishing or revenging the injury we conceive ourselves to have received, is, the consideration how extremely liable we all are to mistake both facts and words in the first report that is made, and the first apprehension that is formed of them. A very minute difference will convert innocent but heedless actions into studied insults—loose and equivocal or unguarded expressions into deliberate affronts: and this circumspection is doubly necessary, when the behaviour or language that offends us comes to our knowledge through the representation of a third person, or the intervention, perhaps, of two or three intermediate accounts. It is not always necessary to suppose express malice in that person. Inaccuracy alone, in either observing or relating, will often fatally mislead a rash and impetuous hearer.

Thirdly; if we be often incorrect in the judgement we form of other men's behaviour, I mean as to the facts, words, and circumstances themselves, much more are we apt to misinterpret the motives from which they arise. It will convince us of this, to recur to our own consciousness; and to recollect whether it hath not frequently happened to ourselves to have the principles, views, and inducements upon which we have acted, totally misunderstood or misrepresented; how forgetfulness hath been construed into neglect; inadvertency into insult; cheerfulness or vivacity of spirits into forwardness, intrusion, or petulance; shyness into distance;

natural reserve into superciliousness and disrespect. It may sometimes have fallen out worse. An unfortunate conjunction of circumstances, or combination of accidents, may have caused us to be suspected of dark purposes, or mean contrivances—of art, craft, or design ; when, in truth, our minds were perfectly free from them. We may have appeared to be insincere when we were never less so ; to have acted an equivocal part, when the whole embarrassment arose from unforeseen, unknown, or unthought of, positive circumstances. If ever this case has been ours, it ought to admonish us to reflect, that the same may happen to others ; and possibly to those with whom we have a present cause of dissatisfaction or complaint. We may be acting, at this very time, upon those hasty judgements from which we have ourselves experienced hardships and injustice. We have seen how liable other men are to error, with respect to us, when they proceed upon first impressions, partial accounts, or even upon appearances ; and we cannot but know, that we are no less fallible in judging of *them*. It ought to teach us caution and forbearance in our first behaviour, under a supposed injury or affront.

Fourthly ; one would think it no extraordinary stretch of candour to make those allowances to others, which we habitually expect for ourselves. Yet we are with difficulty brought to do this, or to perceive palliation in any conduct but our own. We do not remember (what we should never forget), that others have their passions and prejudices as well as we—their favourite aims—their favourite friends—their early fears—their particular caution, their interest, their impulses—their varieties of humour—constancy, or changeableness of mind ; by which, when they are

guided, they do no more than we are doing. They act, it may be true, differently from us, but they act under the same infirmities of temper, constitution, or understanding.

Fifthly; there is a point in the progress of a quarrel, and a situation in which men are often placed, and that is, when both sides would be glad of a reconciliation, but know not how to effect it—when both wish to approach, but neither will make the first advance. It may help us to improve this disposition, and to avail ourselves of this opportunity, to be apprized that neither disposition nor opportunity will last long. If we suffer the quarrel to proceed, the season of reconciliation will be gone for ever; and to invite us to make the first advance, let us be assured that it is a generosity which will never be forgot. There is no man living who is not affected by the kindness, and who feels not the superiority, of a ready forgiveness.

Sixthly; one compendious rule, which, if observed, would prevent many quarrels from originating, and many more from proceeding to desperate extremities, is the following: “Never to speak what will give pain, without a prospect of doing good.” It is of the nature of human resentment to prompt us to say what we think may vex and mortify our adversary—what may raise up in his breast uneasy recollections, and to have a pleasure in doing so. This propensity is more irresistible when the sting is pointed by some scornful wit or vivacity of reply. A successful retort is what few can deny themselves. Our admonition, therefore, is, to control and withstand the impulse; and to reflect upon each occasion, not how grating what we are about to say may be, how it will confound and silence our adversary, how smart or lively, how true,



or even how just and deserved, but what *good* it is likely to produce. This reflection would correct those sudden ebullitions either of anger or fancy, by which, if applause be gained, peace and friendship are destroyed, our tranquillity disturbed, our character ultimately injured, or at least ruffled in the estimation of every one who knows his duty.

Lastly; these rules, and every rule upon the subject, would become unnecessary, if we once acquired, perhaps if we sincerely sought, that disposition which Christianity inculcates and enjoins: which disposition is not that of the proud and haughty and jealous, or peevish and passionate and captious, least of all of the malicious and vindictive, but is mild and gentle, patient and long-suffering, forbearing and forgiving; and if any one be overtaken in a fault, restoring such a one in the spirit of meekness, under a constant sense of our own trials and frailties, lest we also be tempted.

## XXXVIII.

## OATHS.

## HEBREWS VI. 16.

*For men verily swear by the greater ; and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.*

PERHAPS there are few who, in the course of their lives, are not, upon some occasion or other, called upon to take an oath. Therefore, if there is a thing which well deserves to be learnt—to be understood—it is the nature and obligation of an oath. It is an article, indeed, in which the sentiments of mankind are not generally to be found fault with ; for if there be any one thing which men do hold sacred, it is an oath—if there be one character which they agree to condemn and detest, it is that of the perjured man. I believe it is generally true, that few or none have the hardiness to go about knowingly and deliberately to perjure themselves, but those who have given up all pretensions to virtue, and all concern about it, as well as all hopes of religion and interest about their future happiness or misery. And with some, perhaps, this is no security. But admitting that there is with the generality some concern for virtue at the bottom, there is ground to believe, that their opinion of virtue is rather forced by custom than consideration ; and this shows it, that you shall frequently see men scrupulous enough about the observation of the law of oaths—as oaths, for instance, in

evidence before a court of justice, and the like—who are very heedless, not to say worse, of the authority and obligation of an oath in other cases,—as oaths for the due discharge of their office, oaths relating to the customs, and oaths concerning their allegiance, and some others of a like kind. Now it is an oath in both cases; and men's care about the one, and indifference about the other, seem, I say, to indicate that their judgement of oaths is taken up rather from conforming to the prevailing way of thinking, than any just knowledge of the subject, or reflections of their own about it.

In treating this at present, we will observe the following order: first, to say a few words concerning the form of oaths; secondly, their nature; and then the force and obligation upon the consciences of those who take them.

Now as to the form, an oath is a religious ceremony; and like other religious ceremonies not described or pointed out in Scripture, is, and may be, in different countries and different ages of the world, very various, without any substantial alteration in the thing itself. Amongst the Jews, the person sworn held up his right hand towards the heavens, while he repeated the terms of his oath: which explains the meaning of an expression in the Psalms, “And their right hand is full of falsehood.” Amongst Christians, also, the form differs considerably; and in no country, I believe, in the world, is the form worse contrived, either to express or impress the nature of an oath, than in our own. The shortness and obscurity of the form, together with the levity and too great frequency with which it is administered, has brought about an inadvertency to the obligation of an oath, which, both in a religious and political view, is much to be lamented. I do not mean

that it is a common practice for men knowingly and deliberately to perjure themselves. I trust, as I said before, that this is rare and singular; but on some occasions, they carry away so little awe or sense of an oath upon their minds, as hardly to know whether they have taken an oath or not; and therefore they must be in perpetual danger of violating the obligation of the oath, from mere ignorance or inattention, or want of thought: which, though it does not come up to the crime of wilful and corrupt perjury, is still a crime. All I think necessary to say, in explanation of the form in use amongst us, is this—that when the person sworn repeats the words, “So help me God,” he is understood to mean—“so,” that is, upon condition of my speaking the truth, or performing what I now promise; this he is understood to say when he repeats the words, and to assent to when another repeats them. But whatever be the form of an oath, the substance and signification are the same. It is the calling upon God to witness, that is to take notice of, what we say; and invoking his vengeance, or renouncing his favour, if what we say be false, or what we promise be not performed.

This is what the person who swears in effect does; and no man can do that, and know what he is doing, without an awe or dread upon his mind both at the time and whenever afterwards he reflects upon the obligation he is under, and how far he hath been careful to fulfil it. The knowledge alone of what an oath is, is enough, with a serious mind, to enforce the authority of it beyond all other arguments.

In further explaining the obligation of an oath, we must lay out of the case the particular mischief which false security, and false swearing, may, in any instance,

do, because that mischief is to be accounted the same as if compassed by any other means ; this we will pass over, and observe the general guilt of false swearing, which is what we are to consider. Thus, if we take away the life of another by false swearing, it is just the same as if we stabbed him ; there is no difference. If by false swearing we make a cause go otherwise than it would have done, and ought to have done, and thereby deprive the losing side of what he would otherwise have obtained or preserved, it is the same as if we robbed him ; the manner of depriving another of his just right makes no difference. Whatever we consider the *general* nature and guilt of false swearing to be, these *particular* effects and aggravations are incalculable.

In order then to show, that oaths carry with them a proper force and obligation of their own, it will be necessary for me to show, that there is good reason to believe that God will punish false swearing with more severity than a simple lie, or breach of promise ; for unless there be cause to think so, it cannot be contended that an oath has either use or virtue in itself ; but that men's bare word or promise might as well be taken, if there be the same guilt in breaking them as a solemn oath. Comparisons of crimes are to be made with caution, for they are attended with this disadvantage—that when we mention one crime to be greater than another, the hearer is led to fancy the less crime to be none at all, or to be inconsiderable. Thus, while we prove that false swearing is a greater sin, and will be more severely punished than lying, we are apt to think lying can be no great sin in the sight of God, nor the punishment much. This is not an uncommon, but surely a very weak way of reasoning ; for lying remains just the same crime, and the punishment which awaits it

will be just the same, whether perjury be a greater sin or not. It does not make the guilt of one action less, to show that the guilt of another is greater, any more than it diminishes the height of one tower or mountain to say that another tower or mountain is higher.

Under this caution, therefore, we proceed to offer our reasons why we believe that God will punish false swearing with more severity than a simple lie, or breach of promise. First; perjury is a sin of greater deliberation. The person who swears has in fact, I believe, the thoughts of God and of religion upon his mind at the time; at least there are very few who can shake them off entirely: he offends, therefore, if he do offend, with a high hand—in the very face, that is, and in defiance, of the sanctions of religion. This offence implies a disbelief or contempt of God's knowledge, power, or justice; which cannot be said of a lie, when there is nothing to carry the mind to any reflection upon the Deity, or the divine attributes at all. For a lie may be sometimes pleaded haste, negligence, thoughtlessness, surprise: this can never be alleged in extenuation of perjury. It is doing a cool, concerted, deliberate crime. It may be said of a liar, that he was off his guard—had not the sense of his duty, and of God, the Author of all duty, upon his mind at the time; the reverse of this is the case of perjury. A man must have, from the nature of the thing, and in fact has, the thoughts of God Almighty and of his duty upon his mind at the time; and then it is showing, by transgressing one, and in effect bidding defiance to the other, a false way of implying in the person guilty of it, either a disbelief or contempt of God's knowledge, power, and justice. This is a heavy accusation; but when we reflect that a man who swears

calls upon God to witness what he says, invokes his vengeance, renounces his favour, if what he says be false, knowing still that it is false, what are we to think of the swearer's guilt? Can we think he believes that God hears him, that God has the power to punish him, and that God is a punisher and avenger of wickedness? If he believe these attributes, it is clear that he despises and wilfully defies them.

But, secondly; perjury violates a superior confidence. Mankind must trust to one another; and they have nothing better to trust to than another's oath. Hence all legal decisions, which govern and affect every right and interest on this side of the grave, of necessity proceed and depend upon oaths. Perjury, therefore, in its general consequences, strikes at the security of reputation, property, and even life itself. A lie cannot do the same mischief, because the same credit is not given to it. I have repeatedly endeavoured to inculcate this rule, that the way of estimating the guilt of any action is, to consider what would be the *consequence* if others allowed themselves in the same: the rule will never fail us. Now apply it to the case of perjury: what would be the effects, what would be the condition of mankind, if men once began to trifle with oaths, or to allow themselves, without shame or reserve, to swear to a falsehood? no man's innocence, no man's character, no man's estate, no man's life, would be safe for an hour. Who would sleep in his bed in peace that reflected he was in danger of being called out to prison, and perhaps to death, upon the accusation of a false witness; and that, since the obligation of oaths was held no longer sacred, false witnesses were to be procured in every street of a city? We read of something of the kind in the last stage of prophecy, in the

state at which some nations arrived before their destruction ; and a dismal state of affairs it was. It supplied the place of murder and robbery, when men could take away the lives and fortunes of another by false swearing. This they may always do. Courts of justice, be they ever so honest or so vigilant, cannot help it, for they must trust to oaths of witnesses ; for what else, what higher tie upon the consciences of men, can they trust to ? So that it is truly said that every man's estate or life is in the power of perjury to take away ; and this is true in our own country as much as in any other.

The point we laid down was, that there is good reason to believe that God will punish false swearing with greater severity than a simple falsehood ; and we have evidence to prove that it is in reality a greater crime.

But further it is to be observed, in the third and last place, that God, in the Old Testament, directed the Israelites to swear by his name, and the priests to require upon some occasions an oath of the person to be examined ; and moreover, to show the immutability of his own counsels, he solemnly confirmed his covenant with that people by an oath. None of these things, it is probable, he would have done, had he not intended that oaths should have some meaning and effect beyond the obligation of a bare word or promise—which effect must be owing to the severer punishment with which he will hereafter vindicate the authority of oaths.



## XXXIX.

## PROFANE SWEARING.

## EXODUS XX. 7.

*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.*

IN all cases whatever, where there is an express command, it is best, in my opinion, to set off with the command, and to let it come fairly to be tried what the strength of the command is—whether men will take upon them to set aside the authority of God's commandment or not.

Now in the case of profane swearing, there is a positive and express command extant. There neither is, nor ever was, a doubt but that the command reaches the case. There neither is, nor ever was, a doubt but that the case of profane swearing constituted a direct and positive violation of the command. There may be, and there are, various ways of taking God's name in vain, but it never has been disputed that profane swearing is one of them

There is no swearer, then, who does not knowingly violate the divine command, and who therefore has not this question to ask himself,—whether he be safe while he is going on in a continued breach of one of God's commandments? That is precisely his situation; and if he can draw, either from sound reason or from Scrip-

ture, good authority for believing that to be a safe situation, then he may be at ease: if he cannot, then has he the condemnation of a transgressed and despised command to look forward to. It does not seem a case, either for evasion, for doubt, or indeed for much reasoning. The command is clear, if commands *can* be clear. The transgression is also clear.

And in this respect it goes beyond some other duties, and some other sins, in the clearness of the command and the clearness of the transgression: for which reason, although it may be true, and perhaps is true, that the most ignorant persons are the most guilty of this practice, yet it is a case in which ignorance is little or no excuse. Were it a deep or abstruse case—were it a case of much argument or reasoning—were it a case which called for learning, or research, or inquiry, or knowledge, to come to any certainty about it—great apologies might be made for ignorance, great allowance to the want of education or of opportunity, from which the ignorance proceeded. But nothing of this sort can be pleaded. Here is a plain command, and a plain transgression. The ignorant man knows this as well as the wise. It is a rule for all—“God will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain,” is a judgement pronounced for all mankind. The most illiterate understands it—the most learned does no more.

If any questions have been ever raised upon this command, such as whether taking any oath, or upon any occasion, be consistent with it, more especially as it is recognised and applied by our Saviour, they are questions in which the profane swearer has no concern. This case is clearly within the law. It is nothing to him whether other cases be so or not.

I have said, here is a plain transgression of a plain

command—and of what sort of a command? Let that be considered. Let it be considered under what circumstances, with what distinguishing force, with what extraordinary and prodigious solemnity, the Ten Commandments, of which this is one, were originally delivered—what reverence they are entitled to from all who reverence God. With those who think that God is not to be revered—who do not reverence him in any thing, I have no concern. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day and to-morrow; and be ready against the third day, for the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, upon Mount Sinai. And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the Mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, so that all the people that was in the camp trembled; and Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the Mount: and Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole Mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice. And God spake all these words.” “These words,” saith Moses, “the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the Mount, out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice, and he added no more; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.”

Now of commands so delivered, so pronounced, accompanied with such terrible preparation and solemnity, is any one to be made a sport of? Is it to be a

diversion, a mirth, to treat one such command with insult and contempt, and with the very highest degree of both? Yet is it not true, that “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,” is one of these commands? and is it not true, that it is thus treated? I speak not, as I said before, to those who think that God is not to be revered at all, or who do not reverence him in any thing, but to others do I speak, and most especially to all young persons. What a *beginning* is this, of a religious course of life? It is impossible, in the nature of things, that any serious sentiments of religion, any impressions, any conversation, any practice, any thing that resembles a religious character, or approaches to it, can grow out of such an origin.

But it may be said that this was spoken to the Jews, and not to the Christians. Hear how that matter stands: “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 by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king—neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black: but let your communication be yea, yea, or nay, nay, for whatever is more than these, cometh of evil.” These are the words of Christ himself, whereby it appears most indisputably, that he adopts the third commandment in its full extent, and according to the spirit, as well as the letter of it. So far from superseding or weakening its authority, he adds to it his own; “*I* say unto you, swear not at all.” So far from confining its extent, he rather enlarges it; that is, he interprets it according to its spirit as well as its letter: from the name of God he extends it to every thing which relates to God. This excuse, therefore, does not come well from the mouth of any Christian

whatever, namely, that the commandment was spoken only to the Jews; for Christ, the Author of our religion, has explicitly adopted it, in all its force, in all its obligation, and in all its extent. What Christ himself began upon this head, the apostles continued: "Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath." Here is the very same strain of admonition as our Lord had used—clear, positive, decisive; and this is from St. James.

Am I not well warranted, therefore, in asserting concerning profane swearing, that there is a clear command, and a clear transgression? But will any one reply by asking, What is a command without a reason? I will judge the strength of the command by the weight of the reason, when I know it. Is this a reply from a creature to his Creator, from dust and ashes to Omnipotence, from ignorance itself to Him who knoweth all things, from weakness and impotency to the Ruler of the world? Is the command itself nothing? Is not the command itself sufficient: above all reasons or arguments whatever sufficient—a command so pronounced, so ratified; proceeding from such authority, delivered with such solemnity; so decisive in its prohibitions, so clear in its signification?

The reason nevertheless is the strongest of all reasons,—to uphold, namely, in the minds of men, a reverence for their Creator. Such is human nature, such is the constitution of the human mind, that what is treated externally, that is by words or by behaviour, with levity and giddiness and contempt, loses its force and impression internally. It is so in all cases: it is remarkably so in the present. How stands the fact in men addicted to swearing? are they men who live

under an inward conscientious awe of God Almighty; a sense of his infinite adorable nature, of his constant presence, of his bounty or his goodness, of his power or his authority, his close relation to us, our absolute dependence upon him? If these things be true, are they not things which should possess the mind? But is it possible that a mind possessed with such thoughts should allow itself without any shock in the practice of swearing? Is outward profaneness consistent with inward piety? Can they, do they in fact and in experience, subsist together in the same person? That I take to be the exact question. If it be true, either that a deep, a just, a rational piety, even without the smallest tincture of enthusiasm or melancholy, must and actually will produce a seriousness of outward demeanour with respect to these subjects,—at least to a degree sufficient to check both presumptuous contempt and heedless levity; of which contempt and levity a surer evidence and indication cannot be given than by common swearing, in any form of it and under all forms (for though forms of swearing be more or less shocking, they are in their view alike); or if on the other hand it be true, that the habit and practice of swearing will eat out, in young minds most particularly, all reverence for God Almighty, dissipate all good impressions, produce an incapacity for devotion, either public or private; and at last bring them to an impious boldness, to a casting off of all awe of God's judgements, of all regard and respect to him—then undoubtedly there was not only reason, but the highest of all reasons, for laying a restraint upon licentiousness so pernicious in its consequences; and the same, nay indeed much greater reason, for *obeying* that law, and that injunction by which it was laid. Depend upon it, that a regard to

God Almighty lies at the root of every thing which is good, is the only restraint from every thing that is bad—that whatever in any degree diminishes, or tends to diminish that regard, is of all hurtful things the most so.

For if it be allowed, which I think it may, that to see the moral evil of swearing is, to look farther than the generality of men do look; and that these evil effects, though real, and great, and certain, are not, like the effects of murder or theft, sensible and immediate; allowing this, then in what situation does the subject stand with those who have not considered the effects at all? It stands thus—it stands with them upon the ground of religion. The *religion* of the case, the religious command is clear: that at least is obvious and intelligible: of that at least they must be apprised. Wherefore, if they be of the number of those who do not comprehend the reason, or have never much considered the reason which makes swearing and cursing an evil, upon principles of morality, then it becomes a test and trial whether religion alone, whether religion as such, and independently of other considerations, has any authority or influence with them at all. Rules of morality, such as, commonly speaking, are called so, do not afford this test; for they are either enforced by the terrors or penalties of law, or the violation of them is attended with direct and immediate public mischief, or with cruelty, or with injury to individuals: under all which circumstances, although religion operate in keeping us to our duty, yet it operates in conjunction and combination with other powerful motives. In the case before us, that is to say, in curbing and checking, and breaking the practice of profane swearing, religion operates by itself, and therefore shows what degree of

force and strength and weight it really has with us. This observation is applicable to a higher class than those who are vulgarly addicted to this vice, and the very truth is, that those who have upon their minds a sense of religion as such, and in any degree proportioned to its immense importance, are not drawn into the practice of swearing by any position of circumstances whatever; those in whom this sense is feeble, or wanting, or lost, are drawn into this practice, if it so happen that their profession, their company, or their temper, or their habit, lead them into it.

