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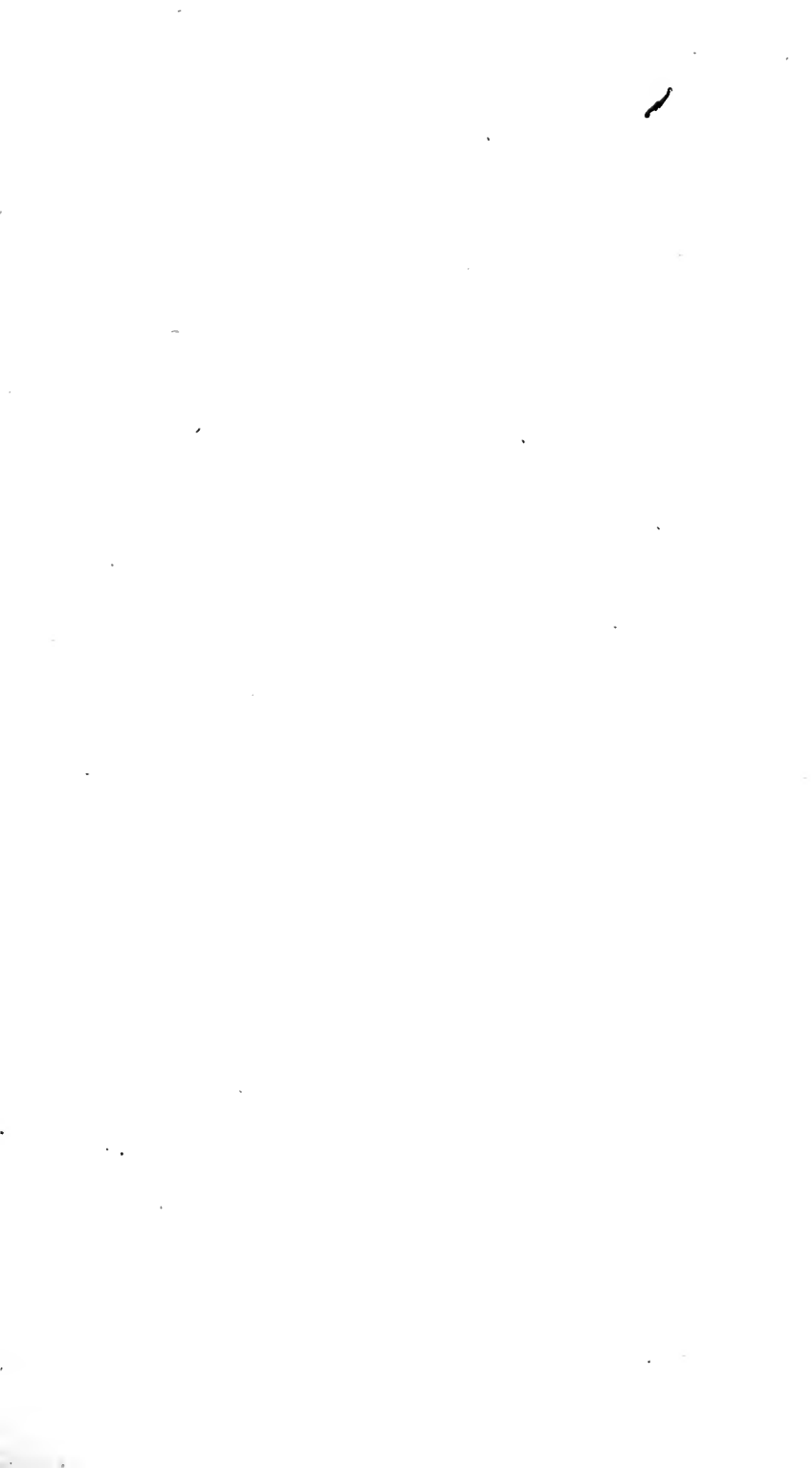
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The Gospels

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FRANÇOIS QUESNÉL

THE
GOSPELS;
WITH
MORAL REFLECTIONS
ON EACH VERSE.

BY
PASQUIER QUESNEL.

WITH
AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY THE
REV. DANIEL WILSON, A. M.
VICAR OF ISLINGTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

THE following work is on all accounts deserving of peculiar attention. The Author himself was a remarkable person, the Book is of the highest value in its particular line, and the Controversy connected with it, is fruitful of the most important instruction. The whole Work will consist of Six Volumes, of which the first three, containing the Reflections on the Gospels, are now submitted to the public: the second division will hereafter appear, comprising the equally valuable remarks on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles.

On the present occasion we shall confine ourselves to some notices of the life and sentiments of the Author; to a review of the chief excellencies and defects of his Reflections; and to an account of the edition of them now presented. The remainder of the Essay will follow, if health and opportunity be granted, at no very long interval, and will contain some view of the great Controversy connected with the Reflections, and such observations as may conduce to the further progress of that Revival of True Re-

ligion, which, in some preceding Treatises, we have ventured to consider.*

I. Our present subject is curious and edifying: a man, in the depths of a corrupt religion, asserting the doctrines of the grace of Christ; connecting this with a most penetrating view of the spiritual communion of the soul with the Saviour, by the grace of the Holy Ghost; maintaining this Religion during a long life; writing a book which excited the enmity of the church to which he belonged, which drew upon the Author a long-continued persecution of the bitterest character; which yet has made its way, during 150 years, into every part of Christendom; and which stands at this moment unrivalled in its particular class—a book which has, in its general strain, all the unction and interior piety of the purest Protestant writers, though it is mingled and debased in other parts with many gross theological errors.

Such an Author, and such a work, warrant, require, demand notice, in a day like the present.

PASQUIER QUESNEL was born at Paris, July 14th, 1634. His grandfather was a native of Scotland; but whether a Roman Catholic or not, does not appear. His father was most probably of that persuasion; and our Pasquier, after being educated at the University of Paris, entered into the Religious Congregation of the Oratoire, in 1657. He devoted himself, from his earliest years, to the study of the sacred Scriptures and of the fathers of the church—a combination most dangerous in a Roman

* Essays prefixed to Bishop Butler's Analogy, Wilberforce's Practical View, and Baxter's Reformed Pastor.

Catholic student, because he connects them with the notions of tradition and authoritative comment. He began soon to compose books of piety, chiefly for the use of the young people intrusted to his care. It was in this course that he was led to write the first portion of those Reflections which, thirty years afterwards, kindled so ardent a controversy. One or two persons of distinction having been much delighted with them, encouraged him to extend his notes to the whole of the Gospels; for at first they comprehended only some portions of our Lord's life—and they thus gradually swelled into a very important work, which gave a character to the age in which it appeared. It was in 1671 that the first edition was published, under the sanction of the then bishop of Chalons sur Marne; for it was not uncommon for persons of that station, if men of piety, to authorize and circulate works of devotion, with the sufferance of their superiors, so long as the peculiar tenets of the Roman Catholic church were intermingled, and no great stir was excited about the evangelical truths which they contained.

Quesnel continually added to his Reflections during the rest of his life. He embraced the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles in his plan, besides enriching, by more than one half, the original notes. His last years were dedicated to the preparation of a still more enlarged edition, with much new matter, which was published in 1727.* Nearly sixty years were thus employed more or less upon this pleasing and elevated task—another proof, amongst a thou-

* Eight years after his death. None of the earlier editions are complete.

sand, that nothing really excellent is the fruit of haste. When you come to understand the real facts, you discover that the books which last, which form eras in theology, which go out with a large measure of the Divine blessing, are the result of much prayer and meditation, of thoughts often revolved, and matured by degrees. Thus new and important lights irradiate the mind, the proximate ideas are suggested by time and occasion, errors and excrescencies are detected, topics assume a new face and consistency, prayer brings down the influences of grace, all the powers of the mind are brought to bear upon the inquiry, and something is produced for the honour of God and the permanent welfare of his church.

One great work is commonly as much as one man produces; and this the result of unexpected incident, rather than of express intention, in the first instance. Pascal left his *Thoughts*—Bacon, his *Novum Organum*—Butler, his *Analogy*—Leighton, his *Peter*—Scott, his *Commentary*—Cecil, his *Remains*—Quesnel, his *Reflections*,—a life having been, in each case, devoted to the particular inquiry; and the form, and magnitude, and importance of each work, having been least of all in the first intentions of the writers. Pride conceives great designs, and accomplishes little: humility dreads the promise of difficult undertakings, and accomplishes much.

Quesnel's sentiments on religion were now becoming known, as his book spread. His talents, his elegant style, his brilliancy of imagination, were acknowledged. His deep and penetrating piety was not immediately understood. His whole life seems

to have been dedicated to the love of his crucified Saviour. The fall, and total corruption of our nature, the distinct necessity of grace for the production of any thing really good, the grateful adoration of the purposes and will of God towards his elect: these formed the foundation of Quesnel's religious principles. They were not held merely as doctrines; they were insisted on, felt, followed out into their consequences. A deep and tender humility appears in his spirit, a deadness of affection as to the world, a perception of joy and peace in the spiritual life, a faith full of childlike simplicity and repose of soul on the grace and power of Christ; a minute conscientiousness in the application of his principles to his whole conduct, a skill in detecting false motives, a bold and uncompromising courage in speaking truth: these were the fruits of the great scriptural principles which he had imbibed.

Mixed, however, with these sound and elevated principles and habits, were many great errors and superstitions, flowing from his education in the bosom of the apostate church. His study of the fathers, instead of being confined to a fair and scriptural consultation of their writings, was cramped by his reliance on them as authoritative guides. They warped his judgment, instead of assisting it. The doctrine of justification was confounded with that of sanctification; and though both were bot-tomed upon grace, in the most decisive manner, yet so wide a departure from the statements of Scrip-ture, could not but have an unfavourable influence upon the whole tenor of his religion. Thus, like Pascal, Nicole, Arnauld, St. Cyran, and the other

great names of the same school, the highest order of excellence on capital points, was combined with some glaring errors. Deep spirituality of mind, unaffected humility, holy love to the divine Saviour, a simple repose on the grace of the Holy Spirit, a life of devoted and courageous obedience, were associated with much uncommanded prostration of the understanding to human authority, many dangerous superstitions, and much uncharitable condemnation of Protestants.

What an inconsistent creature is man ; and, at the same time, what a powerful principle is the divine grace which can raise him, notwithstanding many errors, to such an elevated point of holy love ! What force can one principle, well followed out, acquire over the whole character ! With what charity should we judge of the persons of individuals, in the most corrupt churches, whilst we still contend against those churches, for the faith as once delivered unto the saints ! And let Protestants look to themselves : we may have a beam in our own eye, which prevents our clear discernment, when we attempt to pluck out the mote from an eye like that of Quesnel. Probably our pride of intellect, our cold, systematic, metaphysical theology, our feeble faith, our tame and worldly standard of practical piety, our little humiliation and small measure of real prostration of soul before God, and our negligence of fasting and prayer, may often be more offensive to our heavenly Father, than many superstitions of the humble and spiritually-minded Roman Catholic. Intellectual acuteness is nothing compared to heart-felt love. His is often the fault of the understanding ; ours of the

affections. His is an external, incidental effect of the circumstances of a false education; ours the daring dictate of curiosity and conceit. His is connected with submission to God; ours with rebellion. His is the error of the head; ours of the heart.

But we return to our narrative. It was in 1681 that persecution first burst out against Quesnel. The new doctrines (for truth, when it re-appears in force, is new to fallen man, especially in a very corrupt church,) began to attract attention. Numbers espoused them. The Jesuits were the first to take the alarm. Harlai, archbishop of Paris, informed of our Pasquier's sentiments, obliged him to quit the capital. He took refuge at Orleans. Three years afterwards, he fled to Brussels, to avoid the necessity of signing an absurd formulary, in which the condemnation of Jansenism was allied with the renunciation of the natural philosophy of Descartes. Here he joined the great Arnauld and received his last instructions. He devoted himself now to the continuation of his Reflections; and in 1694 published an edition which comprised, for the first time, the whole of the New Testament. The Jesuits had not yet prevailed. Louis-Antoine de Noailles, afterwards archbishop of Vares, and cardinal, was now bishop of Chalons sur Marne, and scrupled not to recommend the book to his diocese. The bishops of Limoges, Agen, Montpellier, and Sonez, afterwards did the same.

The celebrated Bossuet likewise joined in defending the book, and the cardinal de Noailles also, when the Jesuits publicly attacked them. Bossuet, in his earlier life, seems to have inclined more to the senti-

ments of St. Augustine and Jansenius, than to the contrary notions of the Jesuits. The controversy with Fénelon had not yet soured his mind, nor his elevation at court cooled his piety. An idea may be formed of the immense circulation of the Reflections, and the prodigious eagerness with which they were sought for, from what the bishop of Meaux observes:—"This book, which contained at first only the text of the Gospels and the notes upon them, was received with an avidity and a desire of edification, which seemed to revive in our days, the primitive zeal of Christians for the continual meditation on the word of God night and day. And when the notes on the rest of the New Testament were added, the complete work had so great a success, that all the countries where the French language is known, and the royal city more particularly, were filled with it,—the booksellers could not meet the eagerness of the faithful—unnumbered editions were published one after another, and instantly taken off;—so that we may apply to this happy event what is written in the Acts, that the word of the Lord grew mightily, and that the number of its zealous readers increased every day."

Such was the effect which the persecution and the extraordinary merit of the work concurred, under the blessing of God, to produce.

But further extremities were resorted to by the Jesuits. The Reflections had been before the world more than twenty years. Some disturbance had been made, and the Author had been driven from his country. But the book had a prodigious sale; influential names were attached to it; it was exciting

more and more the hatred of the human heart on the one hand, and gaining converts and readers almost innumerable, on the other. Satan would not let this state of things continue. The real grace of God, though mixed with error, was maintained, and maintained boldly, in the Reflections; man was laid low; the Saviour was exalted; the power of fallen nature to recover itself was denied; the Holy Ghost was honoured; the world and its pleasures were uncompromisingly exposed; a new and holy life was delineated and insisted on; heaven and hell were plainly exhibited. This was enough: nothing could redeem such unpardonable faults in the eyes of the Jesuits. They could not endure the strong light thrown on the nature of man, and the one person of the Saviour. They saw acutely enough, (though perhaps Quesnel did not) that such principles went to undermine Popery. They began their schemes anew. They attempted to detach the powerful defenders of Pasquier. The cardinal de Noailles was rudely assailed. Quesnel, undaunted, prosecuted the improvement of his book, and wrote a prodigious number of occasional pamphlets. He composed also several larger Treatises, on the "Priesthood and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ—Elevations of heart towards Jesus Christ in his passion and death—The Blessedness of the Christian's death—Christian Prayers—Prayers to our Saviour Jesus Christ, for young people and those who desire to read the word of God, and especially the Gospel—Tradition of the Romish Church on the Predestination of the Saints, and on Efficacious Grace."

These productions only augmented the rage of

his enemies. The impression of their excellence, as works of piety, may be judged of from what the celebrated Father de Tournemine is reported to have said;—"That two pages of the Christian Prayers contained more real unction, than all that had issued from the pen of the Jesuits, not excepting Bourdaloue."

In the meantime, Quesnel kept himself in privacy at Brussels. The Jesuits, however, contrived to discover his retreat; and persuaded Philip V. of Spain, (whose conscience they directed,) to send an order to the bishop of Malines to arrest him. He was now cast into prison for the name of Christ; and would probably have lingered there the rest of his days, if he had not been rescued by a Spanish gentleman, who succeeded in penetrating the walls of his prison, and in freeing him from his chains. He fled to Amsterdam, under the protection of the new Protestant States, who had so gloriously succeeded in establishing their liberty. He was soon publicly condemned as a heretic, and a contumacious and seditious person,—names ever ready to be attached to the followers of the humble Saviour, especially under a superstitious and despotic government. The court at Rome was next appealed to, and a decree of Clement XI. condemnatory of the Reflections, was obtained. Nothing however could stop the sale. The work spread wider and wider. Editions were multiplied. All the world were eager to read a work so loudly denounced by the Papal chair. Thus does persecution promote truth. Never would Quesnel's Reflections have been read by one thousandth part of those, who have now, for a century and a half, been

edified by them, unless the Jesuits had pursued the book with so bitter a hatred.

An arrêt of council was afterwards obtained, from Louis XIV. in order to suppress the work. This was in 1711, after it had been forty years before the world.

At length the Jesuits urged the decrepit and superstitious monarch, through Madame de Maintenon, to force the court of Rome to enter into a detailed examination of the book, and thus settle, as they hoped, the agitated minds of men. Three years were consumed in details. At last, in 1714, the bull, known by its first word, UNIGENITUS, was issued, in which 101 propositions were extracted from Quesnel, and specifically condemned as heretical and dangerous,—a step which, like every other since the fatal council of Trent, (the band and chain of Popish errors,) tended to separate the church of Rome more and more widely from the true foundation of the Gospel, and to brand upon her forehead the broadest marks of departure from the faith of Christ. The spirit of Rome was never more graphically delineated, than in her selecting all the most express points of the Gospel, and denouncing them, coolly and avowedly, as heretical and erroneous.

The impression made at the time on the minds of pious Protestants, is seen in the preface to the excellent Mr. Henry's Comment on the Gospels, written just after Europe had been filled with the conversations which the bull excited. He gives the following specimen of the propositions:—

“ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the effectual principle of all manner of good ; is necessary

for every good action; for, without it, nothing is done, nay, nothing can be done. That it is the effect of a sovereign grace, and the operation of the almighty hand of God. That when God accompanies his word with the internal power of his grace, it operates in the soul the obedience it demands. That faith is the first grace, and the fountain of all others. That it is in vain for us to call God our Father, if we do not cry to him with a spirit of love. That there is no God nor religion, where there is no charity. That the Catholic church comprehends the angels, and all the elect, and just men of the earth of all ages. That it has the Word incarnate for its Head, and all the saints for its members. That it is profitable and necessary at all times, in all places, and for all sorts of persons, to know the Holy Scriptures; and that the holy obscurity of the word of God, is no reason for the laity not reading it. That the Lord's day ought to be sanctified by reading books of piety, especially the Holy Scriptures; and that to forbid Christians from reading the Scriptures, is to prohibit the use of light to the children of light."—Mr. Henry adds, "Many such positions as these, which the Spirit of every good Christian cannot but relish as true and good, are condemned, by the pope's bull, as impious and blasphemous. By this it appears, that Popery is still the same thing that ever it was—an enemy to the knowledge of the Scriptures, and to the honour of divine grace."

A merely secular policy was so openly followed, both by the Christian King, as he was termed, and the supple court which yielded to his interference, that the truth of the doctrines scarcely came into

question. It was the policy of Rome which was consulted. The Abbe Renaudot relates, that, on entering once the cabinet of the pope, who was fond of literary men, he found him reading Quesnel's book.—“This is an extraordinary performance,” said the pontiff; “we have no one at Rome capable of writing in this manner. I wish I could have the author by me.”—Yet this very man issued first the decree, and then the bull, which condemned the work. On the feeble mind of Louis, superstition and the Jesuits had taken up their seat. The prince who revoked the edict of Nantz in the prime of life, was not likely, in the last stage of decrepitude, to resist the influence which sought to overthrow an individual foe.

But it is more lamentable to observe, that Bossuet and Fénelon seemed to have joined in the persecution. The former had, some years before, defended the book; but he appears to have shrunk from protecting it or the Author, when popularity took another course. And Fénelon, the amiable, the lovely, the pious Fénelon, took an active part in hastening the condemnation at Rome. His correspondence, lately published, demonstrates the interest he felt, and exhibits the commendations he bestowed, with his own hand, on the divine who drew up the bull. Haughty orthodoxy and mystical devotion, are thus found to yield to the torrent of papal authority, and to lend their aid to support a corrupt and tyrannical church.

The greatest difficulty was found in obtaining the reception of the bull. Nine French bishops, assembled under the cardinal de Noailles, determined to

wait for further information before it was registered. It was not till 1718, that it was definitely accepted. In the meantime, all Christendom rang with the praises of Quesnel's doctrine. Surreptitious editions were multiplied; and the attempt to infix upon the peculiarities of the Gospel the character of impiety and heresy, stamped the deepest mark of reprobation on the church which issued the condemnation.

Quesnel survived the publication of the bull six years. These he spent in writing works of piety, and in preparing the edition of the Reflections, which, as we have observed, appeared in 1727, with all the new matter which he had noted in the margin of his copy. Admirable was almost every additional thought; and, with an undaunted courage, did the venerable saint persevere in the doctrine of the grace of God. He employed himself, likewise, in forming Jansenist churches at Amsterdam, where he died, December 2, 1719, aged 86.

He had a mind above his birth and fortune; a singular faculty of writing with ease, with unction, and with elegance. He enjoyed a robust health, which neither study, nor journies, nor continual trouble of mind, could affect. His manners were pure and irreproachable; and his whole soul was inflamed with the love of God his Saviour. His book was honoured as the instrument of incalculable good. Like the 'Confessions of St. Augustine,' the 'Imitation of Thomas a Kempis,' and the 'Thoughts of Pascal,' Quesnel's Reflections have been a light in a dark church,—the means of guiding thousands and thousands of souls,—the instrument of consolation to numbers of all churches and confessions—a

touchstone to detect and bring out the real spirit of Popery—the unequalled pattern, in its own way, of a profitable and devout study of the New Testament.

II. But from this notice of the Author and his sentiments generally, let us proceed to some considerations upon the great work itself. Let us remark the **CHARACTERISTIC EXCELLENCIES** of these Reflections—and the **CHIEF FAULTS** which are mingled with them.

(I.) The **CHARACTERISTIC EXCELLENCIES** of the Reflections, are, the prominence given to the doctrine of grace—the union of this with the most interior views of spiritual religion—the application of every thing to the practical purposes of the Christian life—the detection of the corruptions of the world, of the human heart, and of the false professor of Christianity—a high reverence for the Holy Scriptures—a constant regard, in all the observations, to the duties, temptations, and success, of the minister of religion—and a holy love and dependence of heart on the blessed Saviour and the influences of the Holy Spirit.

I. The **DOCTRINE OF GRACE** is the basis of Quesnel's theology. Every part of his work is penetrated with it. He refers every thing to its operations. He lays man low, as a fallen, ignorant, impotent creature. He traces back to the gracious will of God in election, all the streams which flow from it as the source of salvation. He seems to have a delight in illustrating the freedom of this grace, and

the difference between its effects and the works of mere nature, and reason, and philosophy. His own soul appears to have felt more of a sense of obligation to the mercy and pity of God, from his own experience and his observation upon the state of man generally, than almost any writer we know.

Take the first example that falls under our eye. Matt. xi. 25—27. “The full sight of God’s mercies towards his elect, of their preference, distinction, and separation from the corrupt mass, deserves the praise and acknowledgment of Christ’s heart.”—“Simplicity and humility are their distinguishing character. My God and my Saviour, imprint on my heart this amiable character, which is the mark of thine elect!”—“God is master of his own gifts; but he divides them by a will full of wisdom, and upon motives which are in himself, and not in us.”—“How lovely is this dependence! O Jesus, I accept it with joy. I desire to depend on thee,” &c.

This is a capital point. It honours God without reserve. And if it be not unscripturally stated, it promotes humility, love, and spirituality of mind in the highest degree.

2. And in Quesnel it is ever united with the most interior views of A PRACTICAL, SPIRITUAL AND ELEVATED PIETY. We scarcely know any writer so thoroughly practical as he, in the true sense of the term. Not in the sense of enforcing practice without motive and doctrine, but in the sense of making doctrine the constant and unvaried motive and spring of obedience. The grace of God is not stated as an abstract dogma, or defended and cleared in an argumentative and speculative manner; but is uniformly

stated as the first spring of that communion with God, that delight in him as a Father, that inward life of love, and repose, and gratitude, which constitutes the essential difference between the living and the nominal Christian. The Author has an interior view of religion as seated in the breast, nourished by the grace from which it sprung, and rising up towards God as the Fountain of felicity. Yet there is nothing of mysticism in this. It is the genuine, scriptural, sound view of that union with God through Jesus Christ, which re-unites what the fall had dis-severed, and replaces man in a commerce with the Father of spirits.

Let this be a specimen. John xv. 7—10. “Observe here three sorts of union, or three conditions, in order to obtain from God that which we desire:—1. We must be united to Christ by a lively faith, and by charity. 2. We must be united to him by a love of his truth, and a frequent meditation upon his word.—3. The third is prayer. It is by this that the branch draws the juice and sap of the vine, and receives from thence more plentiful nourishment.—God chooses us to be Christ’s members, and on purpose to work in and by us all the good we do.—Thou God of my heart, who didst first love me, cause me to continue with perseverance in thy love, that thy love may continue eternally in me.—The fidelity of my love towards God, and the adherence of my heart to his law, can be nothing but the effect of thy almighty grace, O Jesus: vouchsafe, I beseech thee, to produce this effect in me, in honour of that which thy Father produced in thee.”

3. But the application of every thing to the PRAC-

TICAL PURPOSES OF THE CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE, is a further excellent point in our Author. The interior joys and peace of grace he causes to appear in their fruits, he carries out naturally and spontaneously into their appropriate effects. Love, faith, hope, the promises, the influences of the Spirit, prayer, the whole inward testimony of religion to the soul, are most tenderly and sweetly conducted to their due consequences, in the righteousness of the life, and the discharge of the relative duties.

Hear how he speaks: Matt. v. 14. "Of what advantage is it to a Christian to be a light, in respect of his faith and calling, if he be nothing but darkness as to his life and actions? If an Infidel, instead of seeing the light of the gospel and the purity of faith shine in our conversation, discovers nothing there but the darkness of sin, we certainly blind instead of enlightening him."

The reader will observe in these quotations, much of that originality and force of observation which we noticed as distinguishing the cast of his mind. There is a clear and striking manner of putting things, which has, no doubt, much contributed to the great circulation and usefulness of the work.

Perhaps this ingenuity appears no where more clearly than in his remarks upon our Lord's miracles and parables. Every thing is turned to one purpose, the illustration of the grace of God, the promotion of the interior life of grace, and the fruitful obedience to be produced by it. How beautiful is the following reflection! Matt. xiii. 8. "The good ground is the good heart; none is such, but through the mercy of God and the grace of Jesus Christ. It

was a mercy peculiar to thee, O Lord, to purchase at so dear a rate such barren and accursed ground, full of thorns and briers, and fit only to be burned, that thou mightest make it a rich and blessed soil, fertile in every kind of good fruit. Blind and miserable is that man who attributes this work to himself, and gives not thee the glory of it, O my Saviour."

The ejaculations in these and similar sentences are also observable—the pious mind is thus led up to Christ in brief prayers—the heart is touched at once—controversy and dispute give way to devotion; and the deepest practical ends of Christianity are promoted. We know of few writers who attain this in the degree which Quesnel does: he lives by prayer.

4. The detection of THE CORRUPTIONS OF THE WORLD, of the HUMAN HEART, and of the FALSE PROFESSOR of Christianity, is what you would expect from a writer so qualified by natural talent for acute observation, and so sanctified by divine mercy to make the best use of it. He is truly, what most Roman Catholics are only in profession, devoted to God and abstracted from earthly things. His mind is dead to the world. He detects its snares, condemns its vanities, exposes its deceits, shuns its maxims. Hear what he says on the occasion of the daughter of Herodias: Matt. xiv. 6. "The diversions of the world, feasting and dancing, are but too commonly the occasions of sin. After so fatal an example as this, can we in the least doubt whether balls are not snares for souls, destructive of chastity and modesty, and a pernicious invention to awaken and excite the passions."

This is excellent in the highest degree: but mark with what point he turns and addresses mothers: “Unhappy mother, who exposes her daughter to the shipwreck which herself has suffered, and makes her the instrument of her passion and revenge, and the murderer of a saint!”

And then notice the solemnity of the caution he subjoins: “God grant that many mothers may take warning by this example, and have it before their eyes, when they are about to introduce their daughters at court!”

Thus he pursues the world in other passages which we need not cite. Nor will we quote places which prove his skill in exposing the human heart. He shows it to be nothing by nature, but falsehood and sin. He declares that whatever good it has, must proceed from another source. He breaks out continually into prayer, for the cleansing virtues of Jesus Christ.

The false professor of Christianity is dealt with in a manner equally faithful. Could any Protestant write better than he does on Matt. xxiii. 23. “To be exact in little things, and to omit such as are essential to religion and piety, what is this but to deceive ourselves?—Unhappy is that man who rests secure in a vain and conceited exactness about the niceties of devotion, instead of applying himself to his proper duties, to the reformation of his heart, and to the faithful observation of justice and charity towards his neighbour, &c.; this is a kind of delusion more dangerous to some souls, than an open temptation to sin.”

5. But we proceed to notice another characteris-

tic, HIS HIGH REVERENCE FOR THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. Our Author's mind is penetrated with a sense of the value of the Holy Scriptures, of their divine inspiration, of their authority over the conscience, of the peculiar virtue they possess for nourishing the Christian heart. He conceives that what God has spoken by his Spirit, is exactly adapted for that divine life, which the same God, by the same Spirit, creates in the human breast. He looks on the Bible as the waters of life, flowing to assuage the thirst which the new creature experiences. "We must be united to God," (says our Author on John xv. 7.) "by a love of his truth, and a frequent meditation upon his word, which is the rule of our desires, as being the book of God's designs, to which all our prayers and desires ought to be conformable. It is not sufficient to have faith and charity, we must continually nourish them with the word of God. To read it carelessly and for fashion's sake, is directly contrary to that reverence which is due to it, and to our own spiritual advantage. It must be imprinted strongly on our minds, or, as it were, engraved deep on our hearts, that it may abide therein. Nothing but love can perform this, as nothing but love can cause us to practise it."

Such remarks are of the first order, drawn from the very unction of the Holy Spirit—golden observations, the fruit of deep meditation on the blessed Scriptures.

6. But there is a peculiarity in our Quesnel's reflections, still more important to ministers—he has especial regard in his book TO THE DUTIES, THE TEMPTATIONS, AND THE SUCCESS OF MINISTERS.

He very frequently frames a series of six, eight, or ten qualifications of the faithful pastor. At some times he delineates his spirit and labours; at others, he contrasts these with the indolence and unfaithfulness of the worldly-minded teacher. Now, he insists on the humility, spirituality, tenderness of heart, prayerfulness of the true Shepherd; and then he exposes the pride, secularity, love of applause, selfishness of the false one. He especially dwells on the larger unction of the Holy Spirit, which rests on the diligent and spiritually-minded pastor, the brighter knowledge of the Scriptures, the more copious blessings of grace, the wider success.

This is an excellency quite his own. QUESNEL'S REFLECTIONS ARE THE MINISTER'S MANUAL. Look at most of our commentators; they are occupied in expounding, clearing, reconciling the divine word; but they do not seem to study it, under a deep and penetrating sense of ministerial responsibility. The labours, temptations, aims, success of the minister, do not appear to have been present with the commentator's mind. Quesnel studied the New Testament as a minister for ministers.

“A true minister of Christ, after his example,” (Matt. ix. 35, &c.) “is neither detained in one place by the sweetness of the applause of some, nor discouraged from his ministry by the jealousy and calumny of others.—There is an extreme want of labourers in the church. There are abundance who bear this character, but few who really work; and a great many who work in the Lord's name, but very few whom he will own for his ministers.—Jesus Christ requires for labourers, not such as by in-

trigues and human solicitations assume the office, but such as are the fruit of the church's prayers: not such as enter into the harvest, to make themselves the lords of it, but those who labour only for the profit of the Lord of it; not such as in the repose of an idle life, enjoy the honour and temporal advantages of the ministry, but such as work hard, like daily labourers. We do not sufficiently comprehend how much it is our duty and interest to pray for the obtaining good bishops, good curates, holy preachers, full of zeal, knowledge, and disinterestedness."

"The mysterious fishing," (Luke v. 5.) "represents that of souls. In vain the preacher labours to convert them, if God gives not his blessing. It is upon his grace that he must rely, and not upon his own eloquence and strength. The fishing of the night, is an unsuccessful and unfortunate fishing, without light, without mission, without Christ's assistance, in a bark where he is not, and without his direction.—The fishing of the day is a blessed fishing, which is carried on by the light of faith, in the sight of the Sun of Righteousness, with confidence in the promise of his assistance to the end of the world, and in the mid-day of truth."

7. But we hasten to notice, what scarcely requires distinct notice, Quesnel's HOLY LOVE AND DEPENDENCE OF HEART ON THE BLESSED SAVIOUR AND THE INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. This is the inspiring theme which dwells on his tongue—this is the secret charm which elevates his reflections—this is the master-key which unlocks the treasures of his divinity. All our preceding points derive their virtue from this. The whole soul of Quesnel

is filled with love to Christ, and holy dependence on his grace and Holy Spirit.

In this he stands far superior to almost all the writers of his church. Not only does he far surpass Massillon, Bourdaloue, Bossuet, De la Rue, Soanen, Neuville, and the other great French preachers; but also Pascal, Nicole, and the other ornaments of the Jansenist school. Even Thomas à Kempis himself, sweet and sacred as he is, must yield the palm to Quesnel, as to distinct views of the grace and power of Christ, and the operations of his Spirit. Nothing is high, nothing pure, nothing efficacious, nothing permanent, nothing salutary for souls, according to Quesnel, but the name and grace of the incarnate God.

(II.) What, then, it may be asked, can be THE MATERIAL FAULTS in a work of such varied excellence?

They are many, and of very considerable importance; and it is the more necessary to state them in an Introductory Essay to a republication of the Reflections, for two reasons:—

The one, that THE GRACE OF GOD MAY BE MAGNIFIED in bringing light out of such darkness. We cannot feel a real scriptural interest and delight in contemplating the character of Quesnel, unless we clearly see the thick darkness, which, on some questions, oppressed his mind. We must state his errors fully and unreservedly, not from a spirit of envy or false triumph, but in order to glorify the operations of grace, and to magnify the virtue and power of that truth which dwelt in him.

A second reason is, that we may caution young students against any attempts TO LESSEN THE EVIL OF RELIGIOUS ERRORS, because they happen to be associated, in such a case as that before us, with very extraordinary excellencies. In a day like the present, it is most necessary to be on our guard. Corruptions in doctrine are gradual. Declines in the faith almost always begin with pious and eminent persons, whose high attainments throw a veil over their faults, and hand them down with a species of authority. The direct tendency of the false doctrines, the superstitions, the tyranny over the conscience, the prohibition of the Scriptures maintained by the church of Rome, is to ignorance, self-righteousness, irreligion, unholiness. Quesnel and such men are the exception, and the rare exception; not the rule. The church of Rome never admitted and espoused, as a body, such men as Quesnel, Pascal, Nicole; but condemned, persecuted, and cast them out. If our Author be quoted as a proof of the excellent graces which may be found in a Roman Catholic, let it be remembered, that he was a Roman Catholic persecuted, exiled, condemned;—let it be remembered, that the very truths which he asserted with so much zeal, were culled out from his book, were arranged in 101 propositions, and branded as heretical.

With these cautions upon our mind, the reading of Quesnel's book may be most beneficial. We are delighted to see in his case the fact, that a very high measure of light, holiness, love, joy, deadness to the world, interior union and communion with God, real spiritual religion, may consist with many defects, many errors, many grievous false doctrines. There

are few studies more profitable than the calm and unprejudiced contemplation of such a character as Quesnel. Few things more tend to exalt the grace and mercy of Christ—few things more tend to wean us from following too implicitly any human teacher—few things more warn us against adopting ALL the opinions of any human writer.

But let us classify the defects in our excellent Author. They are either derived from a want of clearness in the parcelling out and dividing the truths which he held—or they spring from the actual insertion of unscriptural doctrines and tenets—or they arise from an erroneous system of interpreting the language of holy Scripture.

1. There is A WANT OF CLEARNESS IN THE PARCELLING OUT AND DIVIDING THE CAPITAL TRUTHS WHICH HE REALLY HELD. He believed most cordially and fully all fundamental truths, as we have repeatedly shown, but he had not the blessing of a pure education in scriptural divinity; and therefore truth lay in his mind undivided, unarranged, or rather divided and arranged falsely and dangerously.

The doctrine of justification by faith only, without the deeds of the law, Quesnel did not explicitly, though he most certainly did implicitly, believe. Sometimes he states the justification of man clearly and fully; but in general, obscurely and confusedly.

This is from the different truths of the Gospel not being parcelled out and divided by a free and independent study of the Holy Scriptures. The church of Rome confounds justification and sanctification. The church of Rome holds merits and satisfactions, and works of supererogation. Quesnel is hampered,

cramped, by these decisions. His noble spirit, taught of God, and raised upwards by his grace, is fettered by the bonds of educational prepossession, and church decrees, and writings of fathers. This is the chief defect in Quesnel, as it is in most of the Roman Catholic writers. I know not one that holds clearly and consistently the doctrine of a free justification as taught by St. Paul, and defended by Luther and the Reformers.

But this defect being qualified by an unreserved belief in the doctrine of grace, in the merciful election of God, the utter inefficiency of man to any thing good, and the reward of mercy, was, in Quesnel's case, as in St. Augustine's, not a fundamental error, but a want of order and clearness in his theological creed.

Hear him speaking thus, (Matt. xxv. 35.) "Good works done for God's sake, through Jesus Christ, in the Spirit of the Father and the Son, are the price of the glory prepared for the elect; prepared without merit by a bounty altogether free; bestowed on works as their reward, but on such works as are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, and are the gifts of God."

Another confusion in our Author's mind respects the sacrament of baptism, to which he seems uniformly to attribute the actual communication of the divine life, and the positive infusion of the new principle of grace; though no writer can more strongly insist on the necessity of a spiritual change in every human being, in order to salvation. To attribute too much to baptism as an *opus operatum*, is not, however, a defect peculiar to Roman Catholics.—It is blind human nature fond of substituting the sign for the thing signified.

Thus, on John iii. 5. our Author writes in this dangerous manner: “ We have all received this new and heavenly birth, wherein God himself, by the virtue of his Holy Spirit, is to us as a father; and the church, represented by the water, receives us into her bosom as our mother. Baptism gives us a right to the kingdom of God, provided we live like children of God and members of Christ, in being obedient to his Spirit.”

But this language is not pushed; it is not made prominent;—the moment an occasion is given, the language relapses into the most holy and scriptural strain; which shows, that it is a confusion of ideas, not any fundamental error which pervades his divinity. In the very verse but one after that on which the preceding expressions occur, he writes thus beautifully:—“ Adam being a sinner could beget only sinners, and propagate no other inclinations but such as tend to sin. It belongs to thee, O holy Jesus, as the principle of our new life, to give us thy Spirit, and to inspire into us thy spiritual and holy inclinations. He who is thoroughly sensible of the corruption of the heart of man, is far from wondering that it is necessary for him to be changed into a new man, and that he must receive a new spirit, a new heart, and a new principle of life and action.”

Another point where the want of a right division of the word of truth is apparent, relates to heretics and schismatics, and what he considers the unity of the church. His mind is so possessed with the Roman Catholic exposition of the doctrine of the church, the keys, the power of absolution, the primacy of Peter, the limits of grace and non-salvation out of the

church, that much confusion appears. That he held the freedom and efficacy of divine grace, the spiritual union of all the elect, the invisible body of Christ, consisting of believers of all ages and all parts of the world, is perfectly certain. Yet at times he speaks confusedly, and, if strictly interpreted, in a contradictory manner. So on Luke vii. 35. "*Wisdom is justified of all her children,*" he writes, "The catholic church alone is that wherein all the different ways of God are found. These different paths of religious orders, some more austere, some less, show plainly, that the catholic church is the sole spouse of wisdom, that her children are the children of wisdom, and that they alone are capable of justifying her."

But let us proceed to notice the faults of our Author's work, as they spring,

2. From the ACTUAL INSERTION OF UNSCRIP-
TURAL DOCTRINES AND TENETS.—These peep out, as it were, from under the large and heavenly furniture of divine knowledge and grace with which he is blessed. The primary error of implicit subjection of faith to the church, casts an obscurity over the operations of his understanding, against which the grace of God victoriously struggled for the most part, but which occasionally appeared. Thus on Luke i. 1—4. he says, "Scripture and tradition are the two fountains of Christian truths, very consistent with each other; but tradition preceded Scripture."

So on Luke i. 20. on Zacharias being struck dumb, "Let us learn by this example, that God frequently pardons faults without remitting the whole punishment due to them."

Again in the same chapter, "Christ gives him-

self still to every one of us a victim, by the communion, which is an extension of the incarnation."

Once more, "Mary comes to us when she assists us in our wants: Jesus, who is always in her heart, makes her the instrument of his operations, the channel of his graces, and the minister of his mercies."

Again, "The intercession of saints is authorized by the example of the Centurion;—we honour the great ones of the earth, when we apply ourselves to those about them, whom they honour with their favour; and we honour God, when we make use of the mediation of saints with him, who are his favourites and his friends."

Once more, on Luke xi. "Vouchsafe, O holy Virgin, to teach us to praise thee in such a manner as may honour thy Son. Obtain for us strength to oppose the enemies of that worship which the church pays thee, and to avoid therein whatever is not according to thy spirit."

So, as to relics, Luke xxiii. "It was just and reasonable, that the honour which we pay to the relics of the saints, should begin with the adorable relics of the Saint of saints." Hear again what he says on the primacy,—“Does not Jesus Christ seem to suppose here a primacy in the Apostolical College, and to establish it by the very same words which heretics abuse to subvert it. The primacy of St. Peter is a prerogative of Divine right.”—Matth. xx. Mark iii.

So as to images, John xix. "It is a double ingratitude in heretics to reject the images of Christ crucified—which serve to open the eyes of our faith,

to awaken our memory, and to excite our gratitude. These images are an abridgment of the gospel, both for the learned and the ignorant; and the history of our blessed Saviour's passion, for those who cannot read."

Such is the darkness, the gross darkness of this holy man's mind in many important respects,—and if these dreadful errors were dwelt upon, and occupied any considerable space in the whole body of the Reflections, they would totally destroy its vital excellency, and alter its whole character. But these traits of his corrupt church appear but rarely; are qualified by important concessions; seem the mere effects of education and habit, contrary to the prevailing tenor of his sentiments—are the fragments and remaining links of that chain of darkness in which the grace of God found him, and from which it released his soul.

These false doctrines are gross, and some of them idolatrous—but there are other slighter, though not unimportant errors, which spring from the confusion of truth in his mind, to which we have already adverted, and which are less fundamental in their nature. They may be chiefly traced to the sources we have pointed out—the defects on justification, baptism, and the church.

We bring out these things that the darkness may be seen and felt. We hide nothing. We apologize for nothing. The full exhibition of the real case is essential to our whole purpose. Let the extraordinary phenomena be considered. Here is a man full of the Holy Ghost, full of the deepest humility of soul, full of the purest and most spiritual love to the Saviour—born of God, and following God in a

new and holy obedience,—a man who drew upon himself the persecution of the corrupt church of which he is a member, by his bold avowal of the doctrines of grace—a man whose writings have been a blessing to thousands upon thousands;—and yet this same man believes, in a certain way, these gross errors, is infected with these extraordinary superstitions, remains a member of this apostate church.

What shall we say to such a commixture of light and darkness, but that it forms an additional confirmation of that doctrine of the corruption of man, which laid the foundation, in this very Quesnel's mind, of all the humility which adorned him? What shall we say, but that where the heart is right, the head may be in many important respects wrong? What shall we say, but that where the capital points of contrition and penitence for sin—an humble faith in the merits and sacrifice of Christ, and an entire dependence on the operations of the Spirit, possess the soul—much defect in knowledge and theological furniture of mind may exist?

If these are the real facts of the case—and I apprehend they are so—then it is no use arguing against them; the point is to draw the proper instruction from such phenomena.

And when we see the eminent, the almost unparalleled attainments in the spiritual life, of such men as Pascal, Nicole, Quesnel—when we see their love to God, their separation from the vanities of the world, their holy communion of prayer, their sense of the unutterable evil of sin—their apprehension of the divine grace, as the source of all good—their simple, fervent, self-denying love to Christ—their

compassion and zeal for the souls of their fellow-creatures; we must acknowledge, that intellectual errors are less valid to overthrow, than moral and affectionate emotions of the soul are powerful to sustain, the spiritual life. The Christian lives by love, not by doctrine. If there be light enough in the understanding, to lead to an acquaintance with ourselves and with Jesus Christ; our attainments will go on in proportion to our holy affections, our fervent prayers, our measure of the Holy Spirit, our self-abasement and our union with Christ, the Head of all influence and grace.

3. But we shall be reminded of a third source of the defects in Quesnel's Reflections—A DEFECTIVE SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES,—we mean not a totally false system; but one materially erroneous, defective in its principles, necessarily leaving the interpreter in uncertainty and darkness continually. The false principle in the system is, the interpreting according to human authorities and tradition, and not according to the real meaning of the Holy Spirit in the word, gathered by a sound judgment and a careful examination of the Scriptures themselves. To interpret by the fathers, is to make the New Testament a nose of wax. To impose a certain meaning upon Scripture, instead of drawing all our opinions from that sacred Book, is fundamentally erroneous. Language is the mere instrument of communicating ideas. In using human language, the inspiring Spirit employs ideas which already form part of the stock of human knowledge. This is the point from which we must set out. Human language must be interpreted by the

ordinary laws of human language: otherwise, we have no revelation of God's will intelligible to man.

All Quesnel's errors spring from the trammels and bonds which the church of Rome imposes on her members. He interprets as he is bidden, not as the truth of things demands. An enlightened understanding, as to the main truths of Christianity, and a holy heart, led him, indeed, into substantial truth; but his fathers, and councils, and decrees, and bulls, perverted the operations of his fine powers on many important occasions.

This appears in two principal respects. He applies, without authority, every expression and incident he can, to establish the doctrines or tenets of his church; instead of bringing these doctrines and tenets to the standard of the Bible itself.

The other mischief is—he gives scope to a fruitful imagination; and, instead of interpreting the meaning of the Scriptures soberly, he flies off upon glosses, accommodations, pretty thoughts, secondary uses of the passages before him. The attentive reader will perceive this immediately; and these remarks have extended to such a length, that we cannot stop to make citations.

To occasional playfulness of fancy, we have no objection; to the strong and hyperbolical language of the emotions, we have no objection; to the flights of devotional poetry, we have no objection; to parable, allegory, metaphor, we have no objection; to the accommodation of historical incidents to the illustration of spiritual things, we have no objection. All these methods we find used in the sacred Scriptures. The established laws of interpretation apply

to them, as they do to the plainest parts of the Bible. Men know how to interpret an act of parliament, when that is before them; as they know how to interpret an heroic poem or an ode. If there be true faith in the heart, which seeks honestly to learn and to do the will of God, this faith will set to work all that common sense, all that integrity, all that spirit of prayer, all that application of the powers of the mind to the language of the Scriptures, all that entire submission of the understanding to the matter of revelation, on which a true interpretation depends.

What we object to in Quesnel, is the dangerous system, the defective and erroneous principles, or rather want of principles, in his interpretation, whereby his mind, at sea without a rudder or pilot, is tossed hither and thither. Fancy is the staple commodity, not the ornament and appendage. He proceeds continually as the church directs, as the fathers happen to dictate, as his imagination suggests; and not as the real import of the passage before him requires.

The consequence is, the errors in doctrine which we have been pointing out. Against this whole system we enter our solemn protest. In the case of Quesnel, the evils were neutralized by the high guidance of spiritual affections, and the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit. But the evils are not the less real in themselves. If a sound system of interpretation be once relinquished, all is thrown into uncertainty, the Scriptures may be made to prove any thing; and the very first end of a Divine Reve-

lation may be defeated. But we propose to notice very briefly,

III. THE PLAN ON WHICH THIS TRANSLATED EDITION HAS BEEN CONDUCTED. And here we hasten to relieve the reader from a great source of anxiety. He would naturally ask how he could safely intrust a work debased with such gross and dangerous errors, to the hands of ministers; or in fact how he could venture to read such a book himself? We inform him, then, that THESE ERRORS ARE ALL OMITTED IN THE PRESENT EDITION. Every one of the passages cited in pages 33 and 34 of this Essay, is left out in this translation. We quoted them in order to give the true view of our Author's character; and to show what errors may possibly consist with a very high measure of the divine grace.

The edition we now republish is from the pen of a Protestant English clergyman, the Rev. Richard Russell, who carefully left out the passages of a Roman Catholic character; and printed, in an appendix to the last volume, the omitted words and sentences.* These do not fill more than twenty, out of seventeen hundred pages, (for such is about the proportion,) of which the work consists, and which of course are uninfected with these gross and lamentable corruptions. From these twenty pages we have selected the worst passages, that the reader might be in full possession of the truth of the case.

The translation was made about a century since; but we have not been able to learn any thing impor-

* Many other erroneous or ambiguous expressions have been omitted in this edition, which Mr. Russell had overlooked.

tant concerning the author of it. He prefixes to his work the 101 propositions which the court of Rome condemned; he intimates, that in his day there were many among Protestants more in the dark as to the doctrines of the grace of God in salvation, than Quesnel and other divines of the Roman Catholic church—and, alas! the case is, we fear, the same now.

And this is one principal motive for the republication. We have no work of the same kind—we have nothing in practical divinity so sweet, so spiritual, so interior as to the real life of grace—so rich, so copious, so original. We have nothing that treats the whole New Testament as the manual of the minister of religion. We have nothing that extols the grace of God, and abases and lowers man so entirely. We lessen not the value of our various admirable comments on the New Testament—they have each their particular excellencies. But none of them supersedes Quesnel; none can supply that thorough insight into the world, the evil of sin, the life of faith and prayer, which he possesses.

And this is what we want in the present day. We have learned comments enough—we have light, and doctrine, and systems of divinity enough. But devotional feelings, communion with God, the life of grace, the separation of heart from the vanities of the world, is what we need.

And we doubt whether all the gross errors and defects of Quesnel, are so injurious to the mind of a young Protestant student, as those plausible comments which sap the foundations of grace and truth; which elevate the natural power of man; which place

justification on the footing of human works, conjointly with the obedience and death of Christ; which explain away most of the passages concerning the new and divine birth of the soul; which weaken or deny the experience of religion in the heart; which teach conformity to the world, and insist not on the life of faith and grace.

Here, however, we may be mistaken. But we conceive we are in danger of no mistake, in warmly recommending Quesnel for the particular purposes for which his work is designed. We would place him with Calvin, and Hall, and Henry, and Doddridge, and Guyse, and Scott. We would place him far above another series of commentators, whom it would be invidious to name. At the same time, more caution is necessary in reading Quesnel, than in reading many other authors. We would not put him into the hands of young and inexperienced Christians, whose principles are not fixed, and who want the first "sincere milk of the word." After all the omissions made in our edition, the defective theology of our Author could not, of course, be changed; the confusion in his own mind could not be wholly cleared up; the integrity of the work could not be violated; the occasional tinge of error could not be obliterated.

The doctrine of justification by faith only, if thoroughly known, will be a barrier against most of these evils. The operations of grace, not only by the sacraments, but in all the other means of instruction, and especially by the meditation of the Holy Scriptures, if duly apprehended, will protect the heart against many remaining errors of this work.

The defective system of interpretation will require

more care, because it is seductive to an ardent imagination : it pleases, it opens new and attractive views of reflection. Let the young minister be on his guard. Let him admire, without imitating the fancies and ingenious turns of our Author. Let him use them for devotion and prayer, not for a model of composition or a rule of interpretation. Let him advise with them, select from them, exercise a choice and discretion in his handling of them—not indiscriminately follow their guidance.

We have only to add, that this translation is made from the last and more complete edition of the original work. A translation of the ‘ Reflections on the Gospels ’ was published at Bath in 1791, which is materially defective. It leaves out, under the pretence of avoiding the Roman Catholic errors, almost all the spirituality and beauty of the work ; and gives no just apprehension of the real sentiments of Quesnel. Not so our edition ; which, passing over only the decidedly erroneous passages, leaves the whole spirit of the work unimpaired, and allows the reader to judge of the doctrinal, and practical, and experimental views of the pious Author.

D. W.

ISLINGTON, *June*, 1830.

THE
CONSTITUTION UNIGENITUS;

OR,

*The DECREE of Pope Clement XI. condemning Quesnel's
'Moral Reflections on the New Testament.'*

CLEMENT, BISHOP,
Servant of the Servants of GOD,

To all the Faithful of CHRIST, Greeting and Apostolical Benediction:—

THE only-begotten Son of God, who became the Son of man for our salvation and that of the whole world, while he instructed his disciples in the doctrine of truth, and in the persons of the apostles taught his whole Church, ordering things present, and foreseeing those which were to come, did, by a most excellent and wholesome admonition, advise us to “beware of false prophets, who come to us in sheep’s clothing;” by which name are chiefly pointed out to us those lying teachers, and deceitful seducers, who, by means of a specious show of piety instilling secretly corrupt tenets, introduce damnable sects under the fair appearance of sanctity and holiness; and who, in order the more easily to surprise the unwary, laying by as it were the wolf’s skin, and covering themselves with sentences of the divine law as with a kind of sheep’s clothing, wickedly abuse the words of the Holy Scriptures, and even those of the New Testament, which they many ways falsify to the perdition of themselves and of others; being taught, it seems, by the example and instructions of the first father of lies, from whom they are descended—That the most proper and expeditious way to deceive, is to pretend the authority of the divine word, whenever the imposture of wicked and abominable error is designed to be introduced.

Being forewarned by this truly divine admonition, when we first heard, to the great grief of our heart, that a certain book, printed formerly in French, in several volumes, (under the title of ‘The New Testament in French, with Moral Reflections upon every Verse,’ &c. Paris, 1699. And otherwise, ‘An Abridgment of the Morality of the Gospel, of the Acts of the Apostles,

of the Epistles of St. Paul, of the Canonical Epistles, and of the Revelations; or, Christian Thoughts upon the Text of those Sacred Books,' &c. Paris, 1693, and 1694,) though already condemned by us, and really containing the falsehood of corrupt doctrine in many places intermixed with catholic truths, was notwithstanding still looked upon by many as free from all error, was frequently put into the hands of the faithful, and, by the advice and endeavours of some restless spirits, always attempting something new, was too industriously dispersed every where, and even translated into Latin, that the contagion of pernicious doctrine might, if possible, be conveyed from one nation to another, and from one kingdom to another people; we were extremely afflicted to see the flock of Christ, intrusted to our care, thus gradually led aside by these crafty seducements, into the way of perdition. And therefore being excited thereto, as well by the motions of our own pastoral care, as by the frequent complaints of those who are zealous for the orthodox faith, but most of all by the letters and petitions of very many of our venerable brethren, especially of the Bishops of France, we have resolved to make use of some more effectual remedy, in order to put a stop to this spreading disease, which might otherwise in time break out into all manner of bad consequences.

And having seriously applied our mind to consider the real cause of this growing evil, we have clearly discovered, that the chief mischief of this book owes its progress and increase to its lying concealed within, and because, like corrupted matter, it cannot come forth unless the sore be lanced. For the book itself, at the first sight, allures the reader by a certain show of piety; its "words are softer than oil," yet are they really darts, and which, from a bow ready bent, are prepared to do mischief, and are "privily shot at those who are upright in heart." We therefore judged, that we could not possibly do any thing either more seasonable or safe, than to lay open the fallacious doctrine of the book, not in general only, as we have hitherto done, but more distinctly and plainly, by extracting out of it many particular propositions; that so the noxious seeds of the tares, being separated from the midst of the wheat which covered them, might be openly exposed to the sight of all the faithful in Christ. And thus having detected, and as it were placed in open view, not one or two, but many and most grievous errors, as well those formerly condemned, as those lately discovered, we trust that, by the blessing of God, all will at length find themselves obliged to yield to the truth, now so clearly discovered and made manifest to them.

That this method will be of the greatest advantage to the catholic cause; that it will contribute very much to the healing of those divisions, which have risen, more especially in the flourishing kingdom of France, from the various opinions entertained by the minds of men, which seem to be still widening into more

grievous ruptures ; and that, lastly, it will be very useful, and in a manner necessary to the quieting of consciences : not only the above-mentioned Bishops have signified to us, but more particularly our most dear son in Christ, his Most Christian Majesty himself, Louis King of France, whose extraordinary zeal, in maintaining the purity of the catholic faith and extirpating error, we can never sufficiently commend, has more than once assured us ; for those reasons requesting of us, with repeated instances truly pious, worthy of the Most Christian King, and with earnest entreaties, that we would provide for the urgent necessity of souls, by passing the censure of our apostolical judgment without delay.

Wherefore, by the blessing of God, and trusting in his heavenly assistance, we set about this beneficial work with great diligence and application, as the weightiness of the affair required ; and ordered a great many propositions, faithfully extracted out of the fore-mentioned book, according to the above-cited editions, and expressed both in French and Latin, to be accurately discussed by several professors in divinity, first in the presence of two of our venerable brethren, Cardinals of the holy Roman Church, and then afterwards to be weighed and examined with the utmost diligence and mature deliberation, in our own presence, and that of several other Cardinals, in many repeated congregations, in which each proposition was most exactly compared with the text of the book. The propositions are such as follow, namely,—

1. What else remains to a soul which has lost God and his grace, but sin, and the consequences of sin, a proud poverty, and a slothful indigence, that is, a general inability as to labour, prayer, and every good work ? Luke xvi. 3.

2. The grace of Jesus Christ, the efficacious principle of every kind of good, is necessary to every good action : without it, not only nothing is done, but likewise nothing can be done. John xv. 5.

3. In vain, O Lord, thou commandest, if thou thyself dost not give that which thou commandest. Acts xvi. 10.

4. Yes, Lord, all things are possible to him to whom thou makest all things possible, by working the same in him. Mark ix. 23.

5. When God does not soften the heart by the internal unction of his grace, exhortations and external graces serve for nothing but to harden it the more. Rom. ix. 18.

6. The difference betwixt the Jewish and the Christian covenant consists in this, that in the former God requires the sinner to avoid sin and to fulfil the law, leaving him at the same time in his state of inability ; whereas, in the latter, he gives the sinner that which he commands, by purifying him with his grace. Rom. xi. 27.

7. What advantage was there for a man under the old cove-

nant, wherein God left him to his own weakness, at the same time imposing upon him the yoke of his law? But how great is the happiness to be admitted into a covenant, wherein God confers that upon us which he requires of us? Heb. viii. 7.