I shall conclude with one reflection.

If there be one description of men more than another who ought to have the dread of God Almighty upon their minds, and in whom that dread ought to check all profane, all contemptuous, all idle, all impious treatment of his name and his commands, it is those who carry their lives in their hands. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea I say unto you fear him."



## XL.

## DRUNKENNESS.

ROM. XIII. 13.

*Let us walk honestly, as in the day ; not in rioting and drunkenness.*

WHOEVER considers the purity and strictness of the Christian religion ; how it extends its rules, not only to our actions, but our words, not only to words, but to thoughts ; how it requires self-command, self-government, at almost every turn, and in every point of our duties ; mastery and management of our passions of every kind ; a constraint over every inclination, so as to be able to check and call it back to its subjection to reason—whoever considers this, will see that we stand in need of perpetual vigilance and circumspection—how liable we are to fall ; how little able to maintain a complete adherence to God's laws, even in our soberest hours, with the perfect use of our faculties, and without any extraordinary violence or impetuosity added to our acquired or constitutional propensities ; that consequently, when a great advantage is thrown by intemperance into the wrong scale, the passions of every sort are inflamed and put in motion, our reflection and sense of duty is confused, our judgment disordered, the admonitions of conscience laid asleep, and we are surrounded with temptations and with provocations,—in this condition it cannot be expected

from human strength that a man should preserve an unblameable conduct, or a steady regard to the rules of morality and religion. Accordingly, I suppose it is the fact, that few, or none, recover from a fit of intemperance but who are conscious, when they come to themselves, of some impropriety or extravagance into which drunkenness has betrayed them; some action or some outrage of which they are ashamed; some expression or word which has escaped them, and which they wish in vain could be recalled; some quarrel which they have drawn upon themselves; some enmity of which they have sown the seed, and, universally, a loss of that command of ourselves in which both our happiness and virtue consist. But then comes the specious consideration, that the crimes a man commits in that condition are excused by the very condition he is in; that he is not chargeable with what he does when he is not himself, when he has no command perhaps left of his conduct; when his nature and disposition are altered as to all moral purposes: that, like the insane person, he is entitled to all the indulgence and excuses of that condition. This plea is made by thousands; it is a kind of discourse you often hear; and weighs, I am apt to suppose, much in the private thoughts of persons addicted to intemperate courses. We allow, too, that it carries enough of the semblance of reason to impose upon many, and to deserve examination.

Now, the first observation that occurs is, that if this plea were allowed in its full extent, a man would be at liberty when he found himself disordered by intemperance to commit any crime or any extravagance; for his drunkenness, according to his argument, would cover and excuse it all: and a conclusion so absurd leads one to suspect the argument from which it flows.

The truth of the case seems to be this ; that if we look no further than the point of time when a drunken man commits his crime, it will be difficult to distinguish between his case and that of an insane person ; for he is at that moment more completely bereft of his reason, at least as completely delivered over to the impulse of his passions, as the other : and if that be an excuse for the one, why should it not be so for both ?— So it may be argued, if we confine our attention to the precise period of committing the offence : but here the two cases differ exceedingly—that the one person suffers under the visitation of an inevitable calamity ; the other is the author of his own distemper : and this is what, properly, the drunkard's guilt consists in ; *not* in committing faults when he is in a condition in which he cannot help it, but in knowingly and voluntarily bringing himself into such a condition. And when we once understand the proper foundation of the guilt, we shall be enabled to estimate the crime of the action of a drunken man, compared with the same action in a sober man. The rule of reason and justice appears to be this : whatever proportion the chance of falling into such and such crimes bears to the absolute certainty, the same proportion does the crime of any evil action in a drunken man bear to the guilt of the same action in a sober man ; so that if there be, as there always is, unjustifiable licentiousness, if not of action, at least of language and thought, to which all persons inflamed with liquor are subject ; or if there be certain particular feelings and extravagancies to which the infirmity of particular constitutions when disordered by intemperance are sure to draw men into, then, and to both these, the guilt may be deemed equal to the deeds, if committed with all our senses and faculties about us :

for it makes little or no difference whether we deliberately commit a crime, or deliberately put ourselves into a condition in which we know beforehand that we shall be tempted to commit it. Of crimes and outrages which are the effects of drunkenness but unusual or unthought of, the judgment is not quite the same; they cannot be accounted of, as if proceeding from deliberate wickedness, because they are the effects of a condition which admits of no deliberation, nor can it be said here, as before, that the drunken man foresaw, or might have foreseen these effects, when he suffered himself to be brought into such a condition; for they are by the supposition unusual, and therefore not foreseen: but though unusual, they are not impossible, nor perhaps, all things considered, very improbable. Therefore there is a guilt, and a very great one, in incurring the hazard, or even the possibility of perpetrating those crimes and outrages from which we had power or had reason to withhold us; and from which we are safe, or at least distant, so long as we neither abused that power nor that reason. I here put the supposition more in favour of intemperance than it will properly bear: for I supposed that the disorder occasioned by it deprives a man of the use of his understanding, and leaves him, at the time of committing the crime, in the absolute condition of an insane person; so that the very guilt he was capable of, consisted in bringing himself into that condition. Now this is seldom the case in reality: in intoxication, some self-command, some conscientious sense of right and wrong remains with men; and for so much as does remain they are accountable, as much then, as ever. Another circumstance should likewise always be noticed, which is a great aggravation of drunkenness: When a man finds by experience the mischievous, the

pernicious consequences which intemperance produces to himself, or through him to others, and does not take warning by them, but returns to his drunkenness at every opportunity, and whenever the temptation comes round, it will be difficult to distinguish such a man's misconduct from the same misconduct in a sober person; at least, there is a wide difference between this case, and his who has been casually betrayed into intemperance, and, by intemperance, into improper behaviour, and takes little caution from the experience of his own infirmity, to keep out of the way of a second temptation, or gains little resolution to withstand it.

One considerable part of the mischiefs and evil tendency of intemperance, is the *example*, especially in people whose example is likely to influence others; as of masters of families, persons in public stations, those who are, or ought to be, the instructors of others.

Drunkenness effectually puts an end to all authority; for it so degrades and debases the drunkard, as not only to bring him upon a level with the lowest of those over whom his authority should be preserved, but much beneath them: it is ridiculous in a drunkard to talk to others of decency, order, good manners, quietness, peaceableness, industry, activity, usefulness, who himself, in this one vice, exhibits a public example of the violation of all these duties. And this matter of example, in this, as well as in a thousand other instances, may lead us to enlarge our views of the consequences of our actions, and see a guilt in them which we may not discern in them considered simply in themselves. In the case before us, expense, for instance, may not be a consideration to all; but their example, or their company, may draw in others to make it a consideration very serious. In like manner, the shame, and

distress, and terror, and uneasiness which intemperance is sure to occasion to a person's own family, is an important aggravation of the offence. This is not applicable to those who have no family; but then the infection of their example, or the exercise of their vice, propagates itself to those who have families, and so makes them indirectly the authors of misery which, very possibly, they never intended or suspected.

I have thus enumerated the effects of drunkenness, without exaggeration; for I do not wish to indulge in invective or excite indignation against it, further than the solid mischief it produces will justify. Universally we ought to take into the account, not merely the mischief it produces at the very moment of committing the crime, but altogether, sooner or later, directly or indirectly; to ourselves, in our fortunes, health, constitutions, understandings; to our families, in their subsistence, expectations, morals, peace, and satisfaction; to the neighbourhood and the public at large, by the outrages, indecencies, and extravagancies into which it betrays us; or more generally, by the evil tendency of our example, which will operate afterwards where it is more pernicious than in ourselves, and for which we are in a very serious degree answerable.

It remains that we state the judgment of Scripture concerning this vice; which you will find to be agreeable to what the light of nature, rightly attended to, indicates of its evil tendency: "Be not drunk with wine," says Saint Paul, "wherein is excess." You here find no rigid rules of abstinence or self-denial; nothing of that unnecessary mortification or painful refusal of the satisfactions of life, which all religions that are founded on enthusiasm or imposture have been wont to enjoin. Saint Paul does not forbid wine; but being drunken

with wine, wherein is excess. The reasonableness of this precept entitles it to respect.

In the sixth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, Saint Paul enumerates the offenders of whom he says, "they shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven." Amongst these we find drunkards: "*neither* thieves, nor covetous, nor *drunkards*, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall enter the kingdom of heaven." This declaration admits of no comment save one: that we must understand the Apostle to speak of habitual offenders, persisting in their respective crimes, without repentance, change, or reformation. In other passages, Saint Paul is at some pains to teach his disciples how inconsistent this vice is with their particular characters and profession. It was a common way of preaching with him, to describe those who were indulged with the light of the Gospel as children of light, and of the day; in opposition to the rest of the world, who lived, as to religious matters, in night and darkness. In this view of their condition as Christians, he takes occasion to enforce upon them the duty of sobriety: "They that be drunken, are drunken in the night; but let us who are of the day be sober." I am not concerned to discuss the arguments. The passage shows Saint Paul's sentiments of the crime of drunkenness, and its absolute inconsistency with the Christian profession.

With respect to the preservatives against this vice, the first thing to be remarked is, that there is no trusting to our natural aversion to excessive drinking. Most people have this aversion at first. Therefore, a man being drawn in notwithstanding, proves that that is no security to be depended upon.

If, then, from our business, in which we are exposed to much company and many invitations to excess, or from

any other cause, that we find our aversion abating, and a liking or a desire after this indulgence beginning, I know of no better advice that can be given, than to tie ourselves down by rules, and resolutely and constantly to abide by them.

All such rules are absurd when they are unnecessary; but they are not unnecessary when we are exposed to such danger by the consequences of falling into such a habit, so utterly destructive of all that is good, and of such incalculable mischief; and from which there is so little hope, if there be any indeed, of ever recovering.

The next great caution I would recommend is to beware of indulgences of the kind when alone, at home, and in our own families. So long as we confine our intemperance to occasions of feasting or of company, that can be repeated no oftener than the occasions return, which is not constantly. Whenever we cease to wait for occasions, and have found the way of betaking ourselves to this gratification by ourselves, there is less, there is nothing, to hinder or interrupt a settled habit of intemperance fastening upon us. As I have observed already, the most plausible excuse to ourselves for indulgence is fatigue: thousands have been drawn in by this excuse. It is always, therefore, prudent to place the danger full before our eyes—to reflect how easily and how gently refreshment leads to intemperance, indulgence to excess. We shall consult our safety and happiness by forbidding to ourselves such indulgence the moment we perceive that there is danger of its gaining ground upon us, and laying, however slowly, the foundation for every other vice.



## XLI.

## ON PURITY OF THE HEART AND AFFECTIONS.

1 JOHN III. 2, 3.

*Beloved, now are we the sons of God: and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

WHEN the text tells us, “that every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself,” it must be understood as intending to describe the natural, proper, and genuine effects of this hope, rather, perhaps, than the actual effects, or at least as effects, which, in point of experience, universally follow from it. As hath already been observed, the whole text relates to sincere Christians, and to these alone: the word *we*, in the preceding part of it, comprises sincere Christians, and no others. Therefore the words *every man* must be limited to the same sort of men, of whom he was speaking before. It is not probable, that in the same sentence he would change the persons and characters concerning whom he discoursed. So that if it had been objected to Saint John, that, in point of fact, every man did not purify himself who had this hope in him, he would have replied, I believe, that these were not

the kind of persons he had in his view ; that, throughout the whole of the text, he had in contemplation the religious condition and character of sincere Christians, and no other. When, in the former part of the text, he talked of *we* being the sons of God, of *we* being like Christ, he undoubtedly meant sincere Christians alone : and it would be strange if he meant any other in this latter part of the text, which is in fact a continuation of the same discourse, of the same subject, nay, a portion of the same sentence.

I have said thus much in order to obviate the contrariety which there seems to be between Saint John's assertion and experience. Experience, I acknowledge, proves the inefficacy, in numerous cases, of religious hope and religious motives : and it must be so ; for religious motives operated certainly and necessarily, if they produced their effect by an infallible power over the mind, we should only be machines necessarily actuated ; and that certainly is not the thing which a moral agent, a religious agent, was intended to be. It was intended that we should have the power of doing right, and, consequently, of doing wrong : for he who cannot do wrong, cannot do right by choice ; he is a mere tool and instrument, or rather a machine, whichever he does. Therefore all moral motives, and all religious motives, unless they went to deprive man of his liberty entirely, which they most certainly were not meant to do, must depend for their influence and success upon the man himself.

The success, therefore, is various ; but when it fails, it is owing to some vice and corruption in the mind itself. Some men are very little affected by religious exhortation of any kind, either by hearing or reading. That is a vice and corruption in the mind itself. Some

men, though affected, are not affected sufficiently to influence their lives. That is a vice and corruption in the mind, or rather in the heart : and so it will always be found. But I do not so much wonder at persons being unaffected by what others tell them, be those others who they may, preachers, or teachers, or friends, or parents, as I wonder at seeing men not affected by their own thoughts, their own meditations : yet it is so ; and when it is so, it argues a deep corruption of mind indeed. We can think upon the most serious, the most solemn subjects, without any sort of consequence upon our lives. Shall we call this scared insensibility ? shall we call it a fatal inefficiency of the rational principle within us ? shall we confess, that the mind has lost its government over the man ?

These are observations upon the state of morals and religion, as we see them in the world : but whatever these observations be, it is still true, and this is Saint John's assertion, that the proper, natural, and genuine effect of religious hope is to cause us to strive "to purify ourselves, even as he is pure." Saint John strongly fixes our attention,—I mean as he means, such of us as are sincere Christians,—upon what we are to be hereafter. This, as to particulars, is veiled from us, as we have observed, by our present nature ; but as to generals, as to what is of real importance and concern for us to know (I do not mean but that it might be highly gratifying and satisfactory to know more, but as to what is of the first importance and concern for us to know), we have a glorious assurance, we have an assurance that we shall undergo a change in our nature infinitely for the better ; that when he shall appear glorified as he is, we shall be like him. Then the point is, what we are to do, how we are to act, under this ex-

pectation, having this hope, with this prospect, placed before our eyes? Saint John tells us, “we are to purify ourselves, even as he is pure.”

Now what is the scriptural meaning of purifying ourselves can be made out thus. The contrary of purity is defilement, that is evident; but our Saviour himself hath told us what the things which defile a man are; and this is the enumeration: evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; and the reason given why these are the real proper defilements of our nature, is, that they proceed from within, out of the heart: these evil things come from within, and defile the man. The seat, therefore, of moral defilement, according to our Saviour, is the *heart*; by which we know, that he always meant the affections and the disposition. The seat, therefore, of moral purity must necessarily be the same; for purity is the reverse of defilement: consequently, to purify ourselves, is to cleanse our hearts from the presence and pollution of sin; of those sins particularly, which reside in, and continue in the heart. This is the purgation intended in our text. This is the task of purgation enjoined upon us.

It is to be noticed, that it goes beyond the mere control of our actions. It adds a further duty, the purifying of our thoughts and affections. Nothing can be more certain, than that it was the design of our Saviour, in the passage here referred to, to direct the attention of his disciples to the heart, to that which is within a man, in contradistinction to that which is external. Now he who only strives to control his outward actions, but lets his thoughts and passions indulge themselves without check or restraint, does not attend

to that which is within him, in contradistinction to that which is external. Secondly, the instances which our Saviour has given, though, like all instances in Scripture, and to say the truth, in all ancient writings, they be specimens and illustrations of his meaning, as to the kind and nature of the duties or the vices which he had in view, rather than complete catalogues, including all such duties or vices by name, so that no other but what are thus named and specified were intended—though this qualified way of understanding the enumerations be right, yet even this enumeration itself shows, that our Saviour's lesson went beyond the mere external action. Not only are adulteries and fornications mentioned, but evil thoughts and lasciviousness; not only murders, but an evil eye; not only thefts, but covetousness or covetings. Thus by laying the axe to the root; not by lopping off the branches, but by laying the axe to the root, our Saviour fixed the only rule which can ever produce good morals.

Merely controlling the actions, without governing the thoughts and affections, will not do. In point of fact it is never successful. It is certainly not a compliance with our Saviour's command, nor is it what St. John meant in the text by purifying ourselves.

“Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself; even as he,” namely, Christ himself, “is pure.” It is a doctrine and lesson of the New Testament, not once, but repeatedly, inculcated, that if we hope to resemble Christ in his glorified state, we must resemble him in his human state. And it is a part, and a most significant part, of this doctrine, that the resemblance must consist in purity from sin, especially from those sins which cleave and attach to the heart. It is by Saint Paul usually put thus: “If we be dead with

Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." "Dead with Christ;" what can that mean? for the apostle speaks to those who had not yet undergone natural death. He explains: "Reckon yourselves to be dead unto sin;" that, you hear, is the death he means. "He, that is dead, is freed from sin;" that is Saint Paul's own exposition of his own words; and then, keeping the sense of the words in his thoughts, he adds; "if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Again, still keeping the same sense in view, and no other sense: "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Once more, but still, observe, in the same sense: "We are buried with him by baptism unto death; our old man is crucified with him." The burden of the whole passage is, that if we hope to resemble what Christ is in heaven, we must resemble what he was upon earth; and that this resemblance must consist specifically in the radical casting off of our sins. The expressions of the apostle are very strong; "that the body of sin may be destroyed. Let not sin reign in your mortal body; obey it not in the lusts thereof." Not only in its practices, but in its desires, "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

In another epistle, that to the Colossians, Saint Paul speaks of an emancipation from sin, as a virtual rising from the dead, like as Christ rose from the dead. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God: set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth; for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." In this

way is the comparison carried on. And what is the practical exhortation which it suggests? "Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, evil concupiscence, and covetousness:" which is an equivalent exhortation, and drawn from the same premises, as that of the text, "Purify yourselves, even as he is pure."

The Scriptures, then, teach that we are to make ourselves like Christ upon earth, that we may become like him in heaven; and this likeness is to consist in purity.

Now there are a class of Christians, and I am ready to allow, real Christians, to whom this admonition of the text is peculiarly necessary.

They are not those who set aside religion; they are not those who disregard the will of their Maker, but they are those who endeavour to obey him partially, and in this way—finding it an easier thing to do good than to expel their sins, especially those which cleave to their hearts, their affections, or their imaginations, they set their endeavours more towards beneficence than purity. You say we ought not to speak disparagingly of doing good: by no means; but we affirm, that it is not the whole of our duty, nor the most difficult part of it; in particular, it is not that part of it which is insisted upon in the text, and in those other Scriptures that have been mentioned. The text, enjoining the imitation of Christ upon earth, in order that we may become like him in heaven, does not say, do good even as he went about doing good, but it says, "purify yourselves even as he is pure:" so saith Saint John. "Mortify the deeds of the body, let not sin reign in you; die with Christ unto sin; be baptised unto Jesus Christ, that is, unto his death; be buried with him by baptism unto death; be planted

together in the likeness of his death ; crucify the old man, and destroy the body of sin ; as death hath no more dominion over him, so let sin no more reign in your mortal bodies :” so Saint Paul. All these strong and significant metaphors are for the purpose of impressing more forcibly upon us this great lesson, that to participate with Christ in his glory, we must participate with him in his humiliation ; and that this participation consists in divesting ourselves of those sins, of the heart especially, and affections, whether they break out into action or not, which are inconsistent with that purity, of which he left us an example ; and to the attainment and preservation of which purity, we are most solemnly enjoined to direct our first, strongest, and our most sincere endeavours.



## XLII.

## LICENTIOUSNESS AND DEBAUCHERY.

EPHES. 5, 6.

*Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

THESE are awful words. They assert most satisfactorily, that there are certain things, which, let men say or think what they will, are sure of bringing down the wrath of God upon those who commit them. They further intimate, that, although this be certainly true, and will be found to be so, yet many mistake, fatally mistake the matter—hold flattering opinions upon the subject, which will prove to be false; thereby overlooking or remaining ignorant of their own danger, and of the end to which they will come; that there are deceivers and deceived; they who are labouring to deceive others, and they who are very willing to be deceived. For when the apostle uses these words of warning, “let no man *deceive* you,” he knew that such deceptions were abroad, were common, were employed, were listened to, succeeded and prevailed over the minds and consciences of many. Then he apprizes them of the danger, of the necessity of preparing and fortifying themselves against such delusions. He bids them (for this is the meaning and force of his admonition) he bids them look neither to the right hand nor to the left; to listen neither to what one man

said, nor to what another man said; neither to this specious persuasion, nor to that plausible argument, but to keep close to this one momentous, this never to be forgotten consideration, that these, however varnished, however coloured over, however extenuated or diminished, however excused or defended, will in the event *feel* the wrath of God.

“ Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” Because, you will ask, of what things? That undoubtedly is the first question to be considered. What were the things which St. Paul had *particularly* in his mind when he wrote the words of the text; I say particularly, for that he had some particular view, or some particular class and kind of view in his contemplation, cannot be well disputed. Now the context, the words which go before, must show us what he meant by *these things*, because they were things which he had already mentioned. The term *these things*, implies that; it is a term of reference. But what he had been speaking of before, to which the text relates, was as follows: “Fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting which is not convenient; for this ye know, that no whoremonger nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” And then he goes on: “Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of *these things* cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” Now I say that the class of crimes which the apostle had particularly, and I think had solely in view, were crimes of licentiousness and debauchery. I include all crimes arising from the unlawful and licentious indulgence of men’s passions.

The terms made use of by St. Paul, are “fornications, uncleanness, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting which is not convenient.” Those terms all very evidently relate to one and the same subject, and that subject is what I mentioned. The only thing which can create a doubt whether it was *that* class of vices alone, which St. Paul intended, is the word *covetousness*. Covetousness is put among the other articles enumerated: “all uncleanness or covetousness.” Now it appears very manifest that the word covetousness in this place, does not mean *covetousness* in the sense in which we usually understand it, as it relates to property or to riches, but that it means inordinate desires of another kind; or the intemperate and unlawful indulgence and letting loose men’s passions in the article of licentiousness and debauchery. The phrase, I own, is peculiar—I mean, not only different from the common acceptance of the word at present, but different also from the use of the original word in that language, and in the writings of that time; yet I think it can be made out by proofs, that this and not the other, is the sense of the word in this place—and in some other passages of St. Paul’s epistles. *First*; the covetous man is called an idolater. Now there is no proper reason for this, or meaning in it, according to the common sense of the word *covetous*. For though *we* may sometimes say that a man idolizes gold, it is only a modern fashion of speaking. It is not intended nor found in the language of the New Testament, nor like that language: but in the sense we are arguing for, it is very just and proper. The character of the heathen idolatry (and this is what St. Paul refers to) was, that it taught immorality instead of morality: that instead of prohibiting and discouraging lewd and licentious practices, it promoted

and authorized them by the impurity and indecency of its religious rites—which being the case, it was natural for our apostle to call a man addicted to these vices an *idolater*; inasmuch as these vices composed the character of *that* religion, if it deserved the name of religion, and even of its religious worship.

*Secondly*; in the passage from which our text is taken, v. 13, you read that “*it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret* ;” and what is here said, evidently refers to the offences before enumerated. But its being a shame to speak of it, and its being done in secret, does not apply to *covetousness*, in the common sense of the term : there is nothing indecent or shameful in the mention of covetousness in that sense ; nor in that sense can it be particularly accused of being carried on in secret : but of covetousness in the sense we are affixing to it in this place, the inordinate indulgence of vile and licentious desires, both these may be said truly.

*Thirdly* ; one can hardly avoid being convinced that we are right in our exposition of the word, when we consider how it stands joined with this sort of sins in other parts of St. Paul’s epistles : Col. 3, 5. “*Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon earth ; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*” Again, 1 Cor. v. 9. “*I wrote unto you in an epistle, not to keep company with fornicators of this world, or with the covetous :*” and in the next verse, “*but now,*” says he, “*I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator or covetous.*” In both these places, covetousness is put in close connexion with fornication, which connexion establishes the sense we give to it. The fourth

chapter of the 1st Thess. verse 5th, is equally strong for our purpose, though not quite so obvious: the passage is this—"Ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus"—an awful preface—then what follows? "This is the will of God, even your sanctification; that ye should abstain from fornication; that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God; that no man go beyond, or defraud his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such: as we have also forewarned you and testified, for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." In this passage the Apostle is discoursing of one class and kind of crimes; and what that class was appears from the concluding clause, "God hath not called us unto uncleanness." Now though the word *covetousness* does not appear in our translation, it does in the original language; for the word which is translated *go beyond* in this passage is the word which is translated *coveting*, *covetousness*, in the other passages. In each and every one of these passages, it is put as an undoubted and characteristic mark of idolatry. From the term, therefore, being always put by St. Paul in strict and close connexion with fornication, we are authorized to conclude that it bore in his mind, and in his manner of writing, a signification similar to what that term bears.

It may be said, that investigations of this sort are superfluous and minute; but I answer, that when we read such strong texts as the present, "because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience;" it can never be superfluous to ascertain what things the apostle really meant. These declara-

tions are what we have to go by : their true sense, therefore, is of the utmost moment for us to know : and in the present instance, I think that it is made out with great certainty, that sins of debauchery and licentiousness were what the Apostle had specifically in his mind, when he pronounced this condemnation.

The next observation I have to make is, that these sins were then common amongst the heathen ; that the Christians, before their conversion, had been addicted to them ; that those who practised them were endeavouring, under various pretexts, to draw others to be partakers with them ; that these pretexts were to be resisted by the consideration that, let the slaves or the advocates of those vices say what they will, “ the wrath of God, because of these, cometh upon the children of disobedience.” These sins were so common amongst the idolatrous heathens, that they were emphatically called idolatry itself, and that in all the different passages which have been quoted. Again, some of the Christians themselves, before their conversion, had been addicted to them. “ Ye *were* sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord ; walk as children of the light.” And more express in the Epistle to the Colossians, speaking of the same practices : “ In the which,” says he, “ ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.” Thirdly ; those who practised these crimes were endeavouring, by various practices, to draw in others to be partakers with them : “ Be not ye partakers with them. Let no man deceive you with vain words : have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.” This was the state and character of the times. This was the situation of the persons whom St. Paul so earnestly admonishes. And in similar situations, the like admonitions

will be always necessary. For I take upon me to say, that whensoever any licentious practice becomes common in the country, palliatives and excuses, salvos and subterfuges, will never be wanting to draw in and encourage the timid and apprehensive who are entering upon such courses, as well as to fortify and to harden those who are actually and deeply engaged in them; that there will always be found, as I said before, deceivers; and likewise persons very willing, not to say desirous, to be deceived; that, as it was in St. Paul's time, so since, so now, so hereafter, it will be the case, that those who give a loose to such practices will endeavour by many vain words, by various forced and futile reasons, both to make themselves as easy as they can in the course which they are following, and to bring others, first to relax in their own condemnation of such examples, and then to imitate them. When this once happens (and it happens to all of us), that is the very case in which we ought to recollect St. Paul's powerful warning, delivered under circumstances perfectly similar to those which we experience—" *Let no man deceive you with vain words;*" with artful salvos and subterfuges, with contrived excuses and extenuations; for the solemn truth remains, and so you will find it to be, that "because of these things, cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience."

## XLIII.

## FORNICATION.

(PART I.)

HEB. XIII. 4.

*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled ;  
but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*

IN treating of the crime of whoredom, thus solemnly rebuked in these words, I shall simply mention to you the mischiefs attending it, and the severe declarations of Scripture against it ; and then leave it to yourselves to judge whether the allowing ourselves in this practice can be consistent with the hopes of getting to heaven at the last.

Now, I maintain, that whoredom is destructive to the public, destructive to the person joined with us in the crime, and destructive to ourselves. It destroys the public in this way : if there be one thing more than another of consequence to the public morality, it is the encouraging and keeping up of family connexion ; for without families, what would become of the world ? The business of it could not be carried on ; there would be little private comfort ; there would be no industry or regularity in the country ; children could not be brought up with any tolerable care, or sent into the world to do any good in it. But more need not be said ; for every man that reflects a moment must per-



ceive that it is morally impossible to keep up any peace, quietness, happiness, or order amongst mankind, without families ; and as a proof of it, marriage institutions, of some kind of other, obtain, as far as I know, in every quarter and country of the world : a plain proof that men are convinced it is absolutely necessary for the common good.

Now whoredom and fornication are sure to hinder and discourage marriage, for if people are restrained from the unlawful indulgence of the passions, nature herself will take care to point out to them what is lawful ; and marriage will be more or less frequent and happy, according as men are tied down from loose and irregular gratifications. I am aware what you will answer—that this may be a consideration of consequence upon the whole, but that in a single person's case, the harm a single person can do to the whole community in this respect is but a trifle, scarcely to be perceived. To which I answer, that you may say this almost of any crime : it is not a vast or very sensible mischief that any one man, however wicked, can do to the public at large ; but you will please to remember withal, that if the mischief you do is but a trifle with respect to the public happiness, the punishment you suffer for it hereafter is but a trifle with respect to the public misery ; the one is proportionable to the other, though but inconsiderable with respect to the whole ; it may be enough to destroy you, who in the same view are also inconsiderable. But the proper answer to this, which is a very common way of talking and thinking, is this : What would be the consequence if every one were to argue so ? I allow myself in this, which I own in the general practice to be wrong and hurtful, because my single case can make but small difference. Another

has the same reason to say so that you have ; and so if this excuse is to be allowed in one instance, there is nothing left but to allow the sanction to every one that pleases ; that is, to make an end at once of all morality and religion in the world.

But secondly ; whoredom, I contend, is mischievous in the highest degree possible to the partner of our guilt, the person concerned with us in it. I desire to draw your attention to this point. Imagine a wife, a daughter, a sister of your own, to be the person seduced and corrupted ; you cannot conceive a heavier misfortune, an affliction or disgrace that can equal it. What shame, confusion, and misery in a family ! how is a happy and united house thrown into a scene of bitterness, anguish, and reproach ! What think you of the author of this misery ? Is there no guilt in his behaviour ? Is there no punishment due to it—to be expected for it—from a just and righteous God ? He may have got out of the way, and does not see or know all the misery he has occasioned ; but does that make it less, or extenuate his offence ? I am free to say, that if we compute crimes by the unhappiness and distress they knowingly occasion (and I know no better method of computing), not half the offences for which men suffer death by the law are so guilty as this of seducing and corrupting a young person to her ruin. The loss of money or property is nothing to it. Now, I may say, whoredom always begins or ends with this. It too often begins with this ; or otherwise profligate young men who have already debauched and corrupted themselves in the world become the authors of this mischief and calamity to others.

Thirdly ; it is mischievous also to the offender himself, and in this way : it draws down the mind from all

sense of religion, and by degrees loosens and wears away all the good principles that were in a man. There are some points, which when well passed, all is over with a man; and this seems to be one of those points. When a man has once been brought to allow himself in habitual whoredom and uncleanness, generally speaking, it is all over with him. As to his religious principles, he will soon, if I am not mistaken, find a change himself in this respect, which he will be surprised at; that is, many things which before seemed shocking and abominable to him become so familiar and accustomed to his thoughts as to be made light of: all spiritual meditation and reflection, all religion, and the hopes of it, are laid aside when a man has given himself up entirely to this vice; indeed, he is neither fit for such thoughts, nor has any relish for them; his thoughts and his relish are taken up with something else, from which he finds it impossible to lift or disengage himself. I am saying no more than what I believe fact and observation will easily testify. There are scarce any who give themselves up habitually to this vice who retain any sense of their various obligations, or live in the fear of God in other instances. It has a more immediate tendency, I think, than any other vice to create a disregard to all other breaches of the law, and to occasion a total neglect of duty. The duties of devotion—those particularly relating to the Deity—suffer especially by this practice, which clouds the understanding, corrupts the will, debases the affections, and indisposes the whole man for devotion and any proper service of God. It usually occasions all kinds of sins, and prevents the repentance of any. We need not go far to seek for the causes of this effect: one may be, that as there can be no peace but by reconciling, somehow or other, their practice with their principles, they who will not conform

themselves to the purity required by the Gospel, are forced, as it were, to conform their notions to their own impure conversation, and either at once to have done with the belief of Christianity, or, what is more easy and common, to stifle the remembrance of it. These are the consequences of whoredom to the public at large, to the partner of our crime in particular, and upon ourselves: and I do not know that I have exaggerated them, or put down any which are not true.

I proceed, in the next place, to set before you some of those declarations against it which are to be found in Scripture. I could produce a great deal out of the Book of Proverbs, from the Book of Wisdom, and the prophets, but I shall confine myself to what Christ and his apostles have said, as being of the higher authority with us, and that according to which we shall be judged. "Out of the heart," says our Saviour himself, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man." This is what our Saviour himself says; and one word from him decides the point. You will observe also with what company fornication is classed—with murders, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. I do not mean that these crimes are all to be reckoned equal, because they are all mentioned together; but it proves that they all are crimes. The Apostles are more full; and for this reason, that they had to do with the heathens, who made very light of this crime. Saint Peter enforces the duty of chastity upon the new Christians in the following very strong terms: "Dearly beloved," says he in his first epistle, "I beseech you as pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." And again, in his second epistle: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be

punished ; but chiefly them that walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness.” These are very plain and affecting words : “ the Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished ; but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness.” Saint Paul also has treated this subject very largely ; as indeed he had occasion, being that to which the people he wrote to were before their conversion much addicted : “ but fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh saints.” Saint Paul shows here very plainly his sense of the heinousness of this vice. He not only says, let it not be practised, but “ not once *named* amongst you, as becometh saints.”—This to the Ephesians. To the Corinthians he sets forth the guilt of this vice in this way : “ Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” And that the *defiling* here spoken of is intended of fornication is pretty plain from what he says more fully in the sixth chapter of his epistle—“ Flee fornication ; every sin that a man doth is without the body ; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body in the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God ; and ye are not your own.”

I do not want to explain the argument here used by Saint Paul, or all the expressions contained in it ; because I produce it only to show what it says without any explanation—that Saint Paul condemned fornication as absolutely and peculiarly inconsistent with the Christian profession. In his Epistle to the Colossians (for I think there is hardly one of his epistles which does not take notice, more or less, of this), he charges

them as follows : “ Mortify your members which are upon the earth ; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence ; for which things’ sake,” he adds, “ the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience.” *For which things’ sake* ; that is, for the sake of fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence. This is a very awakening rebuke to these vices ; we find that they call down upon them the wrath of God. Once more also, in his Epistle to the Thessalonians : “ This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” Had the Apostle stopped here, he had told us every thing we wanted of the will of God. “ This is the will of God ; and to know that will and do it is the whole of our business here :” but he proceeds, “ that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel (namely, his own body) in sanctification and honour : not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles, which know not God ; for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” There are two very remarkable passages to our purpose in the Revelation of St. John, in which you cannot fail to take notice both of the terrible sentence denounced against fornication amongst some other crimes, and also with what other crimes it is classed : “ The fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.” And again, speaking of those who shall be excluded from the divine presence, he says : “ Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” The words of the text I reserve for the conclusion, because it is both positive, and withal so short as to be easily carried in

memory. It is in the thirteenth chapter of Hebrews and the fourth verse : “ Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled ; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

I shall make no sort of remark on what has been said, but this one ; that if you are satisfied, partly from the harm it does, but principally from these places of Scripture, that whoredom is really contrary to the will of God, and will draw down his wrath upon it, it matters not how light the world may in general make of it ; because it is by the rules of Scripture and reason that we shall be judged at last, and not by the opinion of the world.

## XLIV.

## FORNICATION.

(PART II.)

HEBREWS XIII. 4.

*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled ;  
but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*

I HAVE in a former discourse set forth the effects of lewdness as we see them in this world ; and also the consequences that we are to expect to ourselves in the next world, if the threats and declarations of Scripture are to be depended on. I made no other observation upon these effects or these declarations than simply this—that if we saw reason to believe from either of them, or both of them together, that a course of unlawful lewdness was inconsistent with our hopes of salvation, not to suffer ourselves to be led away by the opinion of the world, or expect that these things would pass for trifles hereafter, because they are amongst many accounted trifles here. If, then, this be a vice of that serious nature, and which may have such serious effects upon our everlasting condition, the next great consideration will be, what are the proper preservatives and precautions against it.

Indeed the whole subject of the preservation of virtue is vastly too much neglected, in other circumstances, as well as this. A virtuous and vicious character does not so much consist in one or two, or a few single acts of virtue, or of vice, but in such a plan and rule and



habit of living, as is suited to promote the one and guard against the other. I allow that the greater part live without any such plan, rule, or habit; and what is the effect? They commit themselves to every situation that presents itself, without reserve, fear, or caution; and they trust that if a temptation to vice assault them, they shall find firmness and reflection enough in themselves at the time to guard against it; and upon the strength of that persuasion, they either lay themselves out for such situations as furnish temptation and opportunities of vice, and are inviting on that account; or they enter heedlessly into such situations; or they fancy the time for exercising their morality is not yet come; as yet there is no harm; and when they fall, as they are almost sure to do, into the snares, why then, "they were surprised and taken off their guard—they were overpowered by allurements which no one could resist—the reason they depended upon was perhaps grown dark—the resolutions, which were so stedfast and unconquerable, melted away like snow before the fire; and he surely, who knows whereof we are made, will condescend to excuse the passions which he himself has implanted, and not condemn with severity our fall, which no human fortitude could prevent." In which train of thinking the error is, that we do not carry back our minds to that which composes, perhaps, the greatest part of our offence—our leading ourselves into temptation, our either seeking it or suffering ourselves to be drawn into it, or falling upon such a course of life as exposes us to it; which we might have prevented, and which surely we had powers enough to have withstood. "But surely this delusion can happen but once. A man may be once drawn in, and entangled for want of experience; but he will escape,

when he does escape, like a bird out of the hand of the fowler, not to return, one would think, to the snare. Just the contrary is the fact. The same process is renewed—the same often dangerous situation or heedlessness about entering into it—the same weakness in yielding; and the same excuses and palliations will be no longer necessary; till a confirmed habit of vice be formed, “when we work uncleanness,” as the Apostle expresses it, “with greediness,” and without any further molestation from the rebukes or checks of conscience.

Having said thus much upon the necessity of looking after the preservation of our virtue in time, and laying out such a plan of life as may best keep us from temptation, and fortify us against it, I now proceed to propose what appear to me the most effectual preservatives against the sins of lewdness, which of all others most easily and most violently beset us during the early and best part of human life; and these are, employment, temperance, choice of company, and the regulation of the thoughts.

The first precaution against those vices is constant employment. There are few who can *bear* leisure; that is, whom leisure does not lead into vicious attachments. When a man looks about him, and finds nothing for him to do, all his evil thoughts and propensities are directly setting themselves to work; and when once the attention has got hold of any criminal indulgence, it is not easily set loose. Resolutions against these serve only to rivet the thoughts the faster upon our minds, and there are few who can hold out against the continual teasing of such thoughts. The only way was, at first, to have kept our attention better employed; and it is still the only way, to convert it to something else. This account is confirmed by observation. I do

not say that the active and the diligent are always free from these vices, for a man may be vicious, in spite of every thing; but I think you will find few exceptions to the remark, that the idle are generally dissolute—that those who have no business, or do not take to their business, are commonly a nuisance to the neighbourhood they live in, in this very respect. Let those, then, who are to live by their labour or business, receive this additional reason for sticking close to their occupation—that they can hardly fail of success, or of a comfortable livelihood however—that they make their employment, by sticking to it, easy, which otherwise is sure to become irksome and fretting. Besides both these reasons, they are taking the most reasonable method, and perhaps the only one, of passing their time innocently here upon earth, and procuring thereby the happiness they look for hereafter. As to those who have no employment, they have great reason to lament the want of one as a misfortune, if it was only on the account above-mentioned; but a man must be very low in understanding, as well as left very short in his education, who cannot contrive some method of bestowing his activity and thoughts which may procure him advantage or credit, or at least an innocent amusement, as well as make him of some service to the neighbourhood he lives in.

The next safeguard against the vices of lewdness is temperance, especially in drinking. Was drunkenness nothing more than a brutality for the time, every one who had a concern for his duty would avoid it; but the mischief is seldom over so soon. The consequences are too often fatal to virtue in another respect—not only to the drunken man's, if he had any, but to the virtue of some poor sufferer who falls in his way.

Drunkenness, in reality, both inflames men's passions, and confounds and deadens the reason and reflection, and every principle that can restrain them ; so that it always destroys the balance, as one may say, which was intended in the human constitution : and if men of the best and ablest sort can scarcely control their passions, it is not expected they should retain much command over them when such an advantage is thrown into the wrong scale. Now if to these you add a notion, which men in general take up, that drunkenness is an excuse for what men do in that condition, and which notion in effect amounts to this—that when men find themselves drunk, they are at liberty to do what they please : if you lay all these considerations together, it cannot, I think, be reasonably supposed that men will preserve a constant regard to morality and religion in the government of their natural passions, who do not lay a restraint upon themselves in the article of drunkenness.

The next great point to be attended to by those who are anxious for the preservation of this virtue from the allurements of criminal pleasures, is the choice of company. Companions, however they differ in other respects, commonly resemble one another in their vices. The influence of a good man's example may not possibly be always able to make those who associate and converse with him good ; but the contagion of a vicious man's life will seldom fail to infect and draw in all who keep him company : and the reason is, it is in one case against the stream, in the other case with it—in the one case, the example has to combat with our natural propensities—in the other case, it aids and assists them. Nothing so soon and so effectually wears off that horror and shrinking back of the mind from any vicious actions, with which good education and good principles have in-

spired us, as the practices of our companions. We are astonished at first to hear with how much ease they speak of those things which we have been taught to shudder at, and with how little reluctance and regret they practise them : but our surprise by degrees wears off. We begin to think there cannot be all the danger or guilt in those indulgences which we supposed : we then insensibly gather courage ; and as we set not up for singularity, or a superior standard of virtue, we do not understand how that should be so heinous an offence in us, which others allow to themselves without concern or remorse. Thus are our sentiments insensibly changed ; and yet the nature of things is not thereby changed. What *was* immoral, and profligate, and destructive of the happiness of human society, and contrary to God Almighty's commands, and under the sentence of condemnation in his Word which he has revealed to us, is so still. Nor are the consequences less likely to overtake us because we have forgotten them. Another thing, which vastly increases the baneful influence of dissolute company, and renders us, as some may suppose, almost excusable, is a certain shyness in some men, which will seldom allow them to make much opposition to the solicitations and example of their companions, how contrary soever to their own choice and judgement, if they had been permitted to choose and judge for themselves : and then there is generally, in addition to all this, the fear of ridicule, which to the tenderness and sensibility of young minds is like the fear of death. And the misfortune is, they make no distinction—their being laughed at, whether with reason or without, is equally insupportable ; and especially when these scruples look like want of spirit, or their companions give that turn or that name to it ; though, in truth, it is want of

spirit, and nothing else, that keeps them in such company; for what, in reality, can be more mean-spirited than to be led in a state of subjection to those about us, without choice, force, or judgement of our own; and to be compelled, for it is compulsion, to give up our consciences, principles, and resolution?

I mention this, not so much to fortify young men against the influence of bad company (for I have little hopes of that) but to advise them to keep out of their way—to be wary and cautious how they trust themselves in the society, much less with the intimacy, of a dissolute character.

The last and great preservative I shall mention is the regulation of the thoughts. “Whosoever,” says our Saviour, “looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already with her in his heart;” that is, whoever voluntarily entertains loose and bad thoughts and designs, makes himself in a degree a partaker of the crime, so that our Saviour imposed it as a duty upon his followers to lay a restraint upon their thoughts; and our Saviour knew what was in man when he did so—he knew that, without a proper control and regulation of our thoughts, it is in vain to expect virtue in our practice; for licentious thoughts will, earlier or later, according as opportunities present themselves, or we grow tired of struggling with them, lead to licentious practices. I have already mentioned the way of managing our thoughts, that is, by keeping them constantly employed upon some proper object; and I believe there is no other way.

These, then, are the precautions which, with the blessing and assistance of divine grace, are most fitting to conduct us through this world, and in a debauched and licentious age of it, with innocence in that re-

spect, in which of all others there is the most danger, and by which men are drawn into such confirmed habits of universal profligacy as are dreadful to observe.

Men are perpetually complaining that they resolve against these vices, but that their resolutions, in the time of trial, never stand out: and how should they? They have never used any of those cautions—put in practice any of those preservatives, which are absolutely necessary to keep up self-government, or a command over their passions, and to give stability and success to any resolutions. Their virtue does not take the alarm in time. They take up with an idle life: they see no harm in that, if they can afford it—or if they cannot, it is their own concern. Profaneness, drunkenness, unreasonable hours, are only so much frolic, which is over the next morning. They find out, or are found out, by dissolute companions. They are courted for their mirth, or vivacity, or humour, or entertaining qualities, without any care about the danger of the consequences. A habit of vicious thoughts is suffered to grow upon us, because, if it do not lead to a habit of acting, where is the mischief? And then all vice, or entry to vice, is laid open—every precaution neglected, every incentive excited or inflamed, and we are surprised that we are overcome.

## XLV.

## DISCONTENT.

1 TIM. VI. 6, 7, 8.

*Godliness with contentment is great gain—for we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out—and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.*

RESTLESSNESS and impatience in the situation of life they are placed in, is in some men a disposition, in others a habit ; in others, again, a false calculation of the advantages and disadvantages of different conditions. But it is in all a temper of mind extremely prejudicial to a man's happiness, as it will not suffer him to acquiesce in, or enjoy, the satisfactions which are within the reach of his present situation ; and is no mean whatever of procuring him a better. It has an ill effect upon his virtue ; as no man accommodates himself properly to the duties of a station with which he is discontented—which he is labouring only to get rid of. Although there may be no reflections, perhaps, which can compose the fretfulness of his disposition, or correct a confirmed habit of being out of humour with every thing that belongs to himself, and pleased with whatever he sees others possess ; yet where discontent proceeds, as it sometimes does, from mistaken notions of the happiness and misery of different conditions, a



little just reasoning and consideration may help to cure it.

Now what deceives most men in comparing their own situation with that of others, is this; that they are perfectly sensible of their own cares, their griefs and difficulties, the hardships and inconveniences of their own situation, and know little or nothing of those of others. A man's happiness or misery, so far, I mean, as it is affected by outward condition, depends almost always upon invisible circumstances—secret particulars which others are not acquainted with, and never suspect. Few can truly estimate the real circumstances in the condition of others, the evils and inconveniences they suffer; nor if they do, will they trouble themselves to confess what they believe.

Besides, evils are never known till they are passed; that is, there is such a difference between our judgement of the evils which we experience, and those which we are only told of, that the smallest of our own sufferings seems to outweigh the greatest we observe in others. Add to this, that such is also the infirmity or the perverseness of the human mind, that pain of all kind makes a much greater impression than pleasure—inconveniences than advantages—the irksome part of a man's condition, than the benefits and privileges of it. So that when we come to reflect on our own situation, the evil of it is always uppermost. Instead of taking the good and the bad together, and fairly balancing both sides of the account, we dwell, for example, upon the fatigue, or the confinement, or the humiliation, or the indigence, or other disadvantages of our condition, which are remembered distinctly, and with all their aggravations; whilst the comfort and advantages, the peace, quietness, and security and independence, the freedom from care and from danger, and many substantial

blessings we enjoy, we either forget, or overlook as familiar and inconsiderable, and so miss the common benefit of every situation.

Discontent, then, in fact is delusion. We see nothing but the outside, and fair side, of a man's condition ; we see not the secret of the real difficulties and inconveniences ; or if we hear their complaint, we do not feel their sufferings : whereas our own situation is understood to the bottom, the evils and hardships of it are all found out ; and not only so, but these evils and hardships perpetually return upon our thoughts, whilst the comforts which should balance them are left out of the comparison. With such prejudices, it is no wonder we form very false computations, and are betrayed, without reason, into complaint and injustice ; into a dislike of our own condition, and envy of other men's—into a restlessness and discontent, which confine our merit and damp our activity, and make us both uneasy in our condition and useless. That there is some very great deception in men's judgement of one another's happiness, and one another's station in life, is probable from two facts, which all moralists of all ages have taken notice of ; one is, that the man who is discontented in one situation is generally discontented in every other. This is a fair experiment—Suppose a man who is dissatisfied with his condition to be able to change it. Suppose him, if you will, advanced to the very station he coveted, and would have carved out for himself ; if you find this man from thenceforward easy and satisfied, his former uneasiness and impatience were not without foundation ; if, on the other hand, you find, that after the novelty of the change, and the first triumph of success is over, the man returns to his wonted ill-humour—that his discontent continues, though the

subject of it be altered—that new causes produce new complaints—that he still murmurs and still repines ;—if this be the case, it is a reasonable conclusion that the man was originally wrong in his calculation—deceived in his estimation of the happiness of a condition which he had not tried. And this so often is the case, that it furnishes good reason to suppose, that such deceptions are extremely common. The greater part of mankind get nothing by a change, but to regret advantages which they despised, or did not even perceive, whilst they possessed them ; and to discover new sources of anxiety and complaint.

Another fact of the same kind, and which I mention for the same purpose, is that the envy of mankind is commonly mutual ; I mean, that you shall meet with twenty persons who all envy the other's condition. Now they cannot all be right. The greatest part must necessarily be under a delusion, when they judge of their neighbour's happiness. This mutual envy is to be found amongst all orders and professions. The poor man envies the plenty, the appearance, and accommodation of the rich ; and sees them with envy, because he sees nothing else. He compares them with the fatigue he undergoes, with the scanty provision which his own condition affords. The pains and pressure of his own distress he feels, and can therefore judge of them ; the delight and pleasure of his rich neighbour's luxury he only imagines ; and ten to one he is deceived in his imagination, because he places to the account the pleasure that he himself should receive from it, which is very different from what the possessor actually receives. The rich man, in return, when he observes the health and activity, the cheerful countenance and vigorous spirits of the labourer whom he

employs, his continual occupation and sound rest, and compares it with his own languor and listlessness ; when he reflects how burthensome his time and thoughts are, when he reflects upon his tedious days and wakeful nights—when he takes this view of his own condition, he repines at the superior lot of those whose humble but active station supplies them with employment, and exempts them from care.

Stations of peril and enterprise are generally envied by those who are tired with the slow progress of their fortunes ; while such men, in their turn, regret the situations they have left, or lament that they ever exchanged the plain path of patient industry for scenes of adventure and uncertainty. And all such mutual discontents are governed by the same mistake—each man forgets his own advantages, and magnifies those of others : each party is impatient under his own sufferings, and ignorant of those of his neighbours. Generally speaking, we cannot employ our time or thoughts worse than in comparing our own condition with that of others. For the most part, the fewer of these comparisons we make, the better. Indeed, when the mind is in health, as we may say, when the spirits and temper are properly composed, we seldom concern ourselves with them at all ; yet if we will make such comparisons, it is of consequence that we make them truly. This we can never do, till we learn to allow a great deal for the intimate knowledge we have of our own condition, and the imperfect judgement we can form of other men's—for there is a wide difference between observing an evil or inconvenience in others, and coming actually to experience it ourselves—and lastly, for our imperfect enjoyment of pleasures which are new and unexperienced.

Secondly ; the best remedy for discontent is, to learn to attend to those blessings which we enjoy in common perhaps with the rest, or with the generality of mankind—instead of looking for other exclusive or particular privileges which some men possess beyond or above others. A blessing is in reality not the less valuable because others possess it as well as ourselves ; and yet it requires some generosity of temper to see this. It is for the want or defect of this temper that the love of God obtains so little in the heart of man—that there is so much less gratitude towards Him than might be expected from reasonable creatures to such a benefactor. Health and liberty, the perfect enjoyment of our limbs and reason, the use of our understanding and the faculties of our mind, are blessings beyond all price ; yet because others possess them as well as ourselves, because they are only common to us with almost every man we meet, they are seldom in our thoughts—seldom subjects either of satisfaction to ourselves, or of gratitude to God. Not one man in ten reflects from whom he receives these blessings, or continues to receive them. If we are not indulged with riches and honours, and high stations, with the means and knowledge of luxury and show ; unless we are distinguished by those favours which, from the nature of them, must be confined to a few, we can see nothing in our own condition to be thankful for. Could this narrowness of mind be once so far got rid of, as to allow us to estimate the blessings we enjoy according as they are in themselves, and not by the comparison with others, there are few who might not find enough in their condition to excite sentiments of complacency and content, certainly of gratitude towards God.

Discontent, considered in a religious view, besides

that it indisposes us for the duties of our station, by making us lazy or careless about them—besides that it sometimes puts men upon advancing themselves by unjust or forcible means—is utterly inconsistent with a religious temper of mind. It destroys, as we have already said, the love and gratitude we owe to God. It is not to be expected that men should be, nor is it found in fact that they are, capable of much affection towards God, whilst they are discontented with the condition in which he has placed them. When we confer favours, if, instead of observing satisfaction and gratitude in the person obliged, we meet with nothing but impatience, complaint, and discontent, we are naturally and justly offended with such obstinacy of temper: nor do I know any reason why the same temper should not be offensive to God, especially when it is considered that the favours we are able to confer upon one another bear no proportion to those which God has bestowed upon us all.

Discontent, again, argues too great a fondness for the world and for the concerns and advantages of it: a fondness, I mean, greater than is consistent with our expectations and pursuits of a better. Were this world a man's all, it would be difficult to offer any considerations that could abate his passion for it, alleviate his disappointment, or soothe his complaints: but when another, and a better existence, and of longer duration, is held out to us, such a prospect is calculated, one would think, to moderate our attachment to the present, and our solicitude and concern about it. The differences and distinctions of human life, which so much affect and perplex us when placed beside this great object, appear what they are, too diminutive to provoke our jealousy or discontent. For these two

reasons, contentment in us Christians appears to be our duty as well as our happiness, and as such, is enjoined by St. Paul: "having food and raiment," he writes to Timothy, "let us be therewith content;" and to the Hebrews he commands, "be content with such things as ye have." But above all precepts does he recommend this virtue by his own example: "I have learnt," says he, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." There is something very great and affecting in these words, and quite of a piece with that fortitude and firmness of mind which distinguished St. Paul's character upon all occasions.

From what has been said, then, it appears that when we repine at our own condition, and covet other men's, we, for the most part, impose upon ourselves—that we are the dupes of a delusion—natural enough, no doubt, but of which a proper exertion of judgement and reflection will get the better; that when we indulge this fretful, discontented, dissatisfied humour, we cherish a narrow-mindedness, which overlooks the many and great blessings we enjoy, because in common perhaps with most others, in order to torment ourselves with the thought of some fewer, some single advantage which is denied to us;—that this frame of mind is both extremely unfavourable to all sense of affection and gratitude to God Almighty, and also too much binds down our souls to this world, and prevents any due preparation for, and progress to another.

## XLVI.

## SUICIDE.

2 SAM. 17. 23.

*And when Achitophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and got him home to his house, to his city, and put his house in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.*

THE crime of suicide prevailing amongst us beyond the example of any other Christian age or country, and the lawfulness of it being maintained, as it is said, by many, it becomes high time to look into the question, to see whether this practice is, or is not, forbidden to the Christian moralist.

I set out with observing, that to those who regard death as the termination of their being, this question becomes a mere computation of interest, a single comparison of the evils of life with its advantages; and according as one or the other shall appear to preponderate, a wise man will relinquish his existence or preserve it. In which estimate, however, we shall do well to remember that the prospect of many evils is worse than the presence; that though circumstances change not, we shall; that time may dissolve those associations which torment us; that habit accommodates the temper to every variety of situation, and, as the dilated eye discovers glimmerings of light amidst the thickest



darkness, so the mind inured to misfortune finds alleviation and comfort in the most desperate condition.

But to those who look for a future day of retribution and account, the lawfulness of suicide becomes a question of a very different nature. The self-murderer, though he fears not him that killeth the body, and after that can do no more, has the same reason with others to fear Him who casteth soul and body into hell-fire. And here I would premise, but without the least distrust of my argument, that should the guilt of suicide turn out at last to be a matter of doubt only, we are bound by that very doubt to abstain from it. There can be no question but that we may, if we will, lawfully continue in existence: there is a question whether we may lawfully quit it. It is a contempt of authority to incur even the danger of disobedience, when a safe and certain choice is in our power. Besides that, the action in this case would want that entire acquiescence and approbation of conscience, which should accompany every important step of a good man's conduct. For he who can overrule the scruples of his conscience will soon learn to reject its decisions. I am the more confirmed in this position, as I take the case of a hesitating conscience to have been thus, and in an instance of much less importance, adjudged by St. Paul—"He that doubteth," saith the apostle, "is damned if he eat; because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith," that is, not done with a full persuasion of the lawfulness of it, "is sin." This caution applies with especial force to the case of suicide; a sin, if it be one, which cuts off all place of reparation and repentance.

We now proceed to the inquiry itself, whether a

man possesses such a right over his own life and person, that he may lawfully destroy them at his pleasure.

To ask then, what is our duty in any instance, is to ask what the will of God is in that instance. Now the will of God, as of every other intelligent being, must be learnt upon any point, from his express declarations where they can be had; or, where these are silent, from his general character and disposition; from the aim and analogy of his laws and conduct in other instances. We will begin with this latter inquiry, and see how the question stands, upon the foot of reason and natural religion.

First then, the divine will is intimated by that eager and instinctive love of life, which prevails without exception through the whole animal creation. There are who think this love of life to be nothing more than what results from a sense and experience of the pleasures it affords; and to those who think so, this argument has no weight. Many, on the other hand, observe a violence and intensity in this passion, beyond what they deem either the value of life or the pains of death could on their own account create. To such there will appear a separate and original principle superadded for this special purpose, to retain men in existence, when disgust or despair would drive them out of it. And considered in this light, it becomes a proof of God's intention, that we should preserve our lives; and consequently, of his displeasure against those who wilfully and wantonly destroy them.

Secondly; he, who puts it out of his power do his duty, refuses to do it: and who is there so disengaged and unconnected, as to have no duty or demand upon him? Who is there that owes not to some relation or

other, industry or obedience, piety or gratitude, justice or restitution, instruction, counsel, protection, or support? All which obligations are at once violated and forsaken by this single act of suicide. Or, if a situation so singular can be supposed, that all private claims upon our service are satisfied or ceased, I would then ask, what condition can be so abject or so useless, but that "by a patient continuance in well doing," by the exercise of those virtues which fall within our reach, we may hope to improve our merit here, and, of consequence, our proportion of happiness hereafter?

Thirdly; another way of determining whether an action be virtuous, innocent, or criminal, is to see whether the effects of it are beneficial, indifferent, or pernicious to the happiness of human society; which happiness, from the manifold provision he has made for it, appears to be the purpose of God Almighty's will: the end, therefore, and aim of all his laws, and, by consequence, the measure and standard of our duty. Now in this way of reasoning, it is material to remember, that it is not the particular consequence of any individual action which alone determines its moral quality; but the tendency and operation of that general rule, by which actions of the same sort are permitted or forbidden. I will explain myself by an example. Murder in certain instances may produce no immediate or particular mischief to the community: it may deliver a nation from tyranny, or a neighbourhood from oppression; it may transfer power and property to better hands and better uses. But when we reflect that we cannot permit one action and forbid another, without assigning some distinction between them; that the same rule, therefore, which permits this, must permit every assassin to fall upon each man he meets,

whom he thinks useless or noxious ; that the allowance of such a rule would overthrow the best end of society, the security of its citizens ; commit each man to the spleen, fury, or fanaticism of his neighbour, and fill all things with terror and confusion ;—when we reflect upon this, we see, that the present benefit of the action is outweighed by that more important ruin which the admission or impunity of so fatal an example would at length produce. Whatever, therefore, we may think of its particular consequences, we condemn it to sustain a general rule ; which will not endure an arbitrary exception, and which cannot be laid aside without a general injury.

Whatever is expedient is right—whatever is indifferent is innocent. But then it must be expedient or indifferent upon the whole, in all its collateral and remote effects. The same attention to equal and general rules ; the same study of uniformity, which prevails in every code of human jurisprudence, takes place for the same reason in the moral system also, and government of the universe. To apply this reasoning upon the twofold consequences of our actions, to the question before us—Suicide has much to answer for of both. Nor can any case be put, which is not concluded under sin, either by the peculiar injury, or the general mischief : the tears and cries of our unpitied relatives—the confusion and agony of those we leave behind—the loss which may never be forgotten or repaired—the ignominy of our fate, which stings to the heart, and which is derived to all our connexions,—are consequences of self-murder, which cannot be mentioned or thought upon with patience. What must be the stubborn cruelty of his mind who can despise, and in his last hour disregard, the affliction and disgrace of all he loves,

whom no compassion, friendship or affection—whom neither the tender ties of family and kindred, nor the dearer names of wife and child, can withhold from the fierce and sullen purpose of his soul? The thief, the plunderer, and the rebel, inflict not any calamity on a stranger or an enemy, which can be compared with that which the self-murderer brings down on those of his own household, and his own blood. But though no duty were deserted, no claim defrauded, no friend or family afflicted by our death, no orphans abandoned, and no widows to make lamentation; yet, if it be once admitted, that whoever is weary of life, and has rendered, or can suppose, himself useless to others, is for that reason at liberty to quit it,—what have we not to fear, where the accumulating of riches in the few produces the want of a sufficiency in many; where early habits of luxury and refinement have multiplied desires and disappointments; where voluptuousness and sensuality have drained the sources, and worn away all sense of natural pleasures; where the permanent satisfactions of the heart and understanding are unknown, or extinguished by more gross pursuits; where the spirits, convulsed by passion, by turbulent and impetuous exertions, have lost their natural tension and composure; where religion, the appointed medicine of human woes, is converted by our vices and mistakes into an object of terror and aversion. In circumstances like these (connected perhaps with other more physical causes), if ever a time should come when public opinion and numerous examples shall authorize this crime, what havoc may we not expect; what desolation of the species, from spleen, impatience, melancholy, and despair?

These are the arguments, which reason hold forth

against the lawfulness of suicide; and combined together (as in every probable question the arguments on each side ought to be), amount to such a presumption of God Almighty's will, as should stagger the most determined purpose of destruction.

We next inquire, what may be added to this presumption from the light of revelation.

And here I meet an objection which asks why, if suicide be indeed unlawful, we do not find it more expressly forbidden in the Christian Scriptures?