8. We belong not to the new covenant, but only so far as we are partakers of that new grace, which works in us that which God commands us to do. Heb. viii. 10.

9. The grace of Christ is a sovereign grace, without which we can never confess Christ, and with which we never deny him. 1 Cor. xii. 3.

10. Grace is an operation of the almighty hand of God, which nothing can hinder or retard. Matt. xx. 34.

11. Grace is nothing else but the will of Almighty God, commanding and doing that which he commands. Mark ii. 11.

12. When God willeth to save a soul, the undoubted effect, always and every where, follows the will of God. Mark ii. 11.

13. When God willeth to save a soul, and touches it with the internal hand of his grace, no human will resists him. Luke v. 13.

14. At how great a distance soever from salvation an obstinate sinner may be, yet when Jesus shows himself to him by the salutary light of his grace, he must of necessity submit, he must run to him, he must humble himself, and adore his Saviour. Mark v. 6, 7.

15. When God accompanies his command, and external word with the unction of his Spirit, and the internal power of his grace, it then works in the heart that obedience which it requires. Luke ix. 60.

16. There are no charms, but what yield to those of grace; because nothing resists the Almighty. Acts viii. 12.

17. Grace is that voice of the Father which teaches men inwardly, and makes them come unto Jesus Christ: whoever comes not unto him, after having heard the outward voice of the Son, is in nowise taught by the Father. John vi. 45.

18. The seed of the word, which the hand of God waters, does always bring forth its fruit. Acts xi. 21.

19. The grace of God is nothing else but his all-powerful will: this is the idea which God himself gives us of it in all his Scriptures. Rom. xiv. 4.

20. The true idea of grace is this: God willeth our obedience, and he is obeyed; he commands, and every thing is done; he speaks as Lord, and all things are subject to him. Mark iv. 39.

21. The grace of Jesus Christ is a strong, powerful, sovereign, and invincible grace, as being the operation of the almighty will, and a consequence and imitation of the operation of God in making his Son man, and raising him from the dead. 2 Cor. v. 21.

22. The agreement of the almighty operation of God in the heart of man with the free consent of his will, is immediately showed us in the incarnation, as in the source and first pattern

of all the other operations of mercy and grace, which are all of them as free, and as much depending on God, as that original operation. Luke i. 38.

23. God himself has given us an idea of the almighty operation of his grace, representing it to us by that power, whereby he produces the creatures out of nothing, and restores life to the dead. Rom. iv. 17.

24. The just idea which the centurion has of the almighty power of God, and of Jesus Christ, in healing bodies by the sole motion of his will, is the emblem of that idea which we ought to frame, concerning the almighty power of his grace in healing souls of concupiscence. Luke vii. 7.

25. God enlightens and heals the soul as well as the body, by the sole motion of his will; he commands, and is immediately obeyed. Luke xviii. 42.

26. No graces are given except by faith. Luke viii. 48.

27. Faith is the first grace, and the fountain of all others. 2 Pet. i. 3.

28. The first grace which God grants to the sinner, is the remission of his sins. Mark xi. 25.

29. No grace is granted out of the church. Luke x. 35, 36.

30. All those whom God willeth to save through Jesus Christ are infallibly saved. John vi. 40.

31. The desires of Christ have always their effect: he conveys peace into the bottom of hearts, when he wishes it to them. John xx. 19.

32. Jesus Christ gave himself up to death, that he might by his blood for ever deliver the first begotten, or the elect, out of the hand of the destroying angel. Gal. iv. 4—7.

33. O how much must a man have renounced earthly things and himself, in order to have a well-grounded confidence to appropriate to himself as one may say, Jesus Christ, his love, death, and mysteries, as St. Paul does, when he says, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me!" Gal. ii. 19, 20.

34. The grace of Adam produced nothing but human merits. John i. 16.

35. The grace of Adam is a consequence of the creation, and was due to nature when sound and entire. 2 Cor. v. 21.

36. The essential difference betwixt the grace of Adam and of the state of innocency, and the Christian grace, consists in this—that every one would have received the former in his own person; whereas the latter is received only in the person of Jesus Christ risen again, to whom we are united. Rom. vii. 4.

37. The grace of Adam, by sanctifying him in himself, was proportioned to him: the Christian grace, by sanctifying us in Jesus Christ, is all-powerful, and worthy of the Son of God. Ephes. i. 6.

38. The sinner is free only as to evil, without the grace of the deliverer. Luke viii. 29.

39. The will which is not prevented by grace, has no light but to go astray, no warmth of desire but to precipitate itself, and no strength but to wound itself: it is capable of all evil, and incapable of all good. Matt. xx. 3, 4.

40. Without grace we can love nothing but to our condemnation. 2 Thess. iii. 18.

41. All knowledge of God, even that which is natural, even that in the heathen philosophers, can come only from God; and without grace, it produces nothing but presumption, vanity, and opposition to God himself, instead of affections, of adoration, of gratitude, and of love. Rom. i. 19.

42. Nothing but the grace of Christ renders man fit for the sacrifice of faith: without this sacrifice, there is nothing but impurity, nothing but unworthiness. Acts xi. 9.

43. The first effect of baptismal grace is, to make us die to sin; insomuch that the spirit, the heart, and the senses have no more life for sin, than a dead man has for the things of the world. Rom. vi. 2.

44. There are but two sorts of love, from whence the motions of the will and all our actions proceed: the love of God, which does all things for God's sake, and which is rewarded by him; and the love of ourselves and of the world, which does not ultimately refer that to God which ought to be referred to him, and which for this very reason becomes bad. John v. 29.

45. When the love of God reigns no longer in the heart of sinners, carnal love or concupiscence must necessarily reign therein, and corrupt all its actions. Luke xv. 13.

46. Concupiscence or charity renders the use of the senses good or evil. Matt. v. 28.

47. Obedience to the law must flow from some source, and this source is charity. When the love of God is its inward principle, and the glory of God its end, then that which appears outwardly is clean; otherwise, it is nothing but hypocrisy or false righteousness. Matt. xxiii. 26.

48. What else can we possibly be but darkness, wandering, and sin, without the light of faith, without Christ, and without charity? Ephes. v. 8.

49. As there is no sin without the love of ourselves, so there is no good work without the love of God. Mark vii. 21—23.

50. In vain do we cry to God, "My Father," if it be not the spirit of charity which cries. Rom. viii. 15.

51. Faith justifies, when it works; but it does not work at all, except by charity or love. Acts xiii. 39.

52. All other means of salvation are contained in faith, as in their seed and bud; but this faith is not without love and confidence. Acts x. 43.

53. Charity alone does Christian actions in a Christian manner, with relation to God and Jesus Christ. Col. iii. 14.

54. It is charity alone which speaks to God, it is this alone which God hears. 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

55. God crowns nothing but charity: he who runs by any other impulse, and from any other motive, runs in vain. 1 Cor. ix. 24.

56. God rewards nothing but charity; because charity alone honours God. Matt. xxv. 36.

57. Every thing is wanting to a sinner, when hope is wanting; and there is no hope in God, where there is no love of God. Matt. xxvii. 5.

58. There is neither God nor religion, where there is no charity. 1 John iv. 8.

59. The prayer of the wicked is a new sin, and that which God grants to them is a new judgment upon them. John x. 25.

60. If nothing but the fear of punishment excite to repentance, the more vehement this is, the more it leads to despair. Matt. xxvii. 5.

61. Fear restrains only the hand, but the heart is addicted to sin, so long as it is not guided by the love of righteousness. Luke xx. 19.

62. He who abstains from evil, only through fear of punishment, commits it in his heart, and is already guilty before God. Matt. xxi. 46.

63. A baptized person is still under the law, as a Jew, if he fulfil not the law, or fulfil it only out of fear. Rom. vi. 14.

64. Under the curse of the law no good is ever done, because a man sins either by doing evil, or by avoiding it only through fear. Gal. v. 18.

65. Moses, the prophets, the priests, and the doctors of the law, died without raising up any child to God, since they made only slaves by fear. Mark xii. 19.

66. He who would draw near to God, must neither come to him with brutal passions, nor be led, as beasts are, by natural instinct, or by fear; but by faith and by love, as children. Heb. xii. 20.

67. Servile fear represents God to itself no otherwise than as a hard, imperious, unjust, and untractable Master. Luke xix. 21.

68. The goodness of God has abridged or shortened the way of salvation, by including it all in faith and prayer. Acts ii. 21.

69. Faith, the use, the increase, and the reward of faith, are all a gift of the pure bounty of God. Mark ix. 23.

70. God never afflicts the innocent: and afflictions always serve either to punish sin, or to purify the sinner. John ix. 3.

71. Man, on the account of self-preservation, may dispense with himself from observing a law, which God made for his benefit and advantage. Mark ii. 28.

72. One mark of the Christian church is, that it is catholic, comprehending all the angels of heaven, all the elect and just of the earth, and of all ages. Heb. xii. 22—24.

73. What is the church but the congregation of the children of

God, continuing in his bosom, adopted in Christ, subsisting in his person, redeemed with his blood, living by his Spirit, acting by his grace, and expecting the grace of the world to come. 2 Thess. i. 1, 2.

74. The church, or Christ entire, has the incarnate Word for its head, and all the saints for members. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

75. The church is one sole man composed of many members; of which Christ is the Head, the Life, the Subsistence, and the Person; it is one single Christ, consisting of many saints, of whom he is the Sanctifier. Eph. ii. 14—16.

76. There is nothing more spacious than the church of God, because it is composed of all the elect and just of all ages. Eph. ii. 20—22.

77. He who does not lead a life becoming a child of God, and a member of Christ, ceases to have inwardly God for his Father, and Christ for his Head. 1 John ii. 22.

78. A person is cut off from the elect or chosen people, of whom the Jewish people were a figure, and of whom Christ is the Head, as well by not living according to the gospel, as by not believing the gospel. Acts iii. 23.

79. It is useful and necessary at all times, in all places, and for all sorts of persons, to study and know the spirit, piety, and mysteries of the holy Scripture. 1 Cor. xiv. 5.

80. The reading of the holy Scripture is for every body. Acts viii. 28.

81. The sacred obscurity of the word of God is no reason for the laity to excuse themselves from reading it. Acts viii. 31.

82. The Lord's day ought to be sanctified by Christians in reading pious books, and above all, the holy Scriptures. It is very prejudicial to endeavour to withdraw a Christian from reading them. Acts xv. 21.

83. It is a great mistake to imagine, that the knowledge of the mysteries of religion ought not to be imparted to women by the reading of the sacred books. The abuse of the Scriptures, and the rise of heresies, have not proceeded from the simplicity of women, but from the conceited learning of men. John iv. 26.

84. To wrest the New Testament out of the hands of Christians, or to keep it closed up, by taking from them the means of understanding it, is no other than to shut or close up the mouth of Christ in respect of them. Matt. v. 2.

85. To forbid Christians the reading of the holy Scripture, especially of the Gospel, is to forbid the use of light to the children of light, and to make them suffer a sort of excommunication. Luke xi. 33.

86. To deprive the unlearned people of this comfort of joining their voice with the voice of the whole church, is a custom contrary to apostolical practice, and to the design of God. 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

87. It is a method full of wisdom, light, and charity, to allow

souls some time humbly to bear the state of sin, to be thoroughly sensible of that state, and to begin at least to make satisfaction to the justice of God, before they be reconciled. Acts. ix. 9.

88. We are ignorant of the nature of sin, and of true repentance, when we would fain be re-instated immediately in the possession of those good things of which sin has stripped us, and refuse to bear the shame of that separation. Luke xvii. 11, 12.

89. The fourteenth degree of the conversion of a sinner is, That being now reconciled, he has a right to be present at the sacrifice of the church. Luke xv. 23.

90. The church has authority to excommunicate, so as that she exercise her power by the chief pastors, with the presumed consent at least of the whole body. Matt. xviii. 17.

91. The fear of an unjust excommunication ought never to hinder us from performing our duty. We never go without the pale of the church, even when we seem to be driven out of it by the wickedness of men, so long as we continue united to God, to Jesus Christ, and to the church itself by charity. John ix. 22, 23.

92. To suffer peaceably an unjust excommunication and anathema, rather than betray the truth, is to imitate St. Paul; so far is it from rising up against authority, or breaking unity. Rom. ix. 3.

93. Jesus sometimes heals the wounds which the precipitate conduct of the chief pastors makes without his order. He restores to its former state what they cut off by an inconsiderate zeal. John xviii. 11.

94. Nothing gives the enemies of the church a worse opinion concerning the church, than to see therein an absolute dominion exercised over the faith of believers, and divisions fomented on the account of such things as are prejudicial neither to the faith nor to manners. Rom. xiv. 16.

95. Truths are come to that pass as to be a sort of foreign language to the generality of Christians; and the manner of preaching them is like an unknown tongue: so remote is it from the plain method of the apostles, and so much above the common capacity of the faithful. Nor is it sufficiently observed, that this defect is one of the most evident signs of the old age of the church, and of the wrath of God against his children. 1 Cor. xiv. 21.

96. God permits all the powers of the earth to oppose the preachers of the truth, that the victory it gains may not be attributed to any thing but to divine grace. Acts xvii. 8.

97. It happens but too often, that those members which are united to the church in a more holy and strict manner, are looked upon and treated as unworthy to continue in the church, or as already separated from it. But the just person lives by faith, and not by the opinion of men. Acts iv. 11.

98. A state of persecution and penalties which a man endures, as a heretic, as a wicked and impious person, is generally the last

trial, and the most meritorious, as being that which gives a man a greater conformity to Jesus Christ. Luke xxii. 37.

99. Stiffness in opinion, prepossession, and obstinacy in refusing either to examine things, or to own we have been mistaken, do continually, in respect of abundance of persons, change that into a savour of death, which God has placed in his church, that it might be therein a savour of life; namely, good books, instructions, holy examples, &c. 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

100. That is a deplorable time, when God is thought to be honoured by persecuting the truth, and the disciples thereof. This time is come.—To be accounted and treated by the ministers of religion as an impious wretch, unworthy of all commerce with God, as a rotten member, capable of spreading a general corruption in the society of the saints, is to pious persons a death more terrible than that of the body. In vain does any man flatter himself with the purity of his intentions, and with a certain zeal for religion, in persecuting good men with fire and sword, if he is either blinded with his own passion, or hurried on by that of others, because he will examine nothing. We often think we sacrifice to God a wicked person, and we sacrifice to the devil a servant of God. John xvi. 2.

101. Nothing is more opposite to the Spirit of God, and to the doctrine of Jesus Christ, than to make oaths common in the church; because to do this is to multiply the occasions of perjury, to lay snares for the weak and the ignorant, and to make the name and the truth of God subservient sometimes to the designs of the wicked. Matt. v. 37.

Wherefore, having heard the judgment of the aforesaid cardinals and other divines, exhibited to us both by word and in writing, and having, in the first place, implored the assistance of the Divine light, by appointing public as well as private prayers to that end; we do, by this our constitution, which shall be of perpetual force and obligation, declare, condemn, and reject, respectively, all and every one of the propositions before recited, as false, captious, shocking, offensive to pious ears, scandalous, pernicious, rash, injurious to the church and her practice, contumelious not only against the church, but likewise against the secular powers, seditious, impious, blasphemous, suspected of heresy, and plainly savouring thereof, and likewise favouring heretics, heresies, and schism, erroneous, bordering very near upon heresy, often condemned, and, in fine, even heretical, and manifestly reviving several heresies, and chiefly those which are contained in the infamous propositions of Jansenius, even in the very sense in which those propositions were condemned.

Commanding all the faithful in Christ of both sexes, not to presume to hold, teach, or preach otherwise concerning the propositions aforesaid, than is contained in this our constitution: inasmuch, that whosoever shall teach, defend, or publish them, or

any of them, jointly or separately, or shall treat of them by way of dispute, either publicly or privately, unless it be to impugn them, shall, *ipso facto*, without any other declaration, incur the censures of the church, and all the other penalties appointed by the law against such delinquents.

However, by our condemning in express terms the aforesaid propositions, it is by no means our intention in any manner to approve of other things contained in the same book; especially, since in the course of our examination thereof, we found in it many other propositions very like those which have been condemned as above-mentioned, nearly related to them, and tainted with the same errors; and likewise not a few, which, under a certain imaginary pretence of a persecution carried on at this time, do foment disobedience and contumacy, and recommend them under the false name of Christian patience, which therefore we thought it too tedious, and not in the least necessary particularly to recite; and finally, which is yet more intolerable, because we found even the sacred text of the New Testament corrupted with damnable errors, and in many things conformable to another French translation done at Mons long since condemned, but disagreeing very much with, and differing from the vulgar edition, (which has been approved in the church by the use of so many ages, and ought to be looked upon as authentic by all the orthodox,) and besides all this, frequently wrested with the greatest perverseness to strange, foreign, and often hurtful senses.

For which causes, we, by our apostolical authority, made known by the tenor of these presents, do again forbid, and in like manner condemn the said book, as being very artfully contrived on purpose by good words and fair speeches, as the apostle expresses it, that is, under a false appearance of godly instruction, to deceive the hearts of the simple; whether it bear the forementioned title or any other, wherever, and in whatever other language, edition, or version, hitherto printed, or hereafter to be printed, (which God forbid;) as we also in like manner do prohibit and forbid all and singular books or pamphlets in defence thereof, as well written, as printed and already published, or which may perhaps be published, (which God forbid;) enjoining all and every one of the faithful not to read, transcribe, keep, or use any of the said books, under the pain of excommunication to be incurred, *ipso facto*, by those who act contrary hereto.

We require, moreover, our venerable brethren, the patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, and other ordinaries of places, and also the inquisitors of heresy, that they restrain and coerce all those who shall contradict and rebel against this constitution, by the censures and penalties aforesaid, and the other remedies of law and fact, and even by calling to their assistance, if there be occasion, the secular power.

Our will also is, that the same credit be in all respects given even to the printed copies of these presents, subscribed by any

notary public, and bearing the seal of any person placed in ecclesiastical dignity, which would be given to the original letters themselves, were they produced or shown.

Let no one therefore infringe or audaciously oppose this our declaration, condemnation, mandate, prohibition, and interdict. And if any one presume to attempt this, let him know, that he will incur the indignation of almighty God, and of his blessed apostles Peter and Paul. Given at Rome at St. Mary Major's, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and thirteen, on the sixth of the Ides of September, and in the thirteenth year of our pontificate.

J. CARD. Datary.

F. OLIVERIO.

Seen by the Court, L. SERGARDO.

Registered in the office of the Secretary of Briefs,

L. MARTINETTO.

In the year of our Lord Jesus Christ, one thousand seven hundred and thirteen, Indiction the sixth, the tenth day of September, and in the thirteenth year of the pontificate of the most holy father in Christ, and our Lord Clement XI. by divine providence Pope, the apostolical Letters aforesaid were published by affixing them to the doors of the church of St. John Lateran, of the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles, of the apostolical Chancery, and of the Court general in Monte Citorio, in the Campo di Fiori, and in the other usual and customary places, by me, Pietro Romulatio, apostolical Cursitor.

ANTONIO PLACENTIO,
Master of the Cursitors.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF QUESNEL'S MORAL REFLECTIONS.

THE MANDATE OF MONSEIGNEUR LOUIS ANTHONY DE NOAILLES,

Bishop and Count of Chalons, now Archbishop of Paris, Duke
and Peer of France.

LOUIS ANTHONY, by the divine permission, bishop and count of Chalons, and peer of France, to all priests, pastors, vicars, and other ecclesiastical persons of our diocese, greeting and benediction.

If priests ought continually to read the divine Scriptures, if those sacred books ought never to be out of their hands, according to St. Jerome's advice to his dear Nepotian, they are then, no doubt, under a particular obligation to study the Gospels, and all the books of the New Testament. This is the end, and the most precious and sacred part of all the Scriptures, because it contains whatever it has pleased God to conserve to men of the words and actions of the Word incarnate, and of the instructions which his apostles, formed by himself, and filled with his divine Spirit, left to the church. The pastors who succeed them in their functions, and are appointed, as they were, to form Jesus Christ in souls, ought to begin this work by causing him first to live in their own hearts. And how shall they be able to effect this, if they do not carefully feed upon those gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, if they do not attentively meditate upon the great mysteries which he wrought for our redemption, and the divine virtues which he practised for our edification, and if, consequently, they have not always before their eyes these sacred books, which inform us of all the wonderful things relating to him? It was on this account, that we always exhorted you to make these books your chief study and your chaste delight, after the example of St. Augustine. But now we importune you anew to do it, because we have a new assistance to offer you, in order to your profiting by this holy reading, in this work which we now impart to you. Our predecessor thought he made you a great present in giving you it, at a time when it was yet but imperfect. What advantage, therefore, may we not justly hope you will reap from it, now that the author has enlarged and enriched it with many pious and learned reflections; that he has gathered together all the finest and most affecting things which the holy

fathers have written upon the New Testament, and made an extract out of them, full of spiritual unction and light! The difficulties which occur are here explained with clearness, and the sublime truths of religion treated of with such force, and yet such gentleness of the Holy Spirit, as make them relished by the most hard and insensible hearts. Here you will find enough to instruct and edify yourselves. Here you will learn how to instruct the people committed to your charge. Here you will see the bread of the word, with which you are to feed them, broken to your hand, and ready to be distributed to them, and so exactly proportioned to their dispositions, that it will be no less the milk of weak and feeble souls, than substantial food for the most strong. So that this one book will serve instead of a whole library to you. It will fill you with that excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, for which St. Paul counted all things but loss, and will put you into a capacity of communicating it to others, provided you bring along with you, to this holy study, a sincere humility, a pure heart, a good conscience, and a faith unfeigned, as the same apostle expresses it. This is what we earnestly exhort and conjure you to do, assuring you, upon the word of this apostle, that, in doing this, you will both save yourselves and them that hear you. Given at Chalons, in our episcopal palace, the 23d day of June, 1695.

(Signed)

LOUIS ANT.

Bishop and Count of Chalons.

By Monseigneur, LEMAIRE.

THE MANDATE OF MONSEIGNEUR FELIX,

The most illustrious Bishop and Count of Chalons, Peer of France.

FELIX, by the divine permission, bishop and count of Chalons, peer of France, to all pastors and vicars of our diocese, greeting and benediction.—If it be true, as St. Augustine expresses it, that the gospel is to us in respect of Jesus Christ, what his sacred humanity was in respect of the eternal Word; and that it is as impossible for us to know him without the assistance of this precious depositum, as it would have been for men, after the fall, to know the eternal Word, if he had not vouchsafed to take upon him human nature; there is then no doubt, but that one of the principal obligations of the Christian life consists in having this holy book continually before our eyes, that we may take from thence the food of our souls, and the rules of our life and conversation. But this necessity, which regards all the faithful in general, who are capable of informing themselves of the truths of salvation, according to the spirit of the church, does much more peculiarly oblige those who are appointed and settled in the church, as you

are, on purpose to make known the law of God, and to teach the people all the maxims of Christianity contained in the gospel. This is what has induced us to exhort you earnestly, on all occasions to be constant and diligent in this holy study, which is so suitable to your ministry; and to tell you, in the language of the holy fathers, that the New Testament being the book of priests, and the very substance of the priesthood, you ought to spend as much time in reading and meditating upon it, as the exercise of your office will permit; and that it is in the word of Christ that you will find that light, strength, and consolation, of which you stand in need; and that you will draw from this fountain, that learning and knowledge belonging to the saints, which is so necessary to all those who are called to the guidance and direction of souls. But we thought we could not possibly engage you more effectually in this so holy and useful an employment, than by imparting to you this excellent work, which the providence of God has put into your hands, and which we have examined with great care and application. The author must needs have been inspired with that charity which is full of light, of which St. Augustine speaks; and must have been a long time a disciple in the school of the Holy Ghost, who dictated this divine book, otherwise he could not have penetrated with so much perspicuity and illumination into the knowledge of the mysteries and doctrines of the incarnate word. And we hope, that God will pour his blessing upon your diligent reading of it, which we recommend to you with so much earnestness. It will not only be useful to you for your own edification, but it will likewise enable you to prepare with the greater ease those Christian instructions which you owe to your people; this author having illustrated the text of the Gospel with most pious reflections, which, though they be short, do notwithstanding generally convey abundance of light into the understanding, and of spiritual unction into the heart. But in order to find therein all these advantages, it is necessary that you bring along with you to the reading of them great purity of mind, without which, says one of the fathers, a man meets with nothing but darkness and precipices in this fountain of light and life. You must likewise enter into the knowledge of the divine truths with a plain and lively faith, an humble piety, and above all, a sincere desire of learning to know and to love our Lord Jesus Christ, and to make your life and actions conformable to his divine example. You will likewise do well to recommend to those under your care a reading so useful as this, in proportion to their capacity, and to the disposition in which they are to profit thereby. Given at Chalons, the 9th day of November, 1671.

FELIX,

Bishop and Count of Chalons.

By Monseigneur, HERBUNOT.

THE APPROBATION OF THE DOCTORS IN DIVINITY OF THE FACULTY OF PARIS.

As the public could not better testify the esteem it had for the book entitled, 'An Abridgment of the Morality of the Gospel,' than by wishing that the person to whom it was indebted for that present, would be pleased farther to enrich it with his Reflections upon the other books of the New Testament: so that author could not better manifest his zeal for the advantage of the public, than by taking himself off from his other employments, to satisfy an impatience which seemed to contribute equally to the glory of God and to the salvation of souls. This is what he has done in this work; in which, without keeping too close to the letter, of which notwithstanding he never loses sight, he improves all occasions to insinuate a thousand important truths, capable of instructing and edifying at one and the same time; he removes the difficulties which might otherwise stop those who are not of themselves in a capacity to add to their faith knowledge; he teaches the happy art of making both those truths which we are able to understand, and those mysteries which we ought to adore without desiring to comprehend them, subservient to piety; and he establishes the principles, and fixes the rules of a life which is so much the more truly Christian, as it is entirely built upon the oracles of the Holy Ghost, and the interpretation of the fathers. Were there no other proof that there is no part of ecclesiastical learning which escapes the penetration of this author's genius, the extent of his knowledge, and the delicacy of his judgment; these Reflections alone would be sufficient to oblige every body to look upon him as a great master in the morality of Jesus Christ. The warmth and fervour with which they are filled, is never separated from light; the heart does not therein drag the understanding after it, nor the understanding impose upon the heart, but they act in concert throughout the whole, and mutually assist each other: and in whatever state and condition Providence has thought fit to place those who read this work, there is ground to hope, that while they learn the means of discharging their obligations, of which they cannot but be sensible, they will regulate their conduct by their duties, and their duties by the law of Jesus Christ. Signed this 21st day of February, 1687.

BLAMPIGNON, Parish priest of St. Mederic.

L. HIDEUX, Parish priest of the Holy Innocents.

L. ELLIE DU PIN.

PREFACE.



IT is not necessary to detain the reader long at the entrance of this work, in order to inform him wherein it consists. The title alone is sufficient to show the design and nature of it. It is now twenty years ago since the first part of it was published; and the end proposed in doing it, was to invite those to the frequent reading of the Gospel, who, to excuse themselves from reading and meditating upon it, complain of their incapacity to make useful reflections upon the wonders of our blessed Saviour's life, and of the barrenness they find in themselves, when they apply their minds to meditate upon this divine book. It was thought that some at least might be cured of that disrelish which is so dishonourable to the word of God, if they were but a little assisted to enter into the spirit of his Son's mysteries, and a way were opened to the great truths which are contained in the words and actions of our divine master.

The specimen which was then published met with greater success than we could have presumed to hope; and that having raised a desire after those Reflections which we published four years ago, upon

the other parts of the New Testament, even these have since occasioned many still to wish that our Reflections on the Gospels might be enlarged, which they are in this last edition.

This is sufficient as to what concerns these Reflections themselves. But without doubt there are many who would not be fully satisfied, if nothing were said by way of preface concerning the Book itself, which is the subject of these Reflections. And though the preface which we have put before the Acts, and the other writings of the Apostles, do not absolutely oblige us to put one likewise before the Gospels, yet those, who, perhaps, never had an opportunity of informing themselves concerning the excellency of this sacred book, would have some cause to complain, if we did not here say something which might show the nature and value thereof; that so the respect and esteem which they will conceive for it by this means, may excite in them a desire of instruction from it by their own endeavours, and cause them to make the reading of the Gospels one of their most common and ordinary employments. To such persons therefore, that which follows is addressed:—

One could not but have a very great idea of this book, were it only to be said of it, that it is the history of the life, actions, and sufferings of the Saviour of the world, and the foundation of the Christian religion, which he came to establish upon earth. But it may justly be added, that the book of the Gospels is properly the book of Christians, the book of the children of God; that it is by means thereof that they know their divine adoption, and their new

birth in Jesus Christ; that therein they discover the rights and prerogatives of this heavenly birth, and learn the holiness and the duties of it; and that therein they ought to study those laws and maxims, by which they are obliged to frame their manners, and to regulate their lives, that they may not be altogether unworthy of that august dignity, to which nothing on earth can be compared.

One may proceed yet farther, and say, that it is the original title, which contains the promise and gift of the inheritance in heaven; that it is the contract of the new covenant betwixt God and man, the divine code, as it were, in which the fundamental laws of the kingdom of God are recorded; or otherwise that it is, as St. Paul expresses it, "The gospel of salvation," which informs us how God predestinated us in Jesus Christ to an immortal life, how he gave us his Son in the incarnation, and how his Son wrought out our salvation upon earth by the mysteries of his life and death; and lastly, how he has anointed, marked, and sealed us with his Holy Spirit, whom he has put into our hearts, in order to imprint his law upon them, by causing us to love and to fulfil it, and that he may continue in them as an earnest and sacred pledge of the glory which is reserved for us in the heavens.

Hence it is easy to infer, that one of the most just and reasonable inclinations of a Christian, who is a child of God and a member of Christ, is that which makes him desirous to read the Gospel. One may venture to say, that this is an instinct which is impressed upon him by the Spirit of God, and which would certainly cause him to place his chief delight

in this divine book, did not the love of worldly things, and the violence of his passions, extinguish it in his heart, by fixing it upon sensible objects, which give him a disgust and aversion for those good things which are declared to him in the Gospel. Thus we see, that in proportion as the love of the latter is renewed in the heart, our relish for the Gospel is proportionably renewed; and that, on the contrary, it is lost more and more, the farther we depart from the holiness of Christianity, and the less we live according to the spirit of the divine adoption. Insomuch that we may very justly apply to the children of this world, that which Christ said to the Jews, who boasted that they were the children of God, "He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

And it is not only the inclination of children to be desirous to hear their father, and to be instructed from his mouth; but the instructing of them is a right which God has always conserved to himself in respect of his children, and of which he has shown himself jealous in every age and state of religion; a right this, which devolved, as it were, upon Jesus Christ, as the Son of God by the incarnation, and as the founder and universal priest of the Christian church. "God," says St. Paul, at the beginning of the epistle to the Hebrews, "who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

The apostle having here a design to enhance the greatness and excellency of the Christian religion by a magnificent encomium, thought he could not begin it by any thing more lofty than this—"That God hath spoken unto us by his Son," and that salvation has been preached to us by the Lord himself. Which is as much as to say, That it was neither by a prophet, nor by Moses, nor by an angel, that God was pleased to treat with us, and to inform us concerning his will; but by his own Son. It is he who is the great prophet of the Christian church, the legislator of the new law, the angel of the eternal covenant, and the teacher of righteousness, who came in person to teach the ways thereof to his church; and that not by speaking to her by private inspirations, confused voices, obscure signs, enigmatical figures, or mysterious dreams, but speaking himself with his own mouth, as a friend speaks to his friend, a brother to a brother, a father to his children, and a master to his disciples.

But to the end that this great benefit and advantage should not be confined only to those who saw him with their eyes, and heard him with their ears, in the days of his flesh, God was pleased to find out a way to render present to us both the incarnate person of his Son, in a spiritual manner, with all the mysteries of his life and death, and likewise his divine instructions: his person and adorable body (spiritually set forth) in the sacrament of the eucharist; his life and his words, in the sacrament of the holy Gospels, if I may be permitted to use that expression. And why may I not use it, taking the word *sacrament*, in general, for the sign and con-

veyance of some sacred thing; since nothing is more sacred, and more conducive to salvation, than that which God has deposited and concealed under the visible sign of the evangelical word; and since the holy fathers have made no difficulty to compare these two celestial gifts, which God has bestowed upon his church, one with the other?

The incomparable author of the Book of the 'Imitation of Jesus Christ,' a person so well versed in the knowledge of salvation, cannot forbear openly declaring the holy passion of his heart towards these two objects. "I perceive," says that holy person, "that there are two things so absolutely necessary for me, that without them this miserable life would be altogether insupportable to me. Shut up as I am in the prison of this body, I cannot but stand in need of food and light. Thou givest me, Lord, thy sacred flesh for the nourishment of my soul; and thy word, to be a lantern unto my feet and a light unto my paths. Should these two things be wanting, I could not possibly live: for thy word is the light of my soul; and thy sacrament, the bread of life."

We shall find no difficulty to fall in with the sentiments of this excellent master of Christian piety, if we consider, that the gospel contains the knowledge of our blessed Saviour and of salvation. But since neither the one nor the other can be fully known, unless we first have some knowledge concerning the corrupt man, and his corruption by means of sin—it may justly be said, that the Gospel is a lively representation of those two men, in whom all mankind are included, according to the doctrine of St. Augustine: "All mankind are reducible to two

men, the first and the second. All those who are descended from the first, are a part of the first; and all those who are regenerated in the second, belong to the second." "In the case of these two men, the whole Christian faith is properly comprehended," says the same saint in another place; "of these two men, by one of whom we were sold to be slaves to sin, and by the other of whom we are redeemed from the slavery thereof. By the one we were precipitated into death, by the other we are delivered and made partakers of life: for the former destroyed us in himself, by doing his own will, not that of him who created him; but the latter has saved us in himself by doing not his own, but the will of him who sent him."

These two men then are those whom we ought to study in the Gospel: the God-man, who humbled himself for our sakes, the grand object of our faith, our trust, and our love—and the sinful man, whom we carry within ourselves, and who ought to be the subject of our shame, our fear, and our hatred, as being the heir of the iniquity and the pride of Adam.

We cannot open the Gospel without casting our eyes upon the delineation of this man of sin, who is the source of all those acts of disobedience which we commit against the law of God. We therein behold two sorts of representations of him both very lively and visible—the one enigmatical and figurative, the other plain and natural. And since a child of Adam, who intends to dedicate himself to God, ought to begin by knowing himself to be such, and by seriously considering all the vices and all the in-

clinations to sin which have defaced the image of God in him; he cannot better attain to this knowledge, than by contemplating himself in these two different representations.

The first of these, which is figurative, we have in those many different diseases and infirmities, over which Christ vouchsafed to exercise his mercy and his power, in curing those who were afflicted with them. For the holy fathers inform us, that our blessed Saviour conferred his benefits in such a manner upon the sick whom he healed, upon the dead whom he raised, and upon the possessed whom he set free from the devil, that at the same time that by those wonderful effects of his sovereign power he gave evident proofs of his divinity, he likewise plainly showed sinners the different wounds their souls had received by the sin of Adam—the death both of the body and the soul, which is the punishment of that sin, and the deplorable bondage in which we are all born under the dominion of Satan. The power which our blessed Saviour exercised over the bodies of men, was no more than a preceding figure of that power which he was come to exercise over our souls, by delivering them from the death of sin, and from the tyranny of the devil.

Whoever, therefore, in reading the Gospel, is desirous to consider and know what it is we call the old man, man corrupted, a child of Adam, a sinner fallen from that happy state in which he was created; or in other words, whoever is desirous to know himself, he will find his own character in the differently diseased persons mentioned in the Gospel. He will behold in the man born blind, and in all those other

blind persons there recorded, the blindness and ignorance, with respect to God and our duties, in which we are born—in the paralytic, that inability as to all good into which sin has cast us—in the burning fever of St. Peter's wife's mother, the heat of concupiscence which inflames our hearts—in the woman with the bloody issue, the habit of carnal vices—in the deaf and dumb person, the deafness of the heart towards God, and its utter incapacity to confess its own miseries, and to praise its Creator—in the dropsical person, avarice and the eager desire of false riches, the abundance of which does but increase the thirst after them, and cause that swelling of the heart which is the vice of the rich—and so of the rest.

But the second portraiture of the old man, namely, of the vices and corrupt inclinations, which, unless the grace of Christ prevent us very powerfully, do continually reign in our heart, is that which we see in the conduct of the scribes and Pharisees, in whom the corruption of man's heart appears in its proper nature and in all its violence. We cannot avoid being filled with indignation against them, when we behold their pride, envy, jealousy, avarice, hypocrisy, and vanity—their implacable hatred against him who showed their vices to the world—their blindness and hardness of heart at the sight of our blessed Saviour's miracles—their fondness for superstition, their attempts to make the law of God of none effect, their inhumanity and rage against all those who opposed their designs, and, in a word, all the other vices, and all the corruption which those whited sepulchres concealed under an external show of reli-

gion, and an affected exactness in observing some certain customs of the law, and all the false traditions they had superadded to it. But while we abhor the manners of the Pharisees, let us take great care, that we do not unreasonably flatter ourselves, as if we did not at all resemble them, at least in some respect. We have all within us the principle from which all these vices proceed. And if they do not appear in our outward actions, it is perhaps because we have other vices, from which the Pharisees were altogether free. In short, if we have not their inclinations in the very same degree of malice and corruption, we have at least enough of them to endanger our salvation: and perhaps there is scarce any person in the world, who is not a Pharisee in some respect, and who has not reason to apprehend, that some degree of the leaven of those hypocrites lies latent in his heart. “Woe, woe to us,” says St. Jerome, “who inherit the vices of the Pharisees!” How hideous therefore soever the representation which the Gospel gives us of them may appear, yet all persons may reap some advantage from it, and every one ought to take that admonition of our blessed Saviour as directed to himself, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.”

Now, as to the portraiture of the second man Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, the head and pattern of Christians, it is that, which all who are honoured with this glorious title ought to study with that care and application which are worthy of him, whose name they actually do, and whose image and resemblance they ought to bear. And in what place of the Gospel will they not find him delineated;

since the Gospel is nothing else but Jesus Christ himself, still living and breathing in his word, still doing the works of his divine omnipotence, and suffering whatever human infirmity can suffer—still teaching on earth the truths of heaven, and forming for that blessed place the church of the elect which sojourns here on earth? Upon which account, St. Augustine scruples not to say, “That we ought to hear the Gospel, as if it were our Lord himself still present; and not to say, ‘O how happy were they who saw him with their eyes here on earth!’ For many of those that saw him, put him to death; and many of those who never saw him, have believed on him.”

Nay, we even seem to have a very great advantage above the former. They saw indeed Jesus Christ; they were witnesses of the wonders which he wrought in all places, and of the good which he did to all persons—they heard the truths which proceeded out of his divine mouth, and which he delivered with that force and energy which is peculiar to God alone. But what a counter-balance to all this did they find in the infirmity of his flesh, in his common and ordinary way of life, in the ignominies and humiliations to which he subjected himself—the scandal whereof, followed by that of the cross, was not yet removed by the glory of his resurrection, and by all the wonderful works which confirmed the truth of it in the succeeding ages? But we who now receive this Gospel of Jesus Christ, sealed with the blood of Christ himself, confirmed by his resurrection and his glorious ascension, by the mission and visible operations of his Spirit, by the accom-

plishment of the prophecies and the promises, by the faith of all nations, and by the blood of all the martyrs, who in all parts of the world joyfully laid down their lives for the truth of this divine book: let us, I say, to whom the Gospel has been given with all these advantageous circumstances, instead of vainly and unjustly repining at our not having heard it from the mouth of our blessed Saviour, offer up our praises unto him, for that through his favour we were born in an age, wherein it is as great and real a folly not to receive this Gospel as the word of God, as it seemed to the eyes of the Gentiles and infidels to be folly, to receive it as something divine and as the instrument of salvation.

Let us receive it then with reverence and gratitude, let us read it with affection and devotion, let us place our delight in it, and make all that pious use of it which we ought to make of a book written by Jesus Christ. For he it is, let us not make the least doubt of it, who is the true Author thereof: and, therefore, let us be very far from entertaining the dangerous and visionary conceits of some certain writers, who have dared to advance this notion, That it is not necessary that an historical book, such as the Gospel is, should have been inspired by the Holy Ghost, in order to make it divine and canonical. But let us rather say with St. Augustine, That “when the apostles and disciples of our blessed Saviour committed to writing what he did and taught, we must by no means say, that it was not he who wrote it; since they were his members who composed the whole, without inserting any thing but what their head himself revealed and dictated to

them. For whatever he intended we should read relating to his words and actions, he caused them to write it as it were with his own hands.”

What comfort and consolation is it to our faith, to have so immoveable a foundation as this ! What joy to our hope, to be no less assured of the truth and certainty of the promises made in the Gospel, than if the incarnate Truth himself delivered them to us now with his own mouth ! What assistance is it to our charity, to be assured, that we shall find in this adorable book the Mediator, without whom we cannot possibly be reconciled to God—the way, without which we cannot go to him—the guide, who alone can conduct us in it—the victim, in whose blood we must be washed—the High-priest ever living, ever present, and ever making intercession for us before the face of God—the master, whom we ought to hear—the model, by which we are to frame our lives—the pattern of all the virtues which should render us conformable to our head—and, in a word, that adorable Head himself, as the principle of life, of faith, and of the spirit of grace in his members, and as the sovereign judge of the quick and of the dead !

But if we desire earnestly to study the righteousness and the life of faith, which is the life of Christians, we must do it with the respect, docility, caution, humility, submission, and simplicity of faith ; far from bringing along with us the presumption, pride, boldness, and that spirit of self-sufficiency and independency, which heresy insensibly conveys into all those whom she has seduced.

For nothing is more true than that which St. Au-

gustine says in his 18th Treatise upon the Gospel of St. John, where he instructs his people how they ought to hear and read the Gospel. "Heresies," says he, "and pernicious doctrines, which insnare souls, and cast them into the abyss of hell, have sprung from no other cause but this, from men interpreting the Scriptures, which are good in themselves, in a bad sense, and then maintaining and defending that sense with all the rashness and confidence imaginable." But in order to preserve the most unlearned from this misfortune, especially in reading the Gospel of St. John, which is the most sublime of all, this holy doctor gives them a rule, which he calls 'A rule proper to keep them sound in the faith;' by the help of which they may, without any danger, feed upon the bread of the divine word. "It is absolutely necessary, my dear brethren," says he, "that we read or hear those things which are above our capacity, with abundance of precaution, with a heart full of piety and devotion, and, as it is written, with fear and trembling: observing still this rule of a pure and sound faith, That we should joyfully feed upon those truths which we are able to understand, but as to those which surpass our understanding, let us defer our endeavours to understand them till another time, but let us not defer one moment giving our assent to them without the least doubt; that is, though we may meet with something which is beyond our reach, let us notwithstanding be fully persuaded, that it contains nothing but what is good and true."

Nothing can be more prudent and just than this advice: but at the same time nothing is more humbling and more capable of confounding the pride of

those vain and presumptuous persons, who think they can of themselves understand every thing, and who flatter themselves that they have always the spirit of understanding so as to penetrate into the sense of the most difficult places; nothing, I say, is more capable of covering them with shame and confusion, than that account which this great saint gives us afterwards of his own disposition. For this sublime and penetrating genius ranks himself with children and disciples, and is not in the least ashamed to confess his own ignorance, and the need he has to have recourse to the light of heaven, in order to attain to a true understanding of the Scriptures. “Consider a little, my brethren,” says he to his people, “who I am that I should undertake to discourse to you upon the Gospel, and of what nature the truths are which I have taken upon me to explain: the truths are altogether divine, and I am only a man—they are spiritual mysteries, and I am carnal—they are the secrets of eternity, and I live in a body subject to mortality. Far be from me, my dear brethren, all vain presumption, if I desire to preserve the health of my soul in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. I myself receive according to my small capacity that which I set before you: when truth vouchsafes to open to me, I feed upon it together with you; when it shuts itself up from me, I knock with you at the gate thereof.”

Another disposition in order to read the Gospel with profit, as we may also infer from the words of St. Paul, is a great esteem and reverence even for things which appear mean and little to the eyes of

the flesh. Those who behold them with the eyes of faith, whilst they therein contemplate the righteousness and the life of faith, say with St. Paul, that they are “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.” St. Paul, in saying that it is “the power of God,” does in this one expression comprehend every thing great and magnificent which can be spoken to the advantage of this divine book. For his meaning is, that if we consider the eternal truths therein declared, it is God who speaks therein, it is God also of whom he speaks, and he speaks as God; because at one and the same time he therein speaks both in such a manner as is suitable to his greatness and infinite majesty, and to the depth of the mysteries he reveals, and likewise in such a manner as is adapted to the meanness of those whom he instructs, and to the different capacity of those who read these heavenly oracles. If we consider in them the past matters of fact which are there recorded, what can we find in all the histories extant which does at all come near this? A God who is born in a stable, and who dies upon a cross; who is at once both God and man, whose whole life is but one continued series of miracles which could be the effect of nothing but a divine power—and whose humiliations, sufferings, and death, appeared more powerful and miraculous than his miracles themselves: these having almost generally only hardened those who had the greatest reputation for wisdom and sanctity amongst his people, whereas the former converted even his enemies and executioners.

As to those future things which are there foretold

by this God-man, nothing was ever at one and the same time so credible and incredible. The destruction of that temple, that city, and that people, which God had established by so many wonders, and by the subversion of so many nations: the raising up of another people who were to fill the whole earth, after they had been formed into a body by twelve fishermen, in the midst of persecutions, and of a deluge of blood, and in opposition to all the powers of the earth. These wonders already come to pass were so visible, that they afford us a full security as to that which remains still to be fulfilled, namely, the universal judgment which a crucified God shall pass upon all mankind, at the end of the world, in the sight of heaven and earth, and the consummation of the church of the saints in the glory of eternity, where all the magnificent promises made to the elect, throughout the whole Scripture, shall be fully and perfectly accomplished.

In fine, the means which we there plainly see were chosen by Christ, to the forming of these great designs, the manner of life, and the laws he prescribes to those who are to compose this new people, and the rules of the Christian morality which he there teaches, are so worthy of admiration, that, at the same time that human wisdom is confounded and pride humbled, we cannot but adore the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God which lie hid therein, and are constrained to cry out, that the finger of God is there, that the Gospel is truly "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

But it is not "the power of God unto salvation,"

except only when the finger of God, that is, his Spirit, vouchsafes to write in our hearts the faith or belief of the eternal truths and mysteries of Christ, the hope of the accomplishment of the promises, and of the good things to come, and charity, or the love of his law, his precepts, and his evangelical maxims. For without this quickening Spirit, the letter, even of the Gospel, is a letter which killeth; and this savour of life is, by our abuse of it, changed into a savour of death. From whence it is easy to infer, that in order to read it with advantage, it is necessary to join to this holy exercise, such fervent prayer as may draw down upon us his Spirit, and his benediction. Our own sanctification, as well as the sanctity of his word, requires that our reading should have more in it of adoration than of study. And since even the food of our body ought to be received with prayer and thanksgiving; how much more ought this spiritual food to be so, which is not at all beneficial to the soul, but only so far as the heart is open to receive it, and the eternal truth speaks to the heart? .

But the best preparation for the reading of the Gospel as we ought, is to love it; and we cannot possibly love and relish it, unless the love of eternal treasures reign in our heart, or, at least, begin to gain ground therein, by a desire to devote ourselves to the service of God, and a purpose and resolution to seek his kingdom and the righteousness thereof. The understanding of the truths of the Gospel is the fruit of the purity of our manners. Our lives must be conformable to the Gospel, if we desire to attain to the knowledge of the secrets, of the mys-

teries, and of the holiness of the evangelical perfection. We must disengage our minds from the love of carnal and perishing things, and we must love those which are heavenly and eternal, to qualify us to take delight in a book, the whole design whereof is, to destroy the former sort of love, and to establish the latter upon the ruins thereof. For it is called by Jesus Christ, "the Gospel," or, "the Gospel of the kingdom," as St. Matthew has it; "the Gospel of the grace of God," by the Apostle of grace; "the Gospel of the glory of Christ," and "the Gospel of peace," by the same Apostle in other places. And it is called by these appellations on no other account, but because it declares to us the accomplishment of the spiritual promises, and informs us, that Jesus Christ, the high-priest of good things to come, appeared at last in the world, to impart to us his grace and his Spirit, thereby to conduct us in his ways to our heavenly country, and there put us into the possession and enjoyment of those good things in the bosom of God, which are reserved for his elect.

Not that the Gospel may not, and ought not to be read even by those whose lives are irregular and disorderly. On the contrary, such are to be invited to seek after remedies in this holy book for their blindness and concupiscence. And who can tell but that it is the design of God to make use of some of these words to open their eyes, and to convert them to himself, as he heretofore touched the heart of St. Anthony, and changed it in a moment, by one word of the Gospel, which he heard as he entered into the church; and as he converted St. Augustine by

one single sentence of St. Paul. We must, therefore, if possible, prevail with them to read the Gospel: but, at the same time, “we must,” as St. Augustine says, “take from them, as from children, those childish amusements with which their minds are so foolishly employed, that we may substitute in their stead things more useful, as being for persons grown up to full age.” And that they may raise themselves from the earth on which we see them grovelling, we must speak to them in the words of the same saint,—“Rise, seek; pour forth sighs and ardent desires, and knock at the gate which you find shut against you.”

Let us then purify our hearts by the reading of the Gospel, and this reading will still purify them to a greater degree. Let us sanctify our manners by our respect and reverence towards this holy book, and this book will still sanctify us more and more. Let us kindle within us a warm and ardent affection for this word of fire, and this fire will inflame our hearts to such a degree, as to make us cry out with admiration, as did the two disciples, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures!” Let us make those sweets which God has preserved for us in the word of his Son, our chief delight; and we shall quickly find, that this delicious word will daily turn all that the world calls delight and diversion into bitterness. In short, we shall find our instruction, our strength, our consolation, our counsel, our security and protection, in this treasure which God has deposited in the hands of the church, to be distributed by her to her children. In the word of

Jesus Christ we shall learn how the heart of Christ is affected toward us, and how that of a Christian ought to be affected towards him; and the divine wisdom, concealed and covered, as it were, under this adorable letter, coming into our hearts, all sorts of good things will come into them along with it.

“The bare sight of the Gospel,” says St. Chrysostom, “is sufficient to induce us to regulate our thoughts and desires, and to give us a disgust towards the things of this life.—When this sacred book is in any house, it is like an arsenal filled with arms, which keeps it in perfect safety. It removes all the power of hell at a distance, and the devil dares not enter it. Only to cast our eyes upon this book with reverence, is enough sometimes to prevent our falling into sin; it is enough to awaken our conscience, and to raise in us a salutary shame on the account of those sins into which we have been so unfortunate as to fall. But if to this we join a careful and diligent reading, the soul will find itself, as it were, in a divine sanctuary, and become more pure and perfect, by means of the conversation it has with God in reading his holy word.”


Neither is this only a sanctuary; it is, according to St. Augustine, a heaven, where God clearly manifests to us the wonders of his grace, the riches of his mercy, and the adorable designs of his wisdom and his power.

Let us enter then with confidence into this sanctuary, consecrated by the blood of our blessed Saviour. Let us raise ourselves, and ascend into this heaven, which his Spirit has framed for us here on earth. Let us open the eyes of our faith, and with

reverence, gratitude, and love, contemplate the treasures and good things which are the patrimony and inheritance of the children of promise. And let every one of us offer up with St. Augustine, this prayer, in order to obtain the light and grace necessary to our improvement, by the reading of this book of Jesus Christ.

“Grant us the grace, O my God, to take a clear and distinct view of this heaven which is the work of thy hands. Dispel those mists from before our eyes which hide it from them. It is in these divine books that those oracles are contained, by which thou dost communicate wisdom to the humble. Exalt thy glory to its utmost height, by the mouth of those who speak to us in these books, and whom we may style babes, from the simplicity of their language. For we know no other books capable, like these, to destroy pride, and to overthrow thy enemies, namely, those who would fain excuse themselves in their sins, and who thereby only more obstruct their reconciliation with thee. No, my God, I know none comparable to these holy books. They are these which have made me bow my neck to thy yoke, which have prevailed upon me to confess my miseries to thee, and which have taught me to serve thee with a free and voluntary worship. Cause me then to understand them, O Father of mercies; and let that gracious favour be the reward of the submission which I pay them. For thou hast established their authority upon so firm a foundation, only for the sake of those who should submit themselves thereto.”

THE
GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST,
ACCORDING TO
ST. MATTHEW.



CHAPTER I.

SECT. I.—*The Genealogy of Jesus Christ.*

“ I. THE book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

The Gospel is the history of the foundation of the kingdom of God, which is the Church; formed by the vocation and union of the Jews (David,) and Gentiles (Abraham,) in one and the same faith. It is the relation of the sojourning life of Jesus Christ, the founder of this church, prefigured by the life of Abraham; and of his conquests, prefigured by those of David. It is the covenant of the adoption of the children of the promise made to those two great saints. What consolation is it, to find here, at first sight, the two titles by which we belong to thee, O Jesus! The first is the choice and eternal adoption of thy Father, who becomes ours. And the second is thy grace and Spirit, (the

worthy fruit of all thy labours and conflicts,) which make us thy members. Grant that, in this quality, we may become true penitents, like David, and true worshippers of God, in the spirit of faith, like Abraham !

“ 2. Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren, 3. And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar, and Phares begat Esrom, and Esrom begat Aram, 4. And Aram begat Aminadab, and Aminadab begat Naasson, and Naasson begat Salmon, 5. And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab, and Booz begat Obed of Ruth, and Obed begat Jesse, 6. And Jesse begat David the king, and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias.”

This genealogy of the Son of God is an abridgment of the faith of his incarnation. It informs us that he is true man, by the generations which it contains; that he is a Saviour, by the name of Jesus, which it gives him; that he is both priest and prophet, by the title of Christ, which in him signifies, *anointed* with the Holy Ghost, and with the Divinity itself; that he is the prince and the author of peace, as son of David; author of the faith, father of them who believe, and model of the most perfect self-denial, and of the true circumcision, as son of Abraham; born miraculously, and in virtue of the promise, the immortal sacrifice of the living God, and heir of the promises, as son of Isaac; and lastly, the eldest among his brethren, through free predestination, persecuted by his carnal brethren, and head of the church, which is the Israel of God, as son of Jacob.

“7. And Solomon begat Roboam, and Roboam begat Abia, and Abia begat Asa, 8. And Asa begat Josaphat, and Josaphat begat Joram, and Joram begat Ozias, 9. And Ozias begat Joatham, and Joatham begat Achaz, and Achaz begat Ezekias, 10. And Ezekias begat Manasses, and Manasses begat Amon, and Amon begat Josias, 11. And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: 12. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel, and Salathiel begat Zorobabel, 13. And Zorobabel begat Abiud, and Abiud begat Eliakim, and Eliakim begat Azor, 14. And Azor begat Sadoc, and Sadoc begat Achim, and Achim begat Eliud.”

The true nobility of these kings, and of all the ancestors of Jesus Christ, is to have their names found in his genealogy, and to have a share in his birth—that of Christians, is to be born of and in Jesus Christ himself. Men are apt to be fond, and to boast of an illustrious birth, which yet perhaps, in the sight of God, has been more criminal than a meaner: but they never employ their thoughts upon a holy birth, which renders us children of God, and members of his Son. Greatness, power, and human wisdom, appear in the family of the ancestors of the Son of God incarnate: but He will not enter into it himself, till all those are first gone out.

“15. And Eliud begat Eleazar, and Eleazar begat Matthan, and Matthan begat Jacob, 16. And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”

The parents of Jesus, and Jesus himself, draw no manner of advantage from the power, splendour, or

riches of their ancestors, except only the joy they conceive to see themselves reduced to a low estate, that they may be subservient to the designs of God in the temporal, poor, and humble birth of his Son; and that, by their mean condition, they may represent his humiliation in the flesh, and the concealment of his eternal glories from the eyes of men. O my Saviour, how dost thou confound the pride and vanity of men, in relation to their genealogies, by having thy own composed of a long train of sinners!

“ 17. So all the generations from Abraham to David, are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon, are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ, are fourteen generations.”

The various states and conditions through which the people of God passed, made it evident that none of all these was THAT which had been promised: and that in Jesus Christ alone the promises were to be accomplished, by the establishment of a state of royalty, and an unchangeable covenant. Nothing was able to hinder the execution of this design: neither the age of Abraham, nor the barrenness of Sarah, nor the slavery of their posterity in Egypt, nor their infidelity in the wilderness, and before the time of the kings; nor the sins of David, and those of the kings, his descendants and successors; nor the captivity and desolation of this people, after the declining of their regal government.

SECT. II.—*Joseph encouraged concerning the birth of Christ.*

“ 18. ¶ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise : When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.”

The vigilance alone of Joseph, as guardian of Mary's virginity, quickly discovered that she was with child. The incarnation is the effect of the love of God towards mankind, and therefore it is appropriated to the Holy Ghost, who is the substantial and consubstantial love of the Father and the Son. It is by the same Spirit, that both Jesus Christ as head, and the faithful as his members, are conceived : he, as Son, by nature, we, as his brethren, by adoption. O God, how much does it imply, to be a Christian ! and how great ought his piety and holiness to be !

“ 19. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example; was minded to put her away privily.”

True charity can easily find the middle between jealousy and insensibility. It is never contrary to prudence. The just person knows how to secure his own reputation, without blemishing anothers, by discovering his faults. A passion too credulous, and a false zeal for the law, are often the occasion of violating it, by hindering men from taking notice of any thing but the revenge which it permits, and of all which is severe and rigorous in it. But a wise patience and true justice in Joseph, render him attentive to the mild and indulgent part of the law,

which did not at all oblige him to become the accuser of his spouse. This wise patience is a very great gift both in a husband and in a wife.

“ 20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.”