In the first place, our Saviour's own precepts, if we except that set discourse, which is chiefly taken up in rectifying the perversions, and improving the purity of the Jewish law, are, for the most part, occasional, arising out of some present occurrence, or alluding to some special instance—a method of instruction, for conciseness, perspicuity, and impression, of all others perhaps the most convenient. As no example, therefore, of self-murder is recorded to have fallen within his notice, we are not to wonder that he has left us no observation upon the guilt of it. The morality of the Apostolic writings is contained either in summary catalogues of virtues and vices under their most general denominations, or in certain series of brief independent maxims, pointed, perhaps, sometimes at the particular exigencies or corruption of those to whom they were addressed. Amongst these, it is no more extraordinary that a particular species of murder should be omitted, than that the duties of friendship, the rights of self-defence, the extent of gratitude, the limits of civil or parental authority, are nowhere ascertained. A systematic detail of morality, pursued through all the subdivisions of our duty, is not given. The most beautiful and perfect general rules were laid down, and

men are left for the application of them to the deductions of reason, and the dictates of humanity. What goes a great way towards accounting for the silence of Scripture upon this crime, is, that it does not appear to have prevailed in any great degree amongst those with whom the Scriptures had to do. But four instances are recorded in the Old, and one in the New Testament, of any thing like self-murder; and these, surely, of a kind which can do no credit to the cause—of a rejected favourite, a fallen tyrant, and a perfidious traitor. The Jews are known to have held this vice in the utmost abhorrence, and to have prosecuted the remains of a self-murderer with all the indignities which their law assigned to the worst of malefactors—a circumstance sufficient to show, that the public opinion in this instance was right, and therefore needed no new lesson from the Christian teacher. Admitting, therefore, that the Scriptures had not condemned this crime in so many terms, let us see what can be gathered from them concerning it, by fair implication and construction.

First, then, occurs to our observation the commandment itself, “Thou shalt do no murder.” Who shall say, what the Scriptures have not said, that a prohibition, delivered in terms so absolute and comprehensive, is not meant to include the murder of ourselves; especially, when reasons of public utility, the best interpreter of moral precepts, require that it should? All other exceptions to this rule, the rights, namely, of the magistrate and the soldier, are expressly recognized or clearly allowed; whereas we are repeatedly commanded to abstain from the life of man, without one saving clause in favour of this assumed dominion over our own. When God commits to mankind a right

over the lives of brutes, he expressly reserves out of the grant any authority over the life of man—"For in the image of God," says the Almighty, "made he man:" an expression which, whatever it imports, stamps a superior dignity and estimation on the human species, and contains a reason for the prohibition, which, whatever it be, prevails alike against the killing of ourselves and others.

Secondly; human life, throughout the Scriptures, is every where spoken of as a stated period,—as a race that is set before us,—as a course to be finished,—as a fight that must be fought—descriptions, which could hardly have dropped from the pen of those who considered life, and the duration of it, as in our power, and at our disposal. It is absurd to command us to "persevere unto the end," if the end be determinable by our own choice,—to bid us "not be weary of well doing," if we may cease from it at pleasure.

Thirdly; the passions, temper, and motives, which give birth to suicide, contradict the spirit and principles of our religion. Affliction and calamity, considered in the view under which Christianity exhibits them, are either subservient to the exercise and improvement of our virtue, or swallowed up in the expectation of immortality and heaven. Complain to the disciple of Jesus of the sufferings of life, he tells us, that they are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. Are we overwhelmed with tribulation and distress, he teacheth us that tribulation worketh patience, and patience virtue; that the severities of Providence are the corrections of a parent,—pledges of his care,—and tokens of his love. Now it seems impossible, that a mind possessed in any sort of this persuasion should so far sink under, or repine at the



misery of its condition, as to be driven to this last act of discontentment and distrust. If suicide be lawful, what is the exceeding great use or excellence of patience, that it should obtain a place amongst the foremost duties of the Christian profession? In vain are we exhorted to take up the example and the cross of Christ,—to look forward unto Jesus, the finisher of our faith,—to rejoice, inasmuch as we are made partakers of his sufferings,—to endure the chastisement of the Lord, and not to faint, when we are rebuked of him,—to struggle, in a word, through all the dangers and difficulties of life, if we may take refuge at once in a voluntary death. The accidental temper in which a man dies does not determine his fate, any further than as it is the effect or indication of more established principles. But that death can never be safe which proceeds from a total want or decay of those principles, which it was the first care of Christianity to inculcate.

Fourthly; it does not appear that any of the first disciples of Christ did, in fact, ever admit this crime amongst them, though provoked to it by the most extreme and intolerable sufferings. As far as relates to this life, they were, both by their history and confession, of all men the most miserable. If they had conceived themselves at liberty to choose under these circumstances, it is extraordinary that they should all have preferred life, when they universally professed and believed that to be with Christ was life, and to die was gain. I rest it here.

One argument, however, which rises from our reasoning against suicide, deserves an answer.

As a man cannot give what he has not,—if he has no right over his own life, how can he transfer that right to another? and how, then, can any state derive, from

any implied and social compact with its citizens, that right which it claims and exercises of punishing by death? I answer, that the state derives this right, not from any secret or supposed consent of the subject, but immediately from God. I mean, from that presumption upon God Almighty's concurrence with every necessary means of upholding society; upon which presumption, the whole right and obligation of civil authority relies. This power in private hands, and in the hands of the magistrate, has very opposite effects upon the general welfare. For the same reasons, therefore, of public utility, God has delegated it to the one, and denied it to the other.

These reasons may be sufficient to evince the unlawfulness of suicide, considered in a general sense, when it is wanton and unprovoked,—when it is called in to put a period to a life made miserable by our crimes.

But is there no exception or excuse for those who flee for refuge to the grave from the injuries of fortune, or the never-ceasing anguish of a wounded mind? If self-murder be unlawful, these reasons afford only the same excuse for it, that any violent temptation does for the sin it prompts us to commit,—that want does for theft, thirst for drunkenness, or revenge for murder. We know that the sufferings of life may be aggravated beyond the ordinary patience of human nature; we know, too, that there is born with some men, and generated in others, a certain horror and dejection of spirits, which spreads a dismal shade over the fairest scenes, and fills our evil days with sorrow and disconsolation. But we will not allow that this is either insupportable or incurable. We mistake the remedy: let them cease to expect it from riot and excess, which serve only to stupify the feelings, while they exasperate the malady.

Let them try what temperance, soberness, and chastity will do,—the satisfaction of virtue, and the hopes of religion,—the exhilarating activity of some benevolent pursuit, or the triumph of successful struggles with our passions and ourselves. Lastly, let them resort to that gracious Being, who despises not the sighings of a contrite heart, nor the desire of such as be sorrowful,—who will relieve, and in his own good time reward, those sufferings with which, for some kind but mysterious purpose, it hath pleased him to visit us.

## XLVII.

## THE LAW OF HONOUR.

LUKE XVI. 15.

*For that which is highly esteemed amongst men is abomination in the sight of God.*

A CONSIDERABLE part of mankind, and those too of the higher orders of society, govern their conduct, so far as they do govern it at all, by the rule of reputation, or, as it is better known, by the name of the law of honour.

In the first place, I acknowledge that it is a great thing to act according to any rule: for, generally speaking, men fail not so much in the choice of their rule, as in not being able to act up to it. To obey every impulse of passion; to yield to any or every temptation; to catch at all opportunities of all sorts of pleasure with plan, prospect, and condition, is the lowest state of moral character. To proceed by some rule, to aim at some standard, to possess an authority over our conduct, and exercise our judgment at all, is the next state, and compared with the last, a state of improvement. To take for our guidance the rule of reason and the rule of Scripture, to inquire after it, to inform ourselves of it, to endeavour to understand it, and when we do understand it to conform our behaviour to it, is the perfection of moral excellence; and like perfection in every thing, seldom perhaps absolutely

and completely attained, but what we should always aim at, and gradually advance towards.

Again ; I would by no means decry or disparage the law of honour universally. It holds many to order, whom nothing else would. Part of mankind seem, in a great measure, incapable of reasoning about their duty, or inquiring for themselves. These must of necessity proceed a great deal by the rule of honour and reputation ; that is, in other words, by what they hear praised and esteemed by the persons they converse with. In a multitude of instances, the law of honour in all civilized countries (and we have no concern with any other on this subject) prescribes the same behaviour that reason and religion prescribe. Saint Paul himself, who had no extraordinary deference for human judgement in these matters, enjoins upon his followers whatever things are praise-worthy, whatever things are of good report ; which is a good general rule, though it may contain exceptions and defects.

Having premised thus much in behalf of the law of honour, and of those who go by it, and who challenge to themselves the character and title of men of honour, and who are certainly much to be preferred to those who go by no rule but present inclination ; I shall now proceed to show that the rule is not, alone, either safe or complete. By safe, I mean sure to conduct to future and final happiness ; by complete, I mean containing all the duties which are required of us by the will of our Creator.

It is not safe or complete, because it omits some duties, and tolerates some vices ; so that a person may be deemed and may be a man of honour, notwithstanding he neglects some necessary duties, and allows himself in some vices.

It is my business to make this appear. Now, as the motive and law of honour is calculated principally, if not wholly, to secure and make easy the intercourse between people of equal, or nearly equal condition in life, by regulating the behaviour of such as are governed by or resting upon fidelity, punctuality, civility; between such this may be the view and object of the rule. It prescribes duties only between equals, or those who account themselves such; omitting, as well that whole class of duties which relate immediately to the Deity, as those which we owe to our inferiors: and the reason of the omission is substantially this—that a man is not the worse companion, nor the worse to deal with, in those concerns which are usually transacted between persons of honour. Hence it comes to pass, that the profanation of God's name and attributes, of his religion, religious ordinances, and all the effect of passions, levity or infidelity, are no breaches of honour, nor accounted such, even by those who think them wrong. And if this be not a true account that I have given of the law of honour, that it is confined to the duties and offices between equals; we would desire to know how it happens that it is not the same as the law of God. At least, it is a demonstration that the law of Moses does not embrace the extent and compass of our duty; since there are points, such as those I have mentioned, relating to the Deity, which we acknowledge to be duties, though yet the violation of them is accounted no breach of the law of honour. The consequence of this is, that those who set up for persons of honour, and look no farther than to maintain the character of men of honour in the world, find no obligation or inducement to any of those duties which we owe immediately to God. They may allow the evil habits of

cursing and swearing to grow upon them and keep hold of them ; they may indulge themselves in the utmost licentiousness in the treatment of many things that belong to religion ; they may be as remiss and negligent as they please in their attendance upon public worship, and behave as irreverently as they please when they do attend ; they may utterly lay aside any act of private devotion ; they may cease, in a word, from every expression of homage, piety, gratitude, and acknowledgment to the Supreme Preserver of us all, without suffering in their character as men of honour, or incurring a stain or imputation upon their honour on that account. Nevertheless, these are duties. God is entitled to our affection and devotion, our love and honour ; and he has commanded that we pay it. This is not disputed ; nor do I insinuate that it is. What I argue is, that the law of honour is not considered to concern itself with these duties, even by those who confess them to be duties.

This, then, will be admitted—that what respects the Divine Being lies out of the province of the law of honour. But in all that concerns man and man ; in that great and important class of duties which are called relative duties, the law of honour may be depended upon as an adequate rule ; and there, it is enough if we act but up to and support the character of men of honour. I wish it were so, for the sake of all who profess this character : but I fear the observations we have laid down—that the law of honour takes notice only of what passes between equals—will be found here also ; and that those duties which we owe to our dependents and inferiors, which form together a very considerable part of a good man's virtues and a bad man's vices, are omitted in the law of honour ; that is, may be either

observed or violated, without any effect upon a man's honour, or reputation for honour, one way or other. Of this kind the following are examples:—the cruel and barbarous treatment of our domestic servants—the worreting them out of their happiness by causeless or immoderate anger, habitual punishments, groundless suspicion, wanton restraint, harsh, scornful, or opprobrious language. It is not to be computed the quantity of misery a fierce, over-bearing temper may produce in his family and amongst his dependents by these means. Yet what has all this to do with his honour? He is not the worse accounted as a man of honour for this behaviour. Notwithstanding, the justifiableness of such behaviour no one will assert; for a conduct which occasions so much unnecessary misery to any, no matter to whom, must be criminal.

Bounty to the poor is a Christian duty; no one doubts it: but I do not find it affects a man's honour either way, whether he is bountiful to the poor or not bountiful. And not only want of charity, but want of justice, is tolerated and connived at by the law of honour. The great and grievous injuries done to tradesmen by delay of payment, oftener by not paying their just demands at all, and by persons of rank and distinction, and who assume the name of men of honour, however inconsistent they be with any principle of moral probity and every pretension to it, are not inconsistent with the reputation of honour, provided the man be careful of his conduct amongst his equals, and preserve a regard to truth, fidelity, and punctuality in his dealings with his equals, or with persons of honour: for all these instances proceed upon and produce the same principle; to wit, the observation we set out with—that the law of honour prescribes and regulates the duties only between



equals: and though it may be right as far as it goes in most instances betwixt such and amongst such, it is altogether regardless of what is due from us on the one hand to our inferiors, or from them to us on the other. And these merely are two capital defects in the law, when it is considered as, or set up for, a complete rule of life.

But this is not all; we have something further to accuse the law of honour of; and that is, in one word, the licentious indulgence of our natural passions. If I was to describe the law of honour freely, I should call it a system of rules well contrived, by persons in the higher stations of life, to facilitate their intercourse with each other. Now, such persons being occupied in a great measure in the pursuit of pleasure, it is not to be expected that they should lay down rules to themselves which trench upon their pleasures, or subject them to any great restraint in that which composes the business and object of their lives. And this remark will be verified by experience. The law of honour is careful to exclude all fraud, chicanery, falsehood, concealment in the mutual dealings of persons of honour; but I do not find that it lays much, if any, stress upon the virtues of chastity, sobriety, moderation, economy; because such stress would greatly check and contract the pleasures and pursuits of this description of men. There are some duties which the law of honour does embrace; but the violation of them contains not any great breach of it. These are decorum, civility, good manners, or the avoiding any of that shuffling and cunning which makes it impossible, or highly inconvenient, to deal with any man. The requiring strictness in those virtues would bear hard upon the manner of life of persons who come most within the reach and influence of the rule of

honour. It is upon the same principle that the great Christian duty of the forgiveness of injuries, of which you hear and read so much in the Scripture, has no place at all amongst the virtues of a man of honour. Indeed it is hard to say whether, if the law of honour were to decide upon it, it would be judged a virtue or a vice; whether it would not be pronounced meanness, rather than magnanimity; an instance of weakness and pusillanimity, rather than of chastised affections or a sense of duty. Resentment is a natural passion, and it costs no little self-mortification to quell and quiet it; and mortification of any sort is not to be looked for in this class of mankind.

The substance of our assertion is, that the rule and law of honour is not alone a right or sufficient rule to go by; and I will comprise the sum of what I have delivered in support of the assertion in two or three queries:—

First; Is it not true that a person may be negligent of every act of duty to the Divine Being, of every act of service, worship, or devotion whatever, without any impeachment of his honour?

Secondly; Is it not true, that the same person may be tyrannical and over-bearing in his family and among his servants; rigorous in the extreme in the treatment of his dependents; utterly without any share of liberality to the poor? Is it not true that a person may be all these without impeachment of his honour?

Thirdly; Is it not true, that he may likewise distress or ruin his tradesmen by dilatory and irregular payment, or by absolute insolvency, and yet pass for a man of honour among those who claim that title?

Fourthly; Is it not true, that he may live in the habitual guilt of fornication, adultery, drunkenness,

prodigality, and be capable of the most desperate revenge, without impeachment of his honour?

Fifthly and lastly; If these things be so, is the law of honour a safe rule of life? Is it enough to satisfy any man who is concerned for his final happiness, to be able to say of himself that he is, or to hear others call him, *a man of honour*; without inquiring whether he hath also fulfilled the duties, and compared himself with the measure of God's Word, explained and applied by the sound judgment of unprejudiced reason?

## XLVIII.

## HONESTY.

## PROVERBS XX. 7.

*The just man walketh in his integrity.*

[N.B.—Passages in it borrowed from Ogden.]

IT is an old question amongst moralists, whether mere justice, or as we commonly call it, honesty, be a virtue. All allow that dishonesty is a vice, and a very great one; but whether the contrary of it be a virtue, or only a strict debt and obligation, has been sometimes controverted. Thus to steal, is a very grievous sin; but merely to keep his hand from picking and stealing, would hardly entitle a man to be called virtuous; nor the paying his lawful debts; nor the discharge of those demands which he is bound, and obliged, and compellable to discharge. None of these, it is said, though they may entitle a man to the name of honest, give him either the name or the characteristic of virtuous. On the contrary, no duties are of greater importance to society than these; perhaps hardly any of so great. Society might subsist without generosity, but without honesty it could not subsist at all. Therefore human laws are all calculated to enforce honesty. There is place, there is opportunity, there is a call for, there is a want of, higher degrees of good-

ness ; but in these men may and indeed must be left, so far as human laws are concerned, to themselves. The essential thing for society is honesty. Therefore in that, men must not be left to themselves. When conscience will not do its office, the laws must. There may be a thousand violations of Christian duty, which the laws of men neither can reach, nor would reach if they could, because they ought to be voluntary : but honesty is so necessary, so essential, so fundamental a part of social order, that the laws of society, not in one but in all countries of the world where there are any laws, punish the violation of it with exemplary severity, and every considerate man acknowledges the justice and necessity of such proceedings. Different views, therefore, of the question, make us see it in different lights. If we look to the character of the person who is merely honest and no more, we do not seem to see any thing for which to call him virtuous. If we look to the conduct itself, we find few virtues of such great importance : and that is the matter which has raised the doubt upon the subject.

I will now explain to you the consideration which I think resolves the difficulty. The true distinction in the case is, whether a man may be honest upon principle, or honest out of policy. That will be found to be the exact distinction. If a man be honest from principle, his honesty is a virtue, and will carry him a great way in the discharge of all social virtues ; which form not the whole (far from it), but an important part of the Christian character. The difference between honesty and other duties is, that there are so many strong external reasons for being honest, that it is extremely possible for a man to be so, without any internal principle whatever. In point of fact, many persons, I be-

lieve, are honest, without any internal principle of duty whatever. With regard to others, therefore, it may be always doubtful, whether this honesty proceed from principle or from policy. But that is not the whole, or the most important part of the doubt. It may be doubtful even to ourselves, from which of these two motives even our own honesty springs.

The fear of the law, without question, keeps many persons honest. They do that of their own accord, in the first instance, which they know the law would compel them to do in the second, with a great addition of inconvenience and expense. Such a man may never, in the course of his life, be the subject of an action or lawsuit,—yet if he act from the consideration here described, and only from that consideration, he acts as much through fear of the law, as if he was under its compulsion; and what he does is as little connected either with a moral or religious principle, as if the law did it for him.

Another man shall discharge the demands upon him, which strict honesty, according to the common signification of the term, requires at his hands, out of mere policy; because he sees plainly that no person would knowingly deal with him if he did not. If he is to draw an advantage from any kind of business, he must observe the rules by which business is regulated. To see this, is only to see his own interest, and is a case rendered so plain by daily and constant experience, that few persons, in fact, miss of seeing it. Yet there may be no principle at the heart all this while. There may be regularity in his transactions, yet no principle at his heart.

A third finds, what it is impossible to live in the world without finding very soon, the numerous advantages of

a good character ; and that character is deeply concerned in the precision and punctuality of his dealings. He looks steadily to his reputation in business. That he knows to be essential to his success : his prospects, his fortune, depend upon it. He goes something farther than the rest. He does not look to the law, or the terrors of the law : he never intends to let the matter come to that. He does not merely take care so to deal with others, as that others will continue to deal with him, but he is anxious to establish a character for honesty,—knowing how serviceable, how important, and how valuable a possession such a character may prove. But though he may carry his conduct somewhat farther than the others, he may be as destitute as they of either moral or religious principle.

The truth is, in all those acts which fall under the meaning of this term honesty, especially pecuniary honesty, there are so many external motives which bear upon our conduct and direct it, that it is impossible almost to know in others, and not very easy to know in ourselves, whether what we do springs from virtuous and religious principles or not. Yet a vast deal depends upon that difference, when the character is to be estimated in a religious view ; or even when the general question is to be resolved whether honesty itself be a virtue or not.

All that a teacher can do (and, so far as he can do it, it may be important), is to point out some of the tests by which a man may satisfy his own conscience, how far the integrity which he observes in his dealings—his honesty, in a word—be the fruit of a right and religious disposition, or be the effect of mere worldly considerations.

Now one of these tests is, when a transaction is of a nature to be perfectly secret—when the truth of it is known only to ourselves, all others who were privy to it being dead or absent—when if we do what is right, we acquire no reputation ; if we do what is wrong, we incur no censure, because the whole world except ourselves are in ignorance of what is either right or wrong in the business. When this happens, as it sometimes does to almost every man who is engaged much in the affairs of the world, then to act with complete fidelity, and with as scrupulous a regard to justice and equity, as if we were acting in the face and under the direction of a court of justice, fully informed in all the facts and circumstances of the case ;—I say, so to act, and to be conscious of having so acted, forms a fair presumption that our honesty is honesty upon principle.

Secondly ; merely to render what is due to those who can claim and assert their right is, as we have said, an equivocal proof of principle ; because a man of no principle whatever, if he were possessed of common prudence, would do the same : but when we deal equitably and justly with those who must take what we choose to give them ; who must sit down under our determination, be that determination what it will—to deal, I say, with those at least as amply and liberally as we should do either with a superior who could command justice, or with an equal who could enforce it—this again I acknowledge to be a proof of honesty upon principle.

Now many persons may stand in this relation to us ; and they often do so, for different reasons.

It is the case with those who are too poor to vindicate their pretensions. The benefit of the laws, in



many cases, cannot be obtained easily. If you will have justice, you must pay for it. When such men, therefore, taking advantage of this difficulty, withhold your right under colour of referring it to the law, they rob ; when, under protection of their own wealth and ability to maintain a contest, they refuse or but delay to comply with equitable obligations, they steal.

But, secondly ; the person with whom we have to do may not be absolutely poor, but may be dependent upon us in some other way. Now, whenever we make this dependency a reason for curtailing him, in any respect whatever, of his full and just rights, we show evidently that our honesty, even when we do act honestly, is not an honesty upon principle. He must be silent, even though oppressed. He must not complain, however injured. But if we be honest upon principle, we shall either lay this situation of his with respect to us entirely out of our consideration, or, if we do consider it, we shall make it a reason for conducting ourselves towards him with more attention to all his claims, and with a strict regard to the justice and honesty of the particular case now under our view ; without reference to any other case, or any other transaction, which may have passed between us. He must not remind us of our duty : therefore we should be more careful and anxious not to forget it ourselves—both to recollect it and to discharge it. We may have been bountiful, we may have been generous towards him upon former occasions, but that is not to be made a reason for doing him injustice upon the present. It may stop his mouth ; we shall hear of no remonstrance from him ; but it ought not to induce us to subtract the smallest particle of his right or his claims.

This is one case in which honesty is put to the test. Nor will it vary the case, whether the person with whom we have to deal be obliged to us by former favours, or be dependent upon us for future expectations.

Exceedingly plain cases need not come in question ; that is, when a demand is precise and positive, exact and clear, both in its amount and in the right. These are not the sort of cases upon which honesty is called upon to do its duty, or to manifest its principle. There is another class of cases, and that is of those in which there is some degree of doubt or latitude. These are the cases for an honest man to show his character in : most especially when they are conjoined with the circumstances of the former case, namely, that whatever we do cannot be questioned ; that in fact we have the making of both sides of the bargain—the adjudication of our own cause in our own breast, and that cause not without grounds of doubt and question,—then is the time to give evidence of the sincerity and the reality of a moral principle within us.

If in cases like these we do not lean, not even a little, towards our own side ; if we attend to the whispers of equity without any one to admonish us ; if we be advocates, not for ourselves, but with ourselves for every one who has a claim upon us ; if we see our own cause with the same eye with which we look upon that of another—our own reasons not made greater than they are by self-interest—another person's reasons not made less than they are because he is unable to maintain them ; if we impose no hardships because they must be borne : then, I say, we have a comfortable assurance in our own conscience, that our integrity,—not only upon these but upon more ordinary occa-

sions, upon occasions in which it cannot be brought to the same test,—is in truth the effect, not of policy, but of principle ; and such integrity, such honesty as this, is a fulfilment of duty, and therefore a great virtue, because it is a fulfilment of that comprehensive Christian precept, “ whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do even so to them.”

## XLIX.

## PRUDENCE IN THE CONDUCT OF OUR TEMPORAL CONCERNS.

PROVERBS XXX. 8, 9.

*Give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I should be full and deny thee, and say who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal.*

I HAVE made choice of this text, not so much for the prayer itself, which yet is a very good one, and what most wise men will join in, as because it marks very strongly, and I believe very truly, the effects which riches and poverty,—the extremes of them, however,—frequently have upon us. We will convert the order of the words, which will make no difference in the substance of them, and consider at present what the text has to say of poverty.

Give me not poverty, says the author of this prayer, lest I be poor and steal. The strength of this observation extends beyond the words. We must not by poverty understand only an absolute want of subsistence, and the ordinary accommodations of life, but every situation, high and low, where men's expenses exceed their income, and thereby occasion embarrassment and distress. Nor is the danger confined to stealing. Any dishonesty, any unfair shifts by which

people can relieve their distresses, come within the extent and substance of this remark. So that the force of the prayer may be seen, perhaps, more plainly if it be put into these words—guard me against all difficulties and embarrassments in my circumstances, lest these difficulties put me upon unfair means of relieving them, and drive me to desperate and dishonest shifts to get rid of them.

Whether there be sufficient reason for this prayer or not, must be judged of by observation and experience; and they who have seen most of the world will be most ready, I believe, to acknowledge that the opprobrium of involved circumstances is so great and so urgent, that there are few who find their integrity firm enough to bear up against it. How frequently do we see, or hear, however, of men of fair character, whilst the world went easily with them, drawn in by degrees as their circumstances grew worse, to try experiments, at first perhaps, though not quite upright, neither on the other hand absolutely dishonest, and end at last in the direct practice of roguery and deceit! The inducement, no doubt, is strong. There are few who can give up their habits of luxury, or part with the indulgencies to which they have been accustomed: fewer still who can bear the shame of it. There is a reputation to be upheld, a pride and point of honour to be maintained, which, however false or foolish, will not permit men to descend in the ranks of life, or submit to those humiliations and restraints which their circumstances require. Now this is a constant pressure and temptation; and although at certain times their reflection may get the better of it, and fortify them against the remotest thought of relieving themselves by dishonesty, yet these reflections coming only at certain times, and the temptations, as I

say, being constant, pressing always upon their thoughts and spirits, if an opportunity comes in their way, of supplying or superseding their necessities, it is well if they be scrupulous about the means, or able to refrain from any expedient which promises alleviation or relief in present distress. One may imagine how urgent the temptation is. A man has tasted what it is to live well and reputably. This must beggar him. He must give up his acquaintance, connexions, place, character, appearance, and esteem. This is what is before him, if he insist upon the strict rules of honesty and uprightness, and all this may be avoided by taking an advantage which is in his power. A man, in such an instant, has not wit or ingenuity enough to disguise or palliate the irregularity of what he is about. But no matter what is the cause of it, if it be found true in fact, that distressed circumstances drive most men to injustice of one kind or other, it affords matter of very serious reflection to all of us.

Are we those, first, who are setting out in the world? Such, if they consider what has been said, will take heed to lay the plan of their expenses so as to fall easily and entirely within the compass of their fortune, and to keep close to this plan. And this, not merely as a matter of prudence and economy, but as a *moral* duty; for so they will find it to be to their cost, if they neglect it. Let not any luxury of living tempt them into dissipation and extravagance. Luxury of eating and drinking is the poorest of all pleasures at the best; and can, I think, be no pleasure at all when it is procured and embittered by the difficulties it draws us into. Neither (which is equally dangerous) let any false notions of shame, or appearance, or emulation, lead them into expenses inconsistent with their fortune. They

may be sure that real respect is never procured that way. They mistake the matter much, if they hope to procure reverence and esteem by displaying an appearance beyond their circumstances. All who are acquainted with the truth will upbraid and despise them for it, and it is surely a pitiful ambition to impose upon strangers. All this, as I said before, is to be pressed upon them on the score of duty and religion, for, if they will either observe the world themselves, or believe those who have observed it, they will find dishonesty in some shape or other, open or concealed, direct or indirect, to be the general effect of involved and encumbered fortunes, especially where the incumbrance is brought on by extravagance or profusion; and when we see other men's integrity so often borne down by the temptation this lays them under, it is a piece of presumption to expect that ours should stand firm against it. So that a reasonable degree of prudence, in the regulation of our desires, habits, and expenses will be found, and I believe most men will own it earlier or later, to be as conducive to our virtue as our comfort,—equally necessary, that is in other words, to make us happy here as hereafter.

I would next address a word to those whose misconduct or misfortunes have reduced them to straits and difficulties in their circumstances. There is a vast difference, no doubt, in the cause of their distress; but their distress, in either case, may be great. Now such, perhaps, should be told what they are to expect. They must look for struggles and temptations. They may expect to meet with opportunities of relieving the present burden by unfair practices; perhaps, of setting themselves, apparently, at ease and at liberty. They must count upon being violently beset and urged in their

minds when these opportunities offer. Their own hearts will suggest to them all the misery of their present situation, what they have suffered, or what they are likely to suffer, if they neglect the present opportunity. Their imagination will go in quest of every excuse and palliation that can be thought of; what they are induced to do is no more than what thousands, and they themselves, perhaps, have done before—what, they hope, urgent want may make pardonable—it is what, some time hence, they may make restitution for—what, perhaps, may never be known—what, if it be known, will not leave them worse than they are. These, and numberless more like reflections, will rise up in their minds. All is, however, of no weight, because what is wrong and unjust in a rich man will be wrong and unjust in a poor man; but such, nevertheless, as will probably be of great influence upon the biassed, bewildered judgement. The temptation they must expect will occur frequently, will meet them at every turn—ruin them when off their guard, struggle with them when upon it—infest them with constant importunity. What advice, then, can be given to such? To stick the closer to their integrity the more urgent their distress grows. To consider that every man has his trial—this is theirs; that this is their proper enemy, the persecution and danger to which they are exposed; this their spiritual enemy. They are to do what a good soldier does, arm themselves the strongest where they know they are the weakest; prepare for defence where they expect the attack: collect, that is, all their resolution, to this point; exert themselves, and all the vigour of character which they are masters of, against their adversary. If they have themselves to blame for their distress, strict honesty under it is the way, and



the only way, by which they can repair their error. Uprightness in adversity always procures the respect and indulgence of mankind; and, we trust, also, the favour of Almighty God. Even when our adversity has been owing to our own fault or folly, it is an atonement in some measure for past misconduct; but when we see extravagance drive men to distress, and distress to dishonesty, there is no one will pity them; because every body but themselves can see that both the distress and dishonesty lay at their own door. The case of those who are reduced by misfortunes, which is what may happen to the best and wisest of mankind, is, as it ought to be, more easy. It is easier, I mean, to bear up cheerfully against the inconveniences of poverty, when we have not ourselves to reproach with it. There is no infamy to contend with; for where is the shame of sharing the disaster which all mankind are liable to? It is like being struck by a thunderbolt. There is no disgrace in it of any kind. Fools, indeed, may deride, when they see us stripped of the ornaments of wealth and honour—but none but fools will laugh: the good and serious will be taught to look up to the hand which holds the rod, and tremble for themselves. Misfortunes man is taught to expect; and, bad as the world is, it will always reverence an honest man struggling with difficulties. But there are for such, comforts and considerations of another kind, far above the world or its opinions. The proper reflection in such a situation, and which should never be out of a man's mind, is this—that their misfortune is the visitation of God alone, probably for the very purpose of trying and proving our integrity.

He, therefore, that stands firm, that holds fast his

integrity, comes out of the fire purer and brighter—approves himself to his God in the very part in which God has been pleased to try him. This is to sanctify our sufferings—making, that is, “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” But, indeed, to speak the plain truth, it is not those who are brought to poverty by misfortunes that are often dishonest under it. It is those who set out with schemes of over-reaching and deceit, and fail in them; or those who begin with extravagance and end in fraud; that is, wanting either any good principle or firmness of mind to abide by it, they are carried away by the temptation which, according to their circumstances, is the strongest: in their prosperity by luxury and pride—in their adversity by the practices of fraud and roguery. The violent temptations that distressed circumstances lay men under, to attempt the arts of fraud and dishonesty, ought both to make us careful ourselves, and likewise somewhat more moderate and charitable towards others, who labour under difficulties of this kind. We may have been, perhaps, fair and honest in our dealings; we have done well—but we have been always in affluence, at ease in our circumstances, and have never felt the load and pressure of perplexed or reduced fortunes. We have never known what it is to look disgrace and poverty in the face. If we have known this, we know not the trial some men’s honesty is put to, nor how far ours would have stood out against them. It is one thing to maintain our integrity in the ordinary transactions and easy concerns of life, and another to hold it fast at an extremity—when we are pushed on by indigence, and the prospect,

perhaps, of ruin on the one side, and convenient opportunity, and the expectation we may be under of setting ourselves at ease and liberty on the other.

I am not now arguing for dishonesty of any kind, or in any circumstances. I am only pleading for the lenity of mankind—somewhat more mildness and moderation in our judgement and treatment of such persons, than is always shown; and this principally to impress upon you the advice of Saint Paul, “That if any be overtaken in a fault, instead of driving him to despair by persecution and ill usage, to restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

## L.

## THE MISAPPLICATION OF EXAMPLE.

1 COR. XV. 33.

*Evil communications corrupt good manners.*

WE often make a very bad use of the example of others ; and this is not owing solely to the wickedness of the example, but to our own error and perverseness in applying it. It is very difficult to live well among bad companions. It is a proof of a strong sense of duty, as well as of a great command of resolution, to maintain our virtue and innocence in any particular branch of morals, in which there is a general relaxation of principle and insensibility of guilt prevailing among the persons around us. Men without principle, men without religion, men of unstedfast minds, of easy consciences, of thoughtless dispositions, are swept away by the current—they go down with the stream of general practice, and of general conversation, with very little opposition to corruptions which have example to support them ; hence, the infectious nature of vice, and the rapid progress of the infection : if licentious and lascivious sins have found their way into a neighbourhood, good and serious men are shocked to see how the youth of both sexes fall into the snare. It is with concern that they observe how many are undone, and how soon. When drinking, late hours, riotous proceedings, gain footing in a place, there is no com-

puting what numbers are drawn in : at first, it is probable, those only who were bad beforehand—then the idle and unoccupied, who are ready for any seduction—then the giddy and foolish—then the pliant tempered ; but the evil practice continues, till husbands and parents forget all those who ought to be the nearest and dearest to them, and share in the general profligacy, to the great grief, terror, and prejudice of their friends, and those who depend upon them. If swearing get into use, it is inconceivable how the horror of it wears away, and how soon oaths and imprecations become frequent in our streets, even from the lips of children ; how all discourse, especially all mirth and diversion, become tainted with it ; but the good Christian reflects—he knows that sin is the same, whether it be common or uncommon, whether there be many examples to countenance it, or none, whether it be the fashion of the place, or the contrary—that it is the same in the sight of God, the same in its final effects, the same in its punishment ; and that all those, be they many or few, who are led away by the commonness of a vice, are either men of hollow and unsound principles, or foolish and ignorant—men wanting in firmness and self-command, men incapable of any moral proficiency: yet, that is the true time to hold close to a man's innocency and resolutions, when he is beset, as I may so say, by the restless importunity of evil example, of a corrupt neighbourhood, of a licentious age.

These all are the natural consequences of bad examples ; but what I rather propose to consider is, not so much the effects, as the misapplications of example. And of these one is the following,—when a man of general good character has some particular failing mixed with his virtues, we, without possessing the

virtues, make them an excuse for the failings in ourselves: than which nothing can be more absurd, for how far these virtues may extenuate the failings in him is certainly of no importance to us; if we have not his virtues to allege in our conduct, they can be of no benefit or profit to us. And if we take the argument the other way—if we suppose that the failing cannot have so much harm and guilt in it as some impute to it, otherwise so good a man would not have allowed himself in the practice, we advance the unsafest argument that can be alleged. Some are very mixed characters, very inconsistent with themselves; and men, otherwise good, are under surprising delusions in that part of their character in which they have suffered themselves to be overcome; so that, to build upon their authority in the very point in which they betray their weakness, is to rely upon a very feeble support indeed. Thus, a man of honour and honesty in his dealings, in whom the world places great trust and confidence, may unfortunately, with all his character for general conscientiousness and integrity, have fallen into habits of sottishness and drinking; others who give themselves up to this insinuating and pernicious vice will plead his example,—and appear to themselves to be sheltered, as it were, under his character, though not one of the qualities which compose his character belong to themselves. But, they say, could he be the man to permit himself these indulgences, if he thought them so wrong? Alas! we ought never to argue in this manner—we cannot infer a man's judgement from his practice, we know not what passes in his mind: perhaps his conscience is struggling against it all the while; perhaps he has been so often overcome by temptation and by his propensity, that con-

science has lost its force and its sensibility—which will happen; perhaps, if he were to counsel and admonish, he would be the first man to warn or caution us against the very indulgence in which we think we are only following him: he would propose his own case to us, not as an encouragement or an example, which we make it to be, but as a lesson and a warning. Sensible of his infirmity and his unsteadiness, he does not undertake to defend it, although he has often found himself overcome by it. And what must be the consequence of this kind of imitation? If we will imitate some particular person, let us imitate him in his good properties; at least, let us imitate him throughout. Picking out from each character the bad parts of it, and infusing those, and those only, into our own, is a plan which must end in gradual loss of virtue and growth of vice; and if others pursued it as well as we, in universal depravity and corruption. We are to judge of actions and conduct as they are in themselves, and not as they are joined with other actions and other conduct in the same person—that is the right and sound judgement: but the most wrong, and the most unsound, is that which would excuse vices which we have, by virtues which we have not; that which presumes that a man's judgement vindicates what his passions prompt him to.

A second misapplication of example is this: when we see a man of pious and religious carriage forget his character, so as to fall into some unjustifiable or loose conduct, we forthwith conclude that his former piety was all hypocrisy, his religion feigned. Now this is a very hasty conclusion; the experience of human life does not authorise it: on the contrary, we see men drawn into transgressions of their duty, without re-

nouncing, or even disturbing their principles. There is a great deal of difference between secretly respecting religion, and religion not having so firm a hold on our minds as to guide and direct our conduct uniformly. We may infer the weakness of a man's principles and resolution, or we may infer the violence of his passions, and the mastery they have gained over him, from his giving way to temptation; but we cannot infer, either his former insincerity, or that any deliberate change in his opinions has taken place. A difference ought to be made whether the sin be casual or habitual; that is, whether it be a single offence, or a course of offending: if it be the first kind, it is a very harsh judgement to pronounce, because a man has been off his guard, and overtaken off his guard, that therefore, in truth, he has no religion at all. There is no foundation for any such inference. Not only charity, but probability is against it. If a man apparently religious falls not only into a single act of transgression, but into an evil course of life, the presumption no doubt is more against him; yet even here it is far from decisive. Men in fact allow themselves a course of unlawful practices in some particular point, who retain a regard to duty in other points. We may perhaps argue that they deceive, even fatally deceive, their own hearts; but we cannot argue that they reject the grounds of moral and religious obligation. I mention this case in particular, because vicious men are exceedingly apt to lay great stress upon it. It is a kind of ease to their minds to find out a hypocrite. If they can but point out in the neighbourhood a man of outward sanctity and apparent religious behaviour, who has been detected in some secret bad practices, or who, after years of sober and regular conversation, has fallen off from his character, and given



himself up to licentious or dishonest courses, they draw a great comfort from it to themselves—they are fond of repeating such instances; they are willing to believe, and would have others believe, that all men at the bottom are very like themselves; that the difference between good and bad men is more in the appearance than the reality; that the opinion of the world, which reprobates and cries out against them, is unreasonable; for it is not, that they are in fact worse than others, but that they do not cover and mask their vices so well. Now I say, that this way of talking and thinking is very irrational, on two accounts: first, because it presumes that every man who allows himself in some bad practice, or who falls off from his former character, is, and all the while has been, secretly, a disbeliever and a contemner of religion,—which presumption is by no means true; it is neither generally true, nor absolutely true. It is a conduct which arises from inconsistency much oftener than from insincerity. And secondly, were it true, the inference they draw from it to the encouragement of their own vices is to the last degree fallacious. Because there are hypocrites in the world, does it follow that there are no solid grounds of virtue? True it is, that some who make a profession of religion, in their hearts reject it—Does it follow that religion has no foundation to stand on? It is only the judgement of these partial persons after all, that is shown: and, what is most material, it is that judgement corrupted and influenced by a bad life—because theirs is always, by the very supposition, a case of concealed or newly-commenced wickedness.

Another species of deceptious argument from example is this—when we see, or rather imagine that we see, other persons perform any act of religion from

selfish or unprincipled motives, we avoid their example by not performing the act of religion at all; which is the most perverse turn to give to the matter that can be. The true reflection from such an example is this: The duty does not cease to be such—the act of religion is not therefore less an obligation, because certain persons of our acquaintance perform it with very improper views and motives; if they comply with it from bad reasons, we ought to comply with it from better, instead of not complying with it at all, in order to show our dislike of their example. Thus because we think some persons come to church or the sacrament, to be thought religious; others because it has been their custom; others because they are obliged to it by their situation, calling, or the authority of their parents and masters; others because they have nothing else to do—therefore we will not go to church or the sacrament at all. This example shows what shifts and pretences men are driven to in excuse of their neglect of duty. Good and wise men would be very unwilling and scarce able to believe, that any persons performed religious acts from any other than religious motives;—but they immediately reflect that if the case be not so, it is nothing to them; it is no extenuation of their guilt, should they neglect what is their duty, if others debase their performance of it by unworthy motives: nor, on the other hand, can it ever detract from the worthiness and acceptability of those services which proceed from a sincere wish to please God.