How good is it to suffer in silence, like the holy virgin! God never abandons those who, according to her example, commit themselves to him. He will send an angel from heaven, rather than leave those finally in trouble who, in imitation of Joseph, conserve charity, and place their confidence in him. The knowledge of hidden truths and mysteries is the reward of calmness and patience under inward troubles. The angel awakes the remembrance of the promises in Joseph, by calling him the son of him to whom they had been made; and thereby prepares him for the belief of their accomplishment in his spouse. The first birth or conception of Christ, is not a communication of the substance of the Holy Ghost, but an effect of his power. This was a double consolation to Joseph, to be at the same time assured both of the fidelity of his spouse, and of the holiness of the infant which she carried in her womb. This is the recompense of his mildness and good nature.

“ 21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins.”

These words declare the second birth of Christ from the womb of the virgin, and how the faithful-

ness of Joseph was rewarded. Nothing so proper to Jesus as *to save*, in destroying sin by his grace. Would to God, that every one would as fully answer his name of Christian, of pastor, of magistrate, of father, of priest, &c. as Jesus Christ does that of Saviour! O amiable and reviving Name! What confidence dost thou inspire into true penitents! What fidelity, gratitude, and love into Christians!

“22. (Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us.)”

Jesus is the completion of the prophecies. Mary is always a virgin, both in conception and delivery. “All the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily” in Jesus Christ; and through him, both with and in us. Thou art verily and indeed with us, Lord, by thy incarnation; vouchsafe likewise to be with us by the impression and lively sense of thy presence, by the belief and imitation of thy mysteries, and by the powerful operation of thy Spirit, thy grace, and thy love.

“24. Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife;”

How acceptable a sacrifice to God, is a ready, humble, and exact obedience! This gives certain relief and comfort under inward pains and troubles. In many such cases, the more one considers, the more one is perplexed: the secret to find true peace of mind, is to suffer one’s self to be guided. A man

who really loves God, as soon as ever he knows his will, will immediately perform it, without knowing the particular reasons of it.

“25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son; and he called his name JESUS.”

Mary, always a virgin, is, in one sense, the mother of Christ entire, as he consists both of head and members—and Jesus is the “first-born among many brethren.” O happy moment of our blessed Saviour’s birth, be thou always present to our mind, be thou always the delight of our heart! That which it had been our duty to have done at the foot of the manger, let us do now by adoration, thanksgiving, love, imitation, humility, &c. O grant us a true respect for this holy name, an ardent love for our Saviour, and a hearty zeal for our own salvation!

CHAPTER II.

SECT. I.—*Adoration of Christ by the Wise Men.*

“1. NOW, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,”

The love of Jesus for a mean and private life, appears from the first moment of his birth, in the choice which he makes of Bethlehem. Those who are nearest to Christ very often know him not; when those who were farther off, seek, adore, and serve him. How great was the faith of these wise men, and how much elevated above human reasonings, and the opinions of the world!

“2. Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

Jesus Christ is king by birth, and from that very time demands our homage and allegiance. This courageous and undissembled faith of the wise men is a very great example. The obedience and simplicity of true Christians sometimes hinder them from seeing the hazards which they run in following the voice of God: but He watches over them. He protects those who think of nothing but performing their duty, without perplexing themselves about the consequences of it. The star of Jesus, with respect to us, is his word. Let us never lose sight of this, if we intend to be his true worshippers.

“3. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

Christ is the peace of the righteous, and the trouble of the wicked. A man is well received by the world, when he comes to flatter it, and to comply with its passions; but if he comes to interrupt, to oppose, and to condemn them, what storms, what tempests does he raise! It is difficult not to follow the example of the great, and to secure ourselves from the influence of their authority and their passions: and therefore they are the more obliged to regulate their conduct.

“4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.”

Adorable conduct of God, to permit this search and study of the Scriptures, for the hardening of Herod, the condemnation of the priests; the warning

of the faithful, and the instruction of the wise men and the Gentiles. It is the Scripture which ought to regulate and justify all extraordinary lights and ways.

“ 5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,”

It is a very dreadful state and condition, for priests and pastors to have the knowledge of the Scriptures, and not to profit by them; to show Jesus Christ to others, and not to follow him themselves; to point out the way of salvation, and not to walk in it. That which leads others to God, has no influence at all upon the heart of those who have the spirit of the world.

“ 6. And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.”

Happy the country, but more happy the heart, in which Christ is born! One city alone had this privilege; but every soul may have it. From the true Bethlehem, or house of the bread of angels, which came down from heaven, and which is (still represented) upon its altars, is derived all lawful mission of pastors and governors, to guide the Christian people, the Israel of God.

“ 7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.”

God laughs at the wisdom of men. He often deceives the wicked by their own artifices, and hinders them from taking advantage of the sincerity and simplicity of the righteous. The Scripture is our star: too often men study it with a corrupt

intention. They plunge into barren disquisitions of chronology and the like; but do not at all examine into the spirit of it: they inform themselves exactly concerning the time of the star, but will not follow the direction of it.

“8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.”

The ambitious are generally hypocrites, and make religion subservient to their interest and policy. Let us take care not to deceive ourselves, in thinking, that we seek to know the mysteries of religion with no other design but to adore them; the secrets of the Scriptures, only in order to love God the more; and his ways, for no other end but to walk in them. How often are men mistaken!

“9. ¶ When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.”

God sometimes withdraws from his saints all extraordinary illuminations, because they should not depend too much upon them. He brings them back, and confines them to the way of faith, that they may the more esteem and value it, in themselves and others. But whenever there is occasion, he restores those illuminations to such as sincerely seek him. All our knowledge ought to tend towards Christ, and to stop at him. All such as cannot help us to attain to his kingdom, is but vanity.

“10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.”

Comfort taken away, and restored to the righteous, becomes more dear unto them, and augments their joy. In following the word of God, one may infallibly find out Jesus Christ. It is not upon the account of light in itself that we should so much rejoice; but because it makes us know Christ, and leads us unto him.

“11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

Let us learn of these first Christians, to humble ourselves, to adore Jesus Christ, and to give up ourselves entirely to him, as soon as we have found him. What faith was here, to worship a poor neglected infant as a God! And what power in this Infant, to bestow such a faith as this, so pure, so humble, so courageous, and so destitute of all human support! To open one's heart, is to open one's treasure: it is Christ who fills it; it is to Him that it must be opened. Happy the man, who always finds therein the gold of charity, the incense of prayer, and the myrrh of mortification! The more careful a man is to present and offer these to God, the more of these does he continually receive again from him.

“12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.”

Let us, like these wise men, be obedient to inspirations; and like them, take the contrary course from the world. Fleshly wisdom and ambition find themselves at length confounded. It is one of the

first lessons given to the first Christians, that they must obey God rather than man. We can never return to heaven, but by a road different from that which has carried us away from it. It is the greatest of all delusions, to pretend to be converted without changing our lives, and to go to heaven by that way which was leading us to hell.

SECT. II.—*The Flight into Egypt. The Murder of the Infants.*

“13. ¶ And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.”

The rigour of God's conduct towards his own Son, is the consolation of those whom he obliges to walk through rugged and grievous ways, without showing them their journey's end. He makes his escape by flight, who could have preserved himself by his own power; to teach us, that we must go to God by the lowest ways, that we must be humbled under the reputation and power of his adversaries, to triumph over them with advantage; and that of all our enemies, pride is the most dangerous. The world seeks Christ for no other end but to destroy him. Let my heart, O Jesus! be the Egypt of thy refuge from the persecution of the world. Live there, reign there, stifle and suppress whatever thou shalt find there of the spirit of Herod.

“14. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:”

A blind obedience is due to God, because he is God, and can neither deceive, nor be deceived. Our trust in his wisdom and his love, should make us take the cross without arguing or disputing. As soon as ever we know the will of God, nothing should keep us from doing it. It is for man to obey, it is for God to answer for the success of obedience. It is he who sometimes stops and hinders us, when invincible difficulties seem to do it. That man always performs his will, who puts himself in a disposition to perform it. God bestows the means, even when he seems to take them away.

“ 15. And was there until the death of Herod : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

What humiliation was it for Christ to be, as it were, driven from amidst the people of God, and banished by his Father into a country of idolatry and abomination. How many lights extinguished, how many graces hidden ! But nothing is lost, when it is lost for God. Thus God sometimes obliges his servants to remain, as it were, buried in a (superstitious and) heretical country, or amongst wicked people, to worship him in their stead, to gather up those graces which they neglect, or to spread them in a secret manner ; or, perhaps, to secure themselves from the ill-will of false brethren.

“ 16. ¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.”

The ambitious man is cruel, and always ready to sacrifice every thing, even Christ himself, to his passion. The world is more to be feared when it flatters, than when it persecutes. It bestows life at that very time when it thinks it takes it away. The disgraces of the world contain in them great graces for those who know how to distinguish and improve them. Salvation given so freely to these infants, teaches us that our own must necessarily be the gift of God. Grace prevents all merit in those whose will it disposes, as well as in these infants, who could not possibly will any thing freely.

“17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 18. In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.”

Christ makes the cruelty of Herod subservient to the publication of his birth, to the accomplishment of his Father's designs, and to the sanctification of his elect. He reduces within the order of his goodness, the greatest disorders of human wickedness. We are often inconsiderately afflicted at that which is the real happiness of those we love. To lament the death of infants, is to lament their salvation. It is, for the most part, a great gain to mothers thus to lose their children in their infancy, who might otherwise, perhaps, prove the occasion of their eternal loss and damnation, by reason of the bad education which they might give them, that idolatrous fondness which they might have for them, and the ambition and wicked methods which parents use to advance them in the world. Happy the tears of such mo-

thers, if they make (some) amends for the past, or preserve them from vain joys for the future !

SECT. III.—*The Return out of Egypt.*

“19. ¶ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,”

A true child of God adores and imitates the humble dependency of Christ on his Father, whose commands he receives from time to time, not by himself, but by an angel, and by Joseph. Let us learn of him, not to take one step, but either by the command, or in the way of God. As to all common and ordinary duties, his command is sufficiently signified to us by the obligations of our state and condition. To him who is not wanting in relation to those, God will not be wanting on all extraordinary occasions.

“20. Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life.”

Thus the designs of God concerning his elect, his church, and his truth, seem to depend upon human and natural events; whereas, in reality, God disposes and orders these events according to his own designs. God humbles himself, to give a reason for his conduct towards his Son; and he humbles his Son, by making him seem unable to save his life but only like other men. The malice and power of men endure as short a time as their life: God alone, almighty and eternal, is terrible in his anger. To wait quietly and patiently, till either the anger of men, or they themselves pass away, is

the most proper means to escape that anger which will never pass away.

“21. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.”

Obedience ought to be ready, persevering, and indefatigable. When God has once placed us, we must not remove ourselves, of our own accord, and without knowing his will. Moses leading the people of God out of Egypt into the land of promise, is a figure of Joseph, who brings back the Son of God from thence; and Joseph represents the pastors, who conduct the church and her children by the mission and the word of God. How happy is a church, whose pastor being, like Joseph, in the hand of God, takes and carries the faithful in his bosom, as his children, to convey them to heaven, the true land of Israel.

“22. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee.”

The joy of this life is always interrupted by sorrow. God is not wont to free his servants from all troubles and afflictions in this world. Here we never want enemies; here is always somewhat to be feared. Christ was conducted step by step by his Father; and as for us, we would fain know immediately all the designs of God concerning us. Let us then, in like manner, with the docility and submission of a child, suffer ourselves to be led and directed, out of obedience, and according to the example of the Word incarnate. He is light itself,

and yet acts as if he was not so. We are nothing but darkness, and yet will needs be our own light.

“23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.”

Jesus Christ a true Nazarene, that is, holy, separate from all impurity, and consecrated to God. A Christian ought to be such in proportion. Let us learn to conceal ourselves, and to keep silence, until our time to act and to speak is come. If Christ go up to Jerusalem, it is only to worship God according to the law, to carry on the work which he gave him to perform, and to finish his sacrifice. Except on these occasions, he lives private and concealed, retired from the world, and shut up in the solitude of Nazareth: this is the pattern of a priest.

CHAPTER III.

SECT. I.—*The Mortified Life and Preaching of St. John.*

“1. IN those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea,”

After a retirement of thirty years, to begin the exercise of his ministry in the wilderness; to prefer the country to the city, the poor to the rich, the ignorant to the learned, is that wherein St. John will have but few imitators. The forwardness and usual aims of preachers are here condemned, in the very beginning of the Gospel. This is what hinders the fruit of it.

“2. And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Repentance is the true preparation for the kingdom of heaven. Let this therefore keep us every moment prepared for it, because this kingdom is every moment approaching nearer to us. If this kingdom is a kingdom of love, the repentance which prepares us for it, must likewise be a repentance of love. It is from thee, O Lord, that we hope to receive both this love, and this repentance, both the principle and the works.

“3. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

Repentance must begin by taking away the stops and hindrances of salvation, that we may proceed directly towards God. It is difficult to hear this voice, except in the wilderness, that is, in retirement, and out of the noise and hurry of worldly affairs; or at least, in a recollected, intent, and sedate mind. The sinner is gone too far from God, to be called back any otherwise than by a great *cry*, that is to say, a great grace. Repentance is not the business of a moment, because it is a preparation for being reconciled with God; nor does this preparation consist only in a few thoughts or words, because the way of God lies in the will—nor is this way easy to be prepared, since by it the heart must pass from darkness to light, and from death to life—nor is all this the work of man, because the preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord, and he only can order and direct his steps, and make him choose and delight in his way.

“4. And the same John had his raiment of

camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey."

He who preaches repentance, ought to perform it himself, and join the outward part to the inward. This persuades more than words. All is singular in St. John, not to attract the esteem and praises of men, but to awaken their attention. A fast so rigid and extraordinary might pass for excessive and indiscreet: but when the finger of God appears, men must hold their peace.

"5. ¶ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,"

Those who direct to God by a straiter way, are most sought to by such as really desire not to deceive themselves, but to be saved. So true is it, that one does not discourage sinners, and drive them to despair, by preaching to them repentance, according to the holy severity of the divine law.

"6. And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."

One part of repentance is to bear the shame and confusion of our sins in confessing them. It is not grievous to any, to show this shame and confusion before men, except only to those who have none at all for their sins before God. Sooner or later the sinner must be humbled; because every sinner is proud: but this humiliation has no virtue in it, unless it proceed from the choice or acceptance of the sinner.

SECT. II.—*Reproaches against the Pharisees.*

"7. ¶ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto

them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

A disinterested and impartial preacher, or director (of the conscience,) spares no one. The holy rigour which he exercises is infinitely better than a false mildness: this only lulls the sinner asleep in his vices; that wakes him, makes him thoroughly sensible of his condition, and shakes his conscience with a saving fear. To treat a sinner harshly, in order to humble him, is not to insult him; it is only piercing the skin with a charitable hand, to take down the swelling of his pride.

“8. Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:”

Unhappy he, whose life passes away in promises, desires, and barren designs of repentance! God requires of us real works, and such as are (in some measure) proportioned to our sins. No fruit, except that of charity, is worthy of God, who is charity itself. A fruit of self-love, such as is a servile fear, cannot be (acceptable to) his justice. The exercises of repentance cannot please him, but by the spirit of repentance—which consists of a true change of mind, a sincere grief, and a penitent love.

“9. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stoncs to raise up children unto Abraham.”

The virtue of Fathers is of no advantage to children, unless they tread in the same steps. God has no need of us to serve him, because he can make worshippers of the most hardened sinners, can change hearts of stone into tender lovers of his law,

and form children out of the most mercenary slaves. O that this heart, O Lord, hitherto so hard and servile, may feel the effects of this sovereign power ! Vouchsafe to show thy glory in making me a child of faith and promise.

“ 10. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees : therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

Let us always look upon death as ready to surprise us. Let us well consider this truth, that to be saved, it is not enough that we do no evil works, but we must do good ones. No works are such, except those which God works in men by his grace, and which men return to God by their charity. Damnation consists of two things : the one, eternal excommunication, in being separated from the body of Christ, and from the presence of God, without the least hope of recovery ; the other, eternal punishment by fire. Let us fear this punishment ; but let us more fear that eternal excommunication.

“ 11. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance : but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire :”

The greatest saints are nothing before Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost (which Christ alone can give) overflowing the soul, purifies, transforms, and lifts it up to God. The less the minister attributes to himself the work of God in the soul, the more he advances it there. The outward part only belongs to him ; but God alone sanctifies, who can work upon the heart, subject it to himself by his Spirit,

and make a new heart of it. What should I do, O Lord, if thou didst not wash me often in the laver of thy blood, and purify me in the fire of thy charity?

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

The present and visible church is the floor, where the corn is as yet mingled with the chaff, the elect with the reprobate. The agitation of persecution, or the salutary suffering for the truths of the Gospel, separate them in this life the one from the other; the fan of the last judgment shall remove them from the floor, in order to be either carried into the garner, or cast into the fire. Terrible, but inevitable separation! We shall eternally belong either to the one or the other; and out of the floor, we shall be the same that we have been in it, either chaff or wheat. Grant, O Lord, that I may have a heart, not as of chaff, feeble, light, empty, barren, and tossed about with every wind; but as of wheat, pure, full of substantial virtue, firm in goodness, fruitful in good works, and fit to become the bread of God, after having been bruised under the millstone of the cross, kneaded in the water of affliction, and baked with the fire of charity.

SECT. III.—*The Baptism of Christ.*

“13. ¶ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.”

Jesus clothes himself with us and our sins, that he may clothe us with himself and his righteousness in baptism. He takes, and, as it were, deifies

in himself the marks, effects, punishment, and remedy of sin. If Christ, being innocence itself, notwithstanding chooses to bear the shame of sin, in passing for a sinner, to subject himself to (a sort of) public penance, and oblige himself by this ceremony to all the duties of a true penitent; let us be ashamed of our pride, injustice, and impenitence.

“14. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?”

How holy and lovely is that contest, which arises, on either side, from nothing but humility! The designs of God are incomprehensible, even to the saints. There is no person but has need of being purified by Christ: let us go to him with confidence every moment, because every moment we have need of his grace. An important lesson this, which God here, at the very first, delivers to us by his apostle; the necessity which we have of a Saviour and of his grace, were we as innocent and as penitent as St. John.

“15. And Jesus answering, said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.”

The humility of Jesus could not but surmount that of St. John. In the former, it is firm and persevering, without heat or obstinacy; in the latter, obedient and submissive, without flagging and growing weak. He who is truly humble, lets slip no opportunity of humbling himself, without improving it. Those who are to preach this virtue, ought to make it appear in their life and conversation. Christian righteousness is almost all included in humility and repentance; because these include all sorts of

good works, at least in the preparation and disposition of the heart. Prepare mine, O Lord; replenish it out of the fulness of thy own.

“ 16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:”

Baptism opens to us heaven, fills us with the holy Spirit, and makes us doves in purity, mildness, groaning, fruitfulness, and charity. Let us not by our sins shut heaven, which baptism, by applying to us the blood of Christ, which is the key thereof, has opened for us. Let us not shut it, by depriving ourselves of the sight of heavenly things, which faith renders both present and visible. Let us always remember what the Spirit is, who descended upon us in baptism, and took possession of our heart. To follow any other, to take our direction from flesh and blood, is to “do despite unto this Spirit of grace.”

“ 17. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Nothing pleases God but in his Son. The baptized enter into the divine filiation, and are made a part of this beloved Son by the grace of adoption. God bestows no favour, and pardons no sin, but through the merits and for the sake of his Son. The certain way for a man not to be refused, is never to present himself before God in prayer, but together with Jesus Christ; to ask nothing but in his name, to do nothing but by his Spirit, to hope for nothing but through his mediation, and to offer nothing to God but in the union of this Son, and in offering him to the Father.

CHAPTER IV.

SECT. I.—*The Fast and Temptation of Christ.*

“ 1. THEN was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.”

Thus the Holy Ghost, received at baptism, inclines the Christian to retirement, and a retreat from the world. The more a man is devoted to God, the more ought he to expect temptation. See here an excess of charity and humility in Christ, who exposes himself to the temptation of the devil, that he may overcome for us the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We seek retirement, that we may shun temptation, and we do well, because we are weak : Jesus goes into the wilderness on purpose to be tempted there, because he goes to overcome for us, clothed in our weakness without, full of his own divine strength within.

“ 2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.”

Fasting, and all mortification of the flesh, has been undergone, sanctified, taught, and rendered easy by Jesus Christ. The devil makes use of our body to tempt us ; we ought to use it to engage, disarm, and vanquish him. He turns the strength and vigour of the body against us ; we must, by weakening it, turn it into arms against him. Assist me, Lord, to do this salutary violence to my rebellious flesh. Give me the strength and fidelity which thou hast merited for me by thy holy fast, to follow thy example, to obey the church, and to fight against sin in myself.

“3. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”

The gluttony of Adam is cured by the fasting of Christ. No necessity should induce us to relinquish the methods of God's ordinary providence, since Christ himself does not do it. It is never necessary to desire miracles for the wants of the body, it is oftenest most expedient not to desire them; and it is always the surest way to leave God to act of himself. We often beg to be delivered from some evil and necessity; and it is by this very means that God designs to show us his mercy and to secure our salvation.

“4. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Providence makes use of every thing, and is confined to nothing; God being able to nourish with his word the body as well as the soul. Trust in God, in the greatest necessities, saves abundance of disquiets, temptations, and sins. He who gave us life before we could desire it, can he want either power or will to conserve it, after having loaded us with benefits, and given us his own Son?

“5. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,”

The most holy persons, as well as Christ, are often left to the power of the devil. The devil lifts up, only in order to cast down and destroy. We could never believe how much power the devil still retains over us, so long as our regeneration and adoption continue imperfect, did we not see an in-

stance of it even in the person of Christ, the Son of God by nature, over whom he never had any manner of right. It is in our stead, and for our sakes, that he suffers this outrageous attempt of the evil spirit; and it is by this that he weakens his power, diminishes his rights, and hinders him from encroaching upon us.

“6. And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

The curiosity of Adam, presumptuous confidence in God's assistance, and superstitious credulity, are cured by this second temptation. It is because Christ is the *Son of God*, that he takes so much care not to tempt his Father. His confidence is perfect, but prudent, subject to the disposition of God, and regulated by his will. The devil lays snares for us by the means of the Scripture, and of the most sacred things. He often inspires into souls a false confidence in God, in order to make them lose the true, and thereby cast them into despair, when they see they are deserted by God in that danger into which they have so rashly brought themselves.

“7. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

To desire to know the power and mysteries of God by sensible experience, is no other than to tempt him. Faith is sufficient to a sincere heart. We render ourselves unworthy of the protection of God, and of the supports of his ordinary providence,

when we create new wants to ourselves without necessity, and contrary to his will. Nothing is more common than to tempt God; and because it is a sin so very common, we take no notice at all of it.

“ 8. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;”

The vanity, pride, and ambition of Adam are cured by the third temptation of Jesus Christ, the new Adam. To love to see the pomps and riches of the world, is to expose ourselves to this temptation. We certainly open our heart to the love of false riches, when we open our mouth to praise them in others. Parents do the devil's office, when they raise in their children an esteem and desire of advancement, of great wealth, and of the glory of the world, by causing them to see and admire these things in others.

“ 9. And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

The devil promises that which is not his own. God seems to give up riches and honours to the power of the devil, and of those who belong to him, as things unworthy of his elect. How can a child of God esteem and set his heart upon them? The devil discovers himself by this promise: for God has never promised to his servants these false riches, any otherwise than to represent to them the promise of the true and eternal riches. Would to God, the world were not so full of persons who make wealth their god, and fall down and worship those who bestow it!

“ 10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee

hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

God alone is truly worthy of our service, adoration, and love. To worship, is not to say, I worship and adore thee; but it is to be really obedient to God, and from the bottom of the heart to prefer his will before all things, to live and act only for him, and to esteem nothing but him, or with relation to him. When we see men busied and employed about every thing except their God, can we believe that there are many who worship and serve him only? Grant, O Lord, that, by thy grace, I may be among the small number of those who worship thee in truth, and serve none but thee!

" 11. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."

God generally makes joy and consolation succeed temptation and trouble. He does not send invisible angels to comfort those who, for his sake, have suffered the assaults of the devil, or of the world; but a vigilant director (of the conscience,) a charitable pastor, or a faithful friend, is a visible angel, who receives from God an invisible mission to go to the assistance of a soul which is in trouble. When will it be, O my Saviour, that, our temptation being finished, and the devil having left us, we shall serve thee in perfect peace, in the company of angels, and be for ever satisfied with the enjoyment of thyself!

SECT. II.—*Christ's residence at Capernaum. His exhortation to Repentance.*

" 12. ¶ Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee ;"

It is prudence and humility to avoid danger and persecution. To wait for it without necessity, and to no good purpose, is to expose one's neighbour to the temptation of doing evil, and one's self to the danger of sinking under it. When the passions of men are raised, we imitate Jesus Christ by taking out of their way even the most innocent occasions.

“ 13. And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim;”

As Christ came to Nazareth out of obedience, so he goes from thence upon the same motive; necessity pointing out the will and command of God. He has no other choice but the persevering mind to do the will of his Father.

“ 14. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 15. The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;”

Christ will not begin his preaching in his own country, nor amongst his own relations. All the ways and steps of Jesus Christ are marked out in the Scriptures, that he might be a man of obedience in all the stages of his life. We imitate him but ill, when we resolve to be governed by none but ourselves, and to do nothing but our own will.

“ 16. The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”

Darkness cannot possibly merit light, nor the sinner the mercy of God; but yet light is pleased to shine through the thickest darkness, and God to show mercy to the most miserable. To me, O

Lord, thou hast already, and dost still show this mercy, as often as thou dost not abandon me to my own darkness. If the light of grace be not joined to that of the gospel, the latter does nothing else but blind, as it blinded the Jews. My God, let not these two lights be separated in me!

“ 17. ¶ From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Jesus begins his preaching, not by flattering men in their inclinations, but by that which is most necessary for them. Repentance is the only gate of heaven for sinners: he who pretends to show any other, is not a guide, but a seducer. Whenever Christ comes to men, whether by his incarnation, or by the eucharist, or by the last judgment, the kingdom of heaven is then at hand, and repentance must always go forth to meet him. Nothing but a penitent heart can perform repentance; and this heart is the gift of God. To will and to do is chiefly the work of God in repentance, because it is that to which man is most averse.

SECT. III.—*The calling of Peter and Andrew, James and John.*

“ 18. ¶ And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.”

Jesus chooses the simple and the poor, to entrust them with the treasures of faith, of the ministry, and of the knowledge of salvation. Let us learn from hence, not to judge of the call to ecclesiastical

dignities, by birth, wit, or natural talents. He calls and blesses those who are busied in an innocent and quiet employment. To pass immediately from a tumultuous and distracting employment, to the ministry of peace and holiness,—is this to follow his Spirit?

“ 19. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

It is a very great honour to follow Christ, and to be admitted to a partnership in his priesthood; but unhappy those, who do not wait for the call of God! To presume to take the name and employment of “fishers of men,” and yet never to cast the net of the divine word,—is this according to the design and intention of Christ? He who follows Jesus Christ in order to be a fisher of men, only in consulting his own inclination for this employment, and does not follow him in imitating his virtues, and guiding himself by his Spirit, though he does not perhaps enter as a thief, yet at least he lives like an hireling.

“ 20. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.”

How powerful is the voice of Jesus Christ! Let us remember to beseech him often, that he would be pleased to speak to our hearts, and make us obedient to him. Vices and inveterate habits are a sort of nets, which sinners are abundantly more unwilling to leave, than Peter and Andrew were to leave theirs; but every thing is equally possible to him who can do all things. These poor men leave indeed only nets: but they certainly leave a great deal who reserve nothing for themselves.

“ 21. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.”

Sometimes God is pleased to unite by grace those who are already united by nature, to show that he does not design to destroy, but to repair it; sometimes he separates them, to prove their sincerity, to show the force of his grace and of his love; to make known his sovereign power, and that he chooses his ministers with distinction, and with the greatest wisdom. There is a time to cast the nets into the sea, that is, to labour for the salvation of others; and a time to mend them, that is, for a man to prepare himself for labour, to make the best amends he can for his wandering, and other imperfections, by prayer and retirement, to gain new strength, and to fortify himself against the dangers to which he may probably be exposed.

“ 22. And they immediately left the ship, and their father, and followed him.”

We must renounce all human expectations, and all the tenderness of nature, (represented here by the nets and the father of these apostles,) in order to enter into the ministry with a true apostolic spirit. And what shall we not find in thee, O Jesus, if we leave all for thy sake! He who but just now united brethren, by calling them to the ministry of grace, now separates the sons from their father, to teach them to obey God at the expense of all things, and to prefer the honour of serving him in poverty and humility, to all the comforts of a father's house.

SECT. IV.—*The Preaching, Miracles, and Reputation of Christ.*

“23. ¶ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people. 24. And his fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought unto him all sick folk that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. 25. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.”

See here the perfect pattern of an evangelical preacher. 1. To go to seek out sinners on every side, that he may show them the way to heaven. 2. To preach “the gospel of the kingdom,” not with a servile spirit, but with a freedom worthy of the king whom he serves, and of the kingdom which he proclaims. 3. To make his reputation, and the confidence of the people, subservient, not to his own interest, but to the good of souls, and to the establishing the kingdom of God. 4. To speak nothing but what may tend towards salvation. 5. To preaching to join the exercise of works of mercy, and temporal assistance, as often as he can. 6. To assist all those who apply to him as penitents, how great sinners, and of what condition soever they be. 7. To take care to make them sensible, that diseases, and all kinds of temporal evils, are the effects of sin; that whether God be pleased to remove them or not,

it is for the good of the soul, and to promote our eternal salvation; and that the power which he makes appear in healing them, is a sure pledge of the power of his grace in healing our souls.

CHAPTER V.

SECT. I.—*The Eight Beatitudes.*

“ 1. AND seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain; and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:”

Since all Christians are the disciples of Christ, they have all a right to hear his word. To this end they must have a disciple's heart, humble, full of respect, teachable, swift to hear, eager to learn, and faithful to obey. To go up with Christ, is to lift up one's heart from the earth, in order to hear the truths of heaven. To sit down, is to hear them with calmness, peace, and repose of mind. To come unto this divine Master, is to be united to him, and to hear him with faith, attention, and love for his word.

“ 2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,”

How great is the mercy of God towards man, in that wisdom herself is sent to instruct him, not by angels nor by prophets, nor in dreams nor in figures, but with her own mouth, and in her own words. When we open the New Testament, it is the mouth of Christ which is opened for us. It is no other than to shut it from Christians, either to wrest this holy book out of their hands, or to keep it closed

up, by taking from them the means of understanding it.

“ 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The first lesson of Christ is concerning poverty and Christian humility. To be poor in possessing much, is to be disengaged from wealth, to use it like a poor man, and to look upon it as a burden or as a trust. Happy then those souls, who have embraced the state of poverty and humility of spirit, provided they have the spirit of that state. The kingdom of heaven is theirs, provided nothing of the kingdom of earth live and reign in their heart. Covetousness is of so malignant a nature, that one may have the poison of riches in the midst of poverty ; grace is so powerful, that one may have the blessing of poverty in the midst of riches. God by no means permits himself to be outdone in generosity : he gives all for all, or rather, all for nothing, heaven for earth, himself for us. In what does the kingdom of heaven in this life consist, but in the riches of faith, the grace of God, his truth, his Spirit, &c. ? And to whom does he communicate them more abundantly, but to those who are most disengaged for his sake from the good things of the world ?

“ 4. Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.”

The second lesson of Christ teaches us, that the afflictions which men suffer for the sake of God, and the tears of repentance which they shed for their own sins, and for those of others, are sources of true comfort. Every one flies from tears, and seeks after

joy; and yet true joy must necessarily be the fruit of tears. Self-love, pride, covetousness, &c. have their sorrow and their tears; but God wipes away only those of humility, charity, poverty, and repentance. May the sweets of temporal prosperity, of the favour of men, and of the diversions of the world, be for ever far removed from me, because they are inconsistent with thine, O my God, and with the consolations of thy Spirit.

“ 5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

The third lesson of Christ is the meekness of charity, in heart, in countenance, and in word. It is no small victory for a man to subdue the severity of his temper. The meekness which leads to blessedness is not a meekness of constitution, of artifice, or of deceit; but a meekness of grace, of charity, and of patience. It is disposed to suffer itself to be spoiled of all in this world: but of what treasures, what inheritances, does it not put us into possession in the land of the living? To possess the land of our heart in patience, is the beginning of the perfect kingdom of charity, and the fruit of Christian meekness. Instruct us, Lord, in this virtue, thou who art the master and the teacher of it!

“ 6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

The fourth lesson of Christ shows us, that a zeal for righteousness and perfection, a hatred of sin, and of the unrighteousness of the age, and the desire of the sovereign and eternal righteousness, ought to be the sole hunger and thirst of our heart. The salutary hunger is after that alone which can nourish and

satisfy our soul according to God. The hunger after every thing else is either a disease of the body, or a folly of the mind. May I hunger after nothing but thee, O my God, because thou alone canst feed me here on earth, and satisfy me in heaven !

“ 7. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.”

The fifth lesson of Christ is compassion on the miseries of others, which consists in aiding them with our substance, our counsel, our cares, and our prayers, both for the body and the soul. Mercy is not purchased but at the price of mercy itself ; and this price is even a gift of the mercy of God. We think ourselves disposed to show great instances of mercy, when we perceive ourselves inclined to pardon great injuries ; when perhaps it is either because the opportunities for it are at a distance, or because there may be honour in doing it, and danger in the contrary. But as for those little instances of mercy, which we have every day many opportunities of showing, by reason of aversions, peevish, troublesome, contradicting, and unequal humours, light offences, small differences, &c. with how much difficulty do we exercise them, if we do it at all ! He who gratifies his resentment, when he thinks he can do it without being damned, ought to fear that his compassion is only servile and mercenary on the greater occasions. What mercy can those vindictive persons hope for, who forgive nothing, and are always ready to imbrue their hands in the blood of their brethren ?

“ 8. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God.”

The sixth lesson of Christ is, that the purity of a heart, either preserved after baptism, or repaired by repentance, consists in loving God alone. Filthy objects are not the only things which defile the heart: whatever it loves contrary to the command and will of God, renders it impure. O infinite purity! what heart can ever be worthy to see thee, unless thou purify it, by engaging it entirely to thyself!

“ 9. Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.”

The seventh lesson of Christ recommends to us a zeal for peace. We ought to preserve it with God, our neighbour, and ourselves, and to procure it wherever we can. Whose children then are those, who sow or foment division in the church, or in families, if not of the spirit of discord, which reigns only by hate and division? O lovely and desirable *peace!* of which God is the God and Father, his Son the mediator and victim, the Holy Ghost the inspirer and band, and the church the kingdom and family! When shall we possess thee? When wilt thou be perfect?

“ 10. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Lastly, the eighth lesson of Christ is concerning the happiness of suffering for righteousness' sake; but few persons comprehend this happiness, and fewer still desire to partake of it. To be willing to suffer for righteousness from the hands of Christians, is a grace more rare than to be persecuted for the faith by infidels. There are more in proportion who give up their life for the sake of the latter, than

there are who, upon the account of the former, sacrifice their ease, their interest, and their fortune. But what ! cannot the kingdom of heaven make us sufficient amends for what we suffer upon the account of righteousness, as well as upon the account of faith ?

“ 11. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.”

Persecution for righteousness and truth includes in it contempt, mockery, injuries, and contradictions, suffered in serving God, at the hands of the wicked and of worldly men. Whom shall we believe ?— Either Jesus Christ, who places our present happiness in this ; or our own self-love, which fixes it in the esteem, the praises, the caresses, and favours of the world ? The cause of God and of Christ is the cause of faith and the gospel, of truth and righteousness, of God’s glory and our sanctification, of the church and her interests.

“ 12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Is there any thing greater, than by means of persecution to enter into fellowship with the prophets and apostles, even in this life ; and to expect God for our reward in the other ? This is a subject not only of joy, but of an excess of joy and of rapture. A joy not of sense, but of faith and hope, which does not stifle the perception of pain, but feeds upon it, and causes us to embrace it ; which does not distract the heart, but unites it to God. How precious and valuable is this communion, by which we are admitted to a fellowship in sufferings, not only with

the prophets and apostles, but with Christ himself; and which is to us a pledge of his love, and of his Spirit!

SECT. II.—*The Apostles the Salt and Light of the Earth. The Law not destroyed. Doing and Teaching.*

“ 13. ¶ Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

Bishops and priests ought to be, 1. Holy, that they may sanctify sinners, in taking away the rottenness and corruption of sin by the salt of the word, of prayer, of repentance, of sacraments, &c. Christians are likewise, in some sense, the “ salt of the earth ;” when, being preserved from corruption themselves, they preserve others from it; make them relish God and his gospel, and have the salt of true wisdom, the spirit of Jesus Christ, &c. What then is a bishop without strength and virtue, a priest without piety and zeal, a Christian without faith or charity, but even salt which has lost its savour, worthy to be rejected of God, and despised of men? How great must be the miracle which can restore to this salt its first strength and savour!

“ 14. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.”

Bishops and priests ought to be, 2. Learned, to instruct; 3. Open, and easy of access to all, in order to do them service. Of what advantage is it to a Christian to be light, in respect of his faith and calling, if he be nothing but darkness as to his life

and actions? If an infidel, instead of seeing the light of the gospel and the purity of faith shine in our conversation, discovers nothing there but the darkness of sin, we certainly blind, instead of enlightening him. The Christian life is something very high and sublime, to which we cannot arrive without pains; whilst it withdraws us from the earth, and carries us nearer heaven, it places us in view, and as a mark to the malice of carnal men.

“15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.”

Bishops and priests ought to be, 4. Of good example, that they may edify others. What is this city and this house, but the universal church, one, holy, immoveable—raised above all human things, contained in one only society, united by one sole communion, and enlightened by one doctrine alone. Out of this house, there is nothing but darkness. Out of this hill, there is no stability. Out of this city, there is no salvation.

“16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Bishops and priests ought to be, 5. Humble, that they may seek nothing but the glory of God. They are obliged to five duties: First, To dispense light; Secondly, To join good works thereto; Thirdly, To direct them all to God; Fourthly, To do it with a filial heart; and that, Fifthly, lifted up to the things of heaven. How rare and extraordinary a thing is it to discharge these duties! How difficult to shine only for God, to work only for heaven!

“ 17. ¶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

Bishops and priests ought to be, 6. Faithful, in doing that first themselves which they require of others, in imitation of Jesus Christ. Yes, Lord, thou fulfillest the law: in *itself*, adding what is wanting to perfect it, and supplying its inability to satisfy God, and sanctify man; in *thyself*, submitting to its types with an exact obedience, and verifying them by thy death upon the cross; in *thy members*, giving them what it promised, and enabling them by thy grace and love to fulfil what it commands. Fulfil it in me, O Lord.

“ 18. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

There is nothing so little in the law, but it has its truth and completion in Jesus Christ, or in his church. The word of God is immutable, because his power is infinite. His mercy will infallibly be accomplished in the saints; his justice will be inflexibly executed upon sinners.

“ 19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

The only just and holy ambition is to desire to be great in heaven: but the only means for a bishop or priest to be so, is not only to *do*, but also to *teach* the gospel. Every part of the law carries in it equally the authority and will of God; we oppose

this, when we violate that. There is nothing more little and contemptible in the sight of God, than a pastor, who, by his principles, his discourse, and his life, diverts those from the meditation and practice of the divine law, whom by all these methods he ought to incite thereto. It is neither eminence of see, nor abundance of wealth, nor magnificence of equipage, nor learning, nor authority, nor the favour of princes, which makes a great prelate: but it is in *doing* and *teaching*, that his true greatness does consist.

SECT. III.—*Exceeding Righteousness. Injurious Word. Reconciliation.*

“20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Let us often consider, how great the perfection of the evangelical law is. It must be internal, spiritual, and in the truth of God. Who can flatter himself with having come near the exactness of these persons in avoiding open and visible sins, and in fulfilling the external part of the law, with having come near the length of their prayers, and the austerity of their lives? And yet, in order to be saved, one must surpass them in righteousness. That which God principally requires is righteousness of heart, charity, humility, a sincere love of the law, of justice, &c. Whoever has not these, may be the most holy person in the world before men, and the most contemptible in the sight of God.

“21. ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them

of old time, Thou shalt not kill ; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment : 22. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment ; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council ; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.”

Observe here the punishment, 1. Of murder ; 2. Of Anger ; 3. Of an angry word ; 4. Of an injurious word. Who will not tremble at these words ! who will not dread the judgment of God, who condemns and punishes the external effects of anger, in proportion to the hatred which a man carries in his heart ! Murder is the most punishable of all crimes, according to the written law, in respect both of our neighbour and of civil society. But he who sees the heart, and who judges it by the eternal law, punishes as much a word or a desire, if the hatred from whence they proceed be complete and perfected.

“ 23. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee ;”

Of how great importance is it for a man, before the communion, to examine whether he has nothing in his heart which is contrary to charity ! A Christian has no enemies at all ; he has only brethren, looking upon all men as children of God and members of Christ, or, at least, as capable of becoming such. If a brotherly heart was required even of a Jew, in order to his offering a bullock or a lamb ; what ought then to be the charity of a Christian, who offers up (the representative sacrifice of) the Son of God, and who is obliged to receive him into his heart ?

“24. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

No sacrifice can be acceptable to God, unless it be accompanied with that of a sincere charity. The gift and offering which God prefers to all others, is for a man to take away, out of his own and his brother's heart, all seeds of hatred, by an humble and necessary satisfaction, or by a charitable and voluntary prevention. It is to fly in the face of the Son of God, with respect to his doctrine and command, to send to the communion, or to admit to the grace of reconciliation, a sinner who will neither forgive, nor make any satisfaction for injuries. A religion, the very soul of which is charity, cannot suffer at the feet of its altars a heart which is revengeful, or which does not use its utmost endeavour to revive charity in the heart of another.

“25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.”

It is a real folly for a man not to be reconciled whilst he has time. Unhappy he, who puts it off till death; still more unhappy he, who lets slip this last and precious moment, the loss whereof is irreparable. But how great is the madness, how desperate the rage of the duellist, who goes in cold blood to deliver himself up to his judge, to seek his executioner, and to cast himself into the eternal prison, by being the occasion of his own death, either through the engagement of a false honour, or out of

a foolish vanity, or in following the torrent of a diabolical custom, or even under the actual impulse of a mortal hatred, and while his heart is entirely possessed and inflamed with the desire and with the last effort of revenge!

“26. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”

How terrible is thy justice, O my God, even to the most righteous! What will become of him whom thou shalt judge according to rigour? He who has not laboured before his death to change justice into mercy by a sincere repentance, shall never escape out of God's hands.

SECT. IV.—*Adultery in the Heart. The Plucking out an Eye, &c.*

“27. ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:”

It is the property of a Pharisee to abstain only from the outward crime. Men are very often less inquisitive to know how far the will of God extends, that they may please him in performing it, than how far they may satisfy their lusts, without destroying themselves by an open violation of the law.

“28. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

Christian righteousness is the righteousness of the heart. Concupiscence or charity renders the use of the senses good or evil. If voluntary and deliberate looks or desires make adulterers, how many persons are there, whose whole life is but one

continual adultery, which they commit even at the foot of the altar? Men would abhor to commit one external act before the eyes of men, in a temple of stone, and yet they are not in the least afraid to commit a great number of them, in the temple of their own heart, and in the sight of God.

“29. And 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.”

Sometimes pride or fear keep us from giving the outward scandal, which causes the fall of our neighbour; but we do not at all watch over our own heart, to avoid the inward scandal or offence which makes us fall ourselves. Let us tear up our evil desires and our corrupt will, and we shall then pluck out our eye, by preventing the bad use which that causes us to make of this. One cannot pluck out an eye without pain, nor without violence; much less an evil inclination, which corrupts the heart. Nothing but thy grace, my God, can perform this necessary and difficult operation. Would to God the sinner would often make the comparison, which our blessed Saviour causes us here to make, of the vain and transitory pleasures of sin, with the inconceivable and eternal pains of hell.

“30. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, 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.”

This is to shut the gate against the enemy; namely, to shut our senses against dangerous objects, to avoid the occasions of sin, and to deprive ourselves

of all that is most dear to us, in order to save our souls. Men often part with the members of the body, at the discretion of a surgeon, that they may preserve the trunk, and die a little later; and yet they will not deprive themselves of a look, a touch, a small pleasure, &c. to save the soul, and secure themselves from dying eternally. It is not enough to shut the eye, nor to stop the hand; the one must be "plucked out," and the other "cut off." Neither is this yet enough: we must "cast them both from us." Not one moment's truce with lust, it must be rooted up and destroyed. But, alas! the end of this work is not to be seen in this life.

SECT. V.—*Marriage Indissoluble. Swearing.*

"31. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:"

God permitted this evil, to prevent a greater, and to prefigure his repudiating the synagogue, which was his first spouse. A Christian ought rather to beg of God the grace to bear patiently and quietly the faults and imperfections of his wife, than to think of the means of being parted from her. That which was allowed to the hardness of an uncircumcised heart, ought not to serve as a rule to a heart into which charity has been infused by the Holy Ghost.

"32. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery."

How inviolable ought to be the alliance of man with his God by charity, since conjugal society is

only an image and figure of it; as it is likewise (an emblem) of the union of Christ with our nature in the incarnation, and with his church. Marriage, which bears so great a relation to this mystery, ought to resemble it likewise in its indissolubility. A husband should be inseparably joined to his wife, as Christ is to his church.

“ 33. ¶ Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:”

They violate this commandment who dishonour God by blasphemies; impious jests; swearing in light matters; frequent and customary oaths, especially on wicked accounts; frivolous, unprofitable, and irreligious vows, &c. It is a very old abuse, to weaken the law of God without scruple, to lighten the yoke of it without authority, and to enlarge the way to heaven by arbitrary and presumptuous explications. To believe that only the perjured person dishonours God, in relation to this precept, is to understand very little the holiness of the divine name.

“ 34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: 35. Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King:”

All swearing without necessity is forbidden. Who is there, among the traders and people of the world, who obeys this law? He who swears of his own accord, without discretion, without judgment, and by custom, is in continual danger of being perjured. When we make any promise contrary to the command of God, taking as a pledge of our sincerity, either God, or something belonging to him, we en-

gage that which is not ours without the master's consent. To make any imprecation against ourselves, with relation to heaven, the earth, or sacred things, of which God has given us the use, is to dispose of ourselves, of the gifts of God, and of his creatures, without the leave, and against the will, of the sovereign Master. God manifests his glory in heaven, as upon his throne; he imprints the footsteps of his divine perfections upon every thing on earth, as upon his footstool; and shows, that his holiness and his grace reign in his temple, as in the place of his residence, and in his palace. Let it be one of our most constant and ordinary cares, to seek and honour God in all his works.

“ 36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.”

How dares man presume to dispose of his person, his time, and his goods, contrary to the command and appointment of God, since he is not able so much as to change the colour of one single hair?

“ 37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

Simplicity is most commonly to be found with truth. Let us be sure not to use an oath for the sake of little temporal interests: this is to abuse religion, and to make God subservient to mammon. The abuse of an oath proceeds, either from the distrust of him who requires it, or from the wickedness of him of whom it is required, or from lightness, or irreverence. Wisdom, probity, and religion, would remedy all. Nothing is more contrary to the Spirit of God, and to the doctrine of Jesus Christ, than to render oaths common in the church; because it multi-

plies the occasions of perjury, lays snares for the weak and ignorant, and sometimes makes the name and truth of God subservient to the designs of the wicked.

SECT. VI.—*Patience.*

“ 38. ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth :”

How many Christians are there worse than Jews, who carry their revenge to the utmost extremity, and return even more evil than they have received! There is a great deal of difference betwixt what the law appointed to the Jews for the public safety, and what charity requires of us for our particular perfection; betwixt the duty of a judge, who ought to punish according to the law, and the temper of a Christian, who ought to pardon according to the gospel.

“ 39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Patience, and true Christian charity, incline a man to quit, to do, to give, and to suffer all things. First, in his person, all sorts of affronts, at least in the disposition of mind. We are allowed to demand justice; but never to avenge ourselves, never to desire punishment for itself, but either for the public good, or for the welfare of private persons. Christian patience, and evangelical prudence, must concur to regulate the use of this counsel; for it is not always expedient to do that publicly, which it is always necessary to be disposed to do at the bottom of the heart. We ought to take care not to deprive ourselves of this blessing by too much reasoning, or by the delusion of self-love.

“ 40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.”

Patience and Christian charity would have us be in the same disposition, in relation to our goods. It is a gain to lose them, rather than the treasure of charity and peace. These words contain only matter of advice; but the foundation of this advice, namely, the having a mind averse to law, and the preferring peace and Christian concord to temporal advantages—this is a precept. We are great gainers when we lose only our money, because we will not run the risk of losing our souls by losing charity.

“ 41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”

Lastly, Patience and Christian charity would have us be disposed to suffer, in our bodies, all sorts of toils, vexations, and torments, that we may be martyrs of charity and peace. Jesus Christ went beyond this advice, when, without being in the least constrained thereto, he suffered himself to be set on a pinnacle of the temple, and taken up into the mountain by the devil, and to be led to the top of Calvary by the Jews. Few persons are exposed to these kinds of vexations; but all are exposed to suffer injustice. If we always believe that our sufferings are less than we deserve in the sight of God, we need never fear our being mistaken, or doing any injustice to ourselves. The way to improve the injustice of men to our own advantage, is, to suffer their violence with a view to the justice of God.

“ 42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.”

To give and to lend freely to all who are in need,

is a general precept, from which we are not excused, but by our inability to perform it. Men are more or less obliged to it, as they are more or less able; as the want is more or less pressing; as they are more or less burthened with poor; or by their office as pastors; or by the necessities of their relations; or by the opportunities and demands of providence; or by the duty of restitution and satisfaction. In this matter we must consult prudence, and more charity. He who makes use of the beggar's hand to ask our charity, is the same of whom we ourselves beg every day our bread: and dare we refuse Him! Let us show, at least, mildness and compassion, when we can do no more. To give and to lend are two duties of charity, which Christ joins together, and which he sets upon an equal footing. The loan is sometimes more beneficial than the absolute gift, because it flatters less the vanity and natural generosity of him who lends; it spares more the shame of him who is in real want, and gives less encouragement to the idleness of him who may not be very honest.

SECT. VII.—*The Love of Enemies. Perfection.*

“ 43. ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: 44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;”

We must love our enemies in heart, in word, and in deed; desiring their welfare, praying for them, speaking well of them, and assisting them as occasion requires. The enemies whom Christ here en-

joins us to love, are either those who hate us, or those whom we do not love. A man certainly bears a hostile mind, when he therein cherishes aversion and hatred, either with or without cause. This one precept alone is a sufficient proof of the holiness of the gospel, and of the truth of the Christian religion. None but God could have imposed a yoke so contrary to self-love; and nothing but the supreme and infinite charity could have made men love and practise a law so insupportable to corrupt nature. In vain do men flatter themselves with loving their enemies, if their works do not give testimony thereof.

“ 45. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

There is nothing greater than to imitate God in doing good to our enemies. All the creatures pronounce on the revengeful the sentence of their condemnation, wrote with the rays of the sun, the drops of rain, and all the other natural good things, the use whereof God gives even to his enemies. If God had not loved us while we were his enemies, we could never have become his children; and we shall cease to be so, if we cease to imitate him.

“ 46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?”

He who loves only his friends does nothing for God's sake. This is the virtue of a publican and a heathen, which will have no other reward but theirs. God is the reward of that virtue only, of which he himself is the principle and the end. He who loves

for the sake of pleasure or interest, rewards himself, and pays himself with his own hands. He who loves for the sake of God, loves his gifts in all men. God has no enemy but sin; we ought to have no other.

“47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?”

If not to salute be a heathenish indifference; to hide hatred under civilities, is a diabolical treachery. It is easy enough to show a signal instance of generosity to a declared enemy, to gain honour before men. But to speak kindly, mildly, and cordially to one whose humour we do not like, or from whom we have received some affront, how rare a thing is this! how hard and grievous is it to nature! Thou alone, O divine Repairer of our corrupt nature! thou alone canst render this pleasant and agreeable to it by thy grace.

“48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

God is, in himself, the principal law, and the chief pattern of the perfection of the man and of the Christian. God has but too many bad imitators of his power, of the simplicity of his nature, of his independency, his vengeance, &c. but he has very few of his love, his condescension, and his indulgence. He calls himself love, to teach us, that in this consists the perfection to which he would have us aspire. God is more easily to be imitated by his children, in the perfections whereby he appears a Father, than in those whereby he appears a God: these for heaven; those for the earth.

CHAPTER VI.

SECT. I.—*Alms.*

“ 1. TAKE heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them ; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”

The best way is to do good works in secret, as far as is consistent with the advancement of God’s glory. The devil engages the wicked to do evil with pleasure, and the righteous to do good out of vanity. Let us wait with patience one moment ; the eternal reward can neither fail us, nor be delayed. To desire to be paid ready money by the hands of men, is the way to lose all ; but to trust God, is to enrich ourselves for ever.

“ 2. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward.”

To do alms in secret is to offer a double sacrifice. A transient and momentary honour, is the empty reward of vain men. Unhappy he, who, in parting with his wealth, deprives himself, by his vanity, of the heavenly riches. It is, as it were, attempting to impose upon God with a wrong title, for a man to endeavour to sell that to him, which he has already sold to vain-glory.

“ 3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth ;”

It is good to conceal our good works, even from

our nearest relations, unless we are under an obligation of edifying them. We ought to proceed farther, to conceal them, as one may say, even from ourselves, by not allowing ourselves the satisfaction so much as to think on them, or to lay them before our eyes by reflections of complacency and self-love. They are given to God, and therefore they ought to be kept hid in him.

“ 4. That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.”

The substantial reward of the secret virtue of the humble is conferred openly. Our alms is our treasure: not to hide it, is to expose ourselves to being robbed. He who seeks any other approbation than that of God, forgets that he is made only for him, and that he ought ultimately to refer all to him alone.

SECT. II.—*Prayer.*

“ 5. ¶ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward.”

In order to approach God, and to incline him to give ear to our prayer, it is necessary to pray out of the hearing of men, and without affecting to be seen by them. A man loves the world when he seeks to please it, and this love spoils the best works. God is a jealous God; and cannot share with any one what is due to himself alone: and this not out of envy, but goodness. He is not afraid of losing

any thing, but of being obliged not to give, and not to bestow himself.

“6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

The heart is God's peculiar portion: he is the judge of it; it belongs to him to reward. It is in this that he will be worshipped and adored. Prayer is the most secret intercourse of the soul with God, and, as it were, the conversation of one heart with another. The world is too profane and treacherous to be of the secret. We must shut the door against it, by forgetting it, and all the affairs which busy and amuse it. Prayer requires retirement, at least of the heart; for this is the closet in the house of God, which house is ourselves. Thither we ought to retire, even in public prayer, and in the midst of company. What goodness is there equal to this of God, to give not only what we ask, and more than we ask of him, but to reward even prayer itself! What advantage is it to serve a prince, who places prayers in the number of services, and reckons to his subjects' account even their trust and confidence in begging all things of him!

“7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”

Prayer requires more of the heart than of the tongue, of sighs than of words, of faith than of discourse. The eloquence of prayer consists in the fervency of desire, in the simplicity of faith, and in the earnestness and perseverance of charity. The

abundance and choice of fine thoughts, studied and vehement motions, and the order and politeness of the expressions, are things which compose a mere human harangue, not an humble and Christian prayer. Our trust and confidence ought to proceed from that which God is able to do in us, not from that which we can say to God.

“8. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him.”

Prayer is not designed to inform God, but to give man a sight of his misery, to humble his heart, to excite his desire, to inflame his faith, to animate his hope, to raise his soul towards heaven, and to put him in mind that there is his Father, his country, his inheritance, &c. He is a Father to whom we pray; let us go to him with confidence: he knows our wants; let us remove far from us all anxious disquiet and concern.

“9. After this manner therefore pray ye:”

The prayer which Jesus Christ gives us here is the pattern of all Christian prayer, and an abridgment of the gospel. What satisfaction is it to learn, from God himself, with what words, and in what manner, he would have us pray to him, so as not to pray in vain! A king, who himself draws up the petition which he allows to be presented to himself, has surely a very great desire to grant the request. We do not sufficiently conceive the value of this prayer, the respect and attention which it requires, the preference to be given to it, its fulness and perfection, the frequent use we should make of it, and the spirit which we should bring along with

us to it. The order of the petitions is the order of our desires and of our duties: it is here we ought to be particularly mindful of them.

“ — Our Father, which art in heaven,”

1st, We must, in the first place, say this prayer with the heart of a heavenly child, disengaged from the earth by his new birth, animated with the Spirit of the divine adoption, and full of desire to be reunited to his Father and Author. The heart of a child of God is a brotherly heart, in respect of all other Christians: it asks nothing but in the spirit of unity, fellowship, and Christian charity, desiring that for its brethren which it desires for itself. Let us adore God in the unity and simplicity of his essence—in the trinity and fellowship of his persons; as the Father of Christians, the source and model of all paternity both in heaven and earth, and the Author of all created good.

“ — Hallowed be thy name.”

2d, We must say it, with the heart of a priest, all inflamed with zeal for God's glory, and for the sanctification of souls, and with the desire of that holiness, which should render him like to God as to his Father. In the sanctification of the elect and of the whole church, God is pleased to place his glory: and, therefore, this glory and this sanctification we ought to desire and to pray for before all things. Let us adore the holiness of God; let us desire that his holy name may be every where known; let us labour to this purpose with all our power, beginning first with ourselves.

“ 10. Thy kingdom come.”

3d, We must say it with the heart of a faithful

subject, zealous for the glory of his sovereign. When will it be, O my God, that death and sin, the devil and his ministers, the world and its offences, shall cease to reign upon earth; and that thou, after having judged the quick and the dead, separated thy elect from the reprobate, and destroyed all the powers of earth and hell, wilt thyself reign alone every where, in all, and for ever, and thy saints with thee, and with thy Son? In order to desire the coming of this kingdom, it is necessary to be in a condition to expect it with confidence. Let us adore the sovereignty of God, and labour to establish his kingdom in our own hearts.

“ — Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

4th, We must say it with the heart of a wife who studies the desires and inclinations of her husband, and seeks only to please him. God every where effects his will, even in those who oppose it the most; but it is done, with and by love, in none but the saints in heaven and on earth. We acknowledge the necessity of a grace, which, by a free and predominant love, may subject our will to that of God, when we pray that ‘his will may be done in us as it is in heaven.’ It is by this that God reigns, and that his name is hallowed. Let us adore the almighty will of God, and desire that it may work in us, so as to subject us to itself.

“ 11. Give us this day our daily bread.”

5th, We must say it with the heart of a sheep, which requires food from its shepherd; and of one really in want, who begs his bread. We ought to ask of God the bread of the body; but much more the bread of the soul—his grace, his word, the divine

eucharist, the love of his law, and the accomplishment of his will. God will have us depend on him. He gives not to the body all its nourishment, nor to the soul all the grace which is necessary for it, on purpose to oblige us to pray: and prayer, which proves that we always stand in need of this grace, proves also that we have it not always. Let us adore the providence of God, let us love to depend upon it, and let us frequently have recourse to it.

“ 12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

6th, We must say it with the heart of a penitent, who begs mercy of his God, whilst he affords it to his neighbour in all respects. That man condemns himself to suffer the eternal vengeance of God, who makes use of this prayer with revenge and hatred in his heart. He who observes not the condition of a transaction so advantageous, does not comprehend what he owes to God, and is a madman who resolves to perish. Let us adore the infinite love and mercy of God; and let us beseech him to give us such a heart, as is indulgent, charitable, and always ready to forgive.

“ 13. And lead us not into temptation ;”

7th, We must say it with the heart of a sick person, who implores the assistance of his physician, acknowledging that he deserves to be forsaken by him. The way of salvation is a way of humility, and the Christian grace a grace of combat. There is nothing makes men more humble, renders them more vigilant, and obliges them to have recourse more frequently to the arms of faith and prayer, than their being unable to ascribe to themselves any good,

their perceiving themselves capable of all evil, their having a domestic enemy who leaves them not one moment's quiet or security, and their depending continually upon a grace which is not due, and of which they are altogether unworthy. Let us adore the wonderful contrivance and wisdom of God in the work of our salvation; and let us give up ourselves entirely to him, that he may not give us up to ourselves.

“ — But deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Lastly, We must say it with the heart of a captive, an exile, or an afflicted person, who has recourse to his deliverer. With how many snares, how many obstacles to good, how many occasions of sin, how many enemies of salvation, are we surrounded, amongst whom our false friends are the most dangerous! Lord, from thee alone we expect deliverance; delay not to succour us. May the frequent combats, in which the tempter engages us, make us sigh and long after the general deliverance, which will for ever banish to hell the tempter and the temptation, all disorderly affection and concupiscence, all sin and wickedness whatsoever. Let us adore the power and justice of the sovereign Judge; let us wait like exiles, to be called home, and, like captives, to be delivered; and let us fly to him for aid under the miseries of our banishment and slavery, and in all the assaults of our enemies.

“ 14. ¶ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:”

He who shows mercy to men, receives it from

God. For a king to forgive his subjects a hundred millions, and an infinite number of treasons against his authority and person, on this one condition, that they will but live peaceably with him and with one another, is what we shall never see; and yet this is but the shadow of that which Christ promises on his Father's part to all true penitents. A man must needs love his salvation but little, who refuses to purchase it at this price.

“ 15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

He who does not awake at the sound of so loud a thunder, is not asleep, but dead. It is not without reason that Christ insists thus upon this one petition concerning the forgiveness of sins; since this alone contains the threat of God's eternal wrath, and the necessity of brotherly love. We hazard all, if we either do not understand it, or do transgress it.

SECT. III.—*Fasting.*

“ 16. ¶ Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”

It is difficult to avoid hypocrisy and ostentation in external mortifications, and chiefly in fasting. He who desires to please men in that which he does by way of atonement to God, seems as if he pretended to expiate and make amends for his affection to the creatures by this affection itself. God turns from the sinner the eyes of his mercy, in the same proportion that he endeavours to draw upon himself those of men. When a man, out of hypocrisy,

affects a sad countenance, he has but little of that godly sorrow in his heart which repentance gives.

“17. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;”

The love of God makes us do that with joy which we do for him. Our heart is the same in respect of God, that our head and face are in respect of men. It is by the heart that he knows us, and judges of us: it is by this that we please him. It is this victim of the heart, which we must wash with the water of our tears, and anoint with the spirit of charity, to make it an acceptable sacrifice of repentance.

“18. That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

He who takes no care to avoid the sight and applause of the world, has but little desire to be seen and rewarded by God. There is a time to show ourselves to men, through the obligation we have to edify them; and a time to hide ourselves from them, to prevent our own destruction. Let us not be afraid that our heart will be concealed from God; but let us be afraid lest he should discover it to be greedy of the glory which comes from men, and little filled with the desire and esteem of that glory which he alone can confer.

SECT. IV.—*Treasures in Heaven. The Single Eye.*

“19. ¶ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:”

What blindness is it for a man to lay up that as

a treasure, which must necessarily perish ! This is to degrade a heart designed for God and for eternity, to fix it upon such things as are subject to corruption, and, on their account, to set it in competition with moths.

“ 20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal :”

He who frequently considers the solidity and eternity of the treasures in heaven, little amuses himself with the contemptible goods of the earth. This treasure is laid up by good works, and especially by alms. The only way to render perishing goods eternal, to secure stately furniture from moths, the richest metals from rust, and precious stones from thieves, is to transmit them to heaven by charity. This is a kind of bill of exchange, which cannot fail of acceptance, but through our own fault.

“ 21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Happy he, who has a heart only for God, and who has only God in his heart. How misplaced is a heart, when it cleaves either to the smoke of honours, or to the dirt of riches, or to the mire of pleasures ! Let our heart then, O God, rest satisfied in thee alone, since it was made only for thee, and since thou alone art worthy of it.

“ 22. ¶ The light of the body is the eye : if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”

The single eye, is the pure intention, and the unity of the end. The eye is neither single nor pure, when it looks upon two objects at once : nor

the heart, when it seeks not God and his righteousness only—when it has some other end besides his glory and his will—when it would fain be happy in the enjoyment of some other good together with him—and when it pretends to unite God and the world, to be the servant of Christ and to please men, and to reconcile the gospel with the eager desire of earthly things. Nothing is more single than the eye of faith; there is nothing which renders our whole conduct more uniform in goodness, than to follow singly the light of it.

“ 23. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”

An evil intention corrupts the best works, and renders them evil. Who can conceive the misfortune and corruption of a heart, which lays up for itself a double treasure of wrath, by suffering itself to be led away to evil actions by a perverse will, and depriving itself of the fruit of good ones by a bad intention? The way of the righteous is a way of light; that of sinners is nothing but darkness.

SECT. V.—*God to be served, not Mammon. Trust.*

“ 24. ¶ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

The master of our heart, is the love which reigns in it: we are slaves to that only which we love most. A man cannot be in a perfect indifference betwixt two objects which are incompatible; he is inclined to

despise and hate whatever he does not love in the highest degree, when the necessity of a choice presents itself. Could we ever imagine that mammon has the advantage of God in the hearts of the generality of mankind, did not experience force us to believe it? How dangerous is it, to set our minds upon riches, since it is so easy to make them our god!

“25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?”

To be so intent on the means of subsistence as to lose all the satisfaction of it, is to have but very little faith; it is even infidelity. On the other hand, to rely so much upon providence, as to do nothing at all, is to tempt God. But to labour, without placing our trust and confidence in our labour, expecting all from the blessing of God; this is to obey him, to co-operate with his providence, to set the springs of it a-going, and to imitate Christ and the saints by a sedate care and an industrious confidence. In the following verses, Christ lays down several reasons why men should not disquiet themselves about the wants of life, or concerning the future. The first is the experience of greater benefits already received. He who gave us life and the body, before we could ask them of him, can he refuse us wherewith to conserve them, when we ask it with an humble confidence? It is ingratitude to fall into distrust with respect to our great Benefactor.

“ 26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”

The second reason is the example of the lesser animals, which the providence of God feeds, without their own labour, though he be not their Father. We never knew an earthly father take care of his fowls and neglect his children; and shall we fear this from our heavenly Father? That man is unworthy to have God for his father in heaven, who depends less upon his goodness, wisdom, and power, than upon a crop of corn, which may be spoiled, either in the field, or in the barn. The excellency of man consists in his being capable of knowing, loving, and enjoying God: and what ought he not to expect from God after so great a gift?

“ 27. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?”

The third reason is the unprofitableness of human cares, unless God vouchsafe to bless them. What can our own uneasiness do, but only render us unworthy of the divine care? The passage from distrust to apostacy is very short and easy; and a man is not far from murmuring against providence, when he is dissatisfied with its conduct. He ought to depend entirely upon it, as well for the conservation of its gifts, as for the gifts themselves.

“ 28. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:”

The fourth reason is the example even of insensible creatures. Let us learn from hence, not, like

these plants, to do nothing, but to trust to God's eye, and to commit ourselves to his almighty hand, which the least of his works discover and manifest unto us. He who makes the lilies of the field grow, cannot he augment our substance, if it be for his glory and our advantage? Nothing is more capable of increasing our confidence towards God, than to consider his works with attention, and to meditate upon his conduct.

“ 29. And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. 30. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

Christ confounds, at one and the same time, both the luxury of the rich in their superfluities, and the distrust of the poor as to the necessaries of life. Let man, who is made for heaven and eternity, learn from a flower of the field, from a flower of a moment's duration, how low the care of providence vouchsafes to stoop. All our disquiets and distrusts proceed from want of faith. A man is rich when he has faith: that supplies all wants. The poor are not really so, unless destitute of faith.

“ 31. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? 32. (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek ;)”

The fifth reason is, that to concern ourselves about these wants with anxiety, as if there was no such thing as providence in the world; with great affection towards earthly enjoyments, as if we ex-

pected no other; and, without praying to God or consulting his will, as if we could do any thing without him—this is no better than to imitate the heathens.

“ — For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

The sixth reason is, because God is a good Father, who knows all our wants. It is the property of a true father to provide necessaries, and not superfluities. Not to hope for the former, is to offend his goodness; to expect the latter, is to do injury to his wisdom. The want of what is necessary is that which generally casts men into uneasiness about the future; and yet it is this very thing which ought to make them easy; because this is properly the business of providence, and the care of a father.

“ 33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

The seventh reason is, because the business of our salvation ought entirely to take us up. Hither all our desires, our cares, and our inquiries ought to tend. He who first seeks God, finds him together with all these things: the righteous are never deprived of them, but only in order to their finding God more certainly, readily, and fully. He who has all his spiritual wants supplied by God himself, though he were left under the greatest wants and necessities of the body, would yet be far from complaining that God had broken his word. Grant, Lord, that I may desire and seek nothing but thee, and that I may live only for thee, and in thee.

“34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

The eighth and last reason is, that a solicitous carefulness renders us unhappy before-hand. The future falls under the cognizance of God alone: we encroach therefore upon his rights, when we would fain foresee all which may happen to us, and secure ourselves from it by our cares. How much good is omitted, how many evils caused, how many duties neglected, how many innocent persons deserted, how many good works destroyed, how many truths suppressed, and how many acts of injustice authorised, by these timorous forecasts of what may happen, and these faithless apprehensions concerning the time to come! Let us do in season what God then requires of us; and let us trust to him for the consequences. The future time, which God would have us foresee and provide for, is that of judgment and eternity; and it is this alone which we will not foresee.

CHAPTER VII.

SECT. I.—*Not to judge. Not to cast holy things to dogs.*

“1. JUDGE not, that ye be not judged.”

God reserves to himself the judgment of the heart of man. Nothing so much incenses a judge against a criminal, as to see him set up himself for a judge. We search into the heart of our neighbour to discover something for which we may con-

demn him, either out of an idle curiosity, or out of envy and malice, or in order to find our own justification in the condemnation of others: this is what a great part of the world do almost without perceiving it.

“ 2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

We believe it, because Christ has said it, that we shall be treated at the last judgment as we shall have treated others; and yet we act every day as if we did not believe it. He who shows mercy shall receive it. This severity which is just, considerate, and proportioned to our sins, is the punishment of the unjust, rash, and excessive rigour of the greatest part of our judgments.

“ 3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”

On one side, self-love blinds us as to ourselves; and on the other, envy and malice give us piercing eyes in respect of others. An excellent remedy against this forwardness in censuring the conduct of others, is to consider ourselves before we find fault with them. When we shall have as much zeal to correct ourselves as we have inclination to correct others, we shall then know our own defects better than we now do those of our neighbours.

“ 4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?”

A false, blind, and irregular charity inspires us with a malicious attention and application to the

faults of others, and with an extreme sloth and negligence in regard of our own conduct. Give us, Lord, that true charity, which teaches, not to flatter ourselves, to spare our neighbour, and to judge equitably of every thing.

“ 5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

The necessary order of action is to labour first about our own sanctification, before we apply ourselves to that of others: for else it is nothing but pride and hypocrisy. A blind, precipitate, and ungoverned zeal, is good for nothing but to puff us up, to darken our understanding more and more with respect to ourselves, and to make us commit very great faults with respect to others. What is it to cast the beam out of our eye before we undertake to exercise the ministry of salvation, but to purify our heart from every human aim and irregular intention, to mortify our passions which are the causes of our blindness, to enlighten our faith by studying the way of salvation and the rules of the church, and to lay aside all false prejudices or popular prepossessions which are contrary to true piety?

“ 6. ¶ Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

It is an express command of the Lord, not to expose the truths, mysteries, or sacraments of the church to the contempt and profanation of sinners; and yet this is what is now-a-days charged as a

crime on those who endeavour to observe it. That is often represented as party management and confederacy, or as dangerous dissimulation, which is really the necessary wisdom and discretion of not dispensing the truth to those, who are fit for nothing but to bark at it like dogs, to trample it under their feet like swine, and to rend or persecute those who deliver it to them. Sacraments are not for such as are continually returning, like dogs, to their former sins, particularly those which proceed from the tongue and the mouth; nor for such as remain, like swine, under habits of impurity, or of any other sins.

THE MEANS TO ARRIVE AT PERFECTION.

SECT. II.—1. *Means: Prayer.*

“ 7. ¶ Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:”

How rich is a man when he knows how to ask, to seek, and to knock as he ought; with his tongue, his desires, and his works! Let us ask, with confidence and humility; let us seek, with care and application; let us knock, with earnestness and perseverance. Grant me, Lord, a faith, which may make me thoroughly sensible of my needs, and humbly ask thy grace; a hope, which may excite me to seek thy kingdom only, and the righteousness which leads thereto; and a charity, which may urge me to knock incessantly and respectfully at the gate of thy mercy.

“ 8. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and

he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”

Prayer is always heard after one manner or another, when charity asks, seeks, and knocks. She alone obtains all which she asks, because she alone asks what she ought, and that in a right manner, and for a good end. The way never to be refused, is, never to desire any thing but the will of God.

“ 9. Or what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone ?”

We have no right to ask any thing of God, but only, 1. Under the quality of children, and as members of his Son. 2. With the heart of children, or a filial love. 3. Necessaries, as bread. Thou art, O my God, both the Father and the bread of our souls. Give thyself to us, thee and thy Son Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. How many times, Lord, have we asked of thee a stone, namely, the good things of the earth, which would only have formed in us a heart of stone, and thou hast been pleased to give us the bread of thy grace, of thy word, and of thy Son !

“ 10. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent ?”

Jesus Christ may be said to be hidden in the Scriptures, as a fish is hidden in the water : faith and charity find him there ; curiosity and concupiscence, instead of him, find there sometimes the serpent and his temptation. If he is an unnatural father who gives his children things hurtful to the life of the body, what then is that person who causes them to lose the life both of soul and body to all eternity, in poisoning them with the maxims of the

world, in giving them the serpent of ambition, &c. either by bad example or otherwise! Thou alone, O my God, art always a Father! and never givest to thy children any other than the gifts of a Father. Let me likewise always show myself a good child in prayer, and never ask any thing but what is worthy of thy paternal love!

“ 11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

Good gifts are always given to children who ask them well. What other good things but those of heaven should a Christian ask of his heavenly Father?—a Christian, who was made such only for heaven! To ask them amiss, is not so properly to ask them, as to render ourselves unworthy of them. They are given only to those who ask them; and we ask them, so far as we esteem and desire them. Show, O my God, that thou art our Father! and make us esteem, desire, and ask that only which thou art willing to give!

SECT. III.—2. *Means: Charity.*

“ 12. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”

The Scriptures contain nothing but charity, which is the substance and the end of them. How rare is this spirit of equity! and how difficult and painful is it even to good men, to walk exactly according to this rule! Self-love is too much confined within these bounds; it always finds out reasons of prefer-

ence and distinction. Thy charity alone, O Jesus, can enable us to observe this law of charity!

SECT. IV.—3. *Means: the strait Way.*

“13. ¶ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:”

Unhappy those, who either flatter, or suffer themselves to be flattered, on this subject! There are four things which show that a man is in the way to heaven:—The first, when he loves the gospel, which confines nature, reduces it to what is strictly necessary, obliges it even not to be too intent on that, and separates it from every thing which flatters or corrupts it. The second, when he does not envy those who enjoy all the comforts, and all the good things of this present life which they desire. The third, when he declines the way that every body is too apt to like, “the broad way that leadeth to destruction.” The fourth, when he earnestly endeavours to “enter in at the strait gate.”

“14. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

To live as the generality of mankind do, is not to take “the way which leadeth unto life.” He who teaches that the gate and way to life are wide and broad, when Jesus Christ wonders to see them so strait and narrow, can be no other than a deceiver. Few find the way of heaven, fewer enter into this way, fewer yet abide in it, fewer still walk in it, and fewest of all persevere, or go forward to the end. As it is thy grace only, O Lord, which

causes us to find it, so from that we expect all the rest.

SECT. V.—*False Prophets. The Fruit like the Tree.*

“ 15. ¶ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

Adherence to the doctrine of the true pastors is one mark that a man is of the number of the true sheep. This advice of Christ, and the difficulty of discerning a sheep in her own natural clothing, from a wolf concealed under that of a sheep, show plainly how difficult the choice is of a good director (of the conscience.) Those who come to you, and are no pastors, instead of leaving you to come to them, are from thence justly suspected to be wolves, who seek not so much to help you to heavenly treasures, as to rob you of earthly. What is the reason that so few find the way to life, unless it be because there are so few who have any distrust of false prophets, or loose directors (of the conscience,) or who are not glad to follow those who make the way very broad? He who really seeks God, will not trust himself to a guide without being assured that he can conduct him to him. The pure and upright heart is attentive; and this attention, joined with prayer, obtains the grace of discernment.

“ 16. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”

The works are the tongue of the heart. When the whole body of actions is bad, the heart must necessarily be corrupt. Hypocrites may deceive for a

time, and conceal their heart on many occasions; but they cannot do it on all, or always. A man has not the Spirit of God in the least, when he does nothing but the works of the flesh: such as, ambition, covetousness, &c. Whoever enriches himself by the direction of conscience, and makes it subservient to the advancement of his family or his friends, or to other passions, he plainly enough discovers by his works, both what he is and what he is not.

“17. Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.”

Such as is the will, such are the actions which proceed from it. One important rule to keep us from delusion, is, to judge of ourselves, not by barren desires, nor by deceitful transports of devotion, but by our good works. The good tree is the good heart; the good fruit is a good life. The heart is God's, and truly Christian, when the life is so: the heart is the world's, when a man lives like the world. It is thou, O my God, who pluckest up the corrupt heart, and who createst, plantest, cultivatest, waterest, and makest the good one fruitful! Mine is in thy hands: make it a good tree; make it thy own plant!

“18. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

Charity is the root of the good tree, and that which renders it good; so long as that subsists, there can be no evil fruit of crimes; so long as it does not, there can be no good fruit of righteousness. To teach, as heretics do, that righteousness is consistent with the greatest crimes, or that the right-

eous sin in all their best works, is really to make a good tree bring forth evil fruit, and to give the lie to the Son of God.

“ 19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

There can be no true piety nor salvation without good works. What greater misery then can a man have, than to be found before the tribunal of God without the root of charity, and the fruit of good works! Let us make haste, for the time is short, and the last moment perhaps at hand! To be forever separated from God and Christ, and to suffer eternally the torment of fire! O God, who can think of it without horror! But whoever does no more than barely think of it with horror, will be but the more inexcusable on that account. The only means to avoid this separation and eternal fire, is to separate ourselves from sin, and the occasions of it, and to purify ourselves in the fire of repentance.

“ 20. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

This truth is often repeated, because our eternal state depends upon it. Not to have *good* fruit, is to have *evil*; there can be no innocent sterility in the invisible tree of the heart; to “bring forth nothing,” is cause sufficient to be “hewn down, and cast into the fire.” One main source of the evils of the church is the neglect of this rule, though given by Jesus Christ himself. The best fruits are frequently counted as nothing, and the trees which are most loaded with them are condemned, upon the word of those who have not the least good fruit themselves, or who bear nothing but evil. When

the proper use is made of this rule of our Lord's, it will soon be discovered who are the good trees.

SECT. VI.—*God judges by the Works.*

“ 21. ¶ 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.”

That man condemns himself, who calls God his Lord, and yet testifies by his works that he does not fear him. God considers actions, and not words; fruit, and not leaves. The false and deceitful devotion which consists only in words, is rejected by Jesus Christ. That alone which is true, substantial, and necessary, consists in studying and doing what God requires of us. How can the world be saved? —the world, which is intent on nothing but doing either its own will, to please itself, or that of others, out of interest! The will of God, which alone can sanctify and save, is regarded by it as nothing.

“ 22. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”

The most shining actions of the reprobate are often such as are rejected by God with the greater indignation, because the principle of them is more corrupt, and the end more criminal. How many preachers are there, who appear prophets in the pulpit; how many (spiritual) directors; how many writers, and other evangelical workman, whose conduct, doctrine, and labour we admire; who yet are really nothing, and even less than nothing, before God, be-

cause they do not perform his will ! It is better to be and to do nothing, than to be or do what God would not have us.

“ 23. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Dreadful separation indeed, which we do not enough consider ! How dear will the vain pleasure of sin, of worldly splendour, of a transient reputation, cost those who forget God ! Grant, O Lord, that I may discover and avoid all those snares which are laid for us by the devil, the world, and our own self-love !—that so thou mayest know and accept me in that great day. Terrible alteration for those among the clergy, who are so eager to be known in the world, and to make their fortune in it, by the functions of the sacred ministry ! Christ knows them not ; whereby is meant, that he regards and treats them as he does the world, to which they have given themselves up, and for which he has not vouchsafed to pray ; and that he strikes them, as well as the world, with this eternal anathema, “ Depart from me !” &c.

“ 24. ¶ Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock ;”

We must build upon the rock, which is Jesus Christ, doing that good by charity which we know by faith. True wisdom consists in working on the building of our salvation, in making it firm by keeping close to the word and the maxims of the gospel, and in conforming our lives thereto. And when, in order to this, we lean upon nothing but the grace of Christ, we then build upon a solid rock.

“ 25. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”

It is the practice of God's commandments which renders our calling and election sure, and which secures our salvation against the divine wrath and the last judgment. There are three kinds of trials and temptations:—1. Those of temporal afflictions, which come from above, like the rain. 2. Those which proceed from the lusts and passions of men, which are like floods. 3. Those which, like impetuous winds, arise from the devil. It is charity, and not the light of faith alone, which can enable us to stand our ground against so many temptations and trials.

“ 26. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand;”

He who knows and does not, builds upon the sand, and is a fool. How many fools on earth pass for the men of true wisdom! And very often he who pities them, is himself of the number! It is a great misfortune not to know the gospel: but it is a real folly, to be filled with the knowledge of its truths, and to make no use at all of them. Render us faithful in this matter, O Eternal Wisdom! and give us that wisdom which consists in knowing how to be saved!

“ 27. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

This is a lively representation of the case of a soul, which, at the hour of death, has nothing to

rest upon. The knowledge of the law alone cannot support a soul against temptations, nor against the judgment of God; it will serve only to overwhelm it the more. The fall of the soul is irreparable, and without remedy, after this life; because the spring of charity will be then dried up, which alone can shelter the soul from the rain of God's justice, stop the floods of his anger, and withstand the wind of his judgment, which will carry away the straw and the sand. Let us strengthen and secure our building, whilst we have time to do it.

“28. ¶ And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine :”

These people will condemn the insensibility of our hearts at the word of Christ. They perhaps heard it but once, and we hear or read it every day. It is something to admire the beauty and holiness of the Christian morality; but to make us love and embrace it, is the work of Him alone who can change the heart.

“29. For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Observe here the difference of Christ, and those who preach by his Spirit, from those who do it out of vanity, and by the spirit of the world. The word does nothing in the minister, without the unction with which God accompanies it. This does all, even in the mouth of him who is himself the Anointed of God. Lord, exercise upon my heart this sovereign power; instruct it with all the authority of thy divine person, and with all the efficacy of thy Spirit. Make it bear the yoke of thy gospel

with affection, and let this excellent abridgment of thy doctrine be always the rule of my manners, and the pattern of my behaviour.

CHAPTER VIII.

SECT. I.—*The Leper.*

“ 1. WHEN he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.”

A preacher or pastor ought never to decline from the perfection of his state; and yet he must often stoop, by way of condescension, to the weak and feeble; he must go to them, if they cannot come to him; and he must descend to their wants, their troubles, and their infirmities. It is the means to gain them to God, to engage them to follow him, and to draw them after him by the sweet savour of the word.

“ 2. And, behold, there came a leper, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

This leper is an emblem of the corruption of man by sin, and of his restitution by repentance. A sinner truly penitent, seeks God with a respectful faith, approaches him in the spirit of adoration, humbles himself under his almighty hand, and acknowledges the greatness of his fall, and the vileness of sin, by an extreme humiliation of heart. His prayer is humble, plain, and full of confidence in God, who can do all things, and of dependence upon his will, which owes him nothing. It is peculiar to God alone, that he need only *will* what he

intends to *perform*. His power is his will: it is because he wills it, that thereby he effects all, both in nature and in grace. These two truths are the fountain of Christian humility, the foundation of continual prayer, and the pledge of the mercy of God, to those whose hearts he has been pleased to instruct and penetrate with them.

“ 3. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

This action of Jesus Christ is a representation of that invisible hand, which makes itself felt by the most insensible hearts,—of that internal word, which makes itself heard by the most deaf,—and of that supreme will, which makes itself obeyed by the most rebellious. There are two sorts of graces: the one, which does not work a conversion, but which prepares the heart for it, by working faith, desires, trust, prayer; and which causes the leper to say, “ Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!”—the other, which does really work the conversion itself, by surmounting all the resistance of the sinner, and inspiring him with a good, strong, full, and perfect will, which entirely heals concupiscence, the very thing in which a bad will does consist. Say to me this word of salvation, “ Be thou clean,” O sovereign Physician, who dependest not on time for the cure of the maladies of my heart! We ought to be so far from despising the greatest sinners, that it is our duty to apply to them, but still as Christ did, not permitting ourselves to be infected by them. Let us admire the efficacy of prayer; and let us put more trust and confidence in it for the future.

“4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”

Observe here the conduct of a good director (of the conscience):—1. Not to suffer the good which God is pleased to do by his ministry to be divulged, but to shun the reputation of good works. 2. To observe the order of the hierarchy. 3. To be unconcerned for his own interest, and zealous for that of God. 4. To prevent all occasion of scandal and jealousy.—Priests ought not to treat sinners as cured of the leprosy of sin, until they are assured of it by sufficient proofs: as the priests of the law could not accept the offering of a leper, nor allow him to partake of the sacrifice, until they had received convincing tokens of his cleanness.

SECT. II.—*The Centurion.*

“5. ¶ And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, 6. And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.”

God very often grants more than is desired. The eloquence of prayer consists in representing our wants to God in a plain manner. The centurion is the pattern of a true Christian master's charity towards his servants, who retains those who are the most incapable of doing him any more service, and is to them instead of a father. The inability to do good without the grace of Christ, is the palsy of the soul. Whence comes it to pass, that men are not near so much concerned at this spiritual palsy, as at

that of the body, and that they complain of it so little? Is it not because their faith is small, and the business of salvation so little at their heart?

“7. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.”

The word and promise of Christ is the great consolation of a sinner. There is no person in the world but what has need that Jesus Christ should come and heal him, either of his mortal wounds, or of his weakness and infirmities. From the time that he has made us sensible of our diseases, and given us the grace to lay them before him in prayer, let us confidently believe, that he says to us, “I will come and heal you;” and let us faithfully and humbly say to him without ceasing, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

“8. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.”

See here the pattern of a lively faith, and a profound humility, which ought always to accompany the prayer of a sinner. Jesus Christ, by his will alone, can heal the palsy of ours. The first degree of humility is to acknowledge the necessity of grace, and our own inability. The second, to confess the freeness of this grace, and our own unworthiness. Nothing more retards our cure than our presumption.

“9. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.”

This is to make a true Christian use of authority, by it to raise our minds to the contemplation of that of God. Let us look upon ours as a small emanation of his; and let us acknowledge, that it is nothing in comparison of his almightiness. Carnal men are apt to idolize either the authority of others, out of flattery or interest, or their own through pride or conceit: but a Christian takes occasion from hence to humble himself, to adhere to God, and to hope for every thing from him.

“ 10. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”

We sometimes see laymen and military persons, on whom God seems to have bestowed fewer favours than on others, have notwithstanding greater faith than they. Humility is, at the same time, both the mother and the daughter of faith. Jesus admires the works of his Father, to whom he refers all, and chiefly the operation of his grace in the soul, to induce us to admire them also, and to give glory to God for all. There are two things which are the subject of Christ's admiration:—the first, how few find the way to heaven by reason of its perfection; (Mat. vii. 14.)—the second, how incomprehensible the election of those is, on whom God confers the free gift of faith. There is nothing greater, nothing more worthy of the attention of a Christian, than faith, and the works of it in the saints.

“ 11. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven:”

Oftentimes he who seems to be lost, enters into the same place with him who led a pious life. We must fear and hope to the end. Christ proclaims and foretells the conversion of remote nations, to the end that we may ask it of God. To pray often for the advancement of his kingdom, and for the propagation of the faith, is one of the duties of a true Christian. All the elect are the children of promise, and are admitted into fellowship with the patriarchs, and into their rights and privileges; because it is to them that the promises were made. Let us imitate Abraham in his faith, Isaac in his obedience even unto death, and Jacob in his hope and expectation of good things to come, amidst all the evils of this life, if we desire to reign with them.

“ 12. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

How many Christians suffer the graces, the kingdom, and the salvation, which they had as it were in their hands to be lost; while Pagans and Idolators obtain salvation! An eternity of darkness, tears, and pains, for one moment of sinful pleasure. What blindness is it to expose ourselves thereto!

“ 13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.”

The faith given by God is the fountain and measure of his other gifts. To beg the increase of it, is to beg many other graces, and to preserve those which we have already. The faith to which Jesus grants all which it desires, is not a naked and bar-

ren faith, but one which produces trust, humility, prayer, &c.

SECT. III.—*St. Peter's Mother-in-law. The Possessed and Sick cured.*

“ 14. ¶ And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.”

As the miracle of the leper represents the corruption of nature by original sin, and the restitution of it by Christian grace; as that of the paralytic expresses our inability to do good, and to resist evil, without actual grace: so this third miracle denotes the concupiscence which still remains, and which, like a fever, is the cause of many frailties and infirmities. Behold them, O Lord, in me, with the same eyes of mercy which thou wast pleased to cast upon this woman.

“ 15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.”

Christ, in touching the hand of this woman, shows plainly the quickening virtue of his flesh, united to the divinity in unity of person. This flesh, so often received (spiritually) in the communion, what ought it not to work in our hearts! When God touches the heart with his grace, he destroys the heat of concupiscence therein. We must, after the example of this woman, be so faithful, as to consecrate and return to God the whole use of his gifts and graces. It is by works that a man proves himself to be cured of his evil habits. The humility and charity which are shown by serving Christ in the poor, are some of the surest marks of a true conversion.

“ 16. ¶ When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick :”

O my God, make the sinner thoroughly sensible, that he falls into the power of the devil when he refuses to have thee for his Lord and Master. The possessed with devils are not to be seen without horror: but what is this possession, if compared to that of the soul, and beheld with the eyes of faith? How terrible to the devil is the word of Jesus Christ! Let us with faith and confidence employ it against his temptations. Let us bless God for having left this word to his church, to be the scourge of the devil. It is Christian prudence, by constant reading, to fill our heart therewith, to the end that the devil may always meet there with this safeguard and defence. That which the word of God, in the mouth of Christ, performs in a moment, it performs by degrees in the sinner who feeds upon it. O the goodness of Christ, not to reject any sick person! O wonderful power, to heal them all! Let none therefore despair under the sight and sense of their miseries.

“ 17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.”

We see here the immense charity of the good Shepherd. To bear the infirmities and frailties of our brethren, is to imitate him. We cannot indeed cure sicknesses; but we can assist, relieve, serve, visit, and comfort the sick. We take upon us their infirmities, when we compassionate them by charity.

Christ fulfils the prophecies in all respects, and is himself the completion and truth of them, as being the Lamb and Victim of God which bears and takes away the sins of the world. He alone is the universal Physician for all the diseases of body and soul. I do not ask, O Lord, to be exempt from the former, because thou makest them remedies for the distempers of the latter: these are they which call upon thee, which wait for thee, and which are incurable to all besides.

“ 18. ¶ Now, when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.”

A man ought (frequently) to withdraw himself from the world, though his piety be ever so much proof against temptation. A pastor, how necessary soever he may be to his people, ought to retire from them for a while, when he finds the crowd and noise of the world prejudicial to his soul.

“ 19. And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.”

The presumptuous person fancies himself capable of every thing. As to ordinary duties, the call of the gospel is sufficient; as to designs of perfection, we must wait until God calls us. To anticipate the call of God, is to prevent his grace: and miserable is he who pretends to walk without it. It is not sufficient that the desires be good; they must also be regular.

SECT. IV.—*Christ is to be followed in his state of Poverty.*

“ 20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”

It is very just and reasonable, to worship Christ even under this destitution of all the conveniencies of life; to undergo the want of some of them, thereby to honour and imitate him, and to beg of him the spirit and the grace to do it. What poor man is not comforted, when he casts his eyes upon this adorable pattern! What rich man is not confounded, when he sees himself so unlike, and at such a distance from it! What shame must those nice and delicate persons hence receive, who are always ill at ease, and who exhaust their wit in daily inventing some new gratifications! Let us adore the Son of God, debased so low as to take upon him human nature in the incarnation; and in some manner more destitute of the conveniencies of life than the very beasts themselves. Whoever designs to follow Christ, in order to make his fortune in the world, does not seek him, but the world and its fortune. A man must disengage himself from every thing, if he would truly serve God, by following Jesus Christ in the sacred ministry, or otherwise.

“ 21. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.”

The voice of God must be obeyed without delay. The children of Adam are always in extremes; either they will prevent God like this scribe, (v. 19.) or they will not follow him immediately like this dis-

iple. The mean between both, is to wait until he speaks; and not to defer following him one moment when he has spoken. Men never want pious pretences, when they have neither resolution enough to enter into the way which God points out, nor humility enough to acknowledge their own weakness.

“ 22. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.”

How difficult is it to forsake the world! Always some secular tie retains those whom God calls to retirement. All human respects, all regard to the duties of civil life, must be laid aside, when our salvation is in question. All other care may be supplied by some other person; the care of saving our soul, is our own personal affair. A man is dead when he lives not according to faith, which is the life of the soul. He who is called to follow Christ in the way of perfection, ought to fear the world and the conversation of worldly people, as much as we generally fear the apparition of a dead man, or the infection of a burying-place.

SECT. V.—*The tempest appeased.*

“ 23. ¶ And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.”

This ship in the midst of the sea, is an emblem of the church in the midst of the world. Jesus is there with his disciples; this is our comfort. Whoever has this truth present to his mind, looks upon every thing which happens in the church with other eyes than those of the world.

“ 24. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.”

We ought to expect to meet with tempests in the church, and to see it covered with waves. Let us not be scandalized at it, but let us arm ourselves with faith and patience. Every one has likewise his storms and tempests. When our faith grows dull and heavy, then Christ is asleep in us. He is asleep in respect of us, when he leaves us some time to ourselves, and makes us know the want of him, by permitting us to fall either under temptation, or inward troubles, or outward persecution of carnal men, or into coldness, difficulties, and disgust in the service of God.

“25. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.”

The advantage of temptation is to make us know our weakness, so as to oblige us to have recourse to God, and to unite ourselves to Jesus Christ. We approach him by faith, we are united to him by charity, and we awake him by prayer. All good perishes, or at least decays in us without Christ. There is not so much as one moment, wherein we are not in danger of perishing, without our Saviour's grace. How proper is this short prayer for us, and how familiar should it be to us, because our Saviour's grace is necessary every moment! It comprehends all the power of our Lord's grace, the abundance of our Saviour's merits, and the depth of the sinner's miseries.

“26. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.”

Faith is courageous, incredulity fearful. A person truly faithful retains his confidence in the most

violent temptations. One word alone of God, restores a perfect calm to souls troubled by temptation. Prayer, though imperfect, is very often heard, 1. That our imperfections may not hinder us from praying to God. 2. That we may be persuaded that our merits do not make our prayers effectual. 3. That we may offer them up with great humility. 4. That we may unite ourselves to Christ in praying together with him. This defect of faith in Christ's disciples consisted in their not having that idea of his power which they ought. Let us fear the same defect, and let us learn of how much use it is, in order to pray well, to have such a notion of grace as is suitable to the omnipotence of that God whom we adore. Great tempest, great calm: God proportions the comfort to the affliction.

“27. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!”

Insensible creatures hear the Creator's voice, and obey it; man alone is deaf and disobedient thereto. God, who makes himself obeyed by them, can he have less command over our heart, when he resolves to subject it to himself? This is the consolation of those who suffer, that he can make himself obeyed in a moment, and restore peace to souls, and to the church. Let us only awake our faith, and pray.

SECT. VI.—*The Devils cast out. The Swine drowned.*

“28. ¶ And when he was come to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs,

exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.”

That which passes in these two possessed persons, is a lively representation of the fury of the devil possessing a sinner's soul, of the misery of the sinner whom he possesses, and of the evils which sin causes in the world. A guilty conscience is a real tomb, wherein a possessed person lodges, and where stench and darkness reign. Happy that person, whom the approach of Jesus Christ causes to come out and meet him.

“29. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?”

The first motions of conversion do but trouble and torment the sinner. Men shut their eyes against the light, they thrust back the hand of Christ, they say it is not yet time, they are incensed against the truths of faith, and against those who set them before their eyes, and show Jesus Christ unto them. There is no communication betwixt the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world: we must renounce either the one or the other.

“30. And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding.”

See here another representation of sinners, of those chiefly who are subject to impurity by habit, or by frequent relapses. They are still farther off from salvation than other sinners, are to be found in greater numbers, and are more addicted to please their appetite. Make them know, O Lord, the shamefulness of their condition, and what it is to have changed thy image into that of a swine.

“31. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.”

The sinner thinks he has injustice done him, when he is restrained from hurting his neighbour. He will not see the end of his sins. He imitates the devil, and does what lies in his power to be at no loss as to wickedness, by never leaving one sin but for another. Since the devil can do nothing but by God's permission, and as the executioner of his justice, it is this adorable justice which he ought to fear, and more yet sin, without which justice is inactive.

“32. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine; and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. 33. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.”

God hears not the devil and certain sinners, but only so far as he hears his own justice. Here is an emblem of the final impenitence, into which the habitually impure more commonly fall than other sinners. Christ permits the devils to do that in the swine, which he did not permit them to do in the possessed, on purpose to show us what rage they would exercise upon us, if God left them at liberty. How many are the divine favours and benefits, which we do not consider, and which we know only in general! God looks upon temporal riches as of little or no value. He suffers them to be lost, sometimes

to disengage us from them out of mercy, sometimes out of justice to punish us, for having acquired or preserved them, either by covetousness or injustice.

“ 34. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.”

The wicked choose rather to lose Jesus Christ, than their temporal goods and the objects of their lusts. Blind and ungrateful wretches, who cannot discern the time and the grace of this visitation of the Lord! There are but too many, whom the fear of some loss, disgrace, or reproach, blinds and intimidates so far, as to make them ashamed of Christ, his gospel, his truth, and his servants. Continue with us, O Lord, for thou art all things to us, and art alone sufficient for us.

CHAPTER IX.

SECT. I.—*The Paralytic healed.*

“ 1. AND he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.”

Wo to those whom God hears as he heard the Gergesenes, abandoning them to their own desires, and to temporal felicity, according to their wishes! Miserable condition, to imagine we can be happy when Jesus Christ departs from us, or withdraws his light, his ministers, &c. because they disturbed our false repose and our passions.

“ 2. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”

The paralytic is an emblem of the total inability into which sin has cast us, and of which Jesus Christ alone can heal us. Faith, charity, and the prayers of the church, obtain from him our cure. See here the confidence which a sinner should have. Christ goes to the source of the evil, which is sin; and to that we ought also to run back in all our maladies. It is probable, that this pious sick man did, by his desires, beg the cure of his soul, leaving the care of his body to others, since Christ heals the soul before the body. Few are there who imitate him. When we seek, before all things, to please God by our piety, he inspires others with the care of our temporal necessities.

“3. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.”

The learned who are proud and conceited, are also blind, unbelieving, slanderers, envious, and obdurate. They call good evil, and abuse and pervert every thing. Christ has no manner of regard to the offence taken by a Pharisee, which he knew would happen. He does the good, though he foresees the abuse of it. Let us also not omit works of charity or justice, on the account of the evil disposition of the pretenders to devotion, the openly profane, or of men of corrupt knowledge. Light serves only to blind and lead men out of the way, when it is not joined with uprightness of heart. The most sacred truths become often an occasion of delusion, where men are under the government of their passions.

“4. And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?”

The meekness of Jesus Christ shows itself on all

occasions in his conduct and behaviour. He sounds the secrets of every heart. No sin escapes his knowledge. How senseless is the sinner, to think he sins securely when unseen by men! Let us fear that Judge who sees the bottom of the heart better than we do ourselves. If we put this question to ourselves concerning all our thoughts, how many of them should we find unjust, rash, foolish, unfit for God to behold, unserviceable to any good purpose, &c. Let us watch over our mind; and, by judging and correcting ourselves, let us prevent the judgment and manifestation thereof which God will one day make.

“5. For whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?”

External miracles are proofs of internal, and of invisible effects. Every thing is equally easy to him who can do every thing by the sole act of his will: but extraordinary and miraculous effects are the necessary proof of an extraordinary mission, and of that authority which a man takes upon himself as coming from God.

“6. But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.”

That man's sins are forgiven him who is converted; and the proof of his conversion is to imitate this paralytic healed of his distemper. He who cannot rise and stand upright, but either continues grovelling on the earth, or falls back as soon as he gets up, is not yet cured of his spiritual palsy. The sinner's bed is every thing which he loves, and in

which he finds his rest and satisfaction upon earth, his criminal inclinations, and the objects of his passions: a true conversion takes up and carries away every thing of this nature. When we see a penitent walk in the way of the commandments, enter into his own heart, there to rest in the enjoyment of his God, and not go out thence any more to run after the creatures, we may then conclude that his conversion is perfect.

“7. And he arose, and departed to his house.”

Thou art obeyed, Lord, the very moment in which thou commandest, because it is thou who workest what thou dost command. Speak after this manner to my heart, and it will then have motion and strength to raise itself towards thee, to go unto thee, and to rest in thee, who art the house and bed of its everlasting rest.

“8. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.”

That which to the doctors of the law is a matter of scandal, is to the humble an occasion of glorifying God. Divine things make a deeper impression upon the heart of the ignorant multitude, than on that of doctors puffed up with their own learning. How much more ought we to bless and glorify God, for so many invisible wonders which he works in the saints and in ourselves? The conversion of one heart, which is rebellious and paralytical as to all good, is more to be admired than all the miracles which God performs on inanimate creatures.

SECT. II.—*St. Matthew called.*

“ 9. ¶ And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.”

The call to conversion seems often a matter of chance; though it be really an effect of divine election. The whole happiness of a soul frequently depends on its being immediately obedient to the voice of God, and following his first call. What cannot the word of Christ, joined with grace, work on the heart? God, in calling all sorts of persons to faith and piety, makes it evident that he is the master both of the work and of the workmen. A profession which is very gainful, excites and nourishes covetousness; and the management of the public money, increases the affection towards earthly riches: but what bonds dost thou not break, O my God, when thou designest to show mercy?

“ 10. ¶ And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.”

It scarcely belongs to any but Christ to converse familiarly with the greatest sinners in order to convert them. We ought to decline the impulse of a false zeal, which often induces souls as yet weak to undertake this work: but we must not refuse to become instruments of Providence, in saving the most abandoned, when that engages us in it. The facility and goodness of Christ, in bearing with a company so opposite to his own holiness, condemns the proud disdain of the great pretenders to devotion.

“ 11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?”

The pretenders to devotion are envious and jealous of the care which any one takes of sinners. A good Christian must expect to see his best actions interpreted ill and condemned. Such a one follows the impulse of humility and charity, without regarding the discourses of the world. Envy is cowardly and timorous, and not daring to apply itself directly to the Master who could confound it, it endeavours to surprise the disciples, and to take advantage of their weakness.

“ 12. But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

Jesus Christ comes to the assistance of the weak when they are attacked on his account. Here are four necessary instructions:—1. That Jesus is the sovereign Physician of souls. 2. That all stand in need of him. 3. That we must acknowledge our own diseases, and the need we have of Christ, if we desire to be healed by him. 4. That it is the greatest of all our maladies to think ourselves whole, this being in effect to renounce Jesus Christ. It belongs to thee, O Lord, both to make us sensible of our diseases and wants, and to oblige us to have recourse to thyself.

“ 13. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Nothing is more conducive to the instruction and humiliation of pretenders to devotion and true Pha-

risees, than to show them that they understand neither Scripture nor religion, when, relying on external performances, they neglect charity, which is the very soul and substance of it. If this inward sacrifice accompany not the outward, the latter provokes God instead of appeasing him. It is an act of religion and a sacrifice, to assist the poor with regard to Christ as present in them. True holiness consists not in external things, but in faith animated and working by love. It is our great comfort, O Jesus, that thou art come to call sinners. Call us, we beseech thee, to repentance; but do it with that strong and powerful voice which always makes itself heard.

SECT. III.—*Fasting. New Cloth. Old Vessels.*

“ 14. ¶ Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?”

Self-conceit and contempt of our neighbour do generally proceed from external mortifications. The humble man looks not on the life of his neighbour, but only in order to imitate the good which he observes therein. Good and well-meaning persons, do sometimes unwarily fall in with the passions of Pharisees, and are misled by their calumnies. A secret jealousy betwixt the disciples of different (masters,) opens the heart to evil-speaking. Charity is the internal way wherein all ought to walk; but there are several external ways which lead to God: every one is to follow the path in which he has set him, without blaming that of others.

“ 15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the chil-

dren of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”

The life of Jesus Christ on earth was a time of indulgence. The present life of Christians is a time of mourning and mortification. Every soul has its time of pleasure and consolation, and its time of exercise and trial: the one ought to be a preparation for the other. In the former, a man should fortify himself against the time of combat; in the latter, he should learn not to misemploy that of peace. Fasting includes all sorts of privations and pains. When God suffers the church to be persecuted, he thereby gives her to understand that she is a widow upon earth, and that she ought to mourn in expectation of the bridegroom who has been taken from her. Every Christian soul is really a widow and desolate, if by faith it becomes thoroughly sensible of the absence of its Lord, and earnestly desires his return.

“ 16. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.”

Christian and pastoral prudence require, that the weak and the newly-converted should be managed with care and tenderness. He does not flatter, but assist the sinner, who endeavours to inure and reconcile the old man by degrees to the yoke of Christ. It is a very great imprudence to neglect this conduct, so recommended here by the great director of souls. We take great care not to spoil the least trifle,

which may be at all serviceable to us any longer, and we have often little or no regard to a soul, which is so precious in the sight of God, and created to serve him eternally. The wounds which we give it by a wrong and too precipitate a conduct are sometimes incurable.

“ 17. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles; else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.”

To impose the yoke of such exercises and mortifications as are not absolutely necessary, before God has changed and renewed the heart, is no other than to endeavour to prevent his grace. Men sometimes cause a soul to lose that portion of grace which it had, by urging it too soon to engage in the ways of perfection, of which it is not as yet capable. Very auspicious beginnings, and great hopes of conversion, even as to a whole people, are often ruined by men proceeding too hastily, by their endeavouring to make their own designs take place, and to have the honour of that success themselves which is due only to God. It is a great degree of knowledge, to be able to observe and follow the motions of grace, on which all depends, and which commonly performs its work by degrees, and step by step, in the souls of particular persons, and almost always in a great people. Give, Lord, the Spirit of thy conduct to the ministers of thy work, that they may know how to manage and improve thy interests in the souls of men, without the least damage to them.

SECT. IV.—*The Daughter of Jairus raised. The Bloody Issue healed.*

“ 18. ¶ While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.”

There are four conditions of a good prayer:—
 1. A man ought to place himself in the presence of God, and to approach him by faith. 2. To humble himself sincerely. 3. To lay open his wants with a holy earnestness. 4. To have confidence in the goodness of Christ, and in the virtue of his holy humanity, which is the source of all the holiness of Christians. The mysterious imposition of hands, used by Christ in bodily cures, represents the sovereign authority of Jesus Christ, the inward touches of his grace, the communication of his merits, the effusion of his Spirit, &c.

“ 19. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.”

Jesus, though able to act as well absent as present, appears upon the place, to teach his ministers not to spare either their steps or their pains, when the salvation of a soul is in question. He rises up, to show them that they must quit their repose and ease, to go in search of souls which are dead in sin. When a pastor, praying earnestly for a soul, of which he is the father, calls Jesus Christ to his succour, he ought to hope that he will rise and follow him.

“ 20. ¶ (And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:”

There is nothing in Christ but what is sanctifying. God sometimes makes little things instrumental to the cure of the most shameful and inveterate habits, to illustrate his grace, and to give confidence to sinners. This is a representation of the natural shame which persons have to discover sins of impurity; of the unworthiness of those who, before their being cleansed from them, approach holy things; and of the humility of a true penitent, who does not aspire immediately (as it were) to touch the flesh of Christ in the communion, but only to "touch the hem of his garment," in reading his word, in meditating on the most humble part of his life and mysteries, and in imitating him by the mortifying exercises of repentance.

"21. For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole."

Faith renders the meanest and weakest things efficacious, and full of virtue to us. Faith is so much the greater, as it is fixed on the less things. Nothing is more simple than that which composes the outward signs of the sacraments; and yet there is nothing which contains greater remedies and richer treasures than the sacraments themselves.

"22. But Jesus turned him about; and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.)"

Christ grants every thing to prayer made with faith and humility. God never fails to turn, and cast the eyes of his mercy upon a penitent, who, out of humility, dares not lift his eyes towards him. How much to blame is the sinner, to distrust the

goodness of God, who comes to meet him with so much mildness, and who himself encourages him under his dejection! Let us firmly believe that we can do, and that we merit nothing; that God can do every thing for us and in us; and that he delights to exercise this power upon the most unworthy. Faith is that which a sinner must bring along with him to repentance and to prayer.

“23. ¶ And when Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,”

How often, on the death of relations, do men encumber and perplex themselves with vain, worldly, tumultuous, and unprofitable ceremonies, instead of making in silence profitable reflections upon death! It is customary for the people of the world to seek for comfort in their grief only from diversions. What is a sinner, deprived of the life of God, whom the crowd of affairs, the noise of his passions, and the delusions of the world, hinder from thinking of his condition, but that very thing which we see here?

“24. He said unto them, Give place; for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.”

How happy is a sinner, when God himself takes care to remove from him all obstacles to the resurrection of his soul! It is apart, and in retirement, that one labours most profitably to this purpose, and that Christ applies himself thereto. Death is but a sleep, in respect of him who raises a dead person more easily than we can awake one who is asleep. Even the death of the soul is but a sleep, when

God has resolved to awaken the sinner, and to restore to him the life of his grace. The world laughs at the truths which it neither comprehends nor loves, and at those who publish them. A faithful minister keeps on his pace, and ceases not to work the work of God.

“25. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.”

Christ and the world are incompatible in the same heart: the world must go out thence, if one would have Christ enter therein. The world is unworthy to be present at the works of God, and to know the operations of his grace. He who desires to rise from sin, ought to distrust the world, and not to discover himself to any but to Christ, or to his true disciples. If the helpful hand of Christ do not take hold of the sinner's, he will never rise. The living hand of our blessed Saviour, and the dead hand of the maid joined together, are an emblem of grace and of the will, which unite and concur inseparably to justification and good works, by the consent which grace works in the will, and which the will gives through grace, which revives it, sanctifies it, moves it, and makes it act.

“26. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.”

The fame of the conversion of a soul diffuses itself in the church like a sweet odour. It is the duty of a minister to conceal himself; and that of a thankful soul to publish the mercy of God.

SECT. V.—*Two Blind Men restored to Sight.*

“ 27. ¶ And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us.”

One good work draws on another. He who is raised by grace, is not thereby delivered from all his darkness,—God enlightens him afterwards. That man is partly enlightened already, who knows that he has a Saviour who is full of mercy; that mercy is all which he must ask; that he must cry and pray with fervour; and that, in praying, he must follow him as God-man, and the son of David expected from heaven.

“ 28. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.”

God often delays to hear us, in order to exercise our patience, to augment our desire, to oblige us to approach Christ the more, and to put our whole trust in him. In our blindness we ought, 1. To have a lively belief of the almighty grace of Christ. 2. To call upon him by an humble and ardent prayer, which is the cry of the heart. 3. To have confidence in him, upon the account of his incarnation. 4. To hope to receive nothing, but only with, by, and in, the church, the house of faith and prayer, which alone possesses, imparts, and prays to Jesus Christ, and in which alone the blind are enlightened and healed.

“ 29. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.”

The internal hand of Christ opens the eyes of the heart, by touching them with his grace. Faith, which is a gift of God, is the measure of his other gifts in us.

“30. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.”

The effect follows the will of Christ without delay. Touch my heart, O Jesus, that its eyes may open themselves to thy truth, and to the holiness of thy law. In eminent and remarkable works, we must conceal ourselves, that we may avoid the reward of men, and not lose that which God reserves for us. Christ seems to be apprehensive of this reward of men as to himself, to this end, that we may really dread it as to ourselves.

“31. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.”

Honour pursues those who fly it. He who is thoroughly sensible of God’s mercy, cannot contain his acknowledgments. God permits not his saints to remain so concealed as they desire, because what he gives them for their own sanctification ought to be subservient also to that of others.

SECT. VI.—*The Dumb Man possessed. The Blasphemy of the Pharisees.*

“32. ¶ As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.”

The devil shuts up the mouth of those who belong to him, when he diverts them from prayer, confession of their sins, and the praise of God. One of the most miserable conditions of sinners is, not to be able to express their misery.

“ 33. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.”

Nothing is more wonderful to the eyes of faith than the change of a soul by grace; but carnal eyes very often see nothing in it but what is contemptible. When charity is once entered into a heart, one may know it by its language. God receives the praise of his works from the mouth of ignorant people, sooner than from that of the learned.

“ 34. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.”

This is a consummate piece of malice, to attribute the works of God to the devil! Envy cannot suffer the approbation which is given to the virtue of others. It makes those whose hearts are possessed by this vice, speak the language of the devil. Calumny is but at a little distance from envy. All persons have not the envy of the Pharisees; but every one ought to fear having some degree of it, since every one has the principle.

SECT. VII.—*The Sheep without a Shepherd. The Harvest and Labourers.*

“ 35. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness, and every disease, among the people.”

A true minister of Jesus Christ, after his example, is neither detained in one place by the sweetness of the applause of some, nor discouraged from his ministry by the jealousy and calumny of others. Wherever Christ exercises his mission, he makes

the proofs of it evidently appear. He works none but salutary and beneficial miracles, because his ministry is a ministry of salvation. Bodily cures foretell that of the soul; and are instrumental thereto, because God makes them so.

“ 36. ¶ But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”

Here is the pattern of a pastor who is indefatigable, and full of compassion for sinners. Let us view here the shadow of what we should be without the divine Shepherd of our souls; and let us never grow weary of praising God for having bestowed him upon us. Without him there is nothing but fainting and wandering.

“ 37. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few:”

There is extreme want of labourers in the church. There are abundance who bear this character, but few who really work; and a great many who work in the Lord's name, but very few whom he will own for his ministers. Christ, by declaring the needs of the church, invites to labour all ecclesiastical persons who either live in idleness, or employ themselves about something quite different from that which they ought to do. If the wants of Europe are great, how much more those of other countries, where several provinces have only one minister! The place of the harvest is the whole earth. It signifies but little where a man works, provided it be by the appointment, in the Spirit, and with the blessing of God.

“ 38. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.”

It is for God to send them, and for us to pray to him to do it. Jesus Christ requires for labourers, not such as confer upon themselves a mission, but who receive it from God: not such as by intrigues and human solicitations assume the office, but such as are the fruit of the church's prayers: not such as enter into the harvest, to make themselves the lords of it, but who labour only for the profit of the Lord of the harvest: not such as in the repose of an idle life, enjoy the honour and temporal advantages of the ministry, but such as work hard, like daily labourers. We do not sufficiently comprehend how much it is our duty and interest to pray for the obtaining good bishops, good curates, holy preachers, full of zeal, knowledge, and disinterestedness. Let us not read this, without doing it with all the fervency of our faith.

CHAPTER X.

THE INSTRUCTION OF THE APOSTLES.

SECT. I.—*Their Names.*

“ 1. AND when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease.”

To call persons to the ecclesiastical ministry, belongs only to Him who can give power over the unclean spirit of sin, and over the diseases of the soul.

There are three kinds of these diseases:—1. Such as are caused by sins of impurity, which are the most obstinate, and like devils which possess the whole soul. 2. Sins of habit, which are, as it were, lingering distempers. 3. Sins of infirmity, which are the (lesser) faults of negligence and of inclination.

“2. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother;”

God often unites by grace those whom he has before united by nature; to show us, that though nature be not a step towards grace, yet it is not always an obstacle thereto. St. Andrew, the elder brother of St. Peter, and who knew Jesus Christ before him, has not the honour to be named first, to teach us, that God is master of his own gifts, and that nothing but his will gives us a right to them.

“— James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3. Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alpheus, and Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus; 4. Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.”

Let us adore the unsearchable judgment of God, in the choice of a wicked minister, whose unworthiness he knew. Let us learn from hence, that no merit gives a right to the ministry, but the sole choice of God by the church. Christ would not put into the ministry none but saints, to oblige us not to judge of the church's holiness by some of her ministers. He would not place in it any of the rich, noble, powerful, or learned; for fear men should affix

ecclesiastical dignities to temporal advantages. Let us suffer the bad with patience; let us adore Christ, and his authority abased in them; yet so as that the sacraments lose not any of their effect thereby: and let us by this believe, that it is Jesus Christ who does all therein, even by the hands of the most unworthy workmen.

SECT. II.—*Their Mission, Power, Poverty, and Preaching.*

“ 5. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:”

Let us not go where inclination, but where God's command carries us. Vocation, mission, instruction, and holiness, are four different gifts, which a man must receive from God by Jesus Christ, to qualify him for a worthy labourer. The very same instructions are given in common to all, in order to establish a uniformity of maxims, conduct, and discipline. Such as God seems at first to have neglected or rejected, are often those for whom he has designed his greatest mercies. He has his own proper time to discover and reveal them.

“ 6. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

A good pastor ought to apply himself to the most diseased of his sheep; and the diseases are the greater, where there is the more ingratitude and abuse of the divine favours. God is faithful to his promises, even in respect of the most unworthy; but often, through the corruption of their heart, and

contrary to his design, his faithfulness turns to their greater condemnation. Men sometimes look upon certain prerogatives and preferences as an honour, which are no other than a subject of fear and humiliation.

“7. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

See here the first efforts of the apostles' preaching. “Preach,” to establish the faith; “the kingdom,” to animate the hope; “of heaven,” to inspire the love of heavenly things, and the contempt of earthly; “which is at hand,” that men may prepare for it without delay. Every Christian ought frequently to repeat this to himself, and to live as continually expecting this kingdom. He who, instead of desiring it, dreads its approach, has but little of the relish and spirit of it. Pour, Lord, the love of it into my heart, for thou alone canst do it.

“8. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils:”

The word of Christ, so efficacious as to give what it commands, towards the removal of bodily diseases, can it be less so in the healing of spiritual? He gives them the power of working the same miracles with himself, to show us that they acted only in his name, and by virtue of it. Let us learn, in our good works, to join bodily relief to spiritual.

“— Freely ye have received, freely give.”

A rule very necessary this, and of large extent,—that we must serve God and his church “freely.” What a shame is it for a man to traffic with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, of which he is not the master,

but the dispenser ! It is a piece of theft, injustice, irreverence, and disobedience. A man may drive a trade, or traffic with them several ways : by pride and vanity, when he desires by them to gain esteem and applause ; by avarice, when he makes use of them to enrich himself, &c. Preachers, and spiritual directors, will never sufficiently comprehend how great disinterestedness Christ requires of them. How few are there whom a perfect disengagement from all manner of interest qualifies to say, that they “ give freely ! ”

“ 9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses ; ”

An apostolical workman resigns himself to the divine Providence for the necessaries of life. If the ministers of Jesus Christ ought to be disengaged from their own wealth, how much more from that of others ? What avails it for a man to have no gold in his purse, if he have it in his heart ? It is the greatest blindness imaginable, in a clergyman to act quite contrary to this direction of Christ, in being chiefly solicitous about providing gold and silver. How many blind persons of this sort are there !

“ 10. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves ; for the workman is worthy of his meat. ”

Nothing should detain an evangelical workman ; he ought always to be ready to set forward. The equipage of an ambassador of Jesus Christ was (at first) only poverty ; his provisions, his trust in the providence of God, and in the charity of the faithful. He who preaches the gospel, ought to make

it known by his life. The maintenance of the clergy is a matter of justice and of divine right. He who labours in the church, not he who does nothing there, has a right to live of the church's revenue, but not therewith to support his luxury, his vanity, &c.

“ 11. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.”

A priest ought to be very careful of his reputation; to lodge with persons of a regular life, and to avoid all suspicion of levity, or of loving good cheer and the conveniencies of life. To receive and entertain workmen truly evangelical, is a favour of which every body is not worthy.

“ 12. And when ye come into an house, salute it. 13. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.”

The peace of the gospel is that which charity and a good conscience give. This is to pay the master of the house largely beforehand—to pray for him, and to offer him peace; namely, the knowledge of Christ, the righteousness of the kingdom of God, and the grace of faith. A man is not worthy to receive this peace, till chosen by God, and prevented by his grace and mercy. The merit of a preacher of the gospel does not depend upon his success. The mortification of a repulse is a gain to a man of God. There is always great advantage to be made in the service of a master, who requires nothing but a good will and obedience, and who bestows even that which he requires.

“ 14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.”

Whoever, out of contempt or neglect, neither reads nor hears the word of God, and whoever does it without improving thereby—ought he not to fear a more terrible malediction? It is necessary that the world should know, that we do not seek it for the sake of its riches; and that we would not have any conversation with it, but only in order to its salvation. When it will no longer hear us speak of this, it is time for us to retire from it.

“ 15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for that city.”

How great a crime is it not to receive, or to despise the truth! If men are thus treated for not having received the preachers of the gospel, what will it be to despise the gospel itself; to decry it, to preach the contrary, to hinder the preaching of it, to abuse those who do it as they ought, and to stop the fruit of it by calumnies, &c.?

SECT. III.—*The wise Simplicity. Boldness before Magistrates. The Holy Spirit speaking in us.*

“ 16. ¶ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”

It is but a small thing for a labourer in the gospel to be prepared for the repulses of the world; he ought to look upon himself as a “sheep in the midst of wolves.” Such a person must be a perfect lamb, that he may oppose nothing to the artifices

and violence of the world, but the simplicity and meekness of that creature. Where can we find those now-a-days, who embrace ecclesiastical dignities, only as a state of labour and suffering? That we may neither draw upon ourselves persecution by our imprudence, nor endeavour to avoid it against the divine command, and by ways contrary to the simplicity of the dove, it is necessary to join these two qualities, wisdom and simplicity; which nothing but the Spirit of God alone can unite in one soul.

“ 17. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues:”

Let us not trust or depend upon every one. Even the best friends are to be suspected, when the business is to consult whether a man shall show his weakness, together with them, to avoid the ill treatment of carnal men, or expose himself to every thing, that he may continue faithful to God. Christ conceals not from his disciples what they have to undergo in his service, because he will not deceive any one; and because it belongs to Him to fortify the heart of man, and to render it invincible to all things.

“ 18. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.”

This is matter of wonderful comfort and encouragement to such as are sent to preach or teach, that they can be assured that it is the cause of God and of Christ, which they have to maintain before the powers of the earth. God never forsakes him who takes his interests to heart. It is the duty of a preacher to declare the truth to kings, but with

abundance of prudence. He who flatters them, makes himself an accomplice in their sins.

“ 19. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.”

The Holy Spirit is in the heart, in the mind, and on the tongue of those who are to speak for Christ, and who belong to him. Neither surprise, nor defect of talent, nor even ignorance, can hurt the cause of God, when the heart is ready to defend it. This promise banishes all distrust and disquiet on dangerous occasions, but without encouraging sloth and negligence, and without dispensing with the obligation we are under, to prepare ourselves, by the meditation of Christian truths, by the study of the Holy Scriptures, and by prayer. A promise so positive would more frequently have its effect, if the incredulity of man did not oppose it.

“ 20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”

The Holy Spirit animates the confessors of Christ, and makes them speak. The Head speaks in his members by his Spirit. It belongs to the Spirit of God to speak for God. It is the Spirit of the Father which speaks, because he works powerfully in the heart of his children, puts into their mouth what they ought to speak, and causes them to do it. Mayest thou, O Holy Spirit, speak in me upon all occasions, since on all occasions I ought to speak like a Christian, only for the glory of God, and by thy impulse and direction!

“ 21. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children

shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.”

Although good men be left to the wicked for a while, yet one ought not to be scandalized at it: Jesus Christ himself was left thus. We accuse the gospel of severity, because it requires us to renounce our human passions and natural affections; and yet there is nothing in all this which comes near that which the devil here causes the wicked to do. Very often by means of detraction, coloured and disguised under a pretence of piety, men in some manner exercise this cruelty, arming Christian against Christian, the shepherd against the sheep, and the sheep against the shepherd.

“ 22. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end, shall be saved.”

Two things are necessary in order to salvation. The first, to suffer at the hands of the world. The second, to persevere under suffering. It is grievous to nature to see one’s self continually exposed to the hatred of carnal men: but when it is for thy name’s sake, O my God—for the sake of thy truth, and for being faithful to thee—how lovely is this hatred! Salvation is the fruit of perseverance; but perseverance is a gift of God, as little due to the sinner as salvation itself.

SECT. IV.—*Persecution to be avoided.*

“ 23. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.”

It is prudence and humility, when charity, or righteousness, obliges us not to the contrary, to avoid persecution. To deprive those who are disposed to do evil of the opportunities of doing it, to convey the grace which they despise to others, to accomplish the designs of God's justice on the former, and of his mercy on the latter, are consequences of the flight of a persecuted preacher. This flight is a matter of precept to pastors who are necessary to the church; of advice to those who would draw upon themselves persecution; and of indulgence, for those who are weak. But this flight is highly criminal in those mercenary pastors, who abandon the flock to the wolf.

“ 24. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.”

He who keeps this saying in his heart, will never complain of what he suffers, nor seek for any other way to save himself, but humiliation and the cross. How many irregular thoughts, affections, and motions, is this maxim capable of restraining! Let us remember, that Jesus Christ is the great Master of humility, suffering, and poverty; and that we are his disciples. A man is not such, unless he learn his doctrine; and he does not learn it as he ought, unless he put it in practice.

“ 25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?”

What injustice is it for a Christian, being a disciple of Christ, to desire to be treated well by the world! What a shame, not to be able to suffer so much as a word, after all which He has suffered!

This delicacy and tenderness in ministers of the gospel, and in a Christian; contests about small rights or imaginary prerogatives; and an excessive sense of injuries, do but little agree with this maxim. This is a solid consolation for those who are oppressed under the calumnies of false brethren.

“ 26. Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.”

He who can make us suffer nothing but what Christ has suffered, is not to be feared. Men cannot make any thing die in us, but what died in him. Had men always been feared, we should never have had any martyrs. God sees every thing: this is the comfort of good men, and the despair of the wicked. When a man has once undertaken the ministry of the word, he ought to consider more the designs of God, as to the truths of the gospel, which he would have made manifest, than the threats of men, who set themselves in opposition thereto. It is of small import for one man to be crushed by another; but it is of the greatest importance that God's will be done, and his truth known, honoured, and defended by men.

“ 27. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house-tops.”

A man ought to preach only that which he has learned from God, in the secret exercise of prayer, of meditation on the Scriptures, and of the study of the holy fathers. In this lies the obligation of the ministers of the gospel, who should be the disciples of God, and of his word, before they become the

instructors of the faithful. The church has now no more hidden mysteries, nor secret truths; and it is now the time to reveal all the knowledge and grace which Christ has committed to her. It is to injure religion, to imagine that it contains some truths or mysteries which ought to be concealed. It is to do wrong to Christians, to deprive them of that which is designed for their sanctification and salvation. This is to resist the Holy Ghost, who is given to the church on purpose to teach it all truth.

SECT. V.—*God only to be feared and trusted.*

“ 28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

It is prudence, to deliver up the body in order to save the soul: this is to cast the lading of the vessel into the sea, to preserve the men from destruction. A man loses nothing, when he loses that only which must perish. That which is visible in me is in the power of men; but it is not by this that I am what I am. Let us fear none but him, who can make the invisible and immortal part of us suffer and die. My God is my life: I die not, but when I lose him. What strange blindness is it, to expose that part of ourselves which should enjoy God eternally, to save that by which we enjoy nothing but the creatures, and them only for a moment! It is not hell which we must fear, but that Almighty Being who there punishes those eternally, who have been so far from loving him above all things, that they have preferred a mere trifle to him.

“ 29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?

and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”

All things are ordered by the will of God: this is the great consolation of those who suffer. The belief of his providence is a powerful support under the most grievous accidents of life. Nothing escapes his observation, not even the smallest things, of which he is only the Creator; how much less those, whereof he is the Father, the Saviour, and the eternal felicity!

“30. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

Nothing is more wonderful, or more incomprehensible, than the care and concern of God for his elect. The least circumstances of their life are regulated, not by the general providence, which extends to all things, but by a particular providence, which fits and directs all things to the design of their salvation. Every thing is happy in the death of a true Christian, how sudden, unfortunate, and calamitous soever it appear, because every thing therein promotes his salvation.

“31. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

How great is the value of a soul for which Christ has given his blood and his life! What confidence ought it not to have in his goodness! It is just, O Lord, that he should have nothing but fear and disquiet who will not rest in thy providence. How sweet is it to trust to thee, and to leave thee to act as thou pleasest!

SECT. VI.—*Jesus Christ is to be confessed.*

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

To confess Jesus Christ, is to follow his precepts and example ; to suffer for his sake ; to love, teach, and practise his doctrine. We have but little faith, if such a promise is not capable of encouraging us to bear testimony to the truth, at the expense of all things. We own Christ, when we own his doctrine, his ministers, his servants, and when no fear hinders us from supporting and assisting them in the time of necessity. We refer this great truth to the times of the martyrs, for no other reason, but only because we will not ourselves be martyrs for the truth. It belongs to all times, and to all sorts of persons ; every one in his proper way.

“ 33. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

Whoever prefers his interest to his duty, with relation to truth and justice, he sets a greater value upon the friendship of men than upon that of God, and in some manner denies Jesus Christ. What confusion will it be to those, who shall not have confessed Christ before men, to see themselves denied by him before God ! Did we thoroughly conceive, that to be denied by Christ, is to have him neither for a Mediator, nor a Saviour, but to be treated as reprobates : human respects, and the fear of men, could have no influence upon us. To appear before the tribunal of God, without having

Christ for our advocate; and on the contrary, to have him there as a party, a witness, and a Judge—how can we think of it, and not expire with horror!

“ 34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.”

Notwithstanding this declaration of Christ, it is this earthly peace and repose which all the world seek. If it be a sin, to think that this repose, built on secular desires and a false peace of conscience, is consistent with the gospel of Christ; what will it be to teach this doctrine, to preach it, and by means of dangerous maxims to confirm and encourage souls therein.

“ 35. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

The truths of the gospel set at variance in order to unite to God, and oppose the false peace of concupiscence, for no other end but to establish that of charity. It is very hard to deprive ourselves of the comfort of these relations; but we shall receive ample amends, by that incomprehensible union with God and Christ which attends us in heaven, and by the society of angels and saints which is promised us by truth itself.

“ 36. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.”

Our relations then are oftentimes the greatest enemies of our salvation. The greater our fondness is towards earthly things, the more capable are they of hurting us in respect of our salvation. The father is the enemy of his son, when, through a bad

education, an irregular love, and a cruel indulgence, he leaves him to take a wrong bias, instructs him not in his duty, and puts ambition into his head. The son is the father's enemy, when he is the occasion of his doing injustice, in order to heap up an estate for him, and to make his fortune. The mother is the daughter's enemy, when she instructs her to please the world, breeds her up in excess and vanity, and suffers any thing scandalous and unseemly in her dress. The daughter is the mother's, when she becomes her idol, when she engages her to comply with her own irregular inclinations, and to permit her to frequent plays and balls. The master is the enemy of his servant, and the servant that of his master, when the one takes no care of the other's salvation, and the other is subservient to his master's passions.

SECT. VII.—*The predominant Love. Contempt of Life.*

“ 37. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.”

He who loves not Christ above all things is not worthy to have him for his Head. The life and the works are the things which show plainly, which of all these affections reigns in the heart. He whom we love the most, is he whom we study most to please, and whose will and interests we most commonly prefer. Let us judge ourselves by this rule. He who is not worthy of Christ, that is, to be a Christian and member of Christ, is unworthy of any thing but hell. A soul, raised above all earthly things, is that which is worthy of Jesus Christ.

“ 38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”

To take the cross and follow after Christ, is not a bare matter of advice, but a necessary means of salvation. It is not sufficient, in order to be really worthy of Christ, for a man not to be fond of any of the sweets of life: he must also be prepared for all the bitterness of the cross. A wicked person refuses, instead of taking it; a philosopher seems to take it, but not in following Christ. Only the Christian takes it, either by choice or acceptance, and bears it for the sake of Christ, in his spirit, and after his example.

“ 39. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

He who despises his life in time, preserves it to eternity. The love of life is the most sensible and the most violent temptation; and it is even the love of life, which should make us surmount it: because we should be ready to give up our mortal life, in order to obtain that which is immortal. Whatever a man sacrifices to God is never lost, because he finds it again in God. That person may be said to lose his life for the sake of God, who sacrifices it by a state of repentance and mortification, or employs it for God in that state and condition to which he has been pleased to call him.

SECT. VIII.—*The Reward of Charity.*

“ 40. ¶ He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me. 41. He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and

he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward."

In our neighbour whom we assist, we must direct our eyes towards Christ by faith, if we would find him there by charity. It is no small honour, or slight advantage, to receive into one's house a minister of Jesus Christ. The less personal merit such minister has, the greater is faith which discovers that of Christ in him. Every body is not admitted to exercise the sacred ministry; but none are excluded from partaking of its grace, its spirit, and its reward. No one can tell how far the charity of those extends, who contribute to the instruction of their neighbours; by being concerned in the maintenance of colleges, schools, catechetical lectures, missions, good pastors, and other truly evangelical workmen. By how much the more useful such a workman is, and the more service he does the church, so much the greater must his reward be, who entertains, receives, and supports him, for the sake of Christ and his church.

"42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, He shall in nowise lose his reward."

Charity heightens the smallest actions. It is this which recommends good works. Under a just and merciful God, no sin is unpunished, no good action is unrewarded. It belongs to men to reward what is done upon human motive; and to God, to crown that which proceeds from a Christian disposition. Jesus Christ confirms this last promise with an oath;

to this end, that we should not doubt but that the most indigent may exercise works of mercy, and that the least of such works will be rewarded. In the world, a man must make his court to great persons, and do them very great services, in order to receive a great reward for them. In the kingdom of God, a man, in doing the smallest services to the meanest persons, may justly hope for a very great reward.

CHAPTER XI.

SECT. I.—*St. John the Baptist sends his disciples to Christ.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.”

Nothing persuades more, than for a man to put in practice himself the instructions which he gives to others. There is no empty space in a pastor's life. A good bishop is continually employed, either in forming and instructing subordinate ministers, or in teaching and labouring in the place of his residence, and in his visitations.

“ 2. ¶ Now, when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,”

A prisoner of Jesus Christ employs his thoughts less about his own condition and danger, than about the interests of his Master, and the salvation of those whom he has committed to his care. His consolation is, to entertain and fill his mind, not with the world, and with what passes therein, but with Christ, with his life, his works, his kingdom, and his church.

To feed prisoners is a good work; but how much more so is it to show them the true Deliverer, the wonderful works of the mystery of redemption, what it is wherein their true captivity does consist, and what use they ought to make of the confinement of the body towards the deliverance of the soul, &c.? A director (of the conscience) should always send his disciples to Christ, and teach them to have regard to him in every thing.

“ 3. And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”

There is a kind of holy address belonging to the pastoral charity and humility, which consists in knowing how to become weak with the weak; in hiding our knowledge like St. John, when the good of souls requires it; and in choosing rather, that God should make himself known by himself, than by our ministry. He who really loves the majesty of God, loves also his own abasement. Yes, Lord, thou art he who shouldst come to heal, to sanctify, and to save me. Perform thy work in me; for I look not for another: and thou alone art my light, my strength, and my salvation.

“ 4. Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see:”

Christ would have men judge of him and of others only by works. One secret in the art of guiding souls is, to manage the tenderness of the weak, and to instruct them by seeming to instruct others. Even Christ, when asked concerning his mission, makes the proof of it evidently appear in his miracles, which had been foretold; and now, persons without

piety, without mission, without authority, without succession, would oblige us to believe them upon their bare word. St. John points out the prophecies; Jesus Christ shows the completion of them in himself.

“5. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

Cause, O my God, blind sinners to (see and) know thy truth, and the way of salvation; make them walk therein with a steady, even, and constant pace; let them be cleansed from the corruption of their heart; let them hear thy word with joy and with advantage; let them, as persons raised from the dead, live the new life of Christ; and let the most poor and miserable receive, love, and observe the gospel. Christ requires a heart which is poor, void of itself, and convinced of its own indigence, unworthiness, inability, and misery. Make my heart, O Jesus, thus poor, that it may be enriched and satisfied with the sacred truths of thy gospel.

“6. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

He who reads or hears the word of God, and does not practise it, takes from thence an occasion of falling, and is offended at it. As Christ condemns the life and maxims of the world by his own: so the world condemns the life and maxims of Christ by those which it prefers before them; and this is to be offended or scandalized at them. If we be not as yet strong enough to enter into the ways of the gospel; at least let us esteem them, and not entertain any prejudice against them. A man is offended in

Christ, when he does not follow him; how much more then, when he diverts others from the paths of piety and perfection, in softening the gospel by a loose morality? To design to amend the gospel, is to blame and condemn it.

SECT. II.—*The Elogy of St. John.*

“7. ¶ And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?”

One ought to avoid praising teachers, and (spiritual) directors, in the presence of those who esteem it an honour to be under them. Though the praise might not at all exalt the disciple, yet it may reach even the master, and either tempt or corrupt him. Jesus Christ is not a false friend, who dares not declare for him who is in disgrace: on the contrary, he has spoke of and for St. John, only since his imprisonment. When the world persecutes good men, then is the time for those who belong to God, with prudence to imitate Christ in relation to them. The first virtue of which Christ takes notice in St. John, is his steadfastness: and it is not without some mystery that he commends this virtue before all others in this minister of his word.

“8. But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.”

The second is his mortified life, which gives authority to his preaching. A preacher should have nothing which appears worldly, or which borders upon excess and softness. That man is mistaken,

who thinks to prevail upon the world by conforming himself to its fashions and manners: the world will much sooner entirely corrupt the heart which opens itself thereto. Would to God, that in this age luxury and softness were to be seen only in kings' houses! It is a greater misfortune than we imagine, to see these vices overflow all ranks and conditions of men, even those of the most moderate fortune: this is what draws down the judgments of God upon us.

“ 9. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you and more than a prophet.”

The third advantage of St. John is his gift of prophecy, whereby he discovers Christ. This is indeed to be “more than a prophet,” for a man to point out the Saviour and sacrifice of the world, and to foreshow him by his retirement, his mortification, his preaching, and his faithfulness, so great, as even to die for the sake of truth. Preachers ought to imitate him, and to be in some measure more than prophets in this respect.

“ 10. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger * before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” (* *Fr. Angel.*)

The fourth advantage of St. John is his office of being the harbinger of the Son of God. His mission is authorized by the Scriptures, not by miracles, because it is not extraordinary. A man should be an angel in purity, in knowledge, in zeal, and in activity, to prepare the way for Christ in the soul, as it is the duty of pastors to do.

“ 11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than

John the Baptist; notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

The fifth advantage of this holy forerunner, is his excellence beyond the other prophets, on the account both of his knowledge and the sanctity of his life. The latter, not the former, renders a man great in the sight of God. The way to be exalted in heaven above others, is to humble ourselves on earth below all. The greatest without comparison amongst all, is he who made himself the least of all, in stooping so low as to resemble sinners, and to become the Lamb or Sacrifice for sin.

"12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

The sixth advantage of John the Baptist is to have set up the standard of repentance, which is the way to heaven. Heaven is not to be taken but by the violence which a man does to his inclinations. All right to eternal happiness is lost in Adam. It is not due to any one; this evangelical violence is that which carries it as by conquest. Happy those holy bands of penitents, those violent persons of the gospel, who, as it were, take heaven by the force of their prayers, their obedience, their humility, &c. But wo unto the men of this world, who know not what it is to deprive themselves of any thing, or to do the least violence to themselves in order to their own salvation!

"13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."

The seventh advantage of St. John is his having first showed Jesus Christ present; whereas the state

of the law was no more than a state prophetic of his coming, in which his mysteries were represented and typified; the prophets having only foretold the Saviour to come, and the true righteousness which he should bring into the world. Let us praise God that we live now, after that all has been unfolded, that truth has succeeded figures, that the promises have their effect, that the prophecies are fulfilled, that Jesus is given, and that he has wrought the salvation of men.

“14. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.”

The last advantage which Christ would have us observe in St. John, is his having been an Elias by his office, his zeal, and his fidelity. He did that at the first coming of Christ, which Elias (perhaps) will do at the second. Pastors should do the same in proportion, in order to the coming of Christ into the soul, by their faithfulness in making him known, by their zeal, their mortification, their constancy, &c. This is what few are willing to comprehend. Give us, Lord, some Johns and Eliases, who may both understand and do for souls that which thou requirest of them.

“15. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Happy he, who has the ears of the heart; for they are not given to all. This is a gift which we must often beg. We frequently lose our time in desiring and expecting an Elias, a good director (of the conscience), to assist our endeavours after perfection or salvation; whereas a good will, and the ears of the heart, are the things which are wanting, and for which we should earnestly pray.

SECT. III.—*Both Jesus and John rejected of the Jews.*

“16. ¶ But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, 17. And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.”

The wicked person, by his malice, makes all which God has done for his salvation become fruitless. Nothing but charity can make it beneficial. There are some, to whom every thing is useful in leading them to God; others, to whom nothing is sufficient. To these, the easy and less austere ways seem too remiss; and yet a more rigorous and severe kind of life quite disheartens them. The defect is in the heart, and not in the means. Every thing is good to a good heart; every thing is hurtful to a corrupt one.

“18. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.”

The sinner will not be persuaded, that what he has no mind to imitate can come from God. There are such violent aversions in some persons, as to make them rather blame even virtue itself, than esteem it in those whom they do not love. This vice has several degrees: let us take care, that there be no degree of it in ourselves. Men sometimes affect to appear wise and prudent in condemning those ways which seem too austere. Pride, envy, and vanity, are the sources of these false and rash judgments.

“19. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners: but Wisdom is justified of her children.”

Whatever measures good men take, they will never escape the censures of the world: the best way is not to be concerned at them. Iniquity, being always ready to oppose and contradict the divine conduct, often contradicts itself. God still finds his glory, not only in the faithfulness of the righteous, but even in the hardness of the wicked, bringing good out of evil itself. Wisdom, which does all for the sake of the elect, knows thereby how to find the justification of her different ways in their salvation, to which she makes every thing subservient. We discover in all things sufficient cause to adore the wisdom and goodness of God, when we are of the number of the true children of this incarnate Wisdom.

SECT. IV.—*The Impenitent Cities worse than Sodom.*

“20. ¶ Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.”

Happy he, who, by a speedy conversion and a true repentance, prevents the reproaches which his conscience would otherwise cast upon him at the hour of death. The more effects of his power God has employed to draw us to himself, the more inexcusable are we. We cannot complain that we have seen no miracles, since all those of our Creator are exposed to the eyes of our mind and of our body,

and all those of our Saviour to the eyes of our faith. Let us take to ourselves these reproaches of our Lord, since his miracles also are designed for us.

“21. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

An impenitent Christian is worse than a Pagan; and his heart is more insensible to the divine word and to miracles, than an infidel's. Let us adore the judgments of God in the distribution of his gracious dispensations, without desiring to pry into the reasons of them; and let us not cease to thank him, that his great goodness to us has suffered no obstruction from our extreme ingratitude. Sackcloth and ashes are the emblems of painful and mortifying exercises. Heretics are under a delusion in excluding these out of repentance, and reducing it to nothing, but bare sorrow of heart, and change of life; contrary to the doctrine and usage both of the Old and New Testament.

“22. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you.”

How terrible are God's judgments on the impenitent! Every thing will help to overwhelm them at the tribunal of God—the benefits and favours which they have received, as well as the sins which they have committed. The divine mercies, which the sinner now buries in oblivion, shall be then rendered present to his mind, in order to his confusion and condemnation. Let us prevent this misfortune.

“23. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted

unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

The proud, who of all sinners are the most difficult to be converted, shall likewise be the most humbled. Pride is a vice, which, instead of diminishing, increases with time. Ye great men of the world, ye rich men of the earth, who think of nothing but how to advance yourselves, and who are never satisfied with wealth, honours, and preferments, read here the sentence of your condemnation if you continue impenitent. Pride hardens the heart even more than the greatest sins of impurity. There is nothing more opposite to the Christian religion, the whole design of which is to make us humble. Every man has some degree of pride, and therefore ought to examine the progress or decrease of it.

“24. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.”

There is a difference and inequality of pains in hell, answerable to that of sins. The contempt and abuse of preaching, and of the word of God, will be there dreadfully punished. Men glory in having holy preachers: and it is this very thing which brings a severer judgment upon those who continue in impenitence. Lord, humble us at present, rather than reserve us for the eternal humiliation of the reprobate.

SECT. V.—*The Wise blinded, the Simple enlightened.*

“ 25. ¶ At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”

Ye wise men of the world, who are prudent in your own sight, fear lest you should be left to your own darkness in the business of salvation, while the humble shall walk by the divine light. Let us dread, but not endeavour to fathom the judgments of God, which are just, terrible, and unsearchable. It was one of the employments of Christ on earth to adore them, and glorify his Father for them: it ought likewise to be the employment of Christians. They have a beauty, which we shall never fully discover but in heaven. The full sight of God’s mercies towards his elect, of their preference, distinction, and separation from the corrupt mass, deserves the praise and acknowledgment even of Christ’s heart; and this heart alone is worthy to know them perfectly, because to him they are given by his Father. Simplicity and humility are their distinguishing character. My God and my Saviour, imprint on my heart this amiable character, which is the mark of thy elect.

“ 26. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

Let us with fear and trembling adore the conduct of God in the disposal of his creatures, and the distribution of his favours. The knowledge of the mysteries of religion and divine truths, ought not to

puff up any one, because it is a gift altogether free, and which proceeds purely from the will of God. He is master of his own gifts, but he divides them by a will full of wisdom, and upon motives which are in himself, not in us, and which tend to the manifestation of his greatness and power, of his mercy and justice.

“27. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”

This is a great truth, and the key of the science of salvation. Christ is the sovereign dispenser of this, and the Lord of all things, by the donation of his Father. All the springs, and the whole dispensation of the divine favours, are in the hand of Christ, as priest and sacrifice of God, as Saviour and mediator, head and pattern, pastor and sovereign judge of men. There is no knowledge, no belief of the mystery of the most Holy Trinity, but what is a gift of God by Jesus Christ, and according to his will. How lovely is this dependence! O Jesus, I accept it with joy, I desire to depend on thee. Make me know the Father; make thyself known to me: but let the love in me be yet greater than the knowledge.

SECT. VI.—*The easy Yoke.*

“28. ¶ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Our only remedy is to have recourse to Christ, under our troubles and afflictions, after our miscar-

riages, in our temptations, and in our inability to do good. How sweet is it to have our dependence on a God who comes to meet us, in order to solicit us to come to him! Sinners, wearied in the ways of iniquity, throw yourselves into the bosom of this amiable Shepherd, who while on earth took so much pains to seek you, and to bring you back to his fold. Penitents, humbled under the weight of your crimes, unite yourselves to this sanctifying Victim, who bore your sins on the cross. Christians, over-burdened with the multitude of your defects, and with the greatness of your duties, lift up yourselves to this eternal High Priest, who is at the right hand of God his Father, and presents himself continually before his face in your behalf. Jesus excepts none, *all* are invited and urged to go to him. But in order to do so, he must speak to the heart, and say, "Come unto me," in such a manner as to make it hear, and to attract it. No man goes to Christ without receiving rest. He himself promises it, and shall we not believe it? I would fain come to thee, O Lord: but as thou givest me the will, be thou also my guide, my light, and my strength, to conduct me to thyself.

"29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Strange paradox! that a man already weary and over-loaded, must take a new weight upon him, in order to be eased, and to find *rest!* But Christ's yoke eases those whom charity inclines to bear it. Jesus Christ is the sole teacher of humility. There is no rest, but only for the humble in heart. Pride

is the source of a thousand disquiets. It is not sufficient to go to Christ by faith; we must take upon us the yoke of his law and gospel, that we may conform our lives thereto, and study his dispositions and behaviour, that we may be capable of imitating them. In the schools of the world, some study philosophy, others physic, law, &c. In the school of Christ, every one must study meekness and humility: for to these two, the whole science of Christianity may be reduced. Meekness of charity—calm and sedate in the midst of wrongs, injuries, affronts, persecutions, without envy, without revenge, &c. Humility of heart—remote from all inordinate and worldly desires by which pride is nourished, ascribing nothing to itself, and desiring nothing, ready to part with all things, to be placed below all men, to remain in silence and oblivion, &c. Lord, vouchsafe to teach us this science, writing it in our hearts by thy love!

“30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

How easy and sweet is it, to serve Christ even in bearing his cross! How hard and painful is the slavery of the world, of sin, and of our own passions, even with all their false pleasures! That satisfaction, peace, and comfort, which grace gives here below, and that which hope encourages us to expect in heaven, make a Christian full amends for all his pains in subduing his passions, and in opposing the world. A yoke which Christ takes together with us, can that be uneasy? A burden which he bears in us by his Spirit, can that be heavy? Come, taste and know by experience how sweet the Lord is, and how worthy his yoke is to be chosen and loved!

CHAPTER XII.

SECT. I.—*The ears of Corn plucked. The observation of the Sabbath.*

“1. AT that time Jesus went on the sabbath-day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.”

Who will not wonder at the extreme poverty of Jesus Christ and his disciples? He was himself present with them, and yet suffered them to want bread! A man, therefore, is not forsaken of God because he is in want. It is more honour to suffer in the fellowship and spirit of Christ, than, in the midst of the world, to have all things in abundance. If, when we first begin to serve God, we should also begin to suffer, and to have more temporal necessities, we should not be surprised at it: the riches of Jesus Christ, and those of his disciples, are all spiritual.

“2. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath-day.”

The pretenders to devotion are sometimes superstitious to inhumanity, sometimes indulgent even to impiety: the true lovers of the law regulate their exactness in observing it by the intent of the law. God sometimes permits such things in the church as may perhaps make some persons murmur, on purpose to afford an opportunity of attacking superstitions or popular errors. Envy is always ready to

blame and to condemn. Conceited sciolists are still forward to determine to the disadvantage of others that which they do not understand.

“3. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him;”

The example of holy men, which the Scripture relates without any censure, may serve to regulate our behaviour. We must, after the example of Christ, confute those by Scripture, who misapply it contrary to charity, and who flatter themselves that they understand it. It is the effect of envy to make us easily see what may serve to accuse others, and not perceive what may justify them.

“4. How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?”

Positive laws cease to oblige four ways:—First, by the natural law of necessity.—Charity opens the eyes and the understanding in defence of slandered innocence. No consecration of things can dispense with the charity which is due to our neighbour in necessity.

“5. Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath-days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? 6. But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple.”

In the second place, positive laws cease to oblige, by means of some other particular law, which is superior.—That which is done for the service of God, ought not to be looked upon as a thing profane. Christ is not discouraged at the malice of his

enemies, but gives them occasion to reflect upon all they had seen, which fully proved his divinity. The reverence and devotion of the Jews in their temple, which was only figurative, will condemn the irreverence and profaneness of Christians in the presence of Christ, who is the true temple.

“7. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.”

In the third place, the obligation of these laws yields to the law of charity and mercy, which is preferable to all other. Few, even among Christians, do thoroughly know, with regard to practice, what this sentence means. It is easy enough to sacrifice to God external things—the sacrifice of charity is that which he requires. The liberty to judge ill of others, is what most agreeably flatters the heart of the sons of Adam. The world is sometimes full of wrongs and violences, which have no other foundation but unjust and rash judgments. The multiplying the external sacrifice of works, is no certain sign of a progress in holiness; but a proficiency in charity and mercy towards our neighbour is always such.

“8. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath-day.”

Lastly, these laws cease to oblige by a lawful dispensation, or by the authority of the legislator. Jesus Christ is Lord—when we once know his will, we must obey it. The change of the Jewish into the Christian and spiritual Sabbath, shows that Christ is not only the Lord, but also the truth and completion of it. When, Lord, wilt thou change this Sabbath into that of eternity, into that un-

changeable rest which thou reservest for the people of God !

SECT. II.—*The withered Hand restored.*

“ 9. ¶ And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: 10. And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-days? that they might accuse him.”

Envy is an implacable enemy, which it is very dangerous for a man to admit into his heart: she is provoked, and her malignity fed, even by her neighbour's charity. The fear of giving offence to pharisaical persons, should not hinder an evangelical labourer from going forward with God's work, according to his rules and maxims. A truly good man is always disposed to excuse what is evil in his brethren: a hypocrite seeks occasion to accuse them even from good itself. This last makes no manner of scruple about plain and evident crimes, and acts the scrupulous person in things most clearly and manifestly good.

“ 11. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?”

Charity sometimes bears with what is done only out of worldly interest: envy cannot bear even that which is done out of charity. Interest is a very decisive casuist, and removes abundance of scruples in a moment. It is always the soonest consulted, and the most readily obeyed. We are not indeed forbid to hearken to it; but we must not let it govern, or determine by itself.

“12. How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath-days.”

He who violates charity, violates the law, though he observe the letter of it. He who exercises charity, observes the law, even then, when for just reasons he neglects the letter. There are but too many Christians who do more for the sake of a beast of profit or pleasure, than for their neighbour. If we owe a great deal to a man, let him be what he will, how much more to a Christian, together with whom we help to form the body of Christ? Strange corruption of the heart of man, to whom it must be proved that he is permitted at all times to do good!

“13. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.”

The bare will of Jesus Christ has an almighty power of restoring life and vigour to our souls. He makes the affliction evident, in order to make known his mercy, and to excite that of the Pharisees. When God designs to heal the withered hand of a sinner, he need only give command, and the sinner begins presently to stretch it forth toward him by prayer, and toward his neighbour by alms, and by all the assistances which he owes him. Lord, my soul is before thee, like this hand: vouchsafe to show it the same mercy!

“14. ¶ Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.”

Nothing sooner leads to blindness and hardness of heart than envy; and when once a man is brought to that, of what is he not capable? To exercise

charity on a sabbath-day is a crime,—to labour on the same day to destroy one's neighbour is a good work!—thus reasons a corrupt heart before it is aware. Such a one gives himself up to all sorts of wickedness on days the most holy, who will condemn without mercy a poor man whom necessity forces to work on any such day: to that degree may a man's heart, not devoted to God, be blinded as to himself, and hardened toward his neighbour.

SECT. III.—*The meekness of the Messiah. The bruised Reed and smoking Flax.*

“ 15. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;”

It is the part of prudence and charity not to provoke the blind and the hardened, and to take from them the occasion of sin. The man of God gives place to persecution. He appears amidst the world, only to do good in it; he retires from it when he is no longer useful in it, or when the obstacles to good are, humanly speaking, invincible. Men still find much good by following Christ; but it is he himself who draws those after him, whom he intends to heal. Let us follow the Physician of our souls, and never leave him.

“ 16. And charged them that they should not make him known:”

Let us love to be hid with Christ, either out of humility or necessity; there is always some advantage in it. To secure himself from being discovered, he uses no other than human means, for which he had no occasion; to teach us not to neglect them in

our necessity. He could have concealed himself as God; but he chooses rather to do it as man, for the instruction and edification of men. He makes use of his power, less on his own account, than on that of men, because he knows that his Father gave it him for them. How much charity and meekness, how much prudence and humility, are here to be imitated in him!

“17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 18. Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles.”

The majesty of God is so great as to have a God-man for his servant! It was by his Father's choice that he entered into this condition; and it is by the same choice that men must enter into the sacred ministry. Christ is, by way of excellence, the Servant of God—being alone worthy to serve him. He who serves God faithfully, becomes his delight. The perfect fulness of the Holy Spirit dwells in Christ alone; and we can receive none of it, but from this fulness. How ought he to be replenished with it, who is appointed to preach the truth? The Spirit of Jesus Christ must be in a minister of God, and that not transiently nor feebly, but after a full and persevering manner, and must reside in him.

“19. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.”

How lovely is this meekness of Christ! How worthy to be imitated! His spirit is not a spirit of contention, murmuring, clamour, or litigiousness. He who loves all this, belongs not to him. The

meekness of Jesus Christ, as his Father's minister, was particularly foretold, on purpose to teach the clergy that their ministry is not a ministry of pride, imperiousness, and violence, but of humility, moderation, and mildness."

"20. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory."

The strength of the perfect must not be left inactive; the good which is in the weak and imperfect must be managed with prudence; and even the most wicked must not be driven to despair. Let nothing discourage us; for truth will certainly prevail. But let us have patience: for neither Christ nor his truth will completely triumph till after the last judgment. He bears with the enemies of his truth and his church in this life, because this is the time of humiliation and suffering,—his power will break forth at the time of triumph.

"21. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust."

Jesus Christ is the sole trust and hope of Christians. To trust and hope in his name, is to expect salvation, and all things necessary thereto, from him alone; to despise all earthly promises; to esteem, love, and desire only heavenly things; and to bear with patience and tranquillity all the losses and evils of this life, upon the prospect and hopes of that felicity which he has obtained for us.

SECT. IV.—*The Possessed, blind and dumb. The blasphemy of the Pharisees. The divided Kingdom.*

"22. ¶ Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed

him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.”

The devil makes himself master of the heart, the eyes, and the tongue of the sinner :—Of his heart, by possessing it with the love of sin ; of the eyes of his mind, by hindering him from seeing the guilt and consequences of it ; and of his tongue, by diverting him from prayer, confession, &c. Work, O my God, these three miracles upon sinners ; and deliver my heart from every degree of this threefold captivity !

“ 23. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David ? ”

Let us but reflect upon what God has done in us, and upon what he can do, to drive out the evil spirit of sin, to open our eyes, and untie our tongues ; and we shall be then wrapt up in admiration, and full of hopes, with much greater cause than this people. Whenever we have a good thought, a holy desire, or an edifying word, let us say, without hesitation, ‘ The son of David works this in us ; ’ and let us say it with gratitude.

“ 24. But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.”

The more disciples truth gains, the more enemies she raises. Thus it is, that the malicious world sometimes ascribes the conversion of sinners to motives of covetousness and interest, or to some passion contrary to the Spirit of God. Can the spirit of contradiction, hatred, and envy, proceed farther than this, to choose rather to give to the devil than to God, the honour of a work which it is forced to ac-

knowledge as miraculous? It is a sin more common than we imagine, for men to be unwilling to own the finger of God in those they hate.

“25. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: 26. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?”

Christ knows the secrets of the heart: and this is a new proof of his divinity which cannot be attributed to the devil. God permits those who, out of a spirit of envy and contradiction, oppose the truth, to fall into manifest contradictions themselves. Division ruins every thing; and the stability of the church depends upon its unity, which must never be broken on any account whatsoever.

“27. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.”

The affections have a great share in our judgments; and we must take care that envy do not make us condemn that in one, which we approve in another. There were exorcists among the Jews.

“28. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.”

None but Christ can destroy the kingdom of the devil. Wherever God's Spirit is, there is also the kingdom of God. The destruction of that of Satan, is a proof and an effect of the incarnation. Christ, by freeing the bodies of the possessed, shows plainly what he came to do in the soul. Exert thy power upon mine, O Jesus, and by thy Spirit prevent all

the attempts against thy rights, which the evil spirit would otherwise there make !

SECT. V.—*The strong Man armed. The Sin against the Holy Ghost. The treasure of the Heart. The idle Word.*

“ 29. Or else, how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man ? and then he will spoil his house.”

Men, through sin, are become the house of Satan, having, of their own accord, surrendered themselves up to this unjust possessor. Whoever gives up his soul to sin, gives it up to the devil. Christ alone can deliver from this bondage, and bind the power of this strong one. Return into thy house and into thy rights, O my God ! and take possession again by Christ, of my heart and mind, and of all the good things wherewith thou hast been pleased to furnish me !

“ 30. He that is not with me is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”

In vain do men seek for ways of accommodation to soften the gospel : there is no medium between loving God and being his enemy—between belonging to Christ or to the devil—between being governed by charity or by self-love ! If we would belong to Christ as we ought, we must give ourselves entirely to him. He alone has paid down the price for us ; he alone ought to be our Lord. When Jesus Christ, his truth, his precepts, and his servants, are openly assaulted, how can a man avoid declaring for them, without incurring the guilt of deserting and betraying them ? How many are there in the world who

are really against Christ, and “scatter abroad,” who yet flatter themselves that they are workers together with him, and in the number of his friends !

“ 31. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men : but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”

There is nothing more contrary to the Holy Ghost and his grace, than to withstand manifest truth, to decry good doctrine and Christian maxims, in opposition to particular persons, and to attribute to an evil spirit that which proceeds from the Spirit of God. This is the sin of arrogant scholars, and of selfish, envious, and opinionative bigots, out of which they scarce ever recover. The forgiveness of this sin is not absolutely impossible, but only very rare : because the conversion of such persons is very rare and difficult. The people are converted in crowds, but very few Scribes and Pharisees yield to the truth.

“ 32. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him : but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”

Jesus Christ, who came to be abased, has endured all manner of humiliation in his flesh—but he will not be abased in his Spirit. Whatever ignominies and persecutions he suffered in his life and death at the hands of the Jews, were forgiven those who received the faith, after the mission of the Holy Ghost : but there is no mercy for such as have rejected the testimony of this Holy Spirit in the preaching of the apostles, in the miracles, gifts, and other marvellous

effects produced by him in the church. Impenitency is the most common punishment of this kind of spiritual sins.

“ 33. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good ; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt : for the tree is known by his fruit.”

The fruit is always like the tree ; the works like the will. Nothing good can proceed from an evil spirit ; no good fruit from a corrupt heart, unless it be renewed and moved by the good Spirit, which only can render it good. If we would know our heart, let us view our actions. That is good, if our life be so : that is devoted to the world, if this be conformable to the maxims thereof.

“ 34. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things ? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”

These are very severe words ; but such as were justly due to the malignity of the Pharisees. Charity has its sting ; but never uses it except in order to heal. What good can a soil so bad as the heart of man produce of itself ? What judgment shall we make of our own, if we judge of it by our vain, slanderous, light, bitter, and haughty words ? All the sons of Adam have naturally a pharisaical heart. Thou alone, O Jesus, canst change it into a Christian heart, by conferring upon it Christian virtues out of thy fulness !

“ 35. A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things : and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things.”

The good heart is the good treasure, and it is

charity makes it so: for charity only never offends. Concupiscence produces nothing but what is evil; and makes the evil heart and the evil treasure.

“ 36. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

It is no small matter to know how to rule the tongue, and to restrain the unprofitable use thereof. God would not have us doubt, but that he will demand an account of it. And if he demand it of every vain, idle, and unprofitable word, how much more then of every calumnious, impure, and offensive word, contrary to religion and charity, &c.? How terrible is this exactness of the divine justice!—the very thought of which should be enough to dry up the source of such a multitude of words, which have no necessity, no usefulness to excuse them.

“ 37. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

There are few who conceive how instrumental the tongue is to salvation or condemnation. We count words as nothing—and yet eternity depends upon them! Set a guard, O Lord, upon my mouth, and reduce my tongue under an absolute subjection to thyself!

SECT. VI.—*Jonas a Sign. The Ninevites. The Queen of the South.*

“ 38. ¶ Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.”

Incredulity, pride, and curiosity, have never proofs enough of the truth. Learned men have particular

reason to fear these vices. To require miracles in this age is to affront and injure God, and, like the persons before us, to make no account of all those which he has wrought for the establishment of the gospel. The proofs of religion are not in the choice of men : God only knows those which are most proper.

“ 39. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas :”

Christ complies with the weakness of men, but never with their extravagant desires. He takes notice of the corruption of heart in these wretches, to show the cause of their incredulity and of his refusal. That man wrongs the truth, who submits to the caprice of its enemies in the manner of proving it. It is natural for unbelievers to imagine, that a miracle wrought on purpose for them would change their heart. But it is presumption, blindness, and delusion, to expect extraordinary signs in order to conversion. What miracle can convert him, to whom even the resurrection of Christ is not sufficient? The general resurrection and last judgment will indeed do it—but that will be too late.

“ 40. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Our blessed Saviour’s resurrection is his grand miracle, the confirmation of all the rest, the seal of his mission, &c. Jonas is the most eminent type of Christ, as preacher of repentance, as voluntary victim of his people, as returning alive from the grave and hell three days after his burial, and as abandoning

the Jews after his resurrection, to preach salvation to the Gentiles. These types and prophecies are very strong arguments for the truth of religion.

“ 41. The men of Nineve shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”

Impenitency is the greatest of all misfortunes; and into this they must necessarily fall who hear not Jesus Christ. We shall have those for witnesses or judges, of whom we would not be the imitators. The fear of temporal destruction causes a people to repent, who had neither Moses nor Christ, neither the law nor the prophets, and who, perhaps, never had but this one preacher amongst them. What judgment, then, shall we undergo, if we continue impenitent, after all that which has been bestowed upon us!

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

How many, who affect the character of strong reasoning, believe, without any proof, what comes from places the most distant, and yet take a pride in doubting of the gospel, though confirmed by so many miracles? Men are apt to run after such preachers as are most powerful in word and deed, and to value themselves upon adhering to them; when it is this very thing which will condemn them the more.—Whenever we read the gospel, our faith should thus dictate to us: ‘He who is here, who speaks here, is

both greater than Jonas, and wiser than Solomon: let our respect, obedience, and fidelity, be proportionably increased.'

SECT. VII.—*The unclean Spirit entering again.
Relapses.*

“ 43. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.”

The devil ceases not to tempt those whom Christ has taken from him; he has no other joy, but only in doing hurt to man. The unfaithfulness of a Christian, and the relapse of a penitent, are his delight. Strange debasement of a spirit created to enjoy God, and to rest in him, not to be able to find any rest but in a corrupt heart. If a man of great power placed his happiness in ruining us, should we venture to be long asleep? Let us watch, therefore, and arm ourselves with faith and prayer; for it is not a man whom we are to resist.

“ 44. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.”

Unhappy that person whom the devil still looks upon as his house; because his evil habits are yet alive at the bottom of his heart, or are only suspended! In what condition is a soul, when, on one side, the devil besieges and attacks it with an eagerness and application which are indefatigable; and, on the other, the soul itself opens the gate to him out of sloth and cowardice? Let us consider, whether this soul be not our own. Negligence and idleness invite the devil. The secret to keep him

out, is to employ all our time in good works, and to be wholly taken up with God.

“45. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.”

The devil makes new efforts, and takes new precautions, that he may not fail to ruin us, whilst we, perhaps, use none at all to escape him. This is because he counts our loss his gain and delight, and we count not our salvation our proper business. How much is a relapse to be dreaded! This renders the sinner worse and more intolerable than before, through his ingratitude and perfidiousness. Habits are formed and strengthened by relapses; and relapses are multiplied and become more incurable through new habits. How is it that the sinner has not eyes to see what a soul is, when deserted by the Holy Ghost and his seven gifts, and made a slave to as many contrary habits; as it were, to “seven devils,” to whom it has surrendered up itself by sin? A galley-slave, loaded with seven chains, would raise compassion in us. With what terror, then, ought we to be affected at the idea of a captive soul, reduced, by frequent relapses, under the power of seven devils!

SECT. VIII.—*Christ's Mother and Brethren.*

“46. ¶ While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. 47. Then one said

unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.”

How great are the modesty and humility of the blessed virgin, who does not interrupt her son whilst he is talking to the people, but is contented to stand without ! Her pious concern for a son, whose absence sensibly affected her, is the cause of her coming, not the desire of having a share in the applause of the people.

“48. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?”

How holy soever relations are, a clergyman who understands the holiness of his office, professes not to know them in the sacred ministry. It is always a loss to be diverted from God’s work by any human thing whatsoever. A minister of eternal salvation ought to be above every thing which is temporal. This answer seems a little harsh, but it is sanctifying for the virgin, corrective for the other relations, and instructive for all.

“49. And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren ! 50. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Grace and faithfulness to God, unite us to Jesus Christ in all respects. He shows us here what a truly apostolical person is. Such a one is insensible to the affections of flesh and blood, entirely taken up and employed about God’s work, and full of tenderness for souls,—he has nothing in his heart and before his eyes but the divine will—he adheres to

God only, regards him only in all things, and counts as nothing whatever belongs not to him—he knows no relations on earth, but such as have God for their Father in heaven: and he consecrates and sanctifies every passion and affection of nature, by turning and applying them to the souls committed to his charge, to whom he is instead of a father, a mother, or a brother, by affording them all kind of assistance and relief.

CHAPTER XIII.

SECT. I.—*Parable of the Sower. Blind hearts.*
Blessed are the eyes which see.

“ 1. THE same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea-side.”

An evangelical labourer allows himself but little rest. His charity makes him quit the comforts of his house and family, to place himself in a readiness to relieve the wants of souls.

“ 2. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.”

The word of God, preached after a holy manner, invites the faithful. The love of it is more quick and ardent in the meaner sort, than in the rich and learned. We see here a representation of the church, which consists of the people united to their pastors. These, being more exposed to violent tossings and storms, are, as it were, in a ship, while those continue at ease on the shore.

“ 3. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow :”

Let us not be discouraged at the obscurity which is in the parables of the Scripture. Truth conceals herself under them, not that she may not be discovered, but that she may oblige us to search after her. It is a double gain, to attain to the knowledge of divine truths, both by the gift of God and by (means of) our own desires, endeavours, and prayers. Our heart is God's field, it belongs to him to sow it. It is a very great misfortune, to deny ourselves the benefit of this divine seed, by neglecting to read or hear the word of God.

“ 4. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up :”

Let us take care lest our heart become a highway, open to all the world, trampled by passengers, covered with the dust of vanity, fouled by the dirt of pleasures, hardened by habitual sin, and exposed to devils. Distraction of mind, diversions, and business, are the fowls which devour the good seed, filling the heart with vain, earthly, and dangerous things.

“ 5. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth ; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth : 6. And when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root, they withered away :”

What is a man the better for not having a heart like the highway, if he has one which is hard and stony as to divine matters ? Unless good thoughts and desires enter deep into the heart, and are there held fast by charity, as by their root, the heat of a contrary lust will scorch them, and make them soon wither away.

“7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:”

The terrestrial world is full of good desires, projects of conversion, and schemes of retreat; but the thorns of secular lusts make them miscarry. If we do not labour to pluck up these thorns, they will certainly grow up and choke all the divine seed in us.

“8. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold.”

The good ground is the good heart: none is such, but through the mercy of God and the grace of Jesus Christ. It was a mercy peculiar to thee, O Lord, to purchase at so dear a rate such barren and accursed ground, full of thorns and briers, and fit only to be burned, that thou mightest make it a rich and blessed soil, fertile in every kind of good fruit. Blind and miserable is that man who attributes this work to himself, and gives not thee the glory of it, O my Saviour!

“9. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Who, Lord, has ears to hear thee, except he to whom thou givest, continuest, and openest them; and by whom thou causest thy voice to be heard in a way peculiar to thyself?

“10. ¶ And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?”

Man would always fain know the reason and method of the divine conduct. Let him but thoroughly conceive what it is to be a sinner, and he will then soon understand what he deserves. The very least degree of knowledge is yet more than is due to him who deserves nothing but eternal darkness.

“ 11. He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”

Christ, who with scorn refuses to satisfy the crafty and malicious curiosity of the Pharisees, answers that of his disciples, which is plain, innocent, and honest. If faith, which is the fountain and foundation of salvation, be a free gift, which God bestows not upon all; what acknowledgments then are due to him, from those who have received it, without deserving it any more than those who have not! The knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is so much neglected by the generality of Christians, that it seems as if they had no concern at all in it, or that it was not worth their pains. Others apply their studies to it, after a manner as entirely human, and with as little faith and prayer, as if it was not a gift. Let us study it with care, but by the light of faith. God, the master of his own gifts, confers the understanding of his word and mysteries upon whom he pleases. Let us be careful to adore this dreadful election, and to humble ourselves, without desiring to know more.

“ 12. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”

The use of grace attracts more; faith gives a man the knowledge of the truths of Christianity. But from whence do this use of grace and this faith proceed, but even from grace itself? The less belief, respect, and relish one has for these truths, the more one deserves to be deprived of them. One divine

gift prepares us for another: he who, by a holy kind of usury, improves them for his Master, enriches himself.

“ 13. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand.”

Blindness is a punishment of sin, and the source of a great many. Obscurity, which exercises the faith, excites the desires, and increases the prayers of true Christians, serves to punish the incredulity, distaste, and slothfulness of others. In order to profit by the word of God, it is necessary, before we read or hear it, to beg of him the seeing eye and the hearing ear; namely, a heart which may understand and love the truth.

“ 14. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:”

Let us take warning from the blindness and hardness of these wretches, for fear lest this prophecy should again be fulfilled in us. God makes known his judgments, that they may be avoided; but this knowledge becomes an occasion of condemnation, if men are not the better for it.

“ 15. For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

An affection to worldly things, a forgetfulness of divine, a disrelish of God’s word, and a spirit of con-

tradition to his truths, do generally produce blindness and hardness of heart in Christians, as they did in the Jews. This deplorable condition, wherein the sick person is afraid of being cured, is more common than we imagine. The delighting in all kind of loose and licentious discourse, and shunning all opportunities of hearing that which is pious, is the way by which men arrive at last at stupidity of heart. By opening our eyes to a false light, and to whatever gratifies our senses, passions, and curiosity, and by closing them against the light of the gospel, they at length continue shut against every thing which tends to salvation.

“ 16. But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.”

How much more blessed are those eyes, which, without having ever seen Jesus Christ, see his religion confirmed by his resurrection, by the faith of all people, by the tradition of all ages, by the blood of all the martyrs, by the writings of all the fathers, by miracles of all kinds, and by the lives of all the saints! Men are not thankful enough to God for the favour of being born in an age, country, and family, enlightened with the gospel—and for either having never had the prejudices of birth, habit, and example to struggle with, or for having surmounted them.

“ 17. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”

How much to be admired are those saints who

lived only by faith, by a faith altogether pure, which relied solely upon God, and was destitute of all the supports which ours finds in the wonders of seventeen ages! The more advantages we have above them, the more criminal is our abuse of them, and our baseness the more punishable. Let us be persuaded, that it is more profitable for us to see and hear Christ with the eyes and ears of the heart, than with those of the body. Let us by no means envy the Jews this last advantage, which tended only to their condemnation; and let us praise God for having vouchsafed us the first, whereof we were more unworthy perhaps than they.

SECT. II.—*The Explication of the Parable.*

“ 18. ¶ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.”

Hear ye, to whom God is pleased to impart the knowledge of his mysteries, to whom he discovers his truths, to whom no means of instruction in the way of salvation is wanting; while so many others are abandoned to their darkness, to ignorance and error, to seducers and blind guides. Do ye therefore comprehend and value your happiness, love and practise what ye know, and by your life glorify him who bestows so many mercies upon you.

“ 19. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which receiveth seed by the way-side.”

Who does not perceive, in this description, the generality of the world, and the manner in which

they hear the word of God? Contempt, neglect, and want of attention, in respect of this word, are greater sins, and more severely punished, than men are apt to think. That heart, which will not vouchsafe to hear God, deserves to be delivered up as a prey to the spirit of error. It is the proper and most usual employment of the wicked one, to endeavour to render fruitless all inspirations, truths of the gospel, and divine seed which has been sown in our hearts. Men watch with great care, that they may not lose the seed of their ground; but they do not at all regard losing that of their soul.

“ 20. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: 21. Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”

We see but too much of these kinds of forwardness, warmth, and joy, on the account of the truths of Christianity and of the word of God, which come to nothing, or to what is next to nothing. The fruit of the word is not to be known except in times of trial, either internal from the conflicts of concupiscence, or external from the tribulations of the world. Let us, but without anxiety, fear lest our fruits should be without root, our beginnings without perseverance, and our works without charity. Lord, grant that I may hear thee, that I may taste thy word, and that I may be thine, not only for a while, but always, even for ever.

“ 22. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of

this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.”

Whatever inclination a man may have to piety and to Christian truths; the love of riches and worldly things, if it be predominant, ruins all. To rely upon riches, is to lie down upon a bed of thorns. To seek for peace amidst the cares of the world, is to seek it in the very bosom of inquietude itself. The word cannot bear fruit in a heart possessed with the love of riches, and with a design of raising a fortune in the world.

“ 23. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty.”

The seed in the good ground is the word in a faithful heart. To hear, to understand, and to bear fruit, are the three signs of this good ground or faithful heart. There are several degrees of fidelity and holiness; but none without the fruit of good works. To be in the most perfect state, is not absolutely necessary, but only to be faithful to God in that to which he is pleased to call us. Convert my heart, O my God, into good ground, and make it bear the fruit which it ought to render thee. Not to render thee all the fruit of thy own seed, is a piece of injustice, unfaithfulness, and theft. Lord, preserve me from this guilt by thy grace.

SECT. III.—*The Parable of the Tares.*

“ 24. ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field;”

The church is God's field, which he cultivates by his grace and his ministers, wherein he sows no other than good grain, where none become such but by charity and other Christian virtues, which are the plant and seed of God. What favour, what mercy is it, to be the wheat of God, sown in his field by his own hand? Grant, Lord, that I may therein continue, grow up, and be still fruitful, even till the time of harvest.

“ 25. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.”

In the church on earth, the wicked are mingled with the righteous: no place but heaven is altogether pure and free from mixture. All societies have their tares; the good grain is not offended or scandalized at them, but suffers them with patience. Wo to those negligent and drowsy pastors, who let the souls under their care be corrupted by error or sin. Whoever sows these tares in the church, is the enemy of God; and he may, in some manner, be said to sow them, who does not hinder the sowing of them. Wake the pastors, O my God, and open their eyes, that they may perceive the tares which choke thy seed.

“ 26. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.”

When the righteous begin to improve and make a progress in virtue, they then begin to experience the malice of the wicked. Afflictions do not make men wicked, but they show what they are. God does not usually permit his elect to be exposed to the vexation of the wicked, until they are strong enough to undergo the trial of suffering. The

mixture of the one with the other is necessary to instruct, exercise, purify, sanctify, and keep the elect in humility.

“ 27. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?”

Adorable is the divine conduct in this mixture of the good and bad. A faithful and vigilant minister fails not to discover the tares, and to address himself to God by prayer, in order to lament the misfortune before him, to inquire after the cause of it, and receive from him the rules of his behaviour on this occasion. It is under these evils which befall the church, that the zeal and application of a true pastor are fully known.

“ 28. He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?”

God answers his faithful servants, and informs them concerning the devil's artifices and attempts against his church, when they apply themselves to him in the way of prayer and pastoral vigilance. The grand enemy of mankind introduces sometimes into the church, and into religious societies, wicked persons, to favour his designs. A zeal, which is rash and precipitate, and not according to knowledge, is as much to be feared as one which is too slow and inactive. But that zeal is commendable which is ruled by God's direction, which does not anticipate his designs, and which is free from all indecent passion. God judges quite otherwise than men of this mixture of the good and evil. He alone knows the good which he intends to produce from it, and how far his

patience towards the wicked should extend, in order either to their conversion or condemnation, or to the sanctification of the righteous.

“ 29. But he said, Nay; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.”

Men often persecute a true Christian, while they intend only to prosecute an impious person, for want of giving heed to this prohibition. God spares the wicked, only in consideration of the elect. He will not pass judgment upon the former, until he completes his mercy towards the latter. A zeal for the extirpation of heretics and wicked men, not regulated by these words of our blessed Saviour, allows no time to the one to grow strong in goodness, or to the other to forsake their evil courses. They are of a spirit very opposite to his, who care not if they root up the wheat, provided they can but gather up the tares.

“ 30. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

We ought patiently to bear with the wicked in this life, because it is God's appointment, that they should continue mingled with the good, to the end of the world. God not only suffers them here, but by his power he makes them instrumental to one another, in promoting his wise designs. For the wickedness of the wicked is so inflamed by the virtue of the good, that, even until their condemnation, they have a gradual increase in sensual desire and wealth, in honour and power: and the virtue of good

men improves so much by the others' wickedness, that they proceed from one degree of grace and piety to another, until their consummation. These two different effects depend upon the justice and mercy of God: upon his justice, which permits and punishes all the evil in the one; upon his mercy, which works and rewards all the good in the other. Do men sufficiently apprehend, what it is to be violently plucked from the earth to which they cleave, to be bound up like a bundle of tares, and cast into eternal fire? And yet to this the temporal felicity of the wicked comes at last. The garner of God is heaven, it is the bosom of God himself. Thither his elect, who are his wheat, are carried, after having been bruised and ground by persecutions in this world, in order to become his bread in eternity, as he will be also eternally theirs.

SECT. IV.—*The Parables of the Mustard Seed, and Leaven.*

“31. ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field:”

This parable is a representation of the progress of the gospel in the world, of the growth of grace in the soul, and of the establishment of the church, which is founded upon the humility of a God stooping to the form of a servant. This humiliation is the proper mark and character of all his works, ever since his incarnation, as also that of true piety: and it is this virtue, which the ministers, and all the souls of the church, ought to study with the greatest care.

“ 32. Which indeed is the least of all seeds ; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”

Truth is depressed in this world, and advanced in the other. The saints find in it their eternal rest, and reap the first-fruits of it in their heart, even here below. The more humble a man is in this life, the more shall he be exalted in the next. These are two characters of the true church, and of the doctrine of the gospel, upon which it is built, to be, according to the order and appointment of their founder, very small in their beginning, and very extensive in their progress and continuance. Our duty is to aim chiefly at our own abasement ; it belongs to God to enlarge and to exalt us. What are, generally speaking, the first impressions of grace, the first motions of faith in the heart, but only a little spark which kindles the fire of charity there, a grain of mustard seed which fills it with its strength and virtue ? Let us not neglect and despise any thing.

“ 33. ¶ Another parable spake he unto them ; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

Whatever use we make of our understanding, our will, and our body, without the leaven of faith and charity, is disagreeable and nauseous to God. The divinity united to the human nature in Christ ; the gospel diffused throughout the world ; the Spirit of God working in a sinner’s heart ; and the sacramental bread nourishing a Christian soul : these are the different sorts of leaven, which thy wisdom, O

my God, has found out, to render man altogether spiritual, to raise him to the love of heavenly things, and to make him bear some resemblance of thyself. How can a heart, so often filled with the wholesome leaven of thy body, O Jesus, still retain its heaviness and inclination towards the earth? Let thy Holy Spirit, I beseech thee, cause mine to rise, to be united, and to cleave inseparably to thee.

“ 34. All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them :”

Let us learn from these parables to discover the Christian world in the natural, the former being represented in the latter. Christ descends from invisible mysteries to these visible descriptions and parables, to excite us to raise our minds from these sensible objects, to the invisible wonders which are in God and his church.

“ 35. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.”

The mysteries, which lay hid in God from all eternity, and in types and prophecies from the foundation of the world, are at length disclosed and fulfilled in and by Jesus Christ. How happy are Christians in being born in the times of manifestation, if they make a good use of this blessing by their faith! Let us leave the covetous wretch to dig to the centre after treasures of no duration, and the naturalist to lose himself in searching into the secrets of nature; the treasures and study of a Christian are Jesus Christ and his mysteries, which he

discovers to us by his word. Thou openest thy adorable mouth, O Eternal Wisdom, to instruct me in them; but this is all in vain, unless thou openest my heart, so as to make it thoroughly apprehend them.

“ 36. ¶ Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house; and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.”

The clear manifestation of gospel truths, is only for the true disciples of Christ. In order to understand them fully, it is necessary to recollect ourselves in and with him, by retiring at least into the house of our own heart, to approach him by faith, and to make our addresses to him in prayer. Why does Christ speak in parables, but only to conceal his truths and mysteries from the wise men of the age, to excite the desire of God’s children, and to inform them, that the knowledge of God and his mysteries is a favour which they must earnestly beg of him?

SECT. V.—*The Parable of the Tares explained.*

“ 37. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;”

Yes, Lord, we acknowledge it with joy, that it is thou alone who formest the saints, and sowest in their hearts all that is good, by a grace which is altogether free. It is thou who performest all this, as Son of man; namely, by the mysterious union of the two natures in thy person, by the merits of thy life and death, by the holiness of thy Spirit, and by the power of thy grace, which is the fruit of the mysteries and sacrifice, finished and completed in thy flesh upon the cross.

“ 38. The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;”

Christian faith and hope oblige us to look upon ourselves as children of the kingdom of God, provided we live according to his laws and precepts. Can we, then, ever lose sight of a kingdom to which we believe we are appointed? How can our heart but be filled with it, and direct all its thoughts and designs towards it? Here is a dreadful description of a sinner, yet such a one as is true; it being given us by Christ himself. They are no other than tares, who choke the good seed, and hinder it from growing up in the love of truth, and from bringing forth the fruit of charity. Men become “the children of the wicked one,” by following his dispositions, and promoting his designs.

“ 39. The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.”

They imitate the devil, and do his work, who sow like him, and change the good seed into tares, by bad examples, evil counsels, enticements, &c. Let us anticipate the time of the harvest and the coming of the reapers. If we are tares, let us use our utmost endeavours to become good grain.

“ 40. As therefore the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.”

The end of every man's life is to him the end of this world; the one, as well as the other, being the end of the time of mercy. My God, what a dismal change will this be, when a sinner, who now lives in

honour and pleasure, shall, like a bundle of tares, be cast into the fire!

“ 41. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, 42. And shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Eternal separation from the body of Christ, the being cast headlong into the furnace, the torment of everlasting fire, and an endless despair: all this is the just punishment of a fond affection towards the creatures, of the loftiness of pride, of the enjoyment of pleasures, and of the love of worldly satisfactions. How much better is it to weep in this life, having the consolation of hope, than to expose ourselves to the wailings of eternal despair? The true church will not be entirely freed from all occasions of offence, till the end of the world. To separate from it, under pretence of the disorders in it, is to understand neither the nature of the church nor the Scriptures.

“ 43. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

How will the condition of the elect be changed in heaven! Here, they are in obscurity and contempt; there, they will shine forth as the sun. Here, under oppression; there, upon the throne of God himself. Here, in poverty and want; there, in possession of the eternal inheritance of their heavenly Father, and of all the rights of the children of God. To conceive and understand this, requires a very lively faith; and all the misfortune of men proceeds from their not conceiving it. The small number of

those who endeavour as they ought to attain to it, shows that this faith is very rare. Let us not cease to request it humbly of God.

SECT. VI.—*The Gospel a hidden Treasure.*

“44. ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”

The effects of a lively faith, are, 1. To make us look upon salvation as our only treasure, and value, beyond all the riches of the world, the grace which causes us to seek after it. 2. To receive this grace as a free gift which precedes all human endeavour. 3. To hide it by humility. 4. To place our whole joy in it. 5. To give all we have for salvation and the grace which leads to it. 6. To be thoroughly sensible, that salvation must be bought, and that it is not bestowed for nothing. It is a purchase, because we buy it. It is a grace, because we do not find it to buy, but, as it were, by chance; and because we give nothing for it but what we have received.

SECT. VII.—*The Pearl of great price.*

“45. ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; 46. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

The sloth and indolence of the greatest part of Christians, with respect to God and their own salvation, are condemned by those merchants who traverse the world, and venture all upon the uncertain prospect of temporal advantage. We must seek, if

we would find ; we must prefer God before all things, and be disposed to part with them all, to secure our own salvation. Wo to him who expects to find any thing more amiable than God, more worthy to fill his heart, and more capable of making him happy !

SECT. VIII.—*The Net cast into the Sea.*

“ 47. ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind :”

The net of God’s word, animated by his Spirit, draws souls out of the abyss of sin and error, to Christian faith and piety. The use of the word and sacraments is common to all. The net and vessel of the visible church receive indifferently both the good and bad fish, true Christians and hypocrites, the elect and the reprobate. This is neither the time, nor the place of distinction : all must continue mixed together till the great day of separation.

“ 48. Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.”

We must labour in the work of our salvation with humility and fear, yet without anxiety, and in hope ; being uncertain what we are in the sight of God. Though a man’s being in the church will not infallibly assure him of salvation ; yet his being out of it is sufficient to make him perish irrecoverably. As yet there is time to become good or better. But the moment will come, when all desires and endeavours to this purpose will be attended only with despair. And who knows but that this moment is just at hand ?

“ 49. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,”

What comfort will it be for those, who, during this life, have incessantly lamented the afflictions of the church, to see it at length freed for ever from the persecution of the wicked, either foreign or domestic! What torment and despair will those feel, who have, either with envy or hatred, borne the sight and company of the righteous, to see themselves separated from them to all eternity! Our faith is very weak, if we can think of this separation without horror. Our love of salvation very faint, if we do not endeavour earnestly to separate ourselves in this world from the wicked, by the holiness of our lives and conversations.

“ 50. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

This is a short description of the pain, grief, and rage of the damned. Happy they, who, by godly sorrow and repentance, prevent these miseries, having renounced all the pleasures and vain delights of the world! Yet but a moment, and these shall be no more. But this fire and these wailings, after thousands of millions of years, will be still beginning, in order to an endless duration.

“ 51. Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.”

Let us not slightly pass over these divine truths, if we desire to be the better for them. Let this question of our blessed Lord convince us of their importance. It is very proper, when we read them, to call ourselves to an account, as to the impressions

which they make upon our mind and heart, as to the use which our faith makes of them, as to the consequences which we should draw from them for the regulation of our lives, and as to that estrangement from worldly lusts and amusements which they ought to inspire into us.

“ 52. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe, which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.”

A small degree of knowledge is not sufficient for a preacher of the gospel. Above all things, he ought perfectly to understand the holy Scriptures, and to make them his treasure. His knowledge does not consist in being furnished with a great variety of human learning, but in being well versed in whatever concerns the kingdom of heaven, and the art of conducting souls thither. To this the learned ought to direct all their skill in the law and the prophets, their natural talents, and their attainments in profane arts and sciences; and to make them all subservient thereto. It is not enough for a man to have these advantages in his possession; he must bring them forth out of his treasure, and distribute them abroad. A good pastor will always remember that he must not, like a miser, keep these things to himself, only to please his own fancy; nor yet, like a merchant, traffic with them to enrich himself; but that, like a bountiful father or householder, he must, with a prudent economy, distribute them freely for the good of his family.

SECT. IX.—*Jesus despised. No Prophet honoured in his own country.*

“ 53. ¶ And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.”

There is no time of amusement or vacation in the life of the great Shepherd of our souls: having performed his mission, he retires. This is the pattern which the subordinate pastors, to whom he vouchsafes a share in his ministry, ought to imitate.

“ 54. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?”

Those who should know Christ best, are very often most ignorant of him. We must not consider the persons who teach, but the truths which they teach. There is, in minds too carnal with respect to mysteries, an astonishment of contempt, incredulity, and unteachableness: as there is one of reverence, adoration, and joy, in souls replenished with faith. O wisdom of the Son of God! O power of the Father! who canst at the same time discover thyself to the eyes of reasonable men, and conceal thyself from such as are carnal! My faith owns, adores, and invokes thee, as the uncreated and incarnate wisdom, as the light of angels and men, hid under the obscurity of our flesh, and debased in the proud conceits of the sages of this world!

“ 55. Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56. And his sisters,

are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?"

Jesus Christ goes amongst his relations and acquaintance only in order to be despised, whereas men generally do it to be esteemed and caressed by them. The more contemptible thou appearest to carnal eyes, O Jesus, the more worthy I find thee to be adored, loved, and admired, in the dispensation of thy mysteries, and the abasement of thy greatness! How glorious is this humiliation of Mary and Joseph, which proceeds only from their union with Jesus Christ! Who would not willingly be his at the same price?

“ 57. And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.”

The most holy things are, to carnal men, an occasion of offence. Without faith, and the grace of Jesus Christ, the means of salvation become obstacles to it. The reason of man cannot comprehend how God should vouchsafe to abase himself for his sake. His pride will not own and receive the wisdom of God, unless accompanied with his greatness and glory. But, from the entrance of sin into the world even to the time of the resurrection, the way from God to man, and from man to God, is the humility of Him who is both God and man.

“ 58. And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.”

Unbelief, and contempt of the divine word, drive Christ out of the heart, as they did out of his own country. Faith seems to put the almighty power of God into the hands of man: whereas unbelief seems

to tie up even the hands of the Almighty. A man, generally speaking, can do but little good amongst his kinsfolk and relations; because it is difficult for them to look with the eyes of faith upon one whom they have been always used to behold only with those of the flesh.

CHAPTER XIV.

SECT. I.—*The Death of John the Baptist.*

“ 1. AT that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, 2. And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.”

It appears from hence, that the belief of the resurrection was common among the Jews. The holiness of St. John is acknowledged even by his persecutor. It is a dreadful judgment upon men, not to have their eyes open to discover the piety and virtue of a good man, till they have caused his death, either by the sword or by ill treatment. The miracles of Jesus Christ, owned and acknowledged by Herod, are the condemnation of him, of the Jews, and of unbelievers in all ages. The hardened sinner has his sin for a continual tormentor, and thinks he sees it every where before his eyes.

“ 3. ¶ For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.”

An unchaste person cannot suffer any charitable advice to disturb his pleasures. Such a one sacri-

fices every thing, be it ever so holy, to his passion. This is what darkens this prince's understanding, and stifles his sentiments of esteem for virtue, and every inclination to good; and it will produce the same effects in every person who gives himself up to it as he did.

“4. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.”

Here is an instance of zeal, fidelity, and courage, in an evangelical preacher. How few imitators has this example! Plainness, mildness, and modesty, are qualifications to be observed when we are obliged to reprove the great. The best service one can possibly do them is, clearly and plainly to lay before them, without any obscure or intricate discourse, what the law of God requires of them, and what it forbids.

“5. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.”

When only fear restrains the hand without changing the heart, the sin is committed already in the will, and will soon be produced into act. The people are better judges of holiness than the great. Miserable prince, who fears to offend his people, but is not afraid of offending his God! When a man resists sin by the help of human motives only, he cannot long defend himself.

“6. But when Herod's birth-day was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.”

The diversions of the world, feasting and dancing, are but too commonly the occasions of sin. After so fatal an example as this before us, can we in the

least doubt whether balls are not snares for souls, destructive of chastity and modesty, and a pernicious invention to awake and excite the passions? Unhappy mother! who exposes her daughter to the shipwreck which herself has suffered, and makes her the instrument of her passion and revenge, and the murderer of a saint! God grant that many mothers may take warning by this example, and have it before their eyes, when they are about to introduce their daughters at court!

“7. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.”

How dear does it cost a man to resign himself up to his passions! To satisfy one he frequently forgets all the rest. Sometimes war is waged for an inch of ground; at another time, by a foolish and rash promise, half a kingdom is given up to the will of a young coquette: there is nothing but contradiction to be seen in the passions of men. What strange kind of religion is here, for a man to remember God in the midst of sin, to no other end but to make his name subservient thereto by a scandalous oath, instead of thinking of him with a reverential awe, in order to renounce his passion!

“8. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist’s head in a charger.”

Impudence and cruelty are the common companions of impurity. How pernicious is the bad education of children, and what a train of evils does it generally draw after it! Men are apt to instruct one another as much and more in order to sin, than to piety and virtue. A wicked mother does more

easily inspire her children with her own corrupt inclinations and passions, than a virtuous one can communicate her good dispositions. How ingenious is carnal wisdom ! It knows how to make an unhappy use of the moments of an inflamed passion, and gives it no time to cool or to recover itself.

“ 9. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath’s sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.”

Religion often serves as a cloak for the greatest crimes. The men of the world sacrifice every thing to human considerations. When a man is blinded by passion, he suffers himself to be brought under the most unjust engagements upon the weakest reasons. By these he thinks to justify himself before men, and, on this very account, he becomes the more guilty before God. How fatal is this regard to men ! which plunges Herod in a crime so heinous, and hinders him from finding one faithful servant who might dissuade him from it, and improve the remorse of his conscience in favour of the innocent. This is the poison of the great, the tyrant of their flatterers, and the destruction of the best of men.

“ 10. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. 11. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.”

There is nothing more revengeful than a lascivious woman, when reprovèd and blamed. A preacher of the gospel has most to fear from this quarter. The first of the profession lost his life for the sake of truth and chastity, that others may learn from hence that all the reward they have to expect in this world,

for their faithfulness in the discharge of their office, is to suffer and die with and for Christ; and that it is in the behalf of truth and chastity that they have most occasion at court to show themselves the ministers of God.

“ 12. And his disciples came and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.”

We have a right, as Christians, to open our mind to Jesus Christ, and to comfort ourselves with him in our afflictions, and under the loss of our friends. St. John taught his disciples in his lifetime, that they must, on all occasions, go to Christ; and they profit by this instruction after his decease. This is to them the first fruit and advantage of his death.

SECT. II.—*The Miracle of the Five Loaves.*

“ 13. ¶ When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.”

A man ought prudently to withdraw himself from the rage of the wicked, and, by retiring, yield to the storm, according to this example of Christ, who did it only for the instruction of his ministers and servants. The farther he seems to remove from us, the more diligently ought we to endeavour to follow and to find him.

“ 14. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.”

How exceeding great must the tenderness and compassion of Christ's heart be towards diseased souls, when he discovers so much in relation to the

distempers of the body ! The sovereign Pastor shows not the least uneasiness, though the people will not let him enjoy that repose which he came on purpose to seek in the desert. That must be relinquished when necessity requires, and an opportunity of doing good presents itself. We ought to have abundance of pity and compassion on diseased souls, to anticipate them, and, as it were, go forth to meet their weaknesses.

“ 15. And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past ; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.”

The charity of the apostles is very mindful of the people's wants : a man is not worthy to succeed them if he do not imitate them. Human prudence should think only of human means, when God has not revealed any extraordinary design. He leaves the want to be taken notice of and considered, on purpose to render the miracle more illustrious and useful. How wonderful is the zeal of these poor people, who, through the comfort of being with Christ and enjoying his presence, are forgetful of their own necessities ! When the soul is either well replenished with God, or very hungry after his word, it is very little sensible of the needs and hunger of the body.

“ 16. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart ; give ye them to eat.”

A bishop and a priest seem obliged to attempt impossibilities, in order to feed the poor, and to serve and assist souls. It is not their own stock, but that of Christ alone, wherein they must expect to

find enough to give to the souls under their care. He who puts his trust in him, has a treasure which is inexhaustible, and always at hand.

“ 17. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.”

The acknowledgment of our own indigence is a great qualification for the divine gifts, and is itself one of them. What store soever of parts and knowledge a minister of Christ may think he possesses, yet he has still occasion for more.

“ 18. He said, Bring them hither to me.”

It is an instance of charity and obedience truly apostolical, for a man, where there is a very great necessity, to give his whole subsistence for the support of others, reserving nothing to himself but a dependence on the treasures of Providence. Let us carry our poverty to Christ, and it will become in his hands an abundance of wealth.

“ 19. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and, looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.”

This transaction is a representation of the consecration and communion of the eucharist. Humility, which is a principal disposition in order to approach it, is represented by the people's sitting down on the grass. It is just and reasonable to thank God for good things already received, before new are asked of him. The looking up to heaven is a token, both of acknowledgment of having received all from God, and of trust in expecting all from him. The blessing of Jesus Christ is powerful and efficacious. It

is to tempt God to depend upon receiving whatever is necessary to salvation immediately from Christ himself, because he gives it generally by the means of his ministers. How many graces pass through their hands! It is their sanctification, as well as that of others, if they know how to make a good use of this advantage.

“ 20. And they did all eat, and were filled : and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. 21. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.”

Little or much is the same thing in the hand of Jesus Christ. The more a man gives to the poor, the more he is enriched one way or another. The feeding and filling this people by the multiplication of loaves, is an emblem of the holy communion, which is the source of all graces and spiritual riches to those souls which are truly filled and nourished by it : but it is one thing to eat it, and another to be truly nourished thereby.

“ 22. ¶ And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.”

A person who is really humble does not continue willingly, or without necessity, in a place where he has done some remarkable good. That man runs the risk of losing his reward from God, who waits for the applause of men. How difficult is it to withstand this inclination, and what need is there of a very powerful and constraining grace in order to do it! Jesus Christ makes haste to send away his

disciples from a near occasion of vanity and complacency, for he fully knows the danger.

SECT. III.—*Prayer. Christ and Peter walking on the Sea.*

“ 23. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.”

Jesus parts from his disciples in order to give them some mortification, to keep them from adhering to him with too human an inclination on the account of this new miracle, and to suppress in them all vain joy, by their grief at his departure. The proper dispositions and circumstances for praying well, are, 1. Retirement from the world. 2. Elevation of heart. 3. Solitude. 4. The silence and quiet of the night.

“ 24. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.”

There is no manner of calm where Christ is not. This is a representation of the present life, which is a state of continual temptation. The church is like a ship in the midst of the sea of this world. Her ministers are continually exposed to the storms of persecution. He who is not prepared to be tossed with waves, knows not to what he is called. The contrary wind of persecution proves a favourable one in the end, which brings Jesus Christ along, and carries the ship safe into the haven.

“ 25. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.”

Christ comes to all his disciples in the time of trouble and temptation. He will not abandon his

church or his ministers, who are, by his appointment, and by their calling, exposed to the vexation of the world. He will work a miracle for their relief, rather than forsake them, when they put their whole trust and confidence in him. Here are three miracles in one:—1. He knows their distress. 2. He finds them out in the midst of darkness. 3. He walks upon the sea. Salvation is often near, when nothing but darkness and destruction are before us. Whoever, when he seems most forsaken, still hopes against all appearance, may truly say that he is not forsaken. It is by the favour of this kind of night that Jesus comes to us.

“26. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.”

The righteous are often troubled and startled at the effects of grace, and take them for illusions; as, on the contrary, these are frequently taken for the operations of God's Spirit. In all extraordinary cases, it is necessary to begin by fear and distrust, and then to consider and examine them. Humility is undaunted only in matters of faith, whereas presumption is bold in every thing which flatters its vanity.

“27. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.”

Christ, by his word and illumination, causes those who are his to discern what proceeds from the good Spirit. It is he who works in their heart that trust and confidence which he requires of them. His word in his church gives sufficient evidence of his presence. Speak, Lord, this powerful and effica-

cious word, "It is I," to the heart of such as still doubt, whether it is thou who speakest in thy Scriptures and church, who workest by thy grace and ministers, who art present in heaven and the holy eucharist; and their incredulity will forthwith be changed into faith.

"28. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water."

An imperfect faith requires signs and wonders; that which is perfect is satisfied with Christ's word alone. When he inspires this confidence in asking, it is because he designs to enable us to perform what he is about to command. We see, in this expression of St. Peter, the character of a generous soul ready to undertake any thing for the sake of God. This confidence proceeds from grace, when charity and humility are the foundation thereof.

"29. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus."

See here a fourth miracle, in the strange power of obedience to Christ's word. To walk on the water to go to Jesus, is to follow him, and to do his will, notwithstanding all troubles and losses, contradictions and persecutions of carnal men. Lord, say to my soul, Come; and it will then go to thee, and do whatever thou wouldst have it, without the least apprehension from the world.

"30. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and, beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me."

A persevering faith is very rare in the world. Upon every new danger and temptation, there is

new want of grace, and new necessity for prayer. It is of great advantage to a Christian, for God to make him sensible, from time to time, of his natural weakness and inability, that he may still have recourse to his Saviour. Temptation in the elect serves to awake their faith. Not one moment passes, but we have occasion to say, "Lord, save me."

"31. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Here are a fifth and sixth miracle: Jesus holds Peter up in the midst of the water; and knows the bottom of his heart. Let us take great care that we do not, like St. Peter, consider more the danger in which we are, than the power of Christ: such a piece of infidelity would make us deserve to be left entirely to ourselves. His word is our light; his hand, our strength. He permits his elect to fall, only in order to humble them; and by raising them up, to increase their faith and gratitude.

"32. And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased."

This is a seventh miracle. As soon as ever Christ enters into a heart, the wind of temptation, vanity, and uneasiness, ceases to disturb it. St. John mentions an eighth miracle on this occasion, (chap. vi. 21.) wherever Christ is, there is rest. The ship represents the church, which is the house of faith, of peace, and of God himself, but continually subject to be tossed to and fro in this world. Command the winds which toss it to cease, O my God: for thou hast full and absolute power over them.

“ 33. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”

A confidence to approach Christ, a spirit of adoration, and a confirmation in the belief of his divinity, are three effects, which the reading (as well as seeing) these miracles, ought to produce in us. These miracles alone, drew from those who were present at them a confession of Christ's divinity; and yet some presume to doubt of it now, after all the miracles of his life, death, and resurrection, after the wonders of seventeen ages, and the belief of all nations.

SECT. IV.—*The Hem of Christ's Garment.*

“ 34. ¶ And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. 35. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased;”

How many are there of those who seek God only for the sake of life, health, and temporal conveniences? Christ rejects none here, that he may teach his ministers to use their utmost endeavours to cure all sinners who apply themselves to them. Where can one find that zeal for the eternal salvation of the soul, which equals this diligence in seeking after the temporal health of the body? He who really loves his neighbour, never grows weary of exhorting sinners to go to Christ. We ought at least to present, and as it were lay them before God in prayer, when we have no other means of assisting them.

“ 36. And besought him that they might only

touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.”

What mighty influence must the grace and Spirit of Christ necessarily have on the mind, when the very hem of his garment has so much on the body? A man always finds much good by resigning himself up entirely to him. Every thing is sanctifying in him through the virtue of his divinity. Let us by a lively faith touch the mysteries of his mortal life, and that even to the least actions and circumstances of these mysteries wrought on earth: this is a source of a great many graces, and of salvation itself. How much more then is it so, to adore our blessed Saviour, and as it were to receive into our heart his body and blood, and to feed on him with faith, confidence, and humility?

CHAPTER XV.

SECT. I.—*Unwashed Hands. Human Traditions.*

“ 1. THEN came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, 2. Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.”

The fondness which men generally have for their own inventions, for ancient errors, and superstitious devotions, is a continual source of calumnies, rash judgments, persecutions against good men, and of great disturbances in the church. The disciples of Jesus Christ must expect to be treated as their Master was. Why, instead of praising God, and being edified by the labours of pastors, should a man be

intent only on discovering in them occasions to decry them and make them odious? It is because a Pharisee takes more pleasure in blaming others, than in amending himself.

“ 3. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition ?”

The pretender to zeal often prefers and opposes superstitious usages to the divine law, and the essential duties of Christianity. Strange depravity of men’s hearts, who think to honour God by transgressing his commandment, and doing their own will ! The world is full of zealots of this kind, who neglect their duty to follow human inventions. To oppose these abuses is to imitate Christ, provided a man do it with mildness and modesty ; not insulting, but instructing ; not merely to gain the victory, but to gain over souls to God. He who does it by his Spirit, still does it after this manner.

“ 4. For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother : and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.”

Obedience to the fathers and pastors of our souls, and to sovereign princes, is no less enjoined by this commandment, than piety towards the fathers of our flesh. Whoever pretends to release and withdraw us from their government and direction, is a seducer and transgressor of God’s law, how much holiness soever he may seem to have.

“ 5. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me,”

Religion often serves as a cloak for impiety, hard-

heartedness to the poor, and indifference towards parents. It is not uncommon for spiritual fathers to want almost necessaries, by reason that men, through a false devotion, or by an irregular charity, or at the importunity of some person, bestow that otherwise which is in justice due to them. We cannot possibly please God by gifts offered contrary to his law or his Spirit: it is sacrilege, to dedicate that to him which is taken away from the piety which nature inspires, and the divine law enjoins. This is, as much as in us lies, to invalidate our Saviour's declaration, that he accepts as done to himself the good which is done to the least of his disciples.

“ 6. And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.”

It is an infallible sign that our devotion is false, if it contradict any divine command or essential obligation: as it is certainly true, if it contribute to the observation of them. God grant there may not be many, who “ make the commandment of God of none effect,” by means of suggested wills and extorted donations, whereby they exclude their poor relations from inheritances belonging to them. Let us, with the greatest care and readiness, assist the poor, and especially our poor relations, since Christ himself assures us that it is a work preferable to all pious legacies and endowments.

“ 7. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8. This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.”

A known hypocrite deserves not in the least to be

used gently. Nothing is due to a reputation unjustly acquired. It is not evil-speaking, but an act of public charity, to expose the hypocrisy of a seducer. Outward worship is nothing without the inward. It is in the heart, and by the religion thereof, that God is honoured. True piety consists in the union of the heart with God: this is what we must labour to accomplish.

“ 9. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

This is a terrible sentence against those who introduce, and keep up in the church, devotions which are superstitious and altogether human; and who, by their excessive indulgence, flatter the sinner's sloth, keep him under a false peace and fatal security, amuse him, and make him neglect the laws of God. Such are no other than the devil's ministers and agents, to seduce those who have some principle of religion, and to render all their inclinations to piety ineffectual. Their good intention will not save them. In vain do they worship God, says Jesus Christ.

“ 10. ¶ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand :”

The teachers of the superstitious and pharisaical devotion are scarcely ever brought off from it. Jesus leaves them, and applies himself to the people, in order to undeceive them, by instructing them. We must imitate our blessed Saviour in this, using our endeavours to instruct the people in true piety, and to undeceive them as to the false.

“ 11. Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”

It is a rule of great importance, and full of instruction and comfort to souls which seek God, that no sin, no defilement can arise from any thing but the will; as nothing sanctifies us but what comes from the heart. Whatever proceeds from the concupiscence of the heart, is evil; and whatever does not, cannot but be good. It is not that which enters into the mouth, which defiles even him who sins in eating and drinking to excess, or contrary to the church's injunction; but the will and disposition of the heart, which inclines him to transgress the divine law, or that of the church.

SECT. II.—*Giving offence to Pharisees not to be regarded. Blind guides. What defileth a man.*

“ 12. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?”

Truth offends those who have the spirit of a Pharisee. One can scarcely ever touch upon the passions of men, without provoking them. The proud person will neither be humbled for his faults, nor receive instruction to amend them, nor suffer others to be taught those truths which he does not like himself. This is the scandal or offence proper to a Pharisee, which we must neglect and despise.

“ 13. But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.”

That which is not of God, cannot stand and continue. The wicked are of no account in his sight. They are the thorns and briers of his field, as well as their maxims, traditions, and customs. Whoever

has not the spirit of children, which is love, is no plant of the heavenly Father's planting.

“ 14. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”

Wo to blind guides, who damn themselves and those whom they lead. What is such a blind guide as this, but one who is so fond of human traditions, external devotions, and superficial performances, that they become, even contrary to his intention, a hinderance to the observation of God's law? The blindness which proceeds from pride, envy, and obstinacy, is the most dangerous and damnable.

“ 15. Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. 16. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?”

Good God! how many are there who pass for spiritual, and who seem to have studied a long time in the school of Christ, to whom the purity of his worship and religion is still a perfect riddle and parable! The true knowledge of the spirit of the gospel, is a thing more rare and uncommon than we imagine among the generality of Christians, and even of the learned.

“ 17. Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? 18. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.”

How necessary is it to watch over the heart, since that moves the tongue, and is the fountain of all human corruption! It is according to what we are in the inmost recesses of the heart, that we are either

righteous or wicked, that we belong either to God or the world, either to Christ or the devil; and it is according to the state and condition of our will, that we shall be judged. The regulation of this heart, and the reformation of this will, demand our chiefest care: the rest follows their disposition. Lord, from thee I expect to receive this vigilance and application. Thou alone art the light, the strength, and the life of my heart.

“ 19. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:”

Man has in his heart the principle and seed of all kinds of sin; and he finds only in the heart of Jesus Christ the principle of the contrary virtues. Of himself, he is nothing but a sinner; by grace and mercy he becomes righteous. Yes, O my God, whatever good I do, and whatever evil I avoid, it is entirely owing to thee alone.

“ 20. These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”

Christian liberty in external things has no bounds or limits, but the law of God, the ordinances of the church, and the edification of our neighbour: but we must take care not to abuse this liberty, and make it an occasion of licentiousness. Abundance of persons would make a scruple of going to the communion without having washed their hands, who make none at all of doing it without having washed their conscience from habits of vanity, evil-speaking, luxury, wantonness, &c. If a man do not chiefly mind the spirit of religion, he disorders and confounds every thing in it: he makes religious actions of such

as are common and indifferent; and that which is most sacred and holy, he performs out of custom, and as it were by rote, traffics with it, makes it subservient to his passions and interest, and abuses it a thousand other ways.

SECT. III.—*The Woman of Canaan.*

“ 21. ¶ Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.”

This journey of our blessed Saviour seems to be taken without any particular design; and perhaps it was only for the sake of this one soul, since he leaves the place as soon as ever he has healed it. So wonderful is the goodness and kindness of the Son of God towards souls! One alone ought to be dear to a true pastor, and deserves his whole care and application, how despicable soever it may appear.

“ 22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.”

We see here in this woman the picture of a sinner, deeply sensible of the misery of his soul, and truly penitent. Such a one ought to begin, by removing from the occasions of sin, by turning toward his Saviour, putting his whole trust in him, and praying heartily to him. How proper is this prayer for a penitent! It is short, humble, full of faith, fervent, respectful, rational, relying only upon God's mercy, modest, persevering, not presuming to prescribe to God, &c. Can he, who looks upon himself as a slave of the devil, beg with too much earnestness to be delivered?

“ 23. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away ; for she crieth after us.”

This woman's faith first causes her to pray, and then her prayer, adding strength to her faith, makes her capable of undergoing the trial of a slighting silence, an express refusal, and a treatment in appearance somewhat hard and injurious. It is such a faith as this, which should make us cry incessantly after our deliverer. The sinner does well to apprehend his own unworthiness.

“ 24. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Jesus Christ being promised only to the Jews, for the time of his mortal life, and being their proper apostle, it is with some difficulty that he extends his mission to others. How edifying is this reservedness; and how commendable is it, for a man to imitate it, by confining himself as much as possible within the limits of his calling! A pastor ought by no means to apply himself out of self-love to such souls as belong to God already, neglecting to seek after the lost sheep, which cannot of themselves return into the way. This is a conduct to be dreaded.

“ 25. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.”

Let us never cease to pray, and to humble ourselves before God, though he seem to despise our humility, and to reject our prayers. A true penitent is not discouraged by the severity which God shows towards him; he knows that he deserves it, and that it is a means of making some atonement to his justice. The more submissive he is to the di-

vine pleasure, the nearer does his faith bring him to God, humbles him the more in his sight, and inspires him with greater confidence to make his addresses to, and to expect assistance from him. According as these virtues increase in a soul, the spirit of repentance grows and increases in it.

“ 26. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.”

Favours are for children, and love only renders us such. It is through mercy that God makes the sinner sensible from whence he is fallen, what he is become, and to what he should aspire. Jesus instructs by humbling: his repulses speak to those who can understand their language. It is thou thyself, O Jesus, who art the children’s bread; and who turnest even dogs into children of God, that thou mayest feed them with thyself. I know indeed my own misery and unworthiness, but I know also thy mercy, and the power of thy grace.

“ 27. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.”

True faith consents to all the denials and severities which come from God, but at the same time makes use of them to raise, unite, and fasten itself more strongly to him. When a man sincerely desires to be saved, he is discouraged by no difficulties, but, on the contrary, changes even obstacles into means. God defers sometimes to show mercy, on purpose by delay to increase desire; by desire, hope; by hope, the fervency of prayer; and by prayer, humility. God loves the earnestness and importunity of prayer; and at length grants every thing to a per-

severing hope, which grows the stronger by being humbled and refused.

“ 28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

Faith remains victorious at the last, triumphs, as it were, over God himself, and, by a holy violence, wrests out of his hands what he seemed determined not to bestow. Jesus admires this faith, to the end that we may admire and imitate it, and may reap the same fruits and advantages from it. O woman, great indeed is thy faith! but, O my God, much greater is thy mercy! because this great faith is the gift thereof. Faith is the foundation of the whole Christian building; but the foundation, as well as the building, is the work of God. Faith, and the desire to belong entirely to God, increase equally together in a penitent's heart, and his cure is answerable to them both. This is wrought in a moment, but the sinner is not so suddenly prepared for it.

SECT. IV.—*Many healed. The Miracle of the Seven Loaves.*

“ 29. ¶ And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. 30. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, and he healed them;”

That which we have here to imitate, is to follow

Christ up into the mountain, by raising our minds to him in prayer, and humbly representing at his feet our inability to go to him, to know him, to pray to him, and to act for him. Shall Christians then be less eager and forward to go to him, on the account of the diseases of their souls, than these Jews for those of their bodies? Let us but love eternal life, as much as they did the present, and we shall then be willing to spare our pains no more than they. Lord, God, and Saviour of my heart, give me feet, eyes, tongue, and health of heart, that I may run after thee, know thee, praise thee, worship thee, and love thee.

“ 31. Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.”

It is a great matter for a man to be very careful to ascribe to God all the graces, talents, and degrees of knowledge which he enjoys, and to thank him for them. Blessed be thou, O my God, for having loosed the tongue of so many sinners, to confess their sins; restored their feet, to walk in thy ways; and opened their eyes, to see and know thy truth. Complete these miracles of thy grace in me. Perform them in all those who are still in darkness and corruption.

“ 32. ¶ Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.”

There are few so faithful in seeking and follow-

ing Christ, as to forget even the necessaries of life. This is peculiar to his true disciples. He is mindful of their wants himself, when they seek before all things the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Jesus Christ, his grace, his word, and his body, are the true bread, without which they would find themselves without strength, and faint in the way to heaven. He does not think of feeding, till after he has healed them; and they submit themselves to his guidance and direction, without asking any thing but health and instruction. The conduct of Christ, and the behaviour of this people, are the pattern of a wise spiritual director, and of a well-disposed penitent. In the one, there must be tenderness, compassion, and mindfulness of what is wanting; in the other, confidence, docility, patience, and perseverance.

“ 33. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?”

Human foresight is very short even in the saints; it must be supplied by faith. It is the way of the divine wisdom to make men thoroughly perceive the greatness of their want, and the necessity of extraordinary succour, before it vouchsafes to afford it. The world is a wilderness, where nothing is capable of satisfying the heart of man, except Jesus Christ. No, Lord, we shall never fear dying of hunger here, so long as by our faith we can seek, find, possess, and feed upon thee.

“ 34. And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.”

Jesus does not inquire in order to be informed, but to make the necessity more apparent. It is a gift of God to reflect upon our own indigence; it is a greater, thoroughly to understand it, to be convinced of it, to be humbled by it, and to value the grace of our blessed Saviour the more on this account. What have we of ourselves to sustain and feed us in this life? What have we not by and in thee, O Jesus, and in thy church; while those who are out of it perish with hunger?

“ 35. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.”

Every one of us ought to receive the gifts of God in humiliation of heart, and in the repose, at least, of inward retirement. Humility is a principal qualification for the receiving Christ worthily. He here gives us a representation of it.

“ 36. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.”

We must return thanks to God, not only when we receive his gifts ourselves, but also when we distribute them to others. God alone gives without receiving; Jesus Christ himself gives thanks to his Father, because the human nature, even in the only Son of God, has nothing but what it received. The supreme Pastor authorizes inferior pastors, and all the hierarchical subordination. It is by their ministry and conveyance that he bestows his graces; and whereby, according to his appointment, instruction and the sacraments are to be received. They have nothing to confer but what comes from him. He it is who breaks the bread of the word, who gives

the true sense of it, and all the dispositions and qualifications which are necessary to our improvement by his other gifts; but this he does by the ministry of the pastors of his church.

“ 37. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.”

We are not truly filled but only when God himself feeds us. It is not enough barely to eat—it is necessary also to be filled. Thou knowest, O my God, how very few there are who are fed and filled with thy word, and with the flesh and blood of thy sacrifice, though all truly eat at thy table (that which is a lively representation of) the latter, and read the former in thy Scriptures! Suffer not this abuse in me. The more we communicate the gifts of God to our neighbour, the more they abound in ourselves. To distribute and disperse by charity, our spiritual as well as temporal goods, is to sow in order to reap.

“ 38. And they that did eat were four thousand men, besides women and children.”

Christ often gives to the charity which men have for the poor, the grace of multiplying their alms. When a man depends upon Providence, which sees and can do all things, he is not in the least afraid that his stock will be exhausted by the multitude of the poor, and of their wants, either bodily or spiritual. Let masters of families learn from this place to trust to Providence, how numerous soever their families may be.

“ 39. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.”

It is neither inconstancy nor curiosity which makes

Christ remove from one region to another, but humility, charity, and the appointment of God his Father. It is an action worthy of a true disciple of Christ, to withdraw from a place where he has done some remarkable good, in order to go and do more in one where he is not known.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECT. I.—*A Sign desired and refused.*

“ 1. THE Pharisees also, with the Sadducees, came, and, tempting, desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven.”

Wicked men and heretics, who are at so little agreement among themselves, unite always in opposing Jesus Christ, his church, or his truth. Strange is the malignity of envy, which would engage virtuous persons in good works on purpose to take occasion, even from thence, to asperse them! It is an irregularity and corruption which is but too common, for men not to apply themselves to consider and observe the wonders of God and the miracles of Christ, and yet to have the presumption to desire more! This is a piece of ingratitude; and nothing deserves more to be rejected of God than the desires and prayers of the ungrateful.

“ 2. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather; for the sky is red: 3. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day; for the sky is red and lowering.”

Man is too curious about natural, and too little concerned about supernatural things; and yet, upon these latter, eternal salvation depends!

“ — O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? 4. A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.”

Man has abundance of application and foresight as to his temporal affairs—none as to his salvation! His curiosity to discern human events is very great, but he is not at all curious in observing divine prophecies, and the times appointed for the accomplishment of the mysteries of salvation! God forsakes with scorn the double and dissembling soul, but takes pleasure in instructing the simple and sincere. Christ had wrought miracles enough to prove his mission and divinity: that of his resurrection, typified in Jonas, was the only one remaining necessary, to take away the scandal of his cross and death, to fulfil and justify the Scriptures, and to establish the Christian religion—of which Jesus raised from the dead is the eternal Priest and the Sacrifice, now glorified, and become immortal in heaven.

SECT. II.—*The Leaven of Doctrine. The Apostles reproved.*

“ 5. ¶ And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. 6. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”

Happy he, who is so intent on following Christ, as to forget even his bodily necessities. When we have once tasted him, we should not suffer ourselves

to be much employed about earthly things. How few are there who take care to keep themselves entirely free from the pride, envy, and hypocrisy of the Pharisees! It is against these spiritual and contagious vices that those ought particularly to guard, who pass for learned, devout, and spiritual, and for persons of an austere and singular life. Unmindfulness of the other life and eternal salvation, is the leaven of the Sadducees, who believed neither the immortality of the soul, nor the resurrection of the body. The expectation of eternal happiness, humility, and Christian simplicity, are the leaven of Jesus Christ, opposed to that of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Fill us with this, O Lord, out of thy fulness!

“7. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.”

How great is the wretchedness of man, who is at all times sooner sensible of bodily wants than of those of the soul! How great the infirmity and weakness of those whom the Holy Ghost had not yet renewed, to fear wanting bread, after the two late miracles of the five thousand fed with five barley loaves, and the four thousand fed with seven—and to imagine they could be defiled by material leaven, when they had been so particularly instructed concerning the things which could alone defile a man! These defects in the apostles themselves, plainly show the universal necessity of God’s grace, in order to understand, retain, love, and practise his instructions.

“8. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?”

Want of faith is the cause of men being wholly

taken up about the wants of the body, and the source of most of their vices. As Jesus, among all the virtues, praises faith most frequently, so he very often blames the weakness of it; because a lively faith draws after it all the rest, and because nothing can supply the defect of it.

“ 9. Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? 10. Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?”

Men easily forget the divine benefits. If they are so forgetful of such as respect the body, notwithstanding the quick sense they have of its wants, how much more apt are they to forget such as respect the soul! They who are the ministers of these, receive great advantage from them, if they discharge their ministry as they ought. They sanctify themselves whilst they sanctify others; and are fed and nourished by those truths which they dispense to them. Jesus, in providing for the present needs of the people, provides also for the future needs of his disciples. This condemns those who grudge what is necessary to pastors and ministers of the word.

“ 11. How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?”

With how much difficulty do the sons of Adam apply their minds to heavenly things, and how hardly do they understand them? God permits this dimness and inadvertency in the first pastors, that they may not forget that light and attention are his gifts,

that they may have compassion and patience towards those who have not yet received them, and teach them to beg them of him as matters of pure grace and favour.

“12. Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”

God only knows how to reprove in such a manner as to open the eyes. A loose kind of morality is a sort of leaven, which, proceeding from the corruption of the heart, depraves and corrupts a whole people, and diffuses itself every where in a little time. Here are two sects, and both opposite to the Christian morality: the one of the Pharisees, who, minding only external performances, and such things as draw after them esteem and reputation, destroy charity and humility, which are the very soul of religion: the other of the Sadducees, who, believing no other felicity but what depends upon the good things of this life, become the flatterers and slaves of those who can bestow them, and in whose hands worldly prosperity is chiefly lodged. Would to God that these sects were expired and dead with the Pharisees and Sadducees, and that we did not sometimes see them revived and re-united among Christians!

SECT. III.—*The Confession of St. Peter.*

“13. ¶ When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?”

Christ, by taking the mean and humble appellation of “Son of man,” confounds the vanity of men,

who are so apt to be puffed up with their great titles. It is neither out of idleness, curiosity, nor pride, that he inquires concerning what the world says of him, but through a necessity of instructing his disciples, and obviating false reports. It is useful for pastors to know the false notions of religion which are spread among the people, that they may be able to put a stop to them. Ought not Christians to imitate their Master, who concerns not himself about the news of the world, but only so far as it relates to his ministry and to religion?

“ 14. And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.”

Thus an irregular affection divides the minds of men in favour sometimes of one person, sometimes of another. It is another corruption to attribute to saints prerogatives which belong only to Christ. Men are always mistaken and lose their way, when, in discoursing on religious subjects, they follow the conjectures of human reason, instead of being guided by the word of God, and the doctrine of the church. Truth is but one—error is infinite.

“ 15. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?”

Jesus vouchsafes not to regard popular opinions. He teaches us to look for the doctrine of the church, not in the sentiments of private men, but in the faith of the chief pastors.

“ 16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

St. Peter answers for and in the name of all. Only one speaks, to denote the unity of the faith

and of the apostleship, as well as of the church and of the person of Jesus Christ. This would have been nothing new, if he had not been the Son of God by nature, but only by adoption—nothing extraordinary, if he had not been the Christ, that is, anointed with the divinity itself, but only with grace, like other kings, priests, and prophets. I adore and confess thee, O Jesus, as true God and true man, Son of God and Son of man, conserving in the unity of thy divine person the properties of thy two natures! Christ is the Son of the living God—Christians are the children of a dying God!

“ 17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

The saving knowledge of Christ can come only from God. A man must not cease to beg it of him, how knowing soever he may be. No advantages of birth, nor natural talents, nor wealth, nor power, nor honours, compose the happiness of man; but the riches of grace, and the love whereby the Father chose us from all eternity, in order to sanctify and glorify us in his only Son, by the means of faith. Blessed is he who spends his life, not in the pursuit of such knowledge as flesh and blood can bestow, but in the study and love of Jesus Christ!

“ 18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

This particular application to St. Peter is the reward of his faith. His power, strength, and apostolical grace in founding the church, is included in

his name. This he receives from Christ, to show that he receives the other also from him. The church is immoveable and eternal, because the faith which is the foundation of it is firm and unchangeable.

“ 19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

The power to remit all sins is given to the church, to show that this power is not to be found out of the unity of the church. This power is abused when it is used contrary to the design of Christ who gave it. As nothing but sin shuts the kingdom of heaven against men, so by remission of sin it is opened to them. The church binds by excommunication, and by the refusal or delay of absolution; and God ratifies in heaven the judgment of his ministers on earth, when they judge according to the rules prescribed by his word. God preserve us from such cowardly or ignorant ministers, as know not what it is to bind sinners!

SECT. IV.—*Peter rebuked.*

“ 20. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.”

This was the time of Christ's mission to the Jews. None could enter into it until after his death and resurrection, and the mission of the Holy Ghost. It was necessary that he should be sacrificed for the truth, before men could expose themselves to be sacrificed for the sake thereof. Let us learn from hence, not to discover to the world the great truths of religion, except with prudence, and according to the direction of God.

“21. ¶ From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”

Christ's death without the belief of his divinity, is a matter of scandal and offence. Three sorts of persons generally persecute Christ: the rich of the world, covetous or ambitious ecclesiastics, and conceited scholars. The whole knowledge of Jesus Christ is comprehended under his life of sufferings, his sacrifice on the cross, and his life restored to him again. The spirit of Christianity disposes a man to bear life with patience, to receive death with joy, and with faith to expect the resurrection, and the life of the world to come.

“22. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”

Man, blind as he is, is always ready to find fault with the conduct of God, and to judge of his ways and designs. Human reason cannot comprehend that it is necessary to be crucified in this world; much less can it reconcile the belief of Christ's incarnation and divinity with his sufferings and death. The more what he has done and suffered for us is above the reach of our understanding, the more adorable also is his wisdom and love; and the more unbounded, and without reserve, ought our gratitude and fidelity to be.

“23. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

Whoever is against the cross of Christ becomes his enemy. Nothing was in appearance more reasonable, than these human sentiments; but how contrary are they to those of faith! Peter, who but this moment was blessed and enlightened by God, falls back on a sudden into the darkness of human reason, and becomes an adversary and an offence to Jesus Christ himself. Let us from hence learn the difference which there is betwixt man, when assisted by grace, and when left to himself. Let us continue humble under that light and strength which may be taken from us in a moment. Let us look upon every person whatever as our enemy, who attempts to divert us from the ways of God. False friendship and carnal tenderness can inspire us with none but human affections, and such as are contrary to the love of mortification and the cross.

SECT. V.—*The Christian Life.*

“ 24. ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

The principles of the Christian life are—First, To have a sincere desire to belong to Christ. Secondly, To renounce the inclinations of self-love. Thirdly, To embrace the condition which God has appointed for us, to perform the obligations of it, and to undergo the troubles which we meet with in it, and the contradictions and oppositions of men. Fourthly, To do all in the spirit of Christ, and to imitate him. Abundance of people glory in professing to follow him, but very few comply with what he requires in order thereto. A man, when full of

himself and void of God, is but a burden to himself; whereas he is in a condition to walk very fast toward heaven, when he is filled with God, and has taken up the cross of Christ. This is a paradox, which to the spirit of man is incomprehensible; but thine, O Jesus, makes thy true disciples easily comprehend, love, and put it in practice.

“25. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

A fifth principle of the Christian life is, to wean ourselves from the love of the present life and of all the conveniencies of it. A sixth is, to have eternity always before our eyes. The great occasion of the loss of souls is, that men are mindful only of this life, and wholly taken up with the care how to enjoy it in honour, convenience, and abundance. That man who neglects all these things, and who, for thy sake, O my Saviour, despises life itself, is he who shall certainly find it.

“26. For 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?”

A seventh principle is, to consider frequently that all things are unprofitable to one who loses his own soul. An eighth, that this loss is eternally irreparable. At the time of death, there is nothing in the world which a man would not willingly give for salvation; during life and health, he does not so much as think of it. Whilst he is able, he will do nothing at all; and he would fain do all, when he is no longer able to do any thing. What strange delusion is this! Will mankind never recover from it, after so many fatal examples?

“ 27. For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”

A ninth principle of the Christian life is, frequently to exercise our faith upon the last judgment; and to beseech God to give us a salutary dread and apprehension of it. That we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, follow Christ, and be ready to lose our lives for his sake, are not matters of bare advice or counsel, but an indispensable law; since, according to the performance or omission of these works we shall be judged. Those who will not acknowledge the necessity of works, shall find it at that dreadful tribunal. The glorious coming of Christ at the end of the world, is a truth in religion generally known; yet that whereon men do not sufficiently exercise their faith, their fear, and their love.

“ 28. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

In the last place, a tenth principle of the Christian life is, to encourage ourselves with the hope and expectation of that glory which Christ has prepared for those who suffer with and for him. A specimen of this was seen by three apostles on the holy mountain; and every one of them beheld him glorious after his resurrection: but that which we all see of his glory in the Scriptures, and of the reign of his Spirit in the world, is more certain than any other knowledge, even than that which the apostles had at his transfiguration.

CHAPTER XVII.

SECT. I.—*The Transfiguration of Christ. St. John Baptist called Elias.*

“ 1. AND after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,”

Jesus discovers his glory on Mount Tabor, to none but those whom he designs should be witnesses of his agonies on the Mount of Olives. Few understand these mysteries by a lively and true Christian faith. In order so to do, and to live by the belief of them, it is necessary for a man to withdraw from the world, to raise himself from the earth by prayer, and to follow Christ in imitating his example. God advances whom he thinks fit to extraordinary favours. He makes a distinction even among the apostles as to these, to show that he is master of his own gifts, and that no one ought to be jealous of the advantages of his colleagues.

“ 2. And was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.”

Christ prepares his disciples for sufferings, and kindles in them the desire of eternal happiness, by giving them proper consolations, and foretastes of the beatific vision. He takes all sorts of appearances, and enters into all conditions for the good of his church, on purpose to teach the most exalted pastors to regulate their conduct, and to fashion their external behaviour, so as may best answer the occa-

sions of the faithful, and the edification of their neighbour. He makes even the senses serviceable to faith, though they seem quite contrary thereto: and this is what we ought to endeavour at in the instructions which we are obliged to give others. This brightness of glory, wherein Christ appears to these three apostles, confirms the confession which St. Peter made of his divinity, fortifies this apostle against the trouble which the prediction of his sufferings gave him, and encourages all Christians to the practice of the doctrines of self-denial and the cross.

“3. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.”

The law and the prophets give witness to Christ, and scarcely speak but of him: he who seeks any other thing therein, besides the Son of God and his church, reads them not like a Christian. In the prophetic and figurative parts of the Scripture, we see nothing worthy of God, unless we consider them together with Christ, and behold him represented in those shadows.

“4. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”

Let us not set our hearts upon outward comforts: the sweetness of them is apt to make men forget the necessity of passing through sufferings in their way to heaven. We are disposed to lay hold of the first object which presents itself, when it flatters our inclination towards ease and pleasure. But we ought still to mistrust it, and give ourselves time to reflect, that we may see whether it agree with the rule of

our duties, and with the will and designs of God concerning us. If this small drop of vision put St. Peter into an ecstasy; my God, what effect will that torrent of delights have with which thou wilt fill, and, as it were, inebriate thy elect!

“ 5. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”

Let us receive, with a particular respect, that which the Father himself declares to us concerning his Son. According to this gospel of the eternal Father, we must believe in Jesus Christ as Son of God, and be persuaded that the Father loves no person, nor is pleased with any thing, but in his Son; and we must attentively hear him as our Master and our law. See here that which God does continually in the hearts of men. To enlighten them, to make them fruitful in good works, to extinguish or allay the heat of concupiscence; these are so many effects of the grace of Christ, denoted by the bright cloud; and which neither the letter of the law, nor the shadows of sacrifices, nor the preaching of the prophets, were able to produce. Jesus Christ alone does it, by speaking to the heart; of which he only is the Master and Instructor. He alone, therefore, can make it hear effectually, so as to obey, love, follow, and imitate him. Speak, Lord, to my heart; but speak with authority, as the only Son of God, as the personal truth, and the principle of that love which existed from all eternity.

“ 6. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7. And Jesus

came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.”

Great and extraordinary truths fill the mind at first with fear. Jesus Christ dispels it, by touching us with the internal hand of his grace, giving us the love and practice of these truths, and removing every thing but himself from before our eyes. Earth is not the place for large communications from God: man, encumbered with flesh, is incapable either of seeing or understanding the wonders of eternity. Let us be content to adore them by the light of faith, and in the eternal Word, veiled and overshadowed with the cloud of our flesh.

“ 9. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.”

Thus God frequently casts into the heart, truths which, like seeds sown late, produce only backward fruits. We must not neglect to sow the heart of sinners, though it seem as if it were dead, and like ground in the winter season; the spring of grace, and time of resurrection, may possibly come even for such. There is a time to live retired, and a time to appear in the world; a time to make known the greatest truths, and a time to conceal them: a prudent pastor knows how to adapt himself to the capacity of the weak.

“ 10. ¶ And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?”

The wit of man still discovers some contradiction in the mysteries of religion; a tractable disciple hum-

bly desires that instruction which he needs. Those teachers, who have not the true knowledge of the Scriptures, nor the Spirit of God to understand them, are good for nothing but to perplex those whom they should instruct, and prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ. To lull sinners asleep, persuading them that the time of death, which to every one is the second coming of Christ, is yet at a great distance, is full as dangerous, as it was to believe that the time of his first appearance was not come, as the doctors of the law did, confounding the one with the other.

“ 11. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.”

It is out of mercy that Christ will have harbingers, or forerunners. God does not intend to surprise but to awaken sinners. All preachers of repentance are the harbingers of Jesus Christ. It is by means of this, that, like John and Elias, they labour to restore all things, in reclaiming and bringing sinners back to the obedience and piety of the fathers of their faith.

“ 12. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed: likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. 13. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.”

There is no age, no time, in which there does not arise some Elias, some imitator of his zeal, to exclaim and inveigh against the violation of God's law and the profaners of his worship, to preach repentance to sinners and to publish the truth to the

great. Wo to those who know him not, who stop their ears, and who are the occasion of his sufferings. To suffer, is the lot and portion of Jesus Christ and his ministers. It is good to look upon every preacher as our Elias, as the last whom God designs to send to proclaim to us the coming of Christ, and to excite us to prepare his way by repentance.

SECT. II.—*The Lunatic cured. The Power of Faith; of Prayer and Fasting.*

“ 14. ¶ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, 15. Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for oft-times he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.”

The rage and power of the devil against man, in consequence of sin, is expressed by the sad usage which this lunatic suffers. The devil, in bodily possessions as well as spiritual possessions, knows how to take advantage of the constitution, and of natural causes and dispositions, in order to conceal himself. Some of these are as contrary as fire and water. Would to God the sinner were as thoroughly sensible of the misery of his soul, and the spiritual illusions of the devil, as this father is of those under which his son labours. See here the first steps toward conversion; to approach Christ, to humble ourselves in his presence, earnestly to pray to him, and with confidence to lay our misery before him.

“ 16. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.”

God often permits his ministers to be unsuccess-

ful in the cure of souls, both through a just judgment on the latter, and that he may teach the former to expect all from Christ, and to refer their good success to him; that he may purify their hearts by shame and humiliation, and oblige them to pray more frequently, to know, and to distrust themselves.

“ 17. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me.”

Nothing raises more indignation in Christ, than a distrust of his goodness and power in healing our diseases. Alas! how many are there, who present themselves before the ministers of the church, and even at the sacrament, without receiving the cure of their souls, through the bad disposition of their heart, which keeps Christ at a distance, because they come thither without faith, and with an irregular intention. Let us be sure not to imagine, that these words of Christ betray any impatience in him, but, on the contrary, let us adore therein his long and unwearied patience towards sinners. Harshness is only in his words, gentleness is in his heart.

“ 18. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.”

Jesus Christ is the only person whom the devil cannot resist. There are some souls whose cure God reserves to himself alone, and to whom all the application of his ministers appears to be utterly ineffectual. He sometimes does all without them, to the end that they may know that they never do any thing without him. It is a matter of the great-

est importance for us, to place our trust and confidence, not in the minister, but in Jesus Christ, who, by the sole motion of his will, cures in an instant.

“ 19. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?”

When we find our endeavours, with respect to some souls, ineffectual, we ought to humble ourselves, and to examine before God in prayer, what obstacles there may be, on our part, to his grace and mercy towards them. Far be from us the pride of those who never impute to themselves the faults and unfruitfulness of their ministry.

“ 20. And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”

There are perhaps but few ministers of Christ, to whom, upon their addresses to him in prayer, he might not answer after the same manner—that the weakness of their faith is a hinderance to the conversion and improvement of souls. A faith, which has a perfect confidence without any presumption, a holy boldness and liveliness, not weakened by a mistaken humility, and which can discern when it is proper to desire and expect a miracle, is such a thing as is not at all common. To remove pride out of a sinner's heart, is to remove a mountain. This can be the work only of a great faith; and this faith must be, at the same time, both the fruit and the seed of many prayers, and of a penitential life.

“ 21. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”

In order to subdue evil habits, we must humble the mind by prayer, and mortify the flesh by fasting. This is the duty of the minister as well as of the penitent. He has no faith at all, if it do not make him have recourse to prayer and mortification, which are the natural effects thereof. Faith causes a man to pray, by making him sensible of his inability as to all goodness, without the assistance of grace; it disposes him to lead a mortified life, by showing the unworthiness both of the sinner and the minister.

SECT. III.—*The Passion foretold. Christ pays Tribute.*

“ 22. ¶ And, while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men; 23. And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.”

What will become of the man who shall fall into the hands of the living God, if God suffers so much by falling into the hands of mortal men! Men apply themselves very imperfectly to the consideration of the mysteries of salvation, and are affected with them after too natural a manner. They are unduly afflicted at the death of Christ, and rejoice not at his resurrection as they ought: because death is an approaching and natural evil; and the resurrection, a mystery of faith. The death of Jesus Christ should humble the sinner, but it should also fill him with confidence and joy. We ought to humble ourselves, for being so miserable that nothing but the death of God could save us; and to rejoice, that the mercy of

God is so great towards us that he refused not to be born and to die for us.

“ 24. ¶ And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute-money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?”

The divinity of Jesus Christ, stooping thus low, confounds the vanity and eagerness of men in defence of their rights. He refuses no kind of dependence and submission, that he may make the sinner like it, who has always so great an aversion thereto.

“ 25. He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? 26. Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.”

Christ does not insist upon his rights as to external and temporal things, but only in secret, and amongst his apostles. The clergy likewise, after his example, should not speak too frequently to secular persons, concerning this kind of privileges annexed to their state; nor the faithful, concerning Christian and evangelical liberty, which dispenses not with external laws. The Son of God, the Lord of the temple, and the true temple of God, could not be obliged to pay a tribute imposed by God's command, for the use and service of the figurative temple. To make our prerogatives known, is not always vanity; nor to take proper measures of receding from them, without any prejudice to our right.

“ 27. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and

take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.”

It is the duty of charity, still to prevent the occasions of scandal or offence. Let us admire and adore the poverty of Christ in not having the value of four drachms; his obedience and humility in paying them, though not due; his charity in avoiding, even by an extraordinary means, that which might have given offence to the weak; and his greatness under his humiliation, in paying tribute, but paying it as God, by an act of sovereign power. They are far from imitating Christ, who disturb the peace, offend the weak, neglect the care of souls, rise up against the secular powers, &c. to secure some little temporal advantage, and to maintain some external prerogatives. Liberty and subjection agree very well together in a Christian, who by faith is entirely free in respect of all things present, and becomes subject to every creature by charity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SECT. I.—*Christ teaches to be humble, and to become a child.*

“ 1. AT the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

How great and common a misfortune is it, for men to think of nothing but their own greatness, and how to raise themselves above others! Ambi-

tion is no less a vice of ecclesiastical than of secular persons. If the apostles, who had forsaken all, and who had so long had the instructions and example of Christ before their eyes, were, notwithstanding, subject thereto, who ought not to be afraid? This passion is sometimes more violent, and always more scandalous and offensive, in the kingdom of humility, than in the world, which is the kingdom of pride.

“ 2. And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,”

It is a duty of the pastoral charity to adapt ourselves to the capacity of the weak, when we instruct them. Jesus Christ does not here propose himself, but a little child, for a pattern of humility. It is the business of our faith to raise our minds to that divine child, who is free from the defects of the children of Adam, and who has all the perfections of the only Son of God.

“ 3. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

He who still continues under his disorderly habits, and who, instead of abasing and humbling himself, thinks of nothing but becoming greater than he is; this person certainly is not in the way of salvation. Either Christ is not truth itself, or, without a true conversion and humility, there is not the least hope of any place in heaven. There are but too many who are children in inconstancy, affection to sensible things, and love of toys; but how few are such in innocency, simplicity, ignorance of evil, docility, &c.

“ 4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

What is it to be an evangelical child, but to be pure in mind and body, to wish ill to none, to be ready to do good to all, and to have no projects for advancement, riches, honours, fortune, &c.? This Christian childhood will make us great in the kingdom of heaven. How low do we debase ourselves, in order to be great on earth! To be great in heaven, how little do we do! The humility which pleases God is that of choice or of acceptance, not a natural meanness of heart and spirit. The first place is promised to that virtue which seems the most easy, and to the exercise of which external things are least needful: for this reason, we are certainly the less to be excused if we want it.

“ 5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.”

Jesus Christ is received in the persons of the poor, but especially of such as are good and virtuous. In the world, men glory in entertaining the great and the rich: under the gospel, the chief advantage lies in receiving those who stand in need of every thing, except the Spirit of Christ. These must be received, not out of human respects, nor ostentation, nor for our own satisfaction, but in the name, and for the sake of Christ. This renders our hospitality truly Christian.

SECT. II.—*Giving offence to be avoided. The Eye to be plucked out.*

“ 6. But whoso shall offend * one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” [* *Fr.* is an occasion of falling and offence to.]

A violent death is not so much to be dreaded, as the being, through bad counsel or example, the cause of the fall of one soul. The salvation of one soul is more precious to God than we are able to express. The more faith separates us from the world, renders us despicable in its sight, and deprives us of its protection, the more God espouses our interests, and declares himself on our side. If by offending one single soul, we thus draw on ourselves the indignation of God; how abominable in his sight must those needs be, who offend a whole city, and by their wanton dresses, lascivious and loose discourses, immodest pictures, wicked examples, &c. occasion the fall and ruin of a vast number of souls!

“ 7. ¶ Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”

Offence or scandal, which destroys the generality of the world, contributes to the good of those who love God, by means of the good use which charity causes them to make of it. The world is the centre of offence, and as it were the throne whereon it reigns. Unhappy is that man who continues exposed to it without necessity. Unhappy likewise is he who exposes others thereto. But most unhappy of all is that person, who becomes an agent for the world, and an instrument of the devil, to seduce and draw others into sin. The general corruption of the world is a certain source of offences; but yet imposes no manner of necessity on any one to give them.

“ 8. Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed,

rather than having two hands, or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.”

Man has within himself occasions enough of sin, and needs not seek for any from without. He must be ready to part with what is dearest to him, and effectually to cut off all evil actions, words, and inclinations. This is a circumcision grievous to nature, but necessary to salvation. A friend who does us all the good offices imaginable, but who, being an enemy to our piety, hinders us from serving God, is a necessary hand, which, notwithstanding, must be cut off. A visit where a man meets with dangerous objects, which is attended with loss of time, occasions of evil-speaking, distraction of mind, and other temptations to sin, is a foot, which we are likewise obliged to cut off.

“ 9. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire.”

Let us make no scruple of retrenching the curiosity of our senses and understanding, as a thing very dangerous; since, by means of this beneficial blindness, we may attain to that sublime knowledge of God and Christ, wherein eternal life does consist. An immodest picture, of what price soever it be, a lascivious, scurrilous, or licentious book, a dangerous object—each of these is an eye, which must be plucked out. A director of the conscience, be his abilities ever so great, yet if, by any criminal or imprudent affection, he become an obstacle to the salvation or perfection of himself, or the person under his care, is an eye, which this person must cast away.

“ 10. ¶ Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”

Great reason has the Son of God to caution us against despising his little ones, and honest persons of simplicity and innocence: for almost all mankind is guilty of this vice, and scarce any one sensible of it. How can a man despise those who belong to God, and count it a small matter to induce them to sin, and expose them to destruction by bad example or advice! Is not this to oppose God himself, who takes so much care to preserve them, First, By his providence, which watches over them particularly, by the means of his angels? They who have no respect for these little ones, on the account of the care which is taken of them by those angels who stand in the presence of God, and always behold his face, ought at least to forbear hurting them for fear of such powerful protectors. The doctrine of guardian angels is authorised by Christ. God makes every thing subservient to the guidance, protection, and salvation of men; and they very seldom reflect upon it. In promoting the welfare of souls, let us still have God before our eyes; and let us do all for his sake, and in his presence. This is a disposition which priests, the visible angels of the faithful, ought above all things to imitate in the invisible angels.

“ 11. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.”

A second reason against offending those who belong to God, is because he has loved them so exceedingly as to give his own Son for them. Who

can either doubt or wonder, as to God's sending his angels for the service of souls, after he has sent his own Son to serve them even with his blood? They do what they can to destroy the workmanship of Christ, who, by means of scandal or offence, cause those to relapse into sin, whom he by his labours and sufferings has rescued and cleansed from it.

SECT. III.—*The strayed Sheep.*

“ 12. How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?”

Let us learn from hence, what charity and pastoral care is due to those souls which are not in the way of salvation. It is a rule to be observed by pastors, to apply themselves most to such souls whose wants are greatest. It is contrary to the order of the duties incumbent on a true pastor, and to the example of Christ, for a man to be wholly taken up in the spiritual direction of persons far advanced in the way to heaven, a work which is pleasant and easy; and entirely to neglect such as are gone astray, the bringing back of whom requires abundance of pains, application, and prayer. It is the indispensable duty of one of this profession, to leave those who too industriously seek, and without any necessity follow him; and to hasten after such as fly from him, of whom God will certainly demand an account at his hands.

“ 13. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.”

Is it not a sufficient motive to engage a man to

apply himself to the conversion of souls, by ministerial cares, prayers, and good works, to know that it occasions so much joy in the church? The more we have grieved the church and afflicted Christ by our corrupt and irregular life, the more earnestly ought we to endeavour to raise in them this kind of joy, by contributing to the conversion of others. In order to comprehend the good Shepherd's joy on this account, it is necessary to comprehend his love towards souls,—but who is able to do this? If we would have some idea of it which comes near the truth, let us judge of it by his descent from heaven to be incarnate, by the labours of his life, and by the pain and ignominy of his death.

“ 14. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

To cause any of the elect to sin, is to thwart God's designs concerning them; by our bad example to give the least of our brethren an occasion of offence or falling, is to oppose his providence in the appointment of angels, and his love in the mission of his Son. Let the world and the devil do their utmost to corrupt and destroy those whom God, with the tenderness of a father, loves to eternity—not one of them shall perish! They are little, together with Christ, in this life: they shall with him be great in heaven. Grant, O my God, that we may all concur with the designs of thy mercy towards these souls, and towards our own; and that we may be of the number of these little ones, whose salvation is secured by thy will and adorable election!

SECT. IV.—*Brotherly Reproof.*

“ 15. ¶ Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

It is not enough for a man not to make his brother fall; if he be fallen of himself, he must raise him up. Can we see a soul ready to perish through a breach of charity towards us, and not be concerned at it? This is to be wanting ourselves in that charity which we owe him. There often needs no more than a step, a word, or a small advance on our part, to open the eyes and heart of such a weak person,—is the refusing so small a thing consistent with imitating Christ? We must neither revenge ourselves on him who has offended us, nor neglect his salvation. This is the first rule to be observed in reproofing our brother; in doing which, charity must spare the confusion, and tenderly manage the weakness of the person reproofed. Brotherly reproof is certainly a duty; but it is one also to give it after a useful manner, so as not to wound our brother instead of curing him, and so as to avoid every thing which may render our admonition fruitless, or perhaps hurtful, which it must necessarily be, if delivered in a harsh, haughty, indiscreet, or public way.

“ 16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”

The second step to be taken in brotherly reproof is to use prudence, in order to excite the sinner's shame and fear, and thereby to awake him from his drowsi-

ness. It is not enough for us to do something towards the salvation of our brother: we must use all proper methods to procure it. It is charity and prudence to take care to prevent his denying his fault, and, at the same time, not to make it public ourselves.

“ 17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

The third rule of reproof is, zealously to have recourse to authority, in order to discover the sin, without intending to defame the sinner. The fourth and last rule, which charity, prudence, and zeal oblige us to observe in reproofing our brethren, is to exclude the incorrigible person from all society, to prevent the infection of others, and to hasten his amendment. Excommunication is the last remedy, but such as is extraordinary, and reserved for the incorrigible in the case of enormous sins. The church alone has authority to exercise it by the chief pastors, with the presumed consent at least of the whole body. They who having deserved excommunication despise it, know not what it is to be in God's sight no other than a heathen, and to have neither him for a Father, nor Christ for a Saviour, nor the church for a mother, nor Christians for brethren.

SECT. V.—*The Power of the Keys.*

“ 18. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

How much is the judgment of the church on an

obstinate sinner to be dreaded, since it is ratified in heaven! God binds and looses all those who are bound and loosed on earth; because no person is truly bound or loosed, who is not so justly. A man may be excommunicated externally, and to the eyes of men, without being really so either on earth or in heaven. Let us be more afraid of one single sin than of all the excommunications in the world; since these can be only the punishment or remedy of sin, and without it are nothing at all.

“ 19. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”

God is found in union and agreement. Nothing is more efficacious in prayer. When we are united to Jesus Christ, and offer up our prayers through his mediation, it is he himself who prays, his merits which ask, his love which entreats, his heart which groans, his blood which intercedes; and it is the Son who obtains all from his Father. This shows the advantages of prayer made in common—of Christian societies, where God is served, as it were, with one heart and one soul—but above all, of the great society of the church, where we are united in the body and by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

“ 20. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Where charity is, there is Christ—where division is, there is the evil spirit. A Christian family which, in choosing the state of marriage, has sought God alone, which brings up children only for him, and which does all the good that lies within its sphere,

may be assured, by virtue of this promise, that Christ is present in the midst of it in a very particular manner. How great respect is due to councils, wherein the whole church is assembled by its pastors, for the illustration of the truth, the reformation of manners, the establishment of discipline, and the interpretation of the Scriptures !

SECT. VI.—*Forgiveness of Injuries. The Debt of ten thousand Talents.*

“ 21. ¶ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?”

It is a very dangerous thing for a man to be unwilling to do any more good than just what he thinks precisely necessary to salvation. Self-love is always on its guard, always afraid of going too far, and of giving too much. Nothing is more difficult than the forgiveness of injuries to corrupt nature, which is still seeking pretences to evade this duty more than any other. Men seldom consult casuists, but when it is to justify, if possible, their natural and corrupt inclinations.

“ 22. Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.”

Charity is an immense and eternal debt; and, by consequence, the love of enemies and the forgiveness of injuries must have no bounds in the heart, though they may admit of some in the external behaviour. God and Christ have loved us without measure, and that even whilst we were enemies, and have freely pardoned all our sins: and yet we deliberate nicely how far our love of enemies and our forgiveness of injuries are to extend !

“ 23. ¶ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.”

If we consider the lives of the generality of men, can we believe that they are persuaded they must give an account of all their actions at death and judgment? It is with respect to this duty of forgiving injuries chiefly, that a pastor ought to set before his people's eyes the judgment of God; because, on their performance of it, he has engaged to remit every thing, and, on their refusal, he refuses to show any mercy.

“ 24. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents :”

How many debts have we contracted towards God, if we consider that all our time, all our thoughts, desires, words, and actions are his due! We may find on earth ten thousand talents—but where can we find a sum sufficient to satisfy God's justice for one single sin, unless he himself give us wherewith to pay it! Let us all look upon ourselves in the person of this miserable debtor; and yet in him we can see nothing but only a shadow of our own misery.

“ 25. 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.”

There is no sinner but is utterly insolvent, in respect of the divine justice, if he be judged without mercy. God cannot sell the sinner, nor alienate the right which he has over him: but the sinner sells himself to sin and to the devil, for a moment's satis-

faction. It is the very height of misery, for God to leave the sinner in the hands of him to whom he has sold himself; and this, to be under him not as a proprietor, but executioner. A damned soul, who has no longer any share in Christ, has not wherewith to pay his debts; and for this reason his punishment will have no end.

“26. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.”

A sinner, who sees his own poverty, has no other remedy left but these four dispositions:—1. A sincere humiliation of heart. 2. A fervent prayer. 3. An application full of hope to the patience of God. 4. A real desire and firm resolution of satisfying God to the utmost of his power by repentance. It is no presumption in a man who has nothing, to promise the payment of all, provided he depend, not on himself, but on the patience of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ. The value of these is infinite; and from hence the repentance of a Christian receives all its worth. A man cannot have too great hopes, when he is resolved not to spare himself, and his heart is entirely devoted to God.

“27. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.”

God, rich in mercy, shows it more abundantly than we ask it, when we ask it as we ought. He cannot, as one may say, withstand humility: this disarms his justice, and opens the treasures of his mercy. God never grants any thing short of a full pardon; he forgives the greatest debts as easily as

the least; but still on this condition, that a man do not repent only in part, and that his resolution of performing this duty be full and complete.

“28. 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.”

Hard-heartedness towards our neighbour, and ingratitude towards God, are the fruits of a false conversion: whereas a true one produces always a compassionate charity for our brethren, and a love full of acknowledgment towards God. Forgetfulness, in respect of his favours, is very often the cause of our relapses. Let us consider the hard-heartedness and ingratitude of this wicked servant in all its circumstances, and we shall find ourselves therein represented to the life.

“29. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.”

Man, though uncertain of his success, humbles himself before men on the account of temporal debts; and yet, on the account of such as are eternal, he humbles not himself before God, though certain that his humiliation will succeed. Let us thoroughly apprehend, that we are poor and criminal in the sight of God, and we shall then, as in a glass, behold ourselves in such of our brethren as are so in respect of us. Let us think on that moment, wherein we shall fall down at the feet of our Judge, there to receive the sentence of our eternal fate; and we shall have but little inclination to insult those whom we see prostrate before us.

“30. And he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.”

God hears the sinner; and yet the sinner will not hear one like himself. When a man is thoroughly sensible of the weight of his own sins, he is very far from judging others with rigour. God's ears eternally shut against the sinner, hell for his prison, and an inflexible justice punishing every thing and remitting nothing; this is what he must expect who treats his brother after this manner. Truth itself has established this retaliation, declaring, that “with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again.” This then is an immutable law, and such as the sinner can never change, but by changing himself.

“31. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.”

When in heaven we are once united to the supreme and sovereign Justice, we cannot but espouse its interests against sin and the obdurate sinner. Not to pardon injuries, is to scandalize and provoke both heaven and earth. He who hurts one member of Christ, gives offence to all the rest. The whole church will one day rise up against the revengeful, and behold with joy the judgments of God on all such as have shown themselves without mercy and compassion.

“32. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:
33. Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?”

The goodness and indulgence of God towards us is a pattern, which we ought to follow in respect of others, and a law which obliges us thereto. God forgives all, and that at the entreaty of the criminal himself: but to induce a revengeful person to forgive, what pains, what endeavours must be used? Can rigour in exacting temporal debts, and in treating without mercy such as are unable to satisfy them—can this be allowed to a Christian, who ought to imitate his God and Father,—to a debtor, who has been forgiven only on the condition of forgiving others,—to a servant, who should obey his master,—and to a criminal, who is in expectation of his judge and final sentence?

“ 34. And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.”

There is no mercy for him who will not show any. Nothing raises the divine anger and vengeance more than the spirit of revenge in men; because by this we neglect the condition of our reconciliation with God, violate the sacred covenant of Christian prayer, and invade the rights of the supreme Justice. No refuge, no remedy is to be found, when once a man is delivered to the tormentors, of whom these are but a faint resemblance. Death puts an end to every thing on earth: but nothing has an end, in that place, where a man can never see any end of his debt, and where death itself is immortal.

“ 35. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

We must forgive, not only with our lips, but

from the bottom of our hearts : and this is not barely a counsel, but a commandment. We may deceive men by a feigned reconciliation, and a pretended mercy ; but how can we hide our hearts from him who is their Creator and Judge ? The term *every one* which is here used, shows, that no person whatever is exempt from this obligation of forgiving ; neither emperors nor kings, neither great nor small, neither rich nor poor. Give us, Lord, this Christian heart, whose bottom is all charity and mercy, and whose works are all mildness and indulgence.

CHAPTER XIX.

SECT. I.—*Marriage Indissoluble.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass, that, when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan ;”

Jesus goes about every where to seek the sinner. A good pastor’s thirst after the salvation of souls is never satisfied in this life. He always finds sufficient exercise for his zeal. The end of one instruction in a pastor, of one mission in an evangelical labourer, and of one visitation in a bishop, is but the beginning of another.

“ 2. And great multitudes followed him ; and he healed them there.”

Men never follow Christ in vain. Here they run after him in hopes of some temporal advantages : how much more should the pleasant odour of his virtues, the holiness of his mysteries, the sweetness of his truth, the hope of his grace, and the expecta-

tion of eternal happiness, draw us after him! How free and ready is he to distribute his favours! Here are no delays, excuses, or denials—he heals immediately: but what pains must one take, to draw from the hands of man a small alms, a kindness, or even a debt itself!

“ 3. ¶ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”

They who have once declared against the truth are seldom reconciled, but seek all occasions to betray it. Hypocrisy is generally of the party: a pretended love of truth serves often as a veil to cover the hatred which they bear it, and the persecution which they raise against it.

“ 4. And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female;”

In this answer, Jesus Christ shows that marriage is indissoluble, First, By divine institution, and the order settled at the creation. To answer a case of conscience well, in the spirit, and after the example of Christ, we must not regard that which the corruption of manners, or the remissness of men has introduced—but we must look back to the original will, design, and institution of God. Christ knows not what it is to accommodate his morality to the times, or to the inclinations of men. What was done at the beginning, is that which God has judged most worthy of his glory, most profitable for man, and most agreeable to nature.

“ 5. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?”

The second reason which Christ gives for the indissolubility of marriage, is the express commandment of God, conformable to the institution of nature. The union which is formed betwixt man and woman by marriage, is more intimate and inseparable than that betwixt parents and children. It is honoured by being made the figure and representation of the union which is betwixt Christ and his church. It is a partnership of soul and body, of life and fortune, of comfort and support, and of designs and inclinations. What a wickedness then is it, to sow division in a society so holy, and so dear to God! But how much greater is it still, to violate it by a criminal and adulterous commerce with another woman!

“6. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

The third reason of the indissolubility of marriage, is because the married couple become thereby, as it were, one and the same person, and one sole principle of their children's birth. This is not the invention of men, but the work of God. As it was he who made this union at the beginning, so it is he who continues it down through all ages: a union, worthy of respect, honour, gratitude, and singular circumspection; but much the less respected, honoured, and understood, by reason of the brutality and lust of men.

“7. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?”

How great is the disingenuity or ignorance of

these doctors, who seek for pretences, whereby to favour concupiscence, even from the divine law itself? It is dangerous sometimes to tolerate the least evil, though prudence may require it; because toleration raises itself insensibly to permission, and permission soon sets up for command. A bill or writing of divorcement is appointed, on purpose to render the practice of it more difficult; and men make use of this, to justify the action, and to give it the authority of a law.

“8. He saith unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.”

The fourth reason of the indissolubility of marriage, and which Christ gives as a proof of it, is the example of the first married couple. Whatever the laws do not forbid, is not therefore according to the mind and first intention of God. That which is established by the wisdom of the Creator, is one thing: that which is extorted from his condescension by the hardness of men’s hearts, is another. The former has nothing but what is worthy of the perfection of the Creator; the latter is only a remedy for the imperfection of the creature.

“9. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

The fifth reason of this indissolubility, is the evil consequent on separation. Christ takes the authority of a legislator, that he may reform, without any human respects whatever, the abuses introduced and tolerated contrary to the appointment of God. He

here decides the case proposed to him, and declares, that it is not lawful for married persons to separate, except in the case of adultery; and that a woman, put away even on this account, cannot, during her first husband's life, be married to another. Nothing hinders Christ from declaring for the truth, though the design of his enemies in asking him questions be only to insnare and bring him into trouble.

SECT. II.—*Voluntary Eunuchs. Little Children.*

“ 10. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.”

Before we enter into an engagement, which nothing but death can entirely dissolve, we are obliged in prudence to consider it on all sides, in order to understand it thoroughly. There are inconveniences in every state: and those of marriage are not sufficient to keep such persons from it as God thinks fit to call thereto. They must consult his will, and rely upon his grace.

“ 11. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.”

This is a very wise answer, which blames neither of these two states, but approves them both. To some, marriage is necessary by reason of their frailty. When God gives the grace, celibacy is to be preferred. He who, out of caprice, humour, or licentiousness, and not at the divine call, leads a single life, is more in danger than he imagines. Continency is a peculiar gift of God: he who has received it, cannot preserve it but by humility, vigilance, prayer, fasting, mortification, &c.

“ 12. For there are some eunuchs, which were so

born from their mothers' womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

Grace makes one embrace with joy that which otherwise is not endured without pain, when nature or the violence of men imposes it. The state of voluntary and perpetual continence, undertaken for God's sake, is a gift of God himself, and the only kind of virginity which he has engaged to reward.

"13. ¶ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them."

Since the generality of fathers take more thought how to make their children rich and powerful, than to put them under the protection of Christ, and to draw down his blessing upon them by the prayers of good people; one need not wonder that their youth is so addicted to all manner of vice. Imposition of hands, used frequently by Christ, by him has passed from the Jewish Church to the Christian. It is, as it were, the visible sign and sacrament of prayer, in which the divine power and assistance are invoked with authority. A priest has no right to refuse to perform this in the name of Christ and his church, on those who require it with faith and humility, having himself received this power by the imposition of the bishop's hands. It is not according to the spirit and conduct of Christ, to treat those with severity who are as yet children in the spiritual life.

"14. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and

forbid them not, to come unto me ; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus Christ loves children, because he loves simplicity and innocence. Heaven is for the humble and simple, of whom children are the representation. Christ tacitly upbraids his disciples with having so soon forgot his instructions concerning the advantages of childhood. He took this age upon himself, and sanctified it, as well as the other ages, that he might be the pattern and Saviour of men in all. He lets slip no opportunity of recommending and inspiring humility, as being the very gate of heaven.

" 15. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence."

Could the imposition of Christ's hands be otherwise than powerful in preventing wickedness in these children? And can we doubt whether it is of any advantage or not, to desire those, who have his authority or Spirit, to perform this imposition of hands in his name? It is good to have a devout respect for practices derived from Christ. Lay on me, O Lord, the invisible hand of thy divinity, that it may take possession of my heart and senses, that it may repress in me whatever is contrary to thy will, and consecrate me to God as a victim in thee and by thee.

SECT. III.—*The rich Young Man. Perfection.*

" 16. ¶ And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

It is to Jesus Christ that we must address ourselves, in order to learn the way of salvation. The con-

duct of this young man is wise, pious, and prudent; and fit to be imitated by all of his age, who think of choosing a state and condition of life. They are—

1. To look upon God as their Father and Master, without whom they ought not to choose at all.
2. To have confidence in him as a good Father, who hears and directs all such as sincerely apply to him, without seeking any thing but his will.
3. To approach him with a firm belief of his wisdom, power, and goodness; and a full persuasion that no man has any light, strength, or piety, but what flows from, and is freely imparted by, him who alone is wise, powerful, and good in his own nature.
4. To have no other design or ambition, than to put themselves into a condition of working out their salvation.
5. To believe that eternal life is not bestowed for nothing.

“ 17. And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”

They must, 6. Look upon God as the fulness, source, pattern, and end of all good. No one can be good, but by adoring this fulness, by receiving from this source, by imitating this pattern, and acting for this end. 7. They are to consider, that the fulfilling God's commandments is the general way of salvation, and the ordinary and indispensable vocation; and that to choose any state or condition of life, in which we cannot fulfil them, is to choose not to be saved. To enter into, or to continue in such a state, is the same thing.

“ 18. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit

adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19. Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Those who are of age to choose a condition for themselves, ought, 8. To take care betimes to avoid pharisaical ostentation, which is more intent on the observation of ceremonial laws and external usages, than of the essential duties of religion, justice and charity, which are part of the eternal law, indispensable, and necessary for all conditions. They must, 9. Remember that, in order to salvation, it is not sufficient for a man to honour his parents, and to make no attempt on the life, wife, goods, or reputation of his neighbour; but that he is obliged likewise to do good to others, according to their needs and his own power, and according to the rules of charity, of which the well-regulated love of ourselves is the perfect model.

"20. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?"

It is good, 10. For them not to rely too much on their having passed the time of their childhood innocently enough, and without any open violation of the divine law. For this perhaps has proceeded solely from their want of opportunities, and their having been kept from ill company by the vigilance of parents and masters; and even these blessings are in great danger of being lost, through the vanity and presumption of young men, and the liberty which they claim of disposing of themselves. They must, 11. Be persuaded, that they have scarce done any thing as yet, and that the main business is still un-

finished. For, to serve God in the spirit of Christ and his religion, with a perfect disengagement from all other things, and to choose a proper condition of life for the residue of it; this is what remains to be done by a young man, who has not yet thoroughly understood his duty, nor been master of himself.

“ 21. Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.”

They ought, 12. To observe, that, besides the general call and the common way of the commandments, every one has his particular way and call, which he must learn from God with the assistance of men. They ought, 13. To be persuaded, that it is necessary to be so far disengaged from every thing, in the disposition of the heart, as to prefer nothing before God, his love, and his will; and that this is an obligation common to all Christians, and included in the general call. Actually to quit every thing, in order to follow Jesus Christ in a state of poverty, is only a matter of counsel in general; but which may become a necessary means of salvation to those whom God is pleased to call thereto. Whatever we deposit in the hands of the poor, we shall receive with infinite advantage in heaven. He who has stripped himself of all his earthly possessions, is in a readiness to follow Christ, but is not yet arrived at perfection.

“ 22. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.”

Lastly, Those who are about to choose a state of life, must be convinced, that neither great riches, nor

worldly hopes and expectations, ought to hinder them from following the voice of God when he calls them to perfection. We undergo a great deal while we are in suspense between the love of the world and the love of our salvation: we have no manner of peace, good or bad, till the one or the other becomes victorious and predominant. We often deceive ourselves in believing, that we are fond of nothing: a proper conjuncture or occasion is wanting, to make us thoroughly know ourselves. We possess, with fondness and sensual affection, whatever we cannot leave without regret and sorrow. Let every one examine himself by this rule.

SECT. IV.—*The Rich hardly saved.*

“ 23. ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Christ abates nothing of the strictness and holiness of his maxims, on the account of the trouble which they cause to worldly persons; but, on the contrary, delivers them in the stronger terms. Earthly riches are a great obstacle to salvation; because it is very rare to possess without loving them. To be rich, therefore, is a great misfortune; but what rich man can we convince of this, if God himself by an extraordinary grace do not open his heart to receive this truth? Truth itself affirms it with an oath, and yet scarce any one hears, or believes it.

“ 24. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Astonishing expression! which shows us, that a

rich man cannot be saved with an ordinary grace. A man is not rich, in the sense here intended, unless he love riches; and he is properly enough poor in the midst of his treasures, when he uses them, not as a proprietor, but as the steward of God. Wealth is the gate of hell to the greatest number; and to some few the key of heaven. If he who only possesses his own proper estate, can so hardly be saved, what will become of those who unjustly take away or detain that of another?

“ 25. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?”

The natural love which men have for wealth, makes it seem very strange, even to the poor, that it should be so great an obstacle to salvation: how much stranger must it seem to the rich? One cannot easily conceive, how that which contributes so much to the happiness of this life, should be one of the greatest impediments to the felicity of the other: and yet this is the very reason why it is so; for it is impossible for us to be happy both here and hereafter.

“ 26. But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.”

The inability of nature to attain to salvation, is not the despair of a Christian, but the triumph of the grace of Christ. Happy inability this, which obliges us to expect all from Him, without whom we can do nothing! It is as impossible to God as it is to men, to save a rich man possessed with the love of riches; but God can root up this love out of his heart, a thing which man is not able to do. Nothing

can support and comfort a sinner, who is sensible of his natural weakness and impotency, but to know that God has an absolute power over his heart. How is it possible that a truth so full of consolation should startle Christians? What has liberty to apprehend from the sovereign and almighty hand which made it?

SECT. V.—*Reward an hundred-fold.*

“ 27. ¶ Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”

How can a man but reflect with joy on the advantage of seeing himself in the most direct way to salvation, when he considers the perils to which almost all conditions in the world are continually exposed? To forsake all without following Christ, is the virtue of a philosopher. To follow Christ without forsaking all, is the state of the generality of Christians. But to forsake all and follow Christ is the apostolical perfection, which gives a man a right to hope for the highest reward in the world to come. That man forsakes a great deal who reserves nothing to himself, and renounces all hopes and expectations here below.

“ 28. And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

O the goodness of Jesus Christ! Instead of checking the too forward confidence of these beginners, he comforts and fortifies them by his mildness, and encourages them by the prospect of reward. To what do the great aspire by all their wealth and

power, but to make themselves masters of the world for a moment? By poverty, humility, and following Christ, men may come to reign with him for ever in heaven. There is no true greatness but that which he imparts to those who are united to him, and whom he makes partakers of his power and authority as sovereign Judge of the world.

“ 29. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

How little faith have we, to be unwilling to forsake for a moment that which shall be restored with so much interest in heaven! He who possesses God, regains every thing in him,—this is an hundred-fold, which surpasses all expectation. Rather than violate the fidelity due to God, we must break through all ties whatever: there is nothing in the world which we are allowed to prefer before him. Men have not always occasion to forsake all these things for the sake of God, or in order to enter into the way of perfection; but they have always occasion to forsake themselves, by renouncing their inclinations, that they may bear the infirmities and defects of their brethren, their sisters, &c. Here is a double hundred-fold, grace in this life, and glory in the other.

“ 30. But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”

This terrible vicissitude, relating to the Jews and the Gentiles, is a representation of many others in the business of salvation. Perseverance alone is crowned: in a Christian the end is more regarded

than the beginning. Many great sinners will raise themselves by repentance above many just persons. There is not any one in the world to whom a man can justly prefer himself. One who seems to be at a greater distance from God, is he for whom he designs an extraordinary grace, and a glory proportionable thereto. Another is a great saint at present, who will soon decline, or totally fall. In whatever state we are, we have always sufficient cause to humble ourselves.

CHAPTER XX.

SECT. I.—*The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.*

“ 1. FOR the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. 2. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a-day, he sent them into his vineyard.”

God, as it were, went out of himself, early in the creation, and afterwards in the incarnation, to call men to serve him in his church. The church is a heavenly kingdom, because God is therein known, worshipped, feared, and loved. It is a vineyard, because it is a place of labour wherein no man should be idle. Every soul is the kingdom and vineyard of the Lord: every one of us is hired, or rather created, to work in this vineyard towards his own salvation, by causing the will of God to reign and flourish therein. Life is but a day, whereof childhood, or the first use of reason, is the first hour. We are

called to work from the time of our receiving life and reason. This is the first call.

“ 3. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, 4. And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.”

The second call is in the time of youth, which is most commonly idle. Before God calls us by his grace, what can we do towards our salvation? The will which is not prevented thereby, has no light but to go astray with, no warmth of desire but to endanger, and no strength but to hurt itself: it is capable of all evil, incapable of all good. The will is always fickle and inconstant, when not guided and acted by the immutable and eternal will. The more earnestly it endeavours to work, the more faults and sins it commits. The prospect of reward is a good motive, since Jesus Christ himself lays it before our eyes. God is just, and the perfection of reason: this is sufficient ground to expect all from him.

“ 5. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.”

The third call is at the age of manhood. The fourth in old age, which is almost incapable of work. During this present life, God never ceases calling us to labour and salvation. When he commands us to go, and gives us that which he commands, we immediately set forward, and labour to advantage. If thou wilt, Lord, it is sufficient; for my will without delay will be obedient to thine. Rouse up my dull and slothful heart, and I shall run with vigour in the ways of thy commandments.

“ 6. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle ?”

The fifth call is at the end of our lives, and in our decrepit age. We are at no time excused from the work of our salvation; and the mercy of God can render our endeavours useful at any time. No age should be idle; it is always time to begin a work, without which there is not the least hope of eternal happiness. Good God! how full is the world of this sort of people, who pass their whole life in idleness, and are ready to leave it, before they so much as know for what purpose they received it! Man is obliged to pains and labour by the law of the creation; the sinner is condemned to it by way of penance; the Christian is devoted thereto by the holiness of his adoption. Whoever neglects to follow this impression of his Creator, to submit to this decree of his Judge, and to imitate the example of his Head, Pattern, and Restorer, is very much wanting to his own salvation. Every thing conspires to engage man in a busy and laborious course of life; and idleness is one source of damnation.

“ 7. They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.”

If Christ himself come not to seek us, if he do not send us, and set us to work, we shall either live altogether in idleness, or perform only works of darkness, or do every thing out of vanity, but nothing for the sake of God, or for eternity. No salvation is to be had but by Jesus Christ. Without him

man is left to himself, that is, to his own impotency and darkness.

“ 8. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.”

In the work of salvation there is no rest. We must work all day, even till night; that is to say, all the time of our life, even until death. Every thing is labour in the sight of God; action, suffering, sickness, and even repose itself, when necessity and his appointment require it. Happy evening, which will be the beginning of a glorious eternity to those who shall have laboured diligently, without expecting any other reward than that which God has promised to confer by Jesus Christ, with whom he has entrusted the affairs of his kingdom. This is the comfort of the most weak and imperfect, who are faithful to God, according to the measure of their grace, and the quality of their calling, to know that none shall go unrewarded. He who went last to work, being in the last rank of the faithful, shall be rewarded as much as the first, if it appear that he has loved as much.

“ 9. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.”

The ways of God are very different from those of men; let us, adoring them, labour and hope. Provided a man be really converted, though at the last hour, he has reason to hope for a reward. But to delay the business of his salvation till the last hour, is to hazard all. When a man sincerely and heartily employs all that remains of his life for God, accord-

ing to the rules of the gospel, in the spirit and exercises of repentance, he performs every thing which God requires of those whom he calls last, to make them equal to the first. To enjoy God, and to enjoy him eternally, is the penny given equally to all. A moment is perhaps sufficient to obtain it; but it is the height of folly and madness, either through a rash presumption to stay till the last moment, or through a distrust of God's mercy to let that moment slip.

“ 10. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. 11. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,”

There are perhaps abundance of persons whose long labours, great austerities, and aversion to external vices, serve only to nourish their pride, to give them a contempt of others, and to make them think that God is in their debt. The goodness of God towards converted sinners is so great, that it gives some kind of jealousy to the righteous when left to themselves; and would do so even to the saints if they were capable of it.

“ 12. Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.”

We must rely more on the goodness and mercy of God, than on our own labour or righteousness. He dispenses not his liberality either according to the order of our call, or the time of our labour, or the difficulty of the work, or the reputation it has acquired us; but according to the measure of charity,

humility, and fidelity, which he has placed in the heart for the accomplishing his eternal purposes concerning souls. The less value we set upon that which we do for God, the greater will its value be in his account. We should employ our minds less on what we do and suffer for his sake, than on what he does in us by his grace to enable us; since we have nothing but what we have received, and are still of ourselves but unprofitable servants.

“ 13. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? 14. Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last even as unto thee.”

God dispenses his glory with faithfulness, justice, and bounty; faithfulness to his promises, justice to Christ, and bounty to sinners. There is no other title to glory but God's promise; because even the virtues of a good life are included in this promise, and are his gifts; and because this promise and these gifts have no other rule or foundation than the free love and good-will of God. A person truly humble is always satisfied with his lot and portion, and never envies that of others; because he knows that he deserves nothing, and believes that others are more faithful in paying God the interest of his grace.

“ 15. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?”

Jesus Christ distributes his gifts as he thinks fit. Every one ought to be content with the share allowed him. The will and designs of God have always a sovereign justice and infinite wisdom in them, which are infinitely above the reach of human reason.

They are hid from man in this life, to teach him, not to dispute with God, and to seek him, not by reason, but by faith; and to convince him, that it is not knowledge, but obedience, which sanctifies and saves us. The more spiritual jealousy and envy are, the more criminal are they, and like to those of the devil. The gifts of grace being less due to a sinner than those of nature or fortune, it is a greater sin to think we deserve them, and to make them the object of our ambition or jealousy. To covet the grace bestowed on another, is to be guilty of injustice not only towards him, but also towards God, who is master of his own gifts. There is a desire of grace which is humble and commendable; but there is likewise one which is proud and irregular, and more common than we imagine.

“ 16. So the last shall be first, and the first last : for many be called, but few chosen.”

Let us neither presume nor despair on any account. The Gentiles preferred before the Jews, teach us to leave to God the right of choosing, and determining to whom to show mercy. It is not the call, such as it appears to human eyes, but perseverance, which discovers the elect. It belongs to him who bestows it on whom he pleases, to judge who are his in a greater or less degree. The only thing we have to do is, still to humble ourselves, whatever our condition be; because nothing but humility can either keep the first in grace from becoming the last, or draw down that mercy on the last which will make them first.

SECT. II.—*The Passion foretold. Zebedee's Children.*

“ 17. ¶ And Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, 18. Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, 19. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.”

All bear their cross in this world; but Christ discovers the mystery, virtue, and fruit of it, to none but his true disciples. He was always mindful of his sufferings and death, not through any anxious foresight of them, or desire to avoid them, but through a holy earnestness to honour his Father by his sacrifice, and that he might prepare his disciples for it. Such a tranquillity upon such a prospect, is peculiar to him alone who is God as well as man. He seems to relate a history rather than a prediction. By this, as well as by the assurance which he gives them of his resurrection, he prevents the scandal of the cross.

“ 20. ¶ Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.”

The children of Adam willingly stoop and humble themselves when their interest is concerned, and their humiliation may be a step to their advancement. The ambition which parents have to raise their children, makes them often forget the humiliations and sufferings of Christ, and the obligation of conforming

themselves thereto. Who could have imagined, that, while Christ is speaking of nothing but suffering and crucifixion, a mother, who had constantly followed him, should ask any other favour for her children than to partake of his sufferings and cross? She fixes her mind on the resurrection, and on the kingdom which was to follow it, and forgets all the rest. In this she has but too many imitators.

“ 21. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.”

The generality of men seek only to establish themselves, even at the expense of others. There are few mothers, whose heads are not filled with the fortune of their children, and who do not, to promote it, make even piety and devotion subservient, if they pretend to have any. Ambition in pursuit of benefices and ecclesiastical dignities, seems to be the most commendable, because it is the most easily covered with the pretences of God's glory, the service of the church, and the salvation of children; yet it is certainly the most criminal, dangerous, and fatal of all others.

“ 22. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.”

It can be nothing but a false love and a blind passion, which make people desire ecclesiastical employments and great benefices for their children: since the chief prospect they afford is that of labour and

suffering. We know not what we ask, when we take upon ourselves to answer for their call to the most holy state, for the salvation of souls, for the patrimony of the poor, &c. To what does this false and blind love of ambitious parents tend, but only to put their children in a way of being inevitably ruined, and to oblige themselves to be accountable for their sins, and damnation, and for that of many others? No glory is to be hoped, before we have drank of the cup; no crown to be expected, until we have fought the combat. We very often know, neither what to ask, nor how to ask it. Let us be solicitous only in acquiring the Christian virtues; the care of rewarding them let us leave to God. Prayer, made not as it ought, serves only to beget presumption, even in persons of piety.

“ 23. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.”

Jesus Christ gives his disciples assurance of humiliation and the cross, but not of rest and glory: the latter is the fruit and reward of the former. Let us follow him in his sufferings; this is the only way to be assured of the happiness of our eternal portion. This is in the hands of him, who gives grace as well as glory, and equally prepares both the one and the other.

“ 24. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.”

Ambition is one cause of jealousy, murmuring, and animosity in communities. There is but little

of that pure zeal in the world, which is displeased with the sins of others, merely out of hatred to sin, and love to God. Men generally condemn the passions of others, through passions which are of a contrary or like nature. We should learn to know our own defects by seeing those of other men, without provoking or exasperating them. The condemning these defects in our neighbour, renders us the more inexcusable.

“ 25. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.”

The power of the church is very different from that of temporal princes, being entirely founded on humility, dedicated to charity, and established on the death and humiliations of Christ, and being designed only to promote the knowledge and love of humility, and to oppose the pride and pomp of the world. Several duties of pastors are here laid down. The first is, not to look on themselves as absolute masters and lords over the flock of Christ. The second, not to do any thing out of a spirit of imperiousness; and to require only a reasonable obedience. The third, to reform and amend the weak after Christ's example, more by instruction than reproof; not driving them away by harsh and severe treatment, but attracting them by mildness and gentle usage. In the kingdom of charity, those who have authority must distinguish themselves by charity, and not by a haughty and imperious conduct.

“ 26. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;”

The fourth duty of a pastor is, to have nothing of the air and deportment of secular princes. The fifth, to look upon his office as no other than a service or ministry, in which his true greatness does consist. Worldly greatness inclines men still to raise themselves above others, and to make them even instrumental to their own advancement: this is directly contrary to the evangelical and apostolical greatness, which makes men always intent on rendering themselves useful to others by a prudent and wise humility.

“ 27. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:”

It is the sixth duty of a pastor, to attend continually on his flock as a servant; and to dedicate to it all his pains, his goods, his time, and his talents. Happy indeed were the church, if none entered into its offices and preferments, but by the gate of humility! But all the holy ambition of this virtue consists in seeking only the lowest rank and place of a servant.

“ 28. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The seventh duty of a good pastor is, to look on Christ as his pattern; to study his conduct and his spirit; and to imitate his poverty, humility, application, and zeal in ministering to souls. To be always ready to give one's life a ransom for the least and meanest of the sheep, and to spend and be spent for them; in this consists the noble and holy service of which Jesus Christ has set us an example. Can a man possibly act more contrary to this, than by eagerly seeking ecclesiastical dignities, that he may be bet-

ter attended or ministered unto, that he may be freed from dependence and subjection, and that he may live more at his ease, in plenty, luxury, repose, &c.?

SECT. III.—*The two Blind Men of Jericho.*

“ 29. ¶ And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. 30. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way-side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.”

Blindness of heart is the only blindness of which men very seldom complain, and from which they scarcely ever beg to be delivered. It is one part of this blindness not to perceive it, and to think that our sight is good. We are extremely sensible of being deprived of the sight of the creatures, because our love for them is very ardent: if therefore we have no desire to see God, and do nothing to this end, it is certain that we do not love him at all. What have we to do under this spiritual blindness, but, with all the strength of our faith, to cry to him who is our light and our salvation, to implore his mercy, and to put our whole confidence in him?

“ 31. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.”

Whenever we design to draw near to God, we always meet with obstacles from the world: but nothing should hinder us from seeking light, and calling upon Jesus Christ. The devil knows very well, that when once we have a relish for prayer, and apply ourselves constantly to this duty, we have grounds

for the greatest hopes: he therefore diverts us from it as much as possible. Temptations and difficulties at the beginning of conversion, serve only to increase the faith of the elect, to make them pray with more earnestness and fervour, and to rest entirely upon the mercy of God.

“ 32. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?”

Jesus Christ comforts, encourages, brings near, and unites to himself, all such as persevere in prayer. He would have us humbly declare our wants; and excites our desires, to prepare us to receive his gifts. The poverty and blindness of sinners are the usual objects of God's mercy. He as it were stands still, and attends, while they represent them to him by an humble and fervent prayer. God consults not the will of those on whom he designs to show some peculiar mercy, until he has himself disposed it to a concurrence. He expects our consent, but he first forms it in us. O Jesus, thou knowest what I desire that thou wouldst do unto me.

“ 33. They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.”

The first grace is to have the eyes of our heart opened, that we may know our own misery and our Deliverer. Who is there has not occasion to beg this grace almost in every action, since there is ever some degree of darkness in our mind and heart? None but the blind pray for bodily sight; but a man must be already enlightened to pray for that of the soul, to hate its blindness, and to solicit its cure. Lord, make me know my own blindness and darkness. Open thou the eyes of my mind, that I may

perceive my want of sight, and desire earnestly to recover it.

“ 34. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.”

Jesus Christ gives those only the grace to follow him, to whom he has before given the desire and the grace to know him. God's compassion in respect of sin, is his love for the sinner; this love is the fountain of grace; this grace is an operation of his almighty hand; and the effect of this operation is, that the sinner sees and performs his duty, knows God and loves him, that he has faith and does the works of it, that he fixes his eyes on the life and precepts of Christ, and follows him by imitating and obeying him. O my God, may I be the object of thy compassion and love. Let thy grace work in me all that which it causes me to know. And grant that I may follow thee, with that gratitude and fidelity which the wonderful kindness thou hast showed, in giving me the light of faith, requires at my hands.

CHAPTER XXI.

SECT. I.—*Christ's Entry into Jerusalem.*

“ 1. AND when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,”

The entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, is a figure of his reign in the church and in the soul. It is by his death that he is to reign; by humilia-

tion that he is to conquer; and by the cross that he is to triumph over sin, the world, and the devil. He enters therefore with some kind of pomp, only in order to meet death; his whole equipage has nothing in it but what tends to humble him; and his triumph serves only to incense his enemies, and to pave his way to the cross.

“2. Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.”

Christ, in this triumphant entry, gives a representation of the church, for which he came to triumph by his death, and which he designed to compose of two sorts of people—the Jews, accustomed to the yoke of the law, and the Gentiles, who had never borne it. The Christian, consisting of two parts, serves the law of God according to the Spirit, and the law of sin according to the flesh. By the bonds which tied these creatures, thou showest me, O Lord, my bondage under the law of sin; but at the same time thou showest me, that thou art about to untie them, and to leave to thy church, and the ministers of it, the power of loosing sinners, Jews and Gentiles, without distinction.

“3. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.”

Jesus Christ, still uniform in his conduct, is always intent on humbling himself that he may prepare a remedy for our pride; and on setting off his humiliations by marks of his almighty power, that he may establish the belief of his divinity. Nothing resists

his will, when he intends to loose the sinner, or make use of him for his own purposes and designs.

“4. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5. Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.”

See to what the outward magnificence of this triumph is reduced: but to the sight of God, nothing can appear more great and magnificent, than a God who despises greatness and magnificence so far as to divest himself thereof, and who teaches the great ones of the earth to despise it, even whilst they possess it. What an example is here, that the Son of God should come meek, and full of gentleness, to those whose hearts he knew to be full of hatred and rage against himself, and entirely employed in contriving his death; and that he should come even to deliver himself up to them! This is such an instance of charity, as will cover the revengeful with shame, and overwhelm them at the tribunal of God, if they do not profit by it. The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of meekness and of love, by which he subdues both Jews and Gentiles, the spirit and the flesh.

“6. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,”

A ready and faithful obedience to the word of Jesus Christ, is a sacrifice due to him from the reason and will of man. When God commands, there is no time for dispute. Whenever, by his order and authority, we undertake to loose souls, and to bring them to Christ, we must do our duty in following his instructions, without regarding the cen-

tures of men. There may happen some certain occasions, wherein, through zeal to serve souls and obey Christ, we are obliged to expose ourselves to grievous and mortifying suspicions; as the disciples here expose themselves to pass for robbers. Herein they imitate their Master before-hand, who was treated as such at the time of his death, being crucified between two thieves.

“7. And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.”

All here is mystery and instruction. Pastors should learn from hence to strip and divest themselves of every thing, that they may prepare souls for the reception of Jesus Christ as their King; to cover the sins of others with the garment of an inviolable secrecy; to hide their infirmities by a wise condescension, their bashfulness by a preventing charity; and to spare nothing which may engage them to take upon them the yoke of Christ, and to carry Christ himself in their hearts, by a sincere faith and imitation of his virtues.

“8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.”

The people celebrate Christ's triumph over their hearts without knowing it. Their simple and more sincere faith renders them more disposed to receive him and his word. God accepts more favourably the artless praise and small offerings of the poor, than the studied praises of the learned, and the magnificent presents of the great. We do not see here either learned, or rich, or great men come to meet Christ, and contribute to the glory of his triumph;

this is for them a very bad presage: knowledge, which puffs up, being not apt to incline men to the obedience of faith, nor riches to the love of poverty, nor greatness to the humility of Christ.

“ 9. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.”

Some praise Jesus Christ to-day, who will crucify him to-morrow by their sins. See the vanity of the world's applause! To-day men acknowledge Christ to be the Son of David and the Messias; and we shall presently hear them renounce him, require his blood, and place him below thieves and murderers. There are abundance of these well-meaning but weak souls, who would die for the truth when there is nothing to fear; but who, as soon as it is attacked, are the first who turn their backs upon it, and declare against it. All the Scriptures give witness to Jesus Christ, the Old which preceded, as well as the New which followed him. Let us read and meditate on them all with reverence and faith.

“ 10. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?”

That saving trouble with which the elect are affected at the belief of Christ's coming, is very different from that trouble of envy and infidelity, which the establishment of his kingdom causes in the wicked. Had he come to flatter the passions of men, he would then have been welcome to the world; but the world would not have been converted. Had he adapted himself to the desires of sinful men, they would not indeed have been moved or troubled at his

coming; but then they could have had no Saviour. This is a dreadful instance of forgetfulness and ingratitude, to ask who Christ is, after so many wonders and miracles! Such is the forgetfulness of a sinner, who, having been healed and sanctified by his grace, loses it afterwards through his ingratitude.

“ 11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”

The people are readier to acknowledge and confess Jesus Christ than the great: but faith and piety, which have not yet been tried, are very unsteadfast and wavering. Those truths of the gospel, which, in some season or other of their lives, many have known and commended, will serve only to condemn them at the judgment of God.

SECT. II.—*The Buyers and Sellers cast out of the Temple. Little Children commended.*

“ 12. ¶ And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves,”

Avarice, covered with the veil of religion, is one of those things upon which Christ looks with the greatest indignation in his church. It is a sure mark of the terrible punishments which he reserves for the profaners of his true temple the church, that he suffers in it those whose very shadow and figure he would not suffer in the Jewish temple. Merchandise of holy things, simoniacal presentations, fraudulent exchanges, a mercenary spirit in sacred functions; ecclesiastical employments, obtained by flattery, service, or attendance, or by any thing which

is instead of money; collations, nominations, and elections, made on any other motive than the glory of God, and the good of the church—these are all fatal and damnable profanations, of which those in the temple were only a shadow.

“ 13. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

If to do common and ordinary actions in a temple, which contained no more than a figure of the Christian mysteries, denominate a man a thief in God's house; what name do those deserve, who, by criminal and scandalous discourses, by lascivious looks and shameful dresses, profane the churches where Christ is present? They who are placed in the church on purpose to serve souls, and do not do it; or who enjoy the revenues of the church, and neglect the service of it, are thieves in more senses than one.

“ 14. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.”

Jesus Christ soon returns to his kind and charitable inclination, whatever cause of anger has been given him: how can we refuse to imitate him with respect to our brethren? After having condemned the profane use of the house of God, he shows what is the holy and lawful use of it; namely, by prayer, adoration, praise, and sacrifice, to use our utmost endeavours to obtain the cure of those who are under the blindness of sin, and the lameness of irregular affections; or to enlighten them by the divine word.

“ 15. ¶ And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeas'd,”

The blindness and obstinacy of priests and teachers, are generally the effect of ambition, avarice, and pride. Would to God, that they who ought most to promote the advancement of his work, and the kingdom of Christ, were not too often those who obstruct and hinder it the most! The envy, jealousy, and worldly interest of corrupt ecclesiastics, will ever do more mischief to the church than her declared enemies. The most wonderful success of holy bishops, their reputation, and the veneration which the people have for them, are so far from gaining the hearts of their secret enemies, that they do but exasperate them the more.

“ 16. And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea: have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?”

A great reputation is a very great crime, when a man has envious, incensed, or powerful enemies. It is not always a well-regulated humility, to disavow praise and public esteem, when the glory of God and of truth is concerned. The praise of the common people is least to be suspected, because they are least capable of affectation and artifice. God willingly accepts the praises of the simple, because his Spirit draws them out of their mouths.

“ 17. ¶ And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.”

It is wisdom not to persist in endeavouring to instruct those who are blinded with envy. When a pastor has discharged all he owes to truth and the dignity of his office, he should consider what is due to prudence and humility, giving way for a time to

the envy of his enemies, and withdrawing himself from the excessive affection of his friends.

SECT. III.—*The Fig-tree withered. The Prayer with Faith.*

“ 18. Now in the morning, as he returned into the city, he hungered.”

How barren is the friendship of men towards Jesus Christ. Their hard-heartedness often leaves his members to suffer hunger as well as himself. We may conclude, from his hunger, that his triumph was followed by fasting and prayer, two powerful means to suppress human complacency, and expel the poison of applause. Christ had no need of these preservatives himself, but his members wanted this example and instruction.

“ 19. And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away.”

Can the Christian, who affords Jesus Christ nothing but barren words and desires, expect any thing but his malediction and curse? We must continually watch, and employ ourselves in good works, especially those of our salvation, still expecting the hour when Christ will come to demand the fruit of all his gifts and graces. A fig-tree in the way, and a Christian exposed to all the temptations of the world, either bear or preserve but very little fruit. Dryness and barrenness are, without comparison, more terrible in the other world, where there is not the least hope of any more grace. Let us take great

care, not to let the season pass which is proper for producing fruit: one moment will deprive us of it all.

“ 20. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away !”

The desertion and malediction of sinners ought to strike even the just with fear and amazement. We say every day one to another, See how suddenly this man died: but who takes warning by such examples? What we say to-day of others, will perhaps be said to-morrow of us. God is more to be admired in the fertility which he restores to trees and plants every year, than in the sterility wrought by him in this fig-tree; but the more wonders he produces, the less we admire them.

“ 21. Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.”

Nothing is impossible to a faith which doubts not; but this faith is very rare. Few or no miracles are done in our days, because there is so little faith, and so little necessity for them.

“ 22. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”

Faith is the source of prayer. The measure of faith is the measure of our success in prayer; and prayer is the interpreter of faith; it nourishes, increases, preserves, and makes it fruitful in good works. Abundance of people pray, but few proportion the fervency, humility, and perseverance of

their prayers, to the greatness of those gifts for which they pray. The church is the house of prayer, because it is the house of faith. Whoever prays not within the pale or faith of it, prays unprofitably, and somewhat worse.

SECT. IV.—*Christ is asked concerning his authority. Publicans and Harlots preferred to the Pharisees.*

“ 23. ¶ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?”

The wicked cannot believe, that the authority which condemns their maxims, is lawful; and are always ready to oppose it. It happens but too frequently in the church, that other persons, as well as the wicked, interrupt the chief pastors in the exercise of their proper functions, by carrying on unjust actions and vexatious suits against their authority and jurisdiction. The miracles of Jesus Christ are a sufficient proof of his authority; Scripture shows that of his ministers.

“ 24. And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things.”

The wisdom of God very easily finds means to confound the designs and malice of men. It is not out of a spirit contrary to simplicity, that our blessed Lord opposes one question to another; but to expose the insincerity of the enemies of his ministry, and to hinder them from obstructing the gospel.

There is a pious dexterity and address, as well as criminal and wicked artifices.

“25. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? 26. But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people: for all hold John as a prophet.”

One single word of the Son of God puts a stop to the malice, and disconcerts all the wisdom of the world. Simplicity gives a wonderful confidence and peace of mind: double-dealing causes a thousand disquiets and troubles. To what extremity are they reduced, whom envy and obstinacy engage to oppose those whom God sends to instruct them? They are forced even to confess their incredulity, and to acknowledge themselves set only against that which is good. Let a man do his utmost to conceal within his own heart the conviction which he has of truth and innocence, to avoid yielding thereto, or being condemned before men: God, who sees the heart, will, by the light of the last day, produce it as a witness against him, and make it his judge.

“27. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”

They who are once engaged against the truth, never scruple a lie. Pharisaical pride, according to its different interests, prompts men equally, either to pretend to know every thing, or to affect to know nothing. By a real ignorance, God often punishes the feigned and counterfeit ignorance of the envious, who will not acknowledge the good which they see in others.

“ 28. ¶ But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.”

Labour is the universal penance, imposed on all the children of Adam, and yet all the world declines it. Our soul is not our own. It is the vineyard of God, which we ought to cultivate, by fulfilling his commands; and this not out of self-love, but for the love of him. That which would have been the delight of man in innocency, is become a painful work to him since his fall.

“ 29. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented, and went.”

The just perceive at first the opposition of nature to obedience; but grace remains victorious. How happy is it for a man to receive the gift of repentance, when he has been so unhappy as to transgress the divine law in the first years of his life! There are very few Christians who have not lost their innocence by disobeying God; and very few sinners, who, touched with true remorse, “bring forth fruits meet for repentance.”

“ 30. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not.”

The pretended just man is full of presumption, and very eager to embrace the good proposed to him: he promises every thing, and performs nothing. Christian righteousness consists not in making ostentation of a great zeal for God's law, or of great application to every thing which contributes to make it more understood, nor in appearing always ready to fulfil it; but in fulfilling it with humility, exactness,

and perseverance. Men often deceive themselves in this matter: there are abundance of false lovers of the gospel.

“31. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.”

True repentance saves the greatest sinners: a false righteousness does but blind and harden the worldly-wise the more. Men recover more easily from gross and public disorders, than from a false righteousness and secret pride, which corrupt the whole life, and lull the sinner asleep.

“32. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”

If the word and good example had been sufficient for conversion, what sinners would not St. John have converted? Pride, which is the greatest obstacle thereto, requires other remedies. When a soul is not wrought upon, either by the innocency of the just, or the repentance of sinners, what hope can be entertained of its salvation? Worldly men perish continually amidst all sorts of good examples. That of saints, frights and discourages them; that of great sinners converted, they are ashamed to follow; and that of the generality of good men, is not strong enough to affect or stir them. It belongs to thee only, O Lord, to render all these examples useful, and to make them subservient to thy designs concerning souls.

SECT. V.—*The Parable of the Husbandmen.*

“ 33. ¶ Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: 34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. 35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.”

This is a representation of the perfidiousness of the Jews. The vineyard is the synagogue; the hedge, the divine protection; the wine-press, the law; the tower, the temple and sacrifices; and the husbandmen, the priests and doctors of the law. How great ought the fidelity and gratitude of Christians to be, who have received the truth and substance of all these things in Jesus Christ? The vineyard is now the church; the hedge, the faith which separates it from Jews and heretics; the wine-press, the sacrament from whence the blood of Christ, and the merits of his cross, stream into our souls; the tower is the promise of his presence and protection against all the powers of hell; the husbandmen are the pastors; and the far country is heaven, whither Christ ascended, having given them his mission and authority.

“ 36. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.”

The church, which has existed in all times, has, according to the difference of them, had prophets, apostles, pastors, and teachers. There is not a mo-

ment, in which God does not shower down his gifts upon us, and require the fruit of them. The church has been persecuted in all ages, under the law and under the gospel, under the prophets and under Jesus Christ; and the greatest share of persecution has still fallen on the ministers of it. There have been always good and bad husbandmen; and the former have still been ill used by the latter. How happy is the lot of those, who have faith enough to choose rather to suffer in serving the church, than to enjoy worldly peace by delining the service of it!

“37. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.”

The Son of God incarnate, by his word, his example, his mysteries, and his ministers, demands the fruit of those graces which God has betowed on mankind. Neither the infidelity of the Jews, nor their abuse of God's benefits, could put a stop to his goodness, or hinder him from sending his Son into the world. My God, how far from this spirit are the children of Adam! The least trifle is enough to raise their resentment, and to stifle their good-will.

“38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.”

The sinner, to enjoy the miserable peace of his sin, would destroy both Christ and his gospel, if it were in his power. To conspire against the church and its doctrine, as heretics do, is to conspire against Jesus Christ. We put him to death in every one of his members, which, by the poison of bad doctrine, example, or conduct, we rob of the life of faith and grace; or deprive of the food of prayer, of the word, and of the body and blood of Christ.

“ 39. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.”

Let us take great heed, lest, while we detest these murderers of the Son of God, we ourselves be reckoned of their number, on the account of our corrupt will. To be rejected and crucified by the Jews who knew him not, was less grievous to him than to be despised and outraged by Christians, who make profession of adoring him. To cast him out of our heart, is to “ cast him out of the vineyard,” which he has purchased with his blood, and to take away the life which he had in us. How many hearts are guilty of murder in the sight of God! How many, which are at least a prison, where Jesus Christ is detained captive!

“ 40. When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, What will he do unto those husbandmen? 41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.”

Jews and wicked Christians shall both be terribly punished: but the latter so much the more severely, as the gifts they have received are more excellent, and their ingratitude more abominable. If the first coming of Christ, which was all grace and mercy, proved so fatal to the Jews, by reason of their incredulity; how terrible will his second, consisting all of justice and vengeance, be to such Christians as have not lived according to their faith? Faith, without the fruits of it, distinguishes the Christian from the Jew, to no other end but his condemnation. We must render these fruits in their season, and that season lasts all our life.

SECT. VI.—*The Corner-stone.*

“42. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?”

They had read these words, but with a veil over their eyes, which hindered them from perceiving Jesus Christ, and their own heinous crime therein. What wonders should we discover in the Scriptures, if the corruption of our heart did not draw a veil like theirs over our eyes! How admirable would Christ appear to us in them, if we had but an earnest desire to find him there! This passage contains an abridgment of the whole knowledge of Jesus Christ:—

1. He is the workmanship of God by way of eminence.
2. He was rejected, humbled, and crucified by the Jews.
3. Raised again by his Father.
4. Constituted the head and foundation of the church.
5. Made the cement and union of its members, and the peace of Jews and Gentiles.
6. Rendered the object of the joy and admiration of the faithful; an object which ought continually to employ them here, and which will yield them eternal happiness hereafter.

“43. Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation * bringing forth the fruits thereof.” [* *Fr.* people.]

What we see here, in this just rejection of the Jews, and merciful calling of the Gentiles, is fulfilled every day in particular persons. Let not those, who seem the most forsaken, despair, any more than the Gentiles, of the mercy of God. Let not those,

whom he has favoured the most, be too much exalted thereby; but let them fear the miserable lot of the chosen and beloved people. None but a God could, with so much freedom and resolution, pronounce on his enemies the sentence of their condemnation. He who did it must needs have a great desire to die. And it was his earnest zeal to do his Father's will, and to form his chosen people, which kindled this desire in his heart. Christ answers for the fidelity of his people, who are his members; because he will himself engrave his laws upon their minds, and write them in their hearts. For it is he who produces in them, by his grace, the fruits which they bring forth by their will. Lord, since by thy mercy I am of the number of thy people, do thou cause me to bring forth the fruits of the kingdom of God.

“ 44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

All the vain efforts of Christ's enemies, whilst he was on earth, served only to the establishment of his designs, and to the confusion of all those who opposed them. But how dreadful will it be, when the storms of his vengeance shall fall upon the enemies of his kingdom and glory, after his resurrection, and at his second coming! They who, being scandalized at the humiliations of the Son of God, and the ignominy of the cross, rejected him before his resurrection, are those who fell on this stone, and were broken; but yet had opportunities of being converted, after the descent of the Holy Ghost. But as for those, who, after the glory of his resurrection, and the miraculous effects of the Holy Ghost in the establish-

ment of the church, continued still obdurate, this stone, lifted up to heaven, fell upon them at the destruction of Jerusalem; and will again fall upon them at his last coming, and grind them to powder.

“ 45. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.”

The word of Jesus Christ darts light sometimes into the heart of the wicked, but such light as blinds and hardens them the more. The most wholesome advice passes for an affront with those who have shut their hearts against the truth. When that, which should incline men to repentance, does only kindle the flame of spite and revenge, there is no more hope of salvation, without a very extraordinary grace.

“ 46. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.”

He who abstains from evil, only through fear of punishment, commits it in his heart, and is already guilty before God. Men are apt to fear those who can kill the body; but they fear not him who can destroy both body and soul eternally. A true pastor fears nothing but God, when his glory is concerned: a hireling fears every thing, except him whom only he ought to fear.

CHAPTER XXII.

SECT. I.—*The Parable of the Marriage-feast. The Wedding-garment.*

“ 1. AND Jesus answered, and spake unto them again by parables, and said, 2. The kingdom of

heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,"

The Jews were the first who were called to the belief of the incarnation, wherein Jesus Christ espoused the human nature, and the church. He chooses the most strict, tender, fruitful, and most inviolable of all alliances, to make us comprehend how intimate and advantageous to the Christian soul that union is, which God is pleased to have with it in his Son, by faith and charity. What may we not expect from a royal alliance! For what may we not hope from a divine union!

“ 3. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.”

The law, the prophets, and the gospel, are but so many different invitations to the wedding of Jesus Christ, to the belief and fruits of his incarnation. By these nuptials, which are yet only begun, the creature is already become one spirit and one heart with God: how then will it be, when, this marriage being consummated, he will admit the creature to a participation of all his treasure, perfect his charity in it, and make it live eternally for himself! This union with God is contracted very freely; and no man can be forced or necessitated to it: for it is an immediate union of will to will, of heart to heart; and it is by willing and consenting, that we come to God and Jesus Christ.

“ 4. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.”

God's patience is not wearied by the denial and resistance of man's heart. He seems as earnestly desirous of uniting it to himself, as if some great advantage would accrue to him thereby; whereas in truth he finds nothing in it but poverty, misery, and corruption; and, on the contrary, the heart finds in him, wisdom, holiness, greatness, riches, and all things which make a perfect, infinite, and incomprehensible felicity. Jesus Christ is himself the true victim of God, slain for us, to which we are invited, and of which we ought to partake, the sacrifice of the Christian covenant, and the marriage-feast and banquet: and it is by eating of it that this union is completed; here under the veil of the sacrament, but in heaven openly and without any veil.

“ 5. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: 6. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.”

There are three sorts of states, wherein men run the risk of living in a continual forgetfulness and neglect of salvation. The first, is that of a soft, idle, and voluptuous life, wherein a man thinks of nothing, but quietly to enjoy life, health, riches, conveniences, good cheer, public diversions, and private pleasures. This is the life of a man of fortune and pleasure. The second state of life, is that of a man entirely taken up with worldly business, merchandise, the public revenues, or any gainful employment, in which the love of riches, and application to the means of acquiring them, generally stifle all thoughts of salvation, and engross all that time which should be set apart for the prosecution of it. The third state, is

that of men openly unjust, violent, and outrageously wicked, who are sinners as it were by profession, in the face of the world, and who not only neglect their salvation, but are incensed against all those who exhort them to mind it, and impartially declare to them the truth. Permit us not, Lord, ever to be forgetful of thee in any state, or to be engaged in such as are inconsistent with salvation.

“7. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”

God, either sooner or later, takes vengeance on men for their contempt of his word and truth, and for their injurious treatment of his ministers. The punishment of the Jews, by the destruction of Jerusalem, which is here prefigured, is itself but a figure and shadow of the punishment of Christians. Death, which to the saints is the beginning of their happiness, to the reprobate is the beginning of the eternal vengeance of God. The city of this present world, which they make their earthly paradise, is then burnt up and destroyed as to them.

“8. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.”

The substitution of the Gentiles in the room of the Jews, denotes to us another substitution much more to be dreaded. Grace is often taken away from a wicked Christian, and given to others. No person is excluded from the feast, except he be unworthy; though no man is of himself worthy to be admitted to it. Deplorable was the blindness of the Jews, who knew not the feast which was prepared for them: but more deplorable is that of a Christian, who, after

having tasted and fed deliciously on it, loathes and nauseates it, and leaves it, to return to his vomit.

“ 9. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. 10. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.”

There is no respect of persons in the business of salvation. All sorts of sinners are invited to it, Jews and Gentiles, and the poor who have no settled abode, more than the rich and great ones of the world. The church is every where represented as visible, and containing both good and bad, righteous and wicked, united together by the participation of the same sacraments. Abundance of Christians are present at the table of the eucharistical feast, who will never be seen at the eternal table of God. Let us tremble at the thought.

“ 11. ¶ And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: 12. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless.”

Let every man learn from hence, to examine and judge himself, and to abstain from the holy table, until he has put on the wedding-garment: conformably to the apostle's injunction, which Christ authorises so long before by this parable. Thus we may prevent this dreadful separation, which will certainly be followed by an eternal excommunication. It is by faith that we come to the wedding-feast; it is by charity which is the life, and by good works which are the

fruits of faith, that we are qualified to eat the flesh of the Lamb, and to receive nourishment from it. Amongst a thousand unworthy communicants, perhaps there is but one, whose conscience upbraids him after this manner, How camest thou in hither? &c. Happy is he, if amended thereby. No answer can be made at the tribunal of God. The confusion arising from sin, and the conscience of the sinner, will stop his mouth.

“ 13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

See here the sad state and total interdiction of a damned soul. No more feet to run to God's mercy, or to flee from his justice. No more hands to do good, or to make any amends for evil. No more light whereby to know God or his own duty. Nothing but darkness, pain, grief, tears, rage, fury, and despair, remains for those who are cast out from the wedding-feast. This is the fruit of sin, and especially of the abuse of faith, grace, and the holy communion.

“ 14. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Many are called by the law of nature, by the written law, and by the preaching of the gospel: but few are there who come in by faith; few among these who live by faith; and few, even of these last, who persevere in the life of faith. The elect are not known, until the separation is made. One single reprobate cast out represents all the rest. God sometimes manifests his justice on a sinner, even in this world, on purpose to awaken all others; with whom he either bears, in expectation of their repentance,

or whom he reserves for the torments of hell. Let us strive to be of the small number.

SECT. II.—*God and Cesar.*

“ 15. ¶ Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.”

The devil's ministers, like himself, retire only for a while; but never lay aside the design of destroying virtuous people. Of all wicked persons, the envious are the least discouraged at disappointments. The good and pious ought strictly to watch over their words, because the world is always vigilant to make them serve its interests or passions. Set a watch, O Lord, upon my mouth, and secure it from being surprised either by the devil, or the world, or my own corrupt desires.

“ 16. And they sent out unto him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of men.”

The praises of the world are full of snares: he who loves them, loves temptation; and to love it, is to be willing to perish. The wicked scarcely ever make any other use of good, but only to promote their malicious designs. Real enemies and false friends take advantage very often of the good qualities which they discover in us, so as to make us act indiscreetly, and to put us upon imprudent measures. The fidelity which an ecclesiastical person owes to his ministry, banishes all fear of men from his mind; but agrees very well with Christian prudence, which is neither rash nor insensible. There are some regards

which proceed from timorousness, ambition, and complaisance; but there are also others, which spring from charity, discretion, and prudence.

“ 17. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cesar, or not?”

It is one of the common artifices of ill men, to set the spiritual and temporal powers at variance if possible; to engage princes in the disputes about doctrine and religion; and to find some means to render those odious whom they design to ruin. When the enemies of truth are undeniably convinced, their last shift is to make their adversaries pass for persons disaffected to the state, and to cry out against them as a faction. We must be sure not to give any occasion for this charge, but must avoid even the least appearance of deserving it.

“ 18. But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?”

They know but little of Christ, to whom the very bottom of the heart is open, who hope to conceal the wickedness of it from him. It is of great advantage to expose the designs of hypocrites, and to cover them with shame in order to render their calumnies ineffectual. We ought not to suffer the mask of piety, and a false love of truth, to remain on those who take it with no other design but to obstruct truth and piety itself.

“ 19. Show me the tribute-money. And they brought unto him a penny. 20. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?”

Nothing but the wisdom of God can teach us to avoid the snares of men, without wounding truth or justice, without interesting our own passions, and

without flattering or provoking those of others. When we make the divine truth and wisdom the standard of our words, we then weigh them as we ought. Christ seems not to know the tribute-money: 1. To recommend to us a contempt of riches. 2. To show, that he did not concern himself about secular affairs. 3. To confound his enemies by their own answer.

“ 21. They say unto him, Cesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cesar the things which are Cesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.”

This is an answer full of wisdom, which establishes the limits, regulates the rights, and distinguishes the jurisdiction, of the two empires of heaven and earth, of the spiritual and temporal powers. The image of princes stamped on their coin, denotes, that temporal things belong all to their governance; and the image of God imprinted on the soul of man, teaches, that whatever use he makes either of himself or of the creatures, ought to be referred to God. Respect, submission, dependence, and obedience to sovereign princes, as to whatever is temporal, being part of the divine law, we cannot pay them as we ought in the sight of God, but by doing it heartily, and on a principle of love. Princes being more the images of God than other men, ought also to render to God whatever they receive from men, by directing it all to his glory.

“ 22. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.”

They cannot forbear admiring him, and yet they cannot persuade themselves to love him; the hard-

ness of their heart resists the light of their understanding. Thus worldly persons admire good preachers, praise good men, and approve good actions, through a kind of natural integrity of heart; but yet are not converted for all this.

SECT. III.—*The Resurrection, and Angelical state.*

“ 23. ¶ The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,”

One temptation succeeds another. It is not to be expected, that the devil should let those rest who boldly attack him, and labour to destroy his kingdom. He uses his utmost endeavours to render the preaching, miracles, and whole mission of Christ ineffectual, by overturning the very foundation of all—the belief of the resurrection. Few persons openly deny it; the generality live as if they did not believe it.

“ 24. Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.”

In this was a figure of Christ, who was fruitful only after he was dead, and even by his death itself. The apostles, as being his brethern according to the human nature, raise up children; who therefore all bear his name, and not theirs. The expectation of the Messiah, and the desire of having a share in his birth according to the flesh, which was the chief ambition of the Jews, gave occasion to this law. But now we have a share in his birth, by faith and the Spirit; and more perfectly by the barrenness of virginity, than by the fruitfulness of marriage.

“ 25. Now there were with us seven brethren : and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother : 26. Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27. And last of all the woman died also. 28. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.”

Sensualists fear the loss of carnal pleasures in the other world. They are always mistaken, either in referring to the present life the truths of the other, or in entertaining dishonourable notions of this last, and applying to it those mysteries and truths which belong to the church here below, and to the forming of the mystical body of Christ. The devil amuses men with cares suited to their inclinations. Curious questions are a dangerous temptation in the church, and produce libertines therein. The truths of the resurrection of the body, and of the immortality of the soul, disturb and perplex these men the most, and therefore they attack them on every side, and by all the ways imaginable.

“ 29. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.”

Let us be sure not to judge of God, of his designs, and of his works, by the power of reason alone ; this is to derogate nature, from the infinity of his being, and the incomprehensibility of his greatness. There are two causes of the opposition of men to the truths of Christianity. The first is, in that they do not sufficiently understand the Scriptures for want of due application, zeal, faith, reverence, and humility ; they will not frequent the school of God, in

order to learn that which he vouchsafes to teach them concerning himself. The second, which flows from the former, is, in that they frame to themselves too mean an idea of his greatness, holiness, and power over his creatures; of his wisdom, conduct, and designs concerning his elect; and of that eternal life which he bestows on his saints, in himself, without any human means. It is a very great temerity to pretend to measure the eternal and infinite reason, and the omnipotency of the Creator, by the weak and corrupt reason of the creature.

“ 30. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”

All the alliances and unions here on earth, are tokens and effects of man's indigence and mortality. When once he shall enter into eternity, where all his desires will be satisfied, all his wants supplied, and his mortality swallowed up in glory; then all unions and societies shall be lost in the union and society with God. The less intercourse and union we have with the creature, the more have we with the Creator. Happy is that soul, which, even in this world, begins the life of angels, by separating itself from every thing, that it may live only to God, and for him alone as his spouse! Charity can render us like to angels in spirit; virginity only makes us resemble them in body as well as spirit.

“ 31. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 32. I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

God, who is the God, that is, the bountiful, magnificent, and almighty Rewarder of the righteous—whom he recompenses in proportion to his own love and their fidelity—declared to Moses, long after the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he was even then their God in this sense, and in a manner altogether peculiar. Now, if they were not present with God, and in his sight, any more than they were present with men, he could not style himself their God in so particular a manner. For the advantages they received on earth were not sufficient to verify this divine promise in respect of them. And therefore it is absolutely necessary that they should enjoy another life, and that their souls, which still subsist, should one day be re-united to their bodies, to receive in them such advantages, as may make it evident that God is their God, and their reward in a most extraordinary manner.

“ 33. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.”

God permits the infidelity of some, for the instruction and edification of others; the offences taken by the world, for the trial and manifestation of those who belong to him; and heresies, for the greater illustration of the truth. The doctrine of the church, when cleared and explained by holy men, appears the more admirable the more odious heretics have endeavoured to render it to the people. Thus God knows how to bring good out of evil, light out of darkness, and to discover the lustre of truth through the cloud which the wickedness of false teachers has cast upon it.

SECT. IV.—*The Love of God and of our Neighbour.*

“ 34. ¶ But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.”

Those who are powerful in wickedness, are always striving to succeed better in it than others. The admiration of the people, and the putting the Sadducees to silence, instead of discouraging envy, excite and stir it up. A wicked man takes no joy in the mortification of one enemy, when another more odious is exalted thereby, and thinks of nothing but how to deprive the last of the advantage he has gained.

“ 35. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, 36. Master, which is the great commandment in the law ?”

We see here three kinds of enemies and false accusers of Christ and his disciples, and three sorts of accusations brought against them, which are to the latter so many occasions of temptation. 1. The Herodians, or the politicians and courtiers, who form their accusation on the rights of the prince, and on matters of state, (ver. 16.) 2. The Sadducees, or the heretics and libertines, who build theirs upon the foundation of religion and faith, (ver. 23.) 3. The Pharisees, or the loose casuists and pretenders to devotion, who ground theirs upon morality, and chiefly upon the love of God, in this place.

“ 37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”

If to love God with all the heart, be to seek, ad-

here to, and rest in him alone, for his own sake; and to seek, adhere to, and take pleasure in nothing, but only so far as it is conformable to his will, as it may be referred to his glory, or be useful to our own salvation, to that of our neighbour, or to the good of the church—we may then be assured, that the number of those who love God from the bottom of the heart is much smaller than we imagine. There must be no thoughts nor designs in the mind, no desires nor motions in the will, no business nor actions in the life, but what must have the love of God for their principle, and his glory for their end.

“ 38. This is the first and great commandment.”

The greatest sins are those which are committed against the love of God, because this is the first and great commandment. And it is so, 1. In antiquity, being as old as the world, and engraven in our very nature. 2. In dignity, as directly and immediately respecting God. 3. In excellence, being the commandment of the new covenant, and the spirit of the divine adoption. 4. In justice, because it alone renders to God his due, prefers him before all things, and secures to him his proper rank in relation to them. 5. In sufficiency, being sufficient of itself to make men holy in this life, and happy in the other. 6. In fruitfulness, because it includes all the other commandments, and is the root of them all. 7. In virtue and efficacy, because by this alone God reigns in the heart of man, and man is united to God. 8. In extent, leaving nothing to the creature which it does not refer to the Creator. 9. In necessity, being indispensable. 10. In duration, as being never to be discontinued on earth, and to continue

eternally in heaven. How then, my God, can any one forbear loving thee? yet how can any one possibly love thee, unless thou thyself vouchsafest to inspire this love into him?

“ 39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

The love of our neighbour is found in the love of God, as in its principle, pattern, and end; and the love of God is reciprocally found in the love of our neighbour, as in its effect, representation, and infallible mark. We take nothing from God when we love our neighbour for his sake. To love him as ourselves, is to love him as we ought to love ourselves, in observing the order of charity; and not as we love ourselves when we follow our own irregular inclination. It is but one and the same love, which loves God in our neighbour, and our neighbour for God's sake, when we desire that his name may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done in our neighbour after the same manner that we desire it for ourselves.

“ 40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The Scripture contains and commands nothing but charity. How extensive soever our external performance of the divine law may be, we always transgress a part of it when we perform it not for God's sake; because, by this neglect, we fail in the observation of the great precept concerning loving him, which is included in every part of his law. This double precept, concerning the love of God and of our neighbour, is the summary of all the divine and positive commandments, the compendious direction and

way to salvation, the Bible of the simple and ignorant, and the book which even the most learned will never thoroughly understand in this life.

SECT. V.—*Christ the Son and Lord of David.*

“ 41. ¶ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42. Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David.”

Jesus here asks a question in his turn, not to tempt, but to instruct his disciples; to confound the obstinate, to point out the source of all their captious questions, namely, their ignorance of the prophecies which foretold the Messias; to furnish his church with weapons against the Jews in all ages; and, by this last public instruction, to establish the truth of his divinity, incarnation, power, and kingdom, as the foundation of all religion.

“ 43. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, 44. The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? 45. If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?”

This psalm appears to be a prophecy concerning the Messias, by the explication of Christ himself, from the confession of his enemies, and according to the general opinion of those times. We herein find sufficient proof of the divinity of Christ the son of David, not in the manner in which the Jews understood it, but as David had foretold it by the Holy Ghost: Christ being at the same time the Son of God, equal to him in power, and heir of all things. His kingdom will not have its full consummation

till all his enemies are destroyed, and especially sin and death.

“ 46. And no man was able to answer him a word; neither durst any man, from that day forth, ask him any more questions.”

Truth at length triumphs through the wisdom and word of Christ: but the defender of it will, notwithstanding, be oppressed in the sight of men. An important instruction this, to teach us, not to judge of truth by what those who defend it suffer. The more triumphant it is by their ministry, the more they must expect to suffer and to be humbled, in order to counterbalance their vanity, to render them conformable to Christ, to purify them from human infirmities, to make them capable of a greater reward, and to show, that it is not by the endeavours of men that truth gains a triumph, but by the God of truth itself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SECT. I.—*The Chair of Moses. Proud Rabbies.*

“ 1. THEN spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2. Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:”

Let us learn to look always with respect on Christ and his authority, even in the most imperfect of his ministers. Whatever their manners are, their authority suffers no damage thereby. The doctrine of truth which God has placed in the church, loses nothing of its value by the ill lives of its ministers. How contrary is the conduct of the Son of God to

that of heretics and schismatics, who have defamed the church, decried her doctrine, usurped her ministry, and broke her unity, under pretence of abuses in discipline, of superstitious practices, and of irregularity amongst ecclesiastical persons! That which proceeds from their corrupt will, belongs indeed to them, and must be rejected; but the truth and authority which they have from Christ and his apostles, belong to God, and ought to be inviolable. The faith is not built upon the lives of pastors, but upon the visible authority of the church, which warrants nothing but what she has received from Jesus Christ by the hands of the apostles and their successors.

“3. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.”

It is a very great delusion for men to reject good doctrine, to refuse obedience, and not to improve by instruction, under pretence of the ill conduct of their pastors. If these are more to be condemned for exposing the simple to this temptation, they are not, however, the less to be believed on this account when they teach sound doctrine. The only sure way is, always to follow the visible body of the pastors as to faith and doctrine, with which they are entrusted; and not to follow the example of their life, but only when it is conformable to the faith and doctrine universally received by the body. See here the admirable providence of God, who has been pleased to make the authority which is to be followed more visible, than the bad example which is to be avoided; to this end, that the faith and salvation of the illiterate might not depend either on disquisitions where-

of they are not capable, or on the ill example of some pastors, which might possibly draw them away, if they had not a visible and standing rule by which they may and ought to judge of their manners. Let us not without necessity search into the lives of our pastors; nor approve them when they are manifestly disorderly. The first mark of the irregular life of a pastor is, his not living according to those evangelical maxims which he teaches.

“ 4. For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”

The second mark of the corruption of a pastor is, his being severe to others and indulgent to himself. That which is grievous only to corrupt nature, when left to its own weakness, is not the heavy burden of which Christ speaks in this place, but that which a pharisaical severity or indiscreet ignorance imposes on the weak, contrary either to the letter or to the spirit of the gospel. Repentance seems not impossible to any but the impenitent; nor the holy rigour of the gospel grievous to be borne, except only to carnal and sensual minds. The yoke of it is easy and the burden light, when God inclines a man to bear them, by inspiring the love of mortification, and the spirit of repentance. They who preach repentance to others, and do not perform it themselves, render this yoke more heavy, and the necessity of it less credible. Nothing is a better proof that it is not impossible, than to see it practised by those who recommend it. Gentleness, discretion, and a good example, are necessary qualifications of a pastor.

“ 5. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,”

The third mark of a pastor's irregular life is, when he affects to appear righteous, and a great observer of the law, as the Pharisees did, in wearing larger phylacteries, or borders of parchment, in which the words of the law were written, and longer fringes, which were a mark of distinction from the Gentiles, or a sign of greater piety. There is a medium between a humility which would hide, and a vanity which would make a show of every thing: we must endeavour to find it. A pastor owes an example; but it is an example of humility, as much, and more than of any thing else. A man must have the love of the law engraven in his heart, to be a true observer of it in the sight of God. An exactness without ostentation, and works, the sole end of which is God, are the things whereby the people must be edified. He who labours only to gain the esteem of men, has nothing to expect from God but the punishment of his vanity. Singularity in dress is suspicious and blameable: but modesty is no part of singularity, how singular soever the torrent of vanity and extravagance may make it appear.

“ 6. And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,”

The fourth sign that a pastor's life is not regular is, when he loves to have the chief place. For it is one certain mark of a Pharisee, to be always desirous of distinguishing himself from others, either in the sacred ministry, or in the conversation of civil life. A man may take the first place when it is due to his

dignity or rank; he ought sometimes to take it, that he may not give up a right with which he is only entrusted; and he may likewise accept it when offered by civility; but he must never seek it, or be greatly delighted with it, out of a love of preference.

“7. And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.”

The fifth mark of a pastor's irregularity is, his loving public honours. The sixth and last, his being vainly pleased with great names and titles. It is a misfortune to weak and imperfect Christians, to be in a rank and station to which some extraordinary honours are affixed. They are puffed up when they receive them; provoked when they are not given; they require them with haughtiness, possess them with fondness, defend them with heat, lose them with grief and regret, and pursue the recovery of them with greediness and fierceness.

SECT. II.—*God the only Father, Christ the only Master.*

“8. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.”

The church is the only school of truth, where Jesus Christ alone teaches it. He only is the Master, men are but his ministers or servants. It is their mouth indeed which opens, their tongue which speaks, their words which are heard: but the doctrine which they teach is his, they find it in his word, by his authority they preach it, and by his Spirit it is learned and understood. God's truth and word are an inheritance common to all the brethren. He who would seize it to his own advantage or honour, and

deprive his brethren of the use of it, is a usurper of the patrimony of the church. Pastors ought to preach the word with the charity and meekness, and the faithful to hear it with the concord and unity, of brethren: for “all ye are brethren.”

“9. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.”

The church is one family, of which God alone is the Father; from whom all the children, begotten by his word and Spirit, receive a new life. No man partakes of God's quality of Father, but only so far as he partakes of his power, authority, and charity, to breed up children for him, according to the order of nature, of civil life, and of grace.

“10. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.”

A true Christian should hearken only to Christ in his word and ministers: an humble pastor desires to be heard, only as the disciple of this Teacher, and the servant of this Master. Jesus Christ is the sole Teacher of righteousness, foretold by the prophets; because he alone is the internal Master, who, being the word, light, and eternal truth, illuminates every created mind, and discovers all truth; and who, as Saviour and Deliverer, speaks to the heart by his Spirit, and teaches it the truth by causing it to love it.

“11. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”

Humility preserves the graces we have received; charity makes them subservient to the good of our neighbour. All conditions in the world are not equal; and even in the sacred ministry there are different degrees: but humility either renders all equal

in God's sight, or places below others those who were above them. When a man possesses greatness, only to enjoy it himself, and to place his felicity therein, he possesses it as a heathen. When he receives it with confusion, and a sense of his own unworthiness, and looks on it as a means of serving others, he then possesses it as a Christian. All advancement is dangerous; because nothing is so necessary, and yet so rare and uncommon a thing, as humility.

“ 12. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

Humility is the certain way to substantial greatness; abasement, the unavoidable punishment of pride. According to the preceding words, a man exalts himself, and deserves to be abased, when, being in a high station, he neglects to abase himself, by a true humility of heart, and to make his greatness serviceable to his neighbour, according to God's design: how much more then does he exalt himself, and deserve to be abased, when he ambitiously seeks honours, and endeavours to raise himself to the highest preferments! Here is matter sufficient in this place to comfort those who are humbled, either by their own virtue, or by the pride of others: but there is likewise enough to make every body tremble; humility being so strange and unsupportable a thing to those who are in the highest, and so difficult even to those who are in the lowest condition.

SECT. III.—*Hypocritical Teachers.*

“ 13. ¶ But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven

against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.”

As Jesus Christ has delivered eight beatitudes, so he pronounces here as many woes against hypocrites. Having now no manner of reason to treat these men gently, to whom, as persons abandoned to their own blindness, he designs to speak no more ; he here discovers their envy and hypocrisy, that he may hinder them from being hurtful to others. Strange corruption ! that men, obliged by their state and profession to promote the knowledge and love of Christ, should do the quite contrary, by decrying those who are employed in his work, and amusing souls with unprofitable and superstitious practices. It is a great sin in any Christian whatever, out of envy, thus to oppose the salvation of souls, and the designs of God concerning them : but it is one of the greatest causes of malediction on envious and hypocritical ministers. If it be a great misfortune, not to enter into the kingdom of heaven ; it is the greatest of all, to hinder others also from entering. They hinder others from entering, who decry good men who might serve as guides ; who dispense with the exercises of repentance, which is the gate ; and weaken the rules of the gospel, which is the way thither.

“ 14. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer : therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.”

Avarice and hypocrisy very seldom go apart in ecclesiastical persons. When their heart is once corrupted by them, the more wealth they heap together, the greater treasure of wrath they lay up for them-

selves. Will widows never learn to mistrust hypocrites? Give to hospitals, to prisons, to those who are ashamed to ask, and above all to poor relations: this is the way to avoid the snares of such as are only pretenders to devotion, but who are really devoted to nothing but their own interest.

“ 15. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”

Vanity and false zeal often cover themselves under the pretence of God's glory. We must carefully endeavour to discern those who seek their own; but we must not judge of them without evidence, or without utility. One single soul, redeemed by Christ, well deserves the utmost pains of the most considerable ministers of the church. Endeavours of this nature are sometimes the sacrifice of a perfect charity; sometimes the effort of a complete hypocrisy. It is a matter of the last importance, to take care not to put any confidence in a seducer, whose maxims and example can serve only to corrupt the heart the more. The false maxims, prejudices, and calumnies of some spiritual directors, do generally pass into their disciples, and take deeper root in their minds; which renders them more blameable, instead of excusing them.

“ 16. Woe unto you, ye blind guides! which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor.”

The covetous man always gives the preference to the object of his lust: gold has still the first place in his heart. That person's zeal is more than to be

suspected, who recommends those good works most, from which he receives most advantage. A man ought to take great care to purify his intention, and to secure himself from the least suspicion of acting by motives of interest, when he solicits offerings, foundations, gifts to the church, &c. which he must not do, but when there is a necessity for them.

“ 17. Ye fools, and blind ! for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold ? ”

Jesus Christ gives covetous ecclesiastics particularly, the names of fools and blind, because it is the most apparent blindness of mind, and the most deplorable corruption of heart, to make religion subservient to avarice, to value that most in it which it teaches them most to despise, and to form all their notions of it according to their own irregular desires. In all true religion, the temple is the fountain of the sanctity which is therein : in the Jewish, the temple, where God was present ; in the Christian, Jesus Christ the true temple, wherein the fulness of the Godhead dwells, from whence every thing which is offered to God, and even the heart which offers it, receives its sanctification ; in the religion of heaven, “ the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, who are the temple ” of glory, and the source of consummate holiness. (Rev. xxi. 22.)

“ 18. And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing ; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. ”

A blind casuist is guilty of four sins. The first consists in authorising irreligious oaths, and disseminating the abuse of them. The second, in turning both to his own advantage. The third, in dispensing

with an obligation of divine right. And the fourth, in overturning the order of religion and the duties of it, and confounding the notions thereof. A casuist ought to be entirely free from worldly interest, thoroughly instructed in religion, and extremely cautious how he invades the least of God's rights: without these qualifications he ruins all.

“ 19. Ye fools, and blind ! for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift ? ”

Every victim is sanctified by the altar. The person of the Word, to whom the holy humanity of Christ was united, is as it were a divine altar, which not only sanctifies the victim, but also renders it divine and adorable. It is the business of faith, to discover in this general maxim the foundation of the church's religion and worship, which consists in adoring God by Jesus Christ. Nothing is worthy of God, but what is sanctified by this altar; nothing should be offered to him, which has not been purified, elevated, and consecrated, by its union with Christ. It is by the faith and charity of the heart which makes the offering, that this union is made: this is that which we must always endeavour to establish and perfect in souls.

“ 20. Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. 21. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. 22. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.”

We must be careful, not to swear even by the creatures. They are more or less holy, in proportion to the relation which they have to God; and the oath

is so much the more criminal, as it more profanes the holiness of which they partake. Would to God we could never look on the creatures, without considering their relation to the Creator, how much of his perfections he communicates to them, how he is present in them, the use which he would make of them, and which he would have us make for his service, the circumspection and regard with which we ought to do it, &c.

SECT. IV.—*The Gnat and Camel. Outside of the Cup. Whited Sepulchres.*

“ 23. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith : these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

To be exact in little external things, and to omit such as are essential to religion and piety, what is this but to deceive ourselves ? The devil has more than one sort of snares. He has some for the licentious ; and some also for the devout. Unhappy is that man, who rests secure in a vain and conceited exactness about the niceties of devotion, instead of applying himself to his proper duties, to the reformation of his heart, and to the faithful observation of justice and charity towards his neighbour, and of whatever faith and religion require towards God : this is a kind of delusion more dangerous to some souls, than an open temptation to sin.

“ 24. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.”

See here the false tenderness of conscience, which

serves only to nourish pride and vanity, and to deceive the sinner by an appearance of good. One man is extremely concerned at the omission of a prayer, or of some arbitrary practice, which he has imposed on himself, who takes no care to correct his vicious habits of anger, evil-speaking, lying, slandering, luxury, immodesty, &c. Another would not take from his neighbour the value of a gnat or fly, who robs the poor of a sum or heap as big as a camel, by his covetousness, vain expenses, ill use of ecclesiastical revenues, &c.

“ 25. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.”

The heart is the seat of virtue and vice: it is by the heart that we please or displease God. In vain do men hinder their corruption from appearing outwardly, that they may not lose the esteem of men, if their heart be corrupt in the sight of God, through the love of sin, and through criminal desires. A true penitent acts quite contrary: he uses his utmost endeavours to cleanse his heart by the love of God, and the hatred of sin; and is willing to bear the shame and confusion of his misery before men.

“ 26. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.”

External purity proceeds only from the internal: from within it diffuses itself without. He who seeks the applause of the world, is but little concerned about his inward part. It is a blindness, which is very common, for men to think that they have ful-

filled the commandments of God, when they have performed the outward part. Obedience to the law must flow from the fountain-head, which is charity. When the love of God is its inward principle, and his glory its end, then the outside is clean: but without this, it is nothing but hypocrisy and false righteousness.

“ 27. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.”

How many Christians are there in name and in appearance; how few in spirit and in truth! A great many have not the virtues which they seem to have; and have even the contrary vices. There is nothing of greater importance, than to examine and know ourselves thoroughly in this regard; since it is concerning this that we shall be examined and judged at the tribunal of God. When this whiteness, with which the wall is at present covered, shall be taken off, and the naked heart appear as it is, my God! of what use will it then be, to have deceived men by concealing its rottenness, but only to overwhelm it with greater confusion and a more terrible judgment!

“ 28. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

God leaves the outward appearance to men: the heart he reserves for himself. This is the temple in which he will be served and adored, and the seat of Christian piety. Dreadful is the judgment, and miserable the condition, when men are abandoned to this passion of desiring to hide the filthiness of a cor-

rupt heart, under the veil of a false righteousness : there being nothing more apt to increase pride, and to render it incurable. If the best of men find so much difficulty in weaning themselves from the vain desire of the esteem of the world ; how shall a hypocrite ever recover from it, whose whole application and only study it is to attract and secure it !

“ 29. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30. And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.”

The Pharisees thought themselves very far from the injustice and cruelty of those who had killed the prophets ; and yet were themselves at the same time contriving the death of Christ. Let men condemn the conduct of the wicked ever so much with their mouth ; if they imitate it, they approve it. They who praise the saints, and yet persecute those who resemble them, arraign themselves. Men are ready enough to extol the righteous of former ages, and to blame their persecutors ; there being now nothing to fear or hope from those who are dead. But for the sake of a very small interest, they will, without any scruple, join with the world against good men of the present age. Grant, Lord, that our opinions and conduct may be directed by thy word and interests, and not by the corruption of our own heart, or by the spirit of the world.

SECT. V.—*The measure of Iniquity. Jerusalem a murdering City.*

“ 32. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.
33. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

God cannot either commend or approve of sin, because he is infinitely good: but he can abandon and give up the sinner to his wickedness, because he is infinitely just. Miserable is the state of him who has filled up the measure of his crimes. To be deaf to the truth, to oppose it out of interest, envy, and jealousy, and to persecute those who preach it, are generally the last sins. There is a certain measure of grace and mercy, after which God leaves his justice to take its course: this measure is known only to him. When a man is about to commit any sin, he ought to fear that that very sin will be the last to fill up the measure; but after the commission of it, he should hope that it is not, and repent of it. This is the only means to escape the damnation of hell: but how rare is the grace of repentance after a pharisaical life, such as our blessed Saviour has here represented it!

“ 34. ¶ Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:”

The gifts of God in his saints serve only to increase the damnation of those who are left to their own blindness and wickedness. It is an instance of the favour and blessing of God on an age and coun-

try, when he bestows on it some eminent saints, some pastors full of zeal, wisdom, and knowledge: but wo to those who, by persecuting these saints and pastors, change this favour and blessing into judgment and malediction. All private persons contribute to this misfortune by their sins, and therefore they ought all to avert it by their repentance.

“35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.”

The resemblance which the crimes of children bear to those of their fathers, draws upon them the same punishments. There is, in the life of a wicked man, a chain of sins linked one to another, from the beginning to the end of it, which altogether cause his reprobation: so in proportion in a nation, in a community, and particularly in the body of the Jews. Abel, the first righteous man, slain by his brother out of envy, and Zacharias the priest, stoned on the account of his zeal in speaking the truth, are two figures of Jesus Christ, and of the causes of his death.

“36. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.”

So terrible is the justice of God, that when he punishes a sinner, he seems to punish all sins in him. God in mercy foretells his judgments, confirms the prediction by a kind of oath, represents the rigour, and points out the time of them; but the sinner's obduracy turns this mercy into a new treasure of wrath.

“37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

Unbelieving Jerusalem is an emblem of the sinner. How great must the tenderness of Christ for his elect be, since he shows so much for these obdurate hearts! God earnestly desires the sinner's repentance, since he causes it to be preached to him by so many persons, and in so many different manners: but the sinner will not hear. Wretched will, of which man is so fond and jealous; and which yet, by reason of its corruption, is good for nothing but to resist and oppose the will of God! But thou, Lord, canst overcome this resistance whenever thou pleasest. Thou givest way to it, when thy justice requires it; thou subduest it, when thy mercy inclines thee thereto.

“38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 39. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

The Jewish people, left to the justice of God, even to the end of the world, are a dreadful instance of the punishment of sin. When men seek to avoid the loss of worldly goods by forsaking God, they are themselves forsaken by him; and his justice often takes away that, which they endeavoured to secure at the expense of their fidelity. In what a sad condition is a heart, when God withdraws himself from it, when his hand leaves it to itself, when the eyes of its faith are closed, and it sees neither Christ, nor

his truth, nor its own duty! O Jesus, let not this miserable heart be mine! Let it never lose sight of thee. Let thy light continually shine upon it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SECT. I.—*The Destruction of the Temple. Deceivers. Wars. Famine.*

“1. AND Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him, for to show him the buildings of the temple.”

Jesus Christ, by going now the last time out of the temple, denotes the reprobation of the Jews. He bears with the curiosity of his disciples, to teach us how to make that of our friends subservient to their instruction and edification. It is a very extraordinary talent, to know how to improve every unprofitable part of conversation to the advantage of religion, by taking occasion from thence still to mention something which is edifying, and to sow the seed of some beneficial truth.

“2. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

This temple was destroyed, justly, on the account of the sins of the Jews; mercifully, to take away from them the occasion of continuing in Judaism; and mysteriously, to show that the ancient sacrifices were abolished, and that the Jewish worship was ceased. If God spared not his own temple, what will become of those profane edifices, built and

cemented with the blood of the poor? Happy that person who labours only to erect an eternal building!

“3. ¶ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Human curiosity makes a great progress in a little time. This of the apostles is commendable, because they only pursue the intimation given them by Christ, and make him the only subject of their inquiry. There are three different comings of Jesus Christ, which serve mutually to make known and illustrate one another. One in anger, to punish the Jews, and to put an end to the reign of the law. Another in mercy, to form his church, and to begin the reign of the gospel and of grace. The third in glory, to judge the world, and to consummate the kingdom of God in his saints, and that of his justice in hell. Abundance of people are curious to know the time “of the end of the world;” but very few endeavour to prepare themselves for the end of their own life.

“4. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you:”

The world is full of deceivers, (2 John vii.) This is a temptation belonging to all times, and to which the three comings of Christ are subject. The deceit which is covered with the mask of piety, is more to be feared by those who seek God than by others. False Christs to the Jews, false apostles to the first Christians, and false reformers in the last ages. False pastors, false directors of the conscience, and pretenders to the Spirit in all times. It

is not without cause that Christ gives us this caution: as we must not neglect it, so we must not abuse it.

“ 5. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”

In this and the following verses, Christ points out unto us several means and occasions of being seduced. The first means proceeds from false Christs. The delivering the Jews up to them was a just punishment for their having rejected the true during his life, for their having ascribed his miracles to the illusion of the devil, and treated him as a deceiver after his death. How dangerous is it, not to profit by the cares of a good pastor! God oftentimes, by way of judgment, takes such a one away, and permits a hireling to come in his place. Men lose the opportunity of a wise, exact, and experienced director, and fall into the hands of a deceiver. To avoid this first seducement, we must watch, pray, and carefully examine.

“ 6. And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.”

The second occasion of being seduced is, when the sight of the disorders and confusions, which seem to denote the end of the world, causes men to despair of seeing the divine promises fulfilled. Let us not be troubled whatever happens: God will accomplish his own work, and be faithful to his promises. What means is there for men to avoid being troubled at a scourge so terrible as that of war, except by continuing always intent on God, his promises, and his law, and endeavouring to appease his wrath by a

serious conversion? “Wars and rumours of wars,” as to the generality of mankind, serve only to excite the trouble and disorder of their passions, their ambition, revenge, hope, curiosity, avarice, and desire of new events. The true Christian adores God; bewails both those sins which are the causes, and those which are the effects of war; beholds with a holy dread the justice of God, executed by the rage of men; laments the loss of so great a number of souls; casts his eyes on God’s eternal vengeance, of which this is only the shadow; and beseeches him to make all these things subservient to his glory, and to his designs concerning the elect.

“7. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. 8. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

The third means of being seduced, is the attributing that to man which comes from God. Thus the heathens ascribed all the misfortunes of the empire, and all the plagues which God inflicted, to the contempt which the Christians showed towards their idols; whereas these evils were only the punishment of the wicked, and the trial of the good. Men generally turn every thing to the disadvantage of piety. If a man, from the time of devoting himself to God, suffer in his estate, his health, or otherwise, it is, say they, because he is imprudent in his conduct, indiscreet in his mortifications, excessive in his devotions, &c. Revolts, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and all the other evils of this life, are emblems of those of the other, which they warn us to prevent by repentance; and of the vices and disorders of our hearts, which they solicit us to correct.

SECT. II.—*The Righteous persecuted. False Prophets. Charity grown cold. Perseverance.*

“ 9. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”

The fourth occasion of being seduced is, the public and general hatred, and the persecution of the world. Can a religion, said they, which is abhorred by all the world, be the true? Can a handful of men, pursued with fire and sword by all the powers of the earth, and despised by the wisest philosophers—can such as these be the favourites of God? How often does it happen, that good men are persecuted as criminals, merely on the account of this fourth means of seducement? To be hated of all the world is nothing, provided one is beloved of God.

“ 10. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.”

The fifth occasion of being seduced, proceeds from the scandals or offences given by those of the household of faith, their divisions, and the treacheries of false brethren. Nothing is more serviceable to the devil, in seducing the weak and simple. We must still adhere to God, by and for himself; and not forsake him, though we should be left alone. Good example is a great help in piety, but it is not the foundation of it. Our being mingled with the wicked is somewhat inconvenient and troublesome; but it is necessary, to exercise our virtue, and to put us in mind of human infirmity