In like manner, because it sometimes happens that men who are remarkable for their attendance upon religious ordinances are not equally remarkable for their honesty and virtue, and good conduct in other respects, therefore we take up a mean opinion of religion

and religious ordinances. This is a very loose consequence that we draw—religious ordinances never pretended to possess such a check and irresistible efficacy in them, as to make men good universally or necessarily. Great allowances must be made for the difference of men's engagements, and the temper of their minds with respect to them, and some for the difference of men's apprehension of the importance of particular offices; and after these allowances, I believe it will turn out that the soundest virtue, the truest morality, is found in conjunction with a pious veneration for the offices of religion.

The sum of my discourse amounts principally to this: If unfortunately there be any in our religious congregations who are found out to have carried on concealed practices of wickedness along with outward sanctity and devotion; who, after having led for a long time a life of regularity and religion, fall off from these characteristics, we are not entitled to conclude, as we are very apt to do, that they are, and have been, disbelievers on the whole. Experience of human nature authorises no such conclusion; the probability is, that they are not so much consequences as inconsistencies: these men are borne down by the force and strength of the temptation. But, chiefly and industriously, ought we to beware of drawing such inferences from the examples, as to make them either a reason for the less respectability of religion itself; or for thinking that such may in any way, or by any construction, either in the judgement of mankind, or in the final judgement of God, be an excuse or cover for our own evil courses.

## LI.

THE DUTY OF PARENTS TOWARDS THEIR  
CHILDREN.

(PART I.)

EPHESIANS VI. 4.

*Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

THE duty of parents towards their children is a duty which concerns so many, and is of such importance to all those whom it does concern, that it deserves every consideration which we can give it: for though it be a duty generally acknowledged, it is not in some parts of it either so well understood, or so properly practised as it ought to be. I shall divide the duty, for method's sake, into three parts.

First; the maintenance of children, and a reasonable provision for their happiness, in point of circumstances and situation in the world.

Secondly; education.

And thirdly; the proper care of their virtue.

The obligation upon parents to maintain their children is the first and pleasantest part of their duty; and it is founded upon this reason—the helpless condition of infancy renders it absolutely necessary that one or other take the charge of its maintenance. And

it is manifest that the parents have no right, by their act and deed, to burden others with the charge. Nothing, therefore, is left but for the parents to undertake it themselves : so that the maintaining of our offspring is matter of strict debt to the rest of mankind. And this, independent of the affection of parents to their children ; which, if it be instinctive, is an instinct implanted for the express purpose of promoting the interests of their children, and so demonstrative of God Almighty's will and intention about it.

This part of a parent's duty, though so plain and natural, and though the impulse to it be commonly so strong, is not always discharged. They are the lowest, indeed, as well as the vilest of the human species, who neglect or break through it : yet there are some such in every neighbourhood. There are those who run away from their families and leave them to perish, by the want of what they should do for them. There are others who stay at home only to consume in drunkenness and idle sports, what should be bread for their families ; and perhaps what their families earn.

There are those who are fallen into so slothful and idle a course of life, that they had rather cast their children upon the public than labour for them. And there are those, lastly, who, after having ruined the mother, and been the means of bringing innocent sufferers into the world, abandon both to shame and misery, nor concern themselves as being any farther connected with them, or being under any obligation to provide for the maintenance of either : which is just as abandoned and wicked a line of conduct as any of the others,—for, if you remember the reason why parents are bound to maintain their children, that reason holds equally for natural children as for any

other. There is no difference in the obligation, so far as it extends to maintenance, but what custom holds—which is no difference at all. But there is something beyond mere subsistence, which a child is entitled to receive at the hands of its parents, because there is something necessary for it, and which the child cannot procure for itself; and that is, a reasonable provision for the happiness of the child in its circumstances and situation of life. Those who, to make short work of the subject, say that a parent is bound to do all he can for his children, say too much; because, at that rate, every thing a person spends, which might have been saved, and every profit omitted which might have been made, would be criminal, as it would be a breach of that rule. Besides, such very general rules, which have no limits, would be of no sort of use. But a reasonable care of the circumstances and situation of children is certainly a parent's duty,—that is, to put them in such a situation, and leave them, if in our power, in such circumstances, as that they may have a fair chance, and a probable expectation of being happy and useful. *Happy* and *useful* are the two words to be remembered: that is what I mean by a reasonable provision.

Now I do not say a child has this chance or expectation, unless he be well placed in a situation suitable to his habits and reasonable expectations, and furnished likewise with a competent provision for the demands of that situation. But here it becomes a very material question, how we are to calculate the demands and expenses of the situation, or what may be deemed a person's reasonable expectation. For these exigencies depend much upon the young man himself, and they can call or think what they please so many exigencies; and thus making the expectations of the child in some

degree the measure of the parent's duty, we are laying the parent open to unbounded demands. I answer, that the exigencies of any situation, and the reasonable expectations of children, are so far regulated by custom; that as much indulgence in expense, appearance, and manner of living, and the like, as is customarily allowed to and practised by people of such professions, or in similar situations of life, are to be accounted the exigencies of that situation. Not that custom, in its own proper force, can alter or determine what is right or wrong in any case; but in the present case you cannot suppose that a young person who is denied that which all, or almost all, about him are allowed, or, which is the same thing, is not supplied with the means of procuring them, and exposed on that account to continual mortification, and what he reckons disgrace: you cannot, I say, suppose that he will be tolerably easy or happy under such circumstances—at least you will not find him so; and a fair chance for his ease and happiness he has a right to look for. You will understand that all vicious and licentious indulgencies are to be excepted out of this rule, which a parent is not to encourage or supply, or even permit, if he can help it, however common they may be in the situation and class of life in which his child is placed; nor would it alter the case if such practices were universal.

What we have said of custom regulating the exigencies and situation, is equally true as to the expectation of the child, and the choice of situation. In reality, and in the eyes of reason, all situations which are equally innocent and useful are equally honourable; but it is not exactly so in the opinion of the world. The world has what it calls its di-

distinctions of rank, its liberal professions, and inferior stations; and in laying out a plan or provision for our children, we must be content in some measure to submit to such opinions. A child will naturally expect to preserve the place, rank, and condition in life, in which he has been brought up. He has had from the first those who accounted him their equal, and he will expect to continue so. And who should say that his expectations are unreasonable? At least they are natural and unavoidable. It is not likely that a child should be satisfied in a condition which degrades and depresses him beneath his acquaintance; and that he should see with patience the children of all other families, whose birth, place, and rank in life were like his own, advanced before him.

The *habits* of a young person are a consideration of still greater importance than his expectations. To accustom children to habits of ease, amusements, and elegance, and a thousand distinctions, and then to send them abroad into a calling where they must all be given up, or meet every day with contradiction and rebuke, and to suppose that your children will reconcile themselves to the change, is to suppose the children much wiser than their parents—is to expect that from the indecision and vehemency of youth, which you will find is the fruit of reflection and resolution.

The rule we lay down then is this,—that a parent is bound, if in his power (for no one is bound to impossibilities), to provide his child with a calling suited to his talents and reasonable expectations, and to supply the exigencies of that calling; and those expectations and exigencies are to be deemed reasonable which the generality of others in similar circumstances, or of the



same profession, are commonly indulged with: and then, when a parent has done this, he has done his duty—so far as relates to provision.

We will next see how this rule applies to the different classes and conditions of life, and who are the persons that offend against it.

First then, the most important, because the most numerous of men amongst us, are those who have only their labour to live by.

It is manifest that if they accustom their children betimes to industry, and procure them any calling in which their industry will honestly support them, they completely acquit themselves of the duty of a parent to his child; as completely, perhaps even more so, than the man who lays up an independence for his son, in order to raise a family or be in a condition above his birth. He provides his child with a situation suited to his habits; for he took care to habituate him from the beginning to labour and sobriety, and to the reasonable use of exertion: for the child who expects to live in idleness when his parents brought him up by their labour, cannot be said to entertain a reasonable expectation. And then, as to the demands of the situation, a livelihood for himself, and, in due time, the means of providing a livelihood for a family of his own, is the utmost that either reason or even custom can authorize him to expect. That in fact, with no extraordinary vein and inclination, he will expect. These things a parent cannot supply him with; but he can do better: for he can establish him in the business which he has taught him, or can get him taught, and direct him by the sober and industrious life he has brought him up with, to maintain himself. This is a

consolation and encouragement to their condition of life ; as it shows that every man who has health and hands, and activity, need not fear being able to do his duty to his family : and would we did not observe many persons more afraid of the burden of a family than they are of offending God by a life of lewdness and licentiousness ! They who transgress against this rule are the people who suffer their children to live in absolute idleness, or what is next to it, in some trifling employment which can never be of service to them when they become men—or in little pilferings and private tricks ; and who do not, if they grow up, take care betimes to provide them with masters and honest laborious callings.

The next order of men are those who are in the middle, betwixt poverty and riches ; who are of liberal professions, and though of smaller estates, in creditable branches of business. These might provide a mere subsistence for their children by sending them out into the world to get their bread by trade or manual labour ; but they would not satisfy by these means the reasonable expectations of their children, which is necessary to be done, in order to give them a fair chance for happiness. Much less are they bound, on the other hand, to make them or leave them independent of any profession. This may happen sometimes ; but I believe that there is more pleasure than merit in it, when it does happen. A calling in some degree upon a level, in point of place and station, with that which their parents follow, is the utmost they are entitled to expect ; and yet this simple and practicable rule is often and in various ways neglected. It is neglected from avarice, from vanity, and from extravagance. From avarice ;

as when a parent sinks his child's profession to save the charges of education, which of all schemes of economy is the worst : for the child, when he becomes master of his liberty and his fortune, will hardly sit down with the calling he is brought up to, and is qualified for nothing better. But this error is not common. Our rule is violated from vanity, when a parent, from some foolish conceit of birth and distinction, thinks the ordinary occupations of life beneath the dignity of his family, and yet is not in circumstances to advance his children into the more honourable professions, and so leaves them to shift for themselves without either employment or profession at all ; or, what is worse, introduces them perhaps into some profession or place of public education of some great name and repute, and yet has it not in his power to supply him with the necessary expenses of the station in which he has placed his child, until he can maintain himself : I call these *necessary expenses*, as I said before, which all or most in the same situation of life are allowed. This is both folly and cruelty :—folly, for you will hardly ever know an instance of a person succeeding in a profession who is thus shackled ;—and cruelty to the child, for the thus lifting him up into the higher classes of life, without giving him the means of supporting himself, is only to expose him to continual insult and mortification ; to make his life and happiness a prey to every vexation and distress. I am sure that a parent who acts thus does not do his duty by his child, if it be a parent's duty to give his child a fair chance of happiness. He gives him indeed scarcely any chance at all : for there is not any one living who can be at ease under the difficulties and vexations which a man is liable to whose circumstances are inadequate to his state.

And lastly; parents do not discharge their duty to their children, or what is just the same, put it out of their power to discharge it, by their *own extravagance*. When a parent might, by frugality and self-denial and diligence, put his children into a calling suitable for them, and give or leave them sufficient to go on with his calling, and does not do so, he is then extravagant in the properest sense of that word, and his extravagance has a double effect on his children—it both accustoms them to high or luxurious living, and deprives them of the means of continuing it. Nor is it an excuse to say that their children shared with them; that they indulged them while in their power with every thing they could afford, or more. This is not that reasonable and permanent provision for a child's happiness which it is a parent's duty to make.

The last order of men which remains to be considered are those of great fortune and family, and who are bound perhaps to transmit to some one child a considerable part of their fortune. Such child will seldom submit to enter into a profession, nor would the parent be willing he should. When those persons, by luxury or mismanagement, throw away their large fortunes upon themselves—or enjoy it while they may, as it is termed—they leave the rest of their family of all others the most destitute; for they have brought them up with expectations only to be disappointed; with habits which will teaze and torment them, and with a pride which will starve them.

To sum up the whole; the duty of parents to their children, like every other duty, has its limits. There is such a thing as doing too much, when we are so anxious for our family as to be hardly just, and never generous to the rest of mankind. And there is such a thing as

doing too little—when we neglect the opportunities we have, or may have, of providing for our children in such a manner as is reasonable, and, if it be not their own fault, conducting them through an ensnaring and precarious world, with comfort to themselves and usefulness to others.

## LII.

THE DUTY OF PARENTS TOWARDS THEIR  
CHILDREN.

(PART II.)

## PROVERBS XXII. 6.

*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when  
he is old he will not depart from it.*

ONE grand article of a parent's duty to his children is the care of their virtue, and the using of proper expedients and precautions to preserve and inculcate it. This you will say was the business of education, which has been already treated of; but there are certain other precautions and expedients which do not fall under the notice of what is commonly reckoned education, and which therefore we choose to make the subject of a separate exhortation; though to say the truth, it matters little how our duty is arranged or divided, if it be but understood and practised.

Now the first and principal and most direct way of encouraging virtue in our children, is by our own example. The great point in a young person, or indeed in any person, is the being accustomed to look forward to the consequences of their actions in a future world: and this is not to be brought about by any other method than the parents' acting with a view to those consequences themselves. Whatever parents may be in

their own conduct, they cannot but wish to have their children virtuous: both because they know that virtue at the setting out has a better chance for thriving in the world than vice (though with all chances it may turn out otherwise), and because, unless a man has deliberately, and from conviction, cast off all expectation of a future state (which is not, I trust and believe, the case with many, if with any), he cannot but desire, if he love his children at all, to have them happy in that state—he cannot but know that to promote and secure that happiness and that interest is, after all, the very best thing which he can do for them. And I will suppose it to be the wish and purpose of every parent. But then how do they go about to accomplish it? They gravely, perhaps, and solemnly give them lessons of virtue and morality—warn them with much seeming earnestness against idleness, drunkenness, lewdness, dissoluteness, and profligacy; whereas they themselves hang about all day without employ, come home disordered by intemperance, are cried out against in the whole neighbourhood for some profligate connexions, and waste and destroy their substance in riot, dissipation, and high living: or they will tell their children, possibly, of the great importance of religion—that every thing beside is of short duration, and, consequently, small importance, in comparison with this—that death closes all our cares but this—whatever else, therefore, they regard, to take care of this. This is the consolation, perhaps, that they hold with their children, whilst their own conduct all the while has not much of the influence of religion discoverable in it. The offices and ordinances of religion, which are the apparent, and therefore, as examples, the affecting and influencing spirit of it, are put by and neglected, if there be any

pretence or cause for neglecting them—not seldom without any pretence or excuse at all.

All that the child sees of the parents is, that they are continually taken up with the pursuit of some pleasure; or that they busy themselves about some worldly advantage, as much as if there were no such things as religion and a future state ever heard of. One hour the parent shall be representing to the child the tremendous authority of God Almighty—that the whole world is in his hands—that He is the giver of all good, and has the power to inflict upon us every evil—that He is the author of life and death—that it is He only that can kill the body, and after that can cast into hell-fire—that He is never, therefore, to be named or thought of without awe and veneration. Thus will the parent talk one hour, and the next, perhaps, if a very slight provocation fall in his way, the child shall hear him cursing and swearing, and dealing about the name and vengeance of God, the terrors of hell and damnation, with as little concern, and upon as frivolous an occasion, as if these things were only tales to frighten fools with, and to be sport to the wise man. Even the understanding of a child is not to be imposed upon by such mockery, or made to believe that a parent can be sincere, or really is in earnest in delivering rules and principles of behaviour, which manifestly possess no sort of influence upon his own—which he forgets or breaks on every occasion that arises; and when the child has once found out this, or suspects it, the discovery has a fatal effect upon the parent's authority in general; for whatever lessons of prudence, or maxims of morality, or admonitions, or exhortations he afterwards gives his child, they will only pass with it for so much form and affectation: whereas, did the parent



regularly and constantly act with a view to a future judgement and the laws of religion himself, the child would easily learn to turn its eyes and attention the same way, and with very little talking to; and the custom of considering itself accountable hereafter for what it does here, thus silently and insensibly formed by the parent's example, would have a chance of remaining with it to its life's end. This is the least troublesome, and only true way of inculcating religion into young minds, and does not disgust or frighten them with the suddenness of it.

A second thing, by which much may be done towards the preserving and cultivating of a young person's virtue, is in the choice of professions. Professions differ much in the opportunities and temptations to particular vices: young persons differ as much in the disposition and inclination they discover to different vices. Hence, it is manifest, there is room for judgement in selecting professions the least favourable to those vices to which the child discovers a propensity, and the most likely to qualify and correct them. Instances of this may be the following: if a youth betray a turn for a loose and dissolute course of life, some calling in which he will be early restrained, and live at first under immediate inspection and authority, and above all, one in which his hand and mind will be kept constantly employed, and in which sobriety and regularity of behaviour is the general character, and much insisted upon as a point of reputation; some calling of this kind (and of this sort are most employments in trade and business) seems best adapted to keep within bounds his craving for pleasure, and by degrees moderate it.

If he show a propensity to sottishness, low company, and mean diversions, it may remedy this to advance

him into politer stations of life, where he will hear these vices and propensities reprobated, and a spirit of honour and dignity set up against them: and it will carry him away from those places where he is beginning to form mean attachments and bad habits. If there be reason to suspect him of a mercenary, sordid temper,—which in youth is not common,—a liberal education and a liberal profession are the best remedy. An intercourse with young persons of these lines of education and profession will probably cure it. If he be envious, proud, and passionate, impatient of superiority and disappointment, the more private his condition of life is, the better; where he will meet with fewer quarrels, competitions, and mortifications.

This all seems very plain and rational, and yet it is not only neglected in practice, but expressly contradicted, and a rule the reverse of this pretty generally observed. Men choose sometimes their children's professions with a view to the dispositions they remark in them. But how do they direct their choice?—Commonly to such callings and ways of life as are of all others the most likely to foment, call out, and encourage every bad disposition they have betrayed. Thus, does a child seem addicted to dissolute and licentious pleasures, is what we call wild and ungovernable? he is despatched abroad to a distance, and enters one of those professions where he will be out of the reach of his parents or of any other authority; without superintendence and control; with every opportunity and every temptation to vice, together with the example and encouragement and conversation of those he is placed amongst. If his temper be narrow and mean and mercenary, a trade and employment by which that tendency is naturally increased is sought out for him, where a selfish and

avaricious turn will grow upon him, under the name of frugality, attention to business, care, and circumspection; all which he finds to be qualities of great use and esteem in the way of life and among the people he converses with—and to a certain degree they are both necessary and meritorious. If he be of a wily, crafty turn of mind, proud of a successful stratagem, and laying out to overreach and make an advantage of the simplicity and unsuspecting temper of those he deals with—why then he is made, a parent concludes, for one of those callings, necessary and honourable in their nature, but in the practice of which vileness and craft have too many opportunities, too much success. If his spirit be haughty and ambitious, this is considered as the indication of a lofty and aspiring mind, which must be gratified by placing it in one of those liberal professions where the respect and importance, and dignity and rank of that higher order are apt to flatter the vain, the proud, the arrogant; but in which this sort of temper will have no other effect than to expose a man to repulse and disappointment, chagrin, envy, and vexation, and the whole train of conflicting passions which infest unsuccessful, mortified, or affronted pride. In their arguments no regard is had to the care or preservation of the child's virtue, the subduing of his vicious propensities, the amendment of his disposition,—which in reason ought to be the first of all considerations; but the whole attention is paid to worldly advancement and success, in which also their choice often fails.

Another case in which parents are chargeable with the source of their children's ill conduct, is when they urge them, as it were, into situations in which it is very difficult to behave well. The parent complains that

the son is idle—when he has never put it in his power, or given him the means to exert his diligence, with any advantage or encouragement ; or that he is fallen into a loose course of conduct—when the parent, probably from pride, avarice, or some such motive, opposed some generous attachment, and prevented that virtuous connexion which might have preserved him from his present course of life. This also is no uncommon case, no uncommon consequence. Or, the child is fretful and discontented in his situation, instead of attending to the business or the duties of it. This also is often the parent's mismanagement, as well as the child's fault. It may be that the parent has advanced his child to a state of which he either cannot or will not supply the expenses, and so he leaves him in much embarrassment and perplexity—has dignified him with a condition of life beyond his first expectations, or has accustomed him early to habits of luxury inconsistent with the calling he is destined to, or the provision he has given him.

The example of a parent, I have already said, has a great and obvious influence upon the manners and moral sentiments of children ; and the greater in proportion as they entertain the more reverence, esteem, and affection for their parent. Young people seldom seem much or well impressed with moral sentiments of their own ; and it is not to be expected, hardly indeed to be wished, that a child should condemn or regard with abhorrence what he sees his parent practise. This is obvious. But there is another way in which the child's character is often determined by the parent's conduct, which is not so obvious ; and that is, when the parent carries any quality or behaviour to an excess which the child sees and suffers under. The child is apt, when he grows up, to discard the whole principle, and run into

the contrary extreme. Thus, when a parent carries his economy to a length which teazes and harasses, and makes unhappy his family and all about him, it is odds but the child despises, when he enters into the world, all economy as so much covetousness, and sets off, as soon as it is in his power, a prodigal and spendthrift. If the seriousness and gravity of the parent be mixed with moroseness and austerity, the effect is, that the child contracts an aversion to all seriousness, and turns out a character of thoughtlessness, levity, and profaneness. If the parent's religion be melancholy or superstitious, it compels him to a constant affectation of it, in season and out of season. If it be a troublesome attention to multiplied forms and ceremonies, there is danger lest the child take up a dislike to all religion, as inconsistent with any tolerable degree of ease or pleasure.—The same of many other qualities. We are often disgusted even with virtue itself, when coupled with forbidding manners. A parent, therefore, who wishes to recommend good principles and good qualities to the child, should not render them forbidding in his own example: and if he wishes to procure and preserve a proper influence, he should not only be virtuous (which is the first and great thing), but take care to make his virtues sit easy upon him, and render even his virtue—what virtue is always capable of being—amiable, easy, and engaging.

## LIII.

THE DUTY OF CHILDREN TOWARDS THEIR  
PARENTS.

EXODUS XX. 12.

*Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

IN my last discourse I gave an account of those duties which parents owe to their children, I proceed now to take notice of those which the children in return are enjoined to perform towards their parents. And this may be done by examining into the sense and meaning of the words of the text : “ Honour thy father and thy mother.” Something may be added, too, with regard to the promise annexed to the performance of this duty, “ that thy days may be long in the land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

“ Honour,” then, signifies a great many things ; and takes its sense especially from the person it relates to. To honour the king is one thing,—to honour God is another. To honour our equals or inferiors is different from either ; and therefore the word must not be taken in the same sense wherever we meet with it ; but the meaning and extent of it must be determined by the party to which it is addressed. Since then the words, “ Honour thy father and thy mother,” are so much of one of the commandments of God as is meant

to secure the duty of children towards parents; and several duties of love, of respect, of obedience, and of support, which children owe to their parents, are comprehended under them.

First, then, we are commanded to *love* our parents. But because, properly speaking, it is not in our own power to love or hate, to hope for or fear, when, and what, and whom we will, but according as we apprehend the thing or person to be desirable and lovely, —by being commanded to love our parents, we are to take such courses and considerations as may increase our natural affection to them, and avoid all such things as may any way diminish it. How far their being, under God, the authors and originals of our life and existence, may contribute to excite this affection, is not so easy to determine; because life, as it is happy or miserable, is differently to be represented. But parental love, which exerts itself in a constant care and preservation of us, is a real good, which deserves to be repaid with all the love we can show. It is this which supplies all the wants of helpless infancy, secures from all the hazards of heedless childhood, of giddy and unthinking youth. It is this that informs the mind and regulates the manners, that trains up the reason, that exercises the memory, that instructs us to argue and understand such things as by our years we are capable of, and takes care to educate and fit us for greater concerns. It is this that brings us first to God in baptism, and keeps us afterwards in the ways of goodness and religion, by instilling into us wise and virtuous principles; by reminding us constantly of our several duties, encouraging us in good by favours and rewards, and reclaiming us from evil by reproofs and corrections. These, and a thousand more, are the ways which parents

take to make their children happy; besides those endless and innumerable labours, watchings, and solicitations, which consume their whole life, to make a handsome provision for them of the good things of this life. So that whatever benefits can be the grounds and foundation of love in children, the care and love of parents abundantly afford them; and, therefore, they are obliged to take the remembrance of these frequently into consideration, in order to stir them up to love their parents, who have done so great things for them; who next, under God, are not only the authors of their being, but of their well-being likewise, and present happiness.

Another duty which children owe to their parents is *respect*; that is, all external honour and civility, whether in words or actions, by virtue of which they are obliged to be submissive in their behaviour, and mannerly and dutiful in their speeches and answers to them,—to say things honourable and commendable of them, to pry as little into their failings and infirmities as they themselves can, and to extenuate and conceal them as much as possible from others. And for this there is so much reason and decency in nature, that it shocks us to hear one reproach his parents with vices and infirmities, though what he says be true, unless it be done with great concern and tenderness, with grief and pity; but when it is done with contempt and pleasure in telling, we cannot help abhorring such impiety; for the hearts of all men go along with Noah for laying punishment upon Ham for his unnatural and profane derision, and love the memory of those sons who would not themselves see, nor suffer their own senses to be witnesses of, the miscarriages of their father.

That, therefore, children may discharge this part of



their duty the better, and in every gesture, word, and action, show all due honour and respect to their parents, as it is partly in their parents' power to effect, so it should be their care and concern to promote it. And to this purpose, they must be careful how they live and behave in the sight of their children; for if they make themselves vile and cheap in their eyes by too much familiarity, by light and indiscreet carriage, they will in vain expect the reverence and respect that is due to their character. The foundation of respect is some supposed excellence and worth, and in consequence of this, some kind of superiority; but when parents either admit their children to an equality, or make them privy to their follies and indiscretions, they do in effect invite contempt. And, therefore, all due care should be taken, that the domestic differences, and idle and unseemly quarrels and debates, and silly and unkind words and actions, that too frequently pass between parents, should be concealed from children.

The third branch of a child's duty is *obedience*. This will vary greatly at different times of life; but it should never cease. It must be absolute and implicit during childhood. It can admit of very few exceptions in youth. It will ever be general in manhood; even when a son or daughter is of age to judge for himself, he ought to perceive clear and strong reasons before he take upon him to go against his parents' directions and admonitions: before he be able to judge for himself, which is not so soon as many young persons imagine they are able, no excuse can be sufficient. And there is one of the strongest possible reasons for our showing great deference to a parent's pleasure, and that is, that we are sure (which we can never be on following any other person's counsel), that it is meant for our good.

A child ought to reason thus with himself: "I have received every proof imaginable of their affection and good will, nor can I suspect the least design they can have upon me, unless it be to do me good, and prevent me from falling into any miscarriage, which I find affects them rather more than it does myself. They have made me their pride, happiness, and glory. They have placed all their content and satisfaction in my welfare, and therefore I cannot but believe that their counsels and commands are the best that, considering circumstances, they can give, and the safest for me to follow." If children, I say, would but reason thus with themselves, and at the same time reflect upon the ties and obligations they have to be obedient to their parents—the reasonableness, the pleasure, and the security of being so—the approbation of all good people, and the blessing of God going along with it; they would soon bring themselves to a ready disposition of obedience, even though there were some things not so agreeable to their own desires, in what their parents might enjoin.

There is one duty more included under the word "honour;" and that is the support and maintenance of our parents, or our administering to them in their wants and weaknesses. For considering the care and pains which our father, and the sleepless nights and homely offices which our mother, underwent for us—how tender they both were of us in our infancy, when we were incapable of helping ourselves—how liberal of their substance to give us an education and settle us in a station of life, to the utmost of their abilities; we cannot but think it incumbent on us to requite their care, and make them a suitable return, when either poverty, which is a heavy load and requires our support,

or old age, which is a second childhood, and requires our attention, comes upon them.

Upon the whole, parents, in respect to their children, do bear the signal stamp and image of God himself, not only as He is their Maker, but as He is their Preserver and Benefactor ; and, therefore, we may observe, that as the duties to other men are termed kindnesses or charity, or courtesies, or liberality, &c. those towards parents in every language are entitled *piety*: which implies something peculiarly divine in the object of them, and denotes that the offences of children in this respect are greatly increased ; that to slight our parents is more than unkindness ; to refuse them support is more than uncharitableness ; to be unmannerly towards them is more than discourtesy ; and in their necessities not to be liberal is more sordid than avarice, nay, is high impiety and flagitiousness against Heaven. For “ He that forsaketh his father is a blasphemer ; and he that angereth his mother is cursed of God : but he that honoureth his father shall have long life.” These words of Holy Writ bring us to the nature of that encouragement which God has annexed to the performance of our duty towards our parents, “ that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

Now it is evident that this promise was peculiar to the children of Israel, from being limited to the land of Canaan, which they only were to inhabit ; and therefore it cannot from hence be concluded, either that obedient children shall always inherit long life, or that they who arrive at old age have therefore been obedient children ; since every day’s experience shows the contrary. But the encouragement which children have from hence is this—that if long life be most convenient

for them, all circumstances considered, they may expect it; but if it will not prove a blessing, as of itself it seldom does, then is not God unfaithful to his promise, if the best and most obedient children are translated betimes into that better and heavenly country, of which the land of promise was but a poor type or shadow. And therefore we find the son of Sirach exhorting to honour and observe parents, from motives of a higher consideration than what are given to the Jews. “My son, help thy father in his age, and grieve him not as long as he liveth; and if his understanding fail, have patience and despise him not, when thou art in thy full strength; for the relieving of thy father will not be forgotten—in the days of thy affliction it shall be remembered.”

## LIV.

## THE DUTIES OF SERVANTS.

## EPHESIANS VI. 5—8.

*Servants, be obedient unto them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart as unto Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good-will, doing service as to the Lord and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.*

THESE words are a lesson to servants, from no other than the Apostle Paul. It was his custom, at the conclusion of his Epistles, to add short practical precepts and rules of behaviour, adapted to the various understandings of the persons to whom he wrote. So in this and the preceding, which are the last two chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle sets forth the duties of husbands and wives, and children and parents; and in the words which I have read to you, of servants and masters. Now, that in which this lesson exceeds all others, is the religion that it carries with it: and this religion respects both the motives upon which servants ought to act towards their masters, and the rule by which they should regulate themselves. Another instructor, a mere human teacher, would

have had servants be faithful and diligent in their calling, that they might please and satisfy their masters ; because, he would have said, that is the way of recommending one's self—that is the way of bettering our condition, and of keeping a good situation if we have one—that is the way of obtaining and preserving a good name and a good character, upon which our livelihood and our success in the world depend.

He who has nothing to trust to but his hands and labour must recommend himself to an employment by industry, honesty, care, and sobriety. These qualities will constantly be sought for in servants ; and qualities contrary to these, laziness, carelessness, dishonesty, and drunkenness, will as constantly be avoided by all who need them. Therefore a prudent counsellor would suggest, if you have a view to pass your time creditably in your situation, and to have your service sought after—if you would maintain yourself and your family with decency, and have a maintenance always to trust to, secure to yourself by the regularity of your behaviour, as well as by the diligence, skilfulness, and activity of your service, the approbation of those who employ you, and of the neighbourhood in which you live : that will always do, and nothing else will. A merely human teacher, of experience in the world, would probably tell a servant all this, and it is all true. But what says the Apostle ? A divine monitor like Saint Paul puts the matter on a different foundation. He inculcates far higher views : “ Do,” says he, “ the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men ; knowing that whatever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.” In which words three things are imported : First, that

servants are to look up, not to the person who employs them, but to God as their master, "doing service as to the Lord and not to man." Secondly; that it is in truth God, and not man, that sets them their work and their task, "Do the will of God." Thirdly; they are to look to God, and not to man, for the reward of their faithful service, "Knowing this, that whatever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord."

First; the words of the text import this: if God is, so far, the proper master of all servants, then it is He, and not man, who has assigned them their works and their tasks. The foundation of the contract is, that the different lots and conditions of human life are all appointed by God, and that each man's calling and destination is that which God has fixed for him. The general frame of human society, and the origin and constitution of different societies, are points not understood by all, but all can understand some things in every society; for instance, that there must be masters and there must be servants—some to direct and some to be directed. The business of the world must be carried on; and it is only by labour that we are all maintained. Our food and raiment, our habitations and accommodations, and in part our enjoyments, we owe to the hand of industry. Now there are but two methods possible—one is, every man working for himself, to supply himself with every thing he has occasion for—the second is, working for another. The former is the condition of savages, among whom, though every man toils night and day to procure himself food and clothing, every man is wretchedly and scarcely provided with either. In such a state, they who are best provided are worse off than

the poorest inhabitant of this country can be. Therefore by such a rule, if it were possible to establish it, the poor would gain nothing, and all who are above poverty would lose a great deal. The second is the condition of civilized life, in which one man sets himself to work whatever he is qualified to carry on for the benefit of others, and is in return rewarded with the benefit of his industry in some other way. There goes through the different employments of life a general exchange. Service, in particular, is a fair exchange of maintenance for industry, of wages for labour. The exchange is honest and advantageous on both sides. The master is no less obliged to a good servant, than the servant to a good master. There must be property. The face of the earth would be a waste without it. The ground would be uncultivated, if no man had a property in it. No business of any kind need or would be carried on, if they who carried it on had not a property in the produce and the profit: but if there be property at all, it must be regulated by some fixed rules; and let these rules be what they will, property will run into unequal masses. This is inevitable. The art of man cannot hinder it. One man will have a great deal to spare, another will want. But there is one species of property which every man is born to—the use of his liberty; and thanks be to God, things are in such a state with us that this, in general, is equal: but then to turn his strength, faculties, and activity to account, he must engage with some one who has that to spare which he stands in need of. He must give him what he has to give, namely, his personal service, in order to obtain from him what he must obtain, his maintenance; and there is no



service in this country but what is founded in the interest of the servant himself. Now the reflection that arises from all this, and which is the reflection contained in the text, is, that some service necessarily results from the order and constitution of civil life; and since that order was of God Almighty's fixing, that constitution of His appointment, service also itself may be truly said to be the destination and contrivance of his Providence. The state is what God made and designed, because it is owing to that order of things which he has settled in the world; but we are moreover to refer to His Providence the state in which each finds himself: and this is true of the lowest as well as the highest—of the servant in his state as well as the prince upon his throne. We are all disposed into our different states by the appointment of God. Wherefore the business and duties of these several stations may justly be called the task which God has given us to perform; and, be it what it will, whilst we perform it we are performing the will of God. A servant, therefore, as the Apostle admonishes, is doing service to the Lord. The work assigned him is assigned, not only by the will of man, but by the appointment of God; and therefore, as the Apostle proceeds, in the execution of that work he is to look, not merely to the favour of men, but to the approbation of God. Honesty and diligence in a servant are so far their own reward, that they ensure to him a good character, and nothing else will; and his character is his livelihood: but the Apostle of Christ, in giving this servant of his for his wages the reward of a future state, carries his disciple farther; he teaches him that, whatever be a man's state, if he discharge the duties and business of it, he will be rewarded for it by

God Almighty. The words are these: "Whatever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free."

Now as this is the principle and motive which the Apostle proposes, namely, the constant consideration that they are doing God's work, and in doing that work well are serving and pleasing him, the rule by which a servant is to guide himself must correspond with this principle.

Saint Paul delivers his rule in these words: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service." Now the first quality that we find required here is, singleness of heart as unto Christ—that is, not only sincerity of heart, but the same sincerity as if they were immediately serving the Lord Christ. This excludes all pretences, all contrivances and machinations, all affectation and appearance of service, which is not true and real at the bottom. The second thing laid down in the text, in the duty of a servant, is, that he do his duty, "not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ." Eye-service is the service of him who works only under the eye of his master—only while he is seen and observed by him; who is good according as he is watched, diligent so long as he is well looked after. This sort of service is condemned in the text; and for a very plain reason: if pleasing man, if pleasing his master, was the whole and sole object of a servant's view, this might do; but it can never do with God: it can never, therefore, satisfy him who looks to God and not to man for the final recompense of his labours;

it can never be his part who conducts himself, not as a man-pleaser, but according to Saint Paul's direction, as the servant of Christ; it can never be his part who considers himself, whilst he is working for his master, as doing that business, that task of life, which God Almighty has appointed him, and looks, as Saint Paul speaks, to receive of the Lord for his service. Such a one knows, that whether his earthly master be absent or present, be negligent or careful, be skilful or ignorant, be difficult to impose upon or easy to impose upon, He who is to be the ultimate rewarder of him can never be deceived—is watching him when no one else is—seeth in secret—rewards that fidelity and that diligence which is not to be corrupted by opportunity of negligence or dishonesty, or which forgets itself when out of sight.

Having thus stated what I take to be the mind and meaning of the Apostle, as to the duty and condition of servants, I will add, as a concluding consideration, some of the various intimations given us in Scripture how greatly our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ esteemed the character of a good servant. And this appears from hence, that when he would set forth the merit and acceptance of a virtuous disciple, he generally does it by comparing his with that of a good servant: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made a ruler over his household, to give them their meat in due season: blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. I say unto you he will make him ruler over all his house."

Here you see the reception which a true Christian may expect from God, as compared with that which a faithful servant shall meet with from his master.

“The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his servants and delivered unto them his goods ; and unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one. After a long time the lord of these servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And he that had received five talents came in and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents, behold I have gained besides them five talents more ; and the lord said unto him, Thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”—We know that this is but a parable or similitude, and that in truth Christ is representing how God will applaud and recompense those who have improved and best used the abilities and opportunities put into their power ; but what I argue is this, that Christ conveys this representation under the comparison of a just, orderly, and faithful servant ; and that he would never have used this comparison, if the character of such a servant had not been what he approved, and what those who heard him were presumed to approve also. It may be observed also, what were the circumstances of this servant whom our Saviour here describes. They were circumstances, in the first place, of great trust. The master had delivered to the servant certain goods ; the behaviour of the servant was the more praiseworthy, the trial of his fidelity the greater, inasmuch as he had exerted himself so diligently and so successfully when his master was absent, “afar off on a journey ;” and absent for a long time : this increases the virtue and merit of such conduct, and is mentioned by our Lord because it did increase it.

These parables admit of two applications: a good Christian sees his duty and his reward described by the fidelity and recompense of a good servant. A good servant sees how highly that character is prized and valued by Christ, when he finds that Christ makes choice of it as the type and similitude by which he delineates the qualities and virtues which he wishes to find in his disciples, and how those virtues will be accepted at the coming of their heavenly Master.

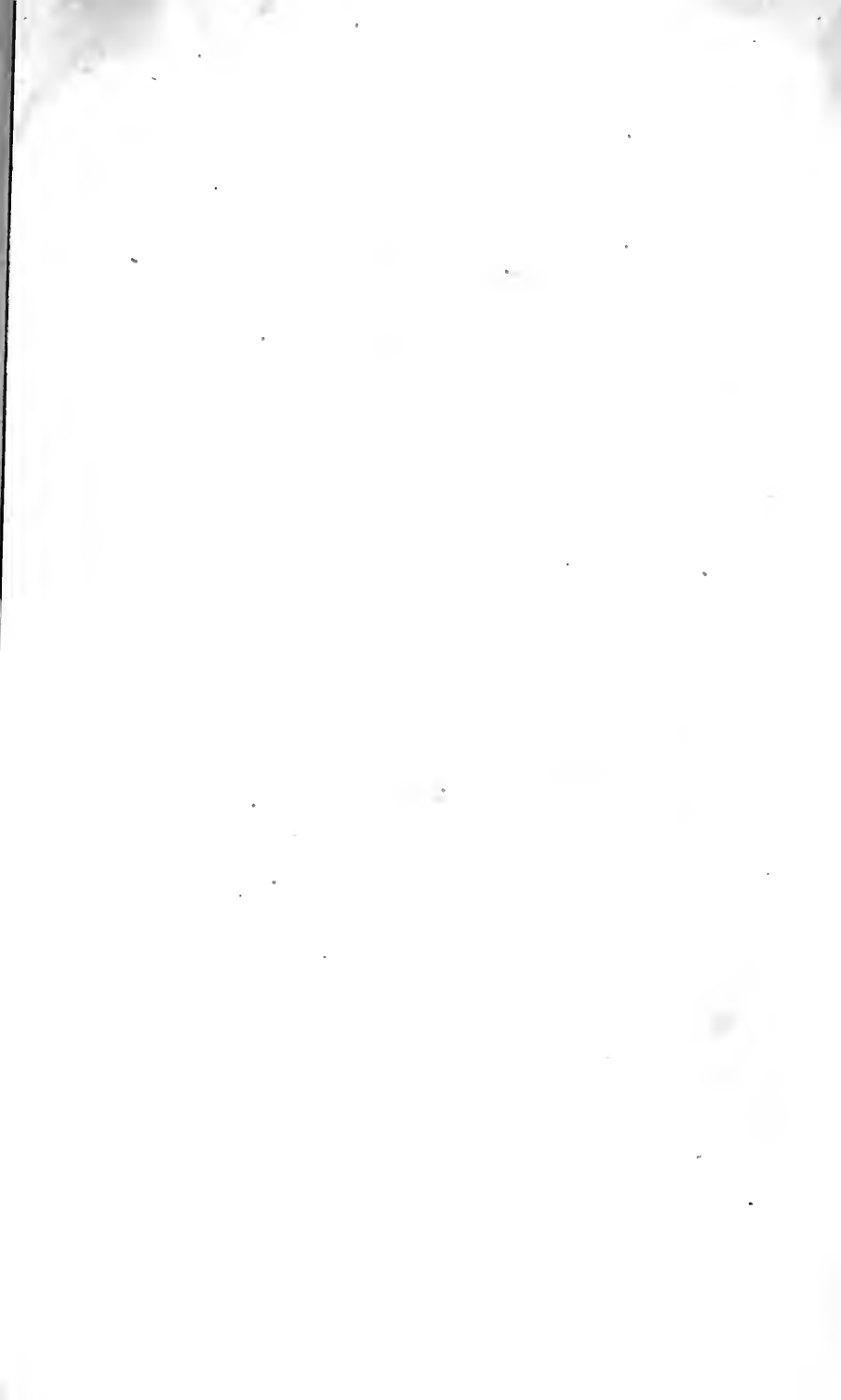
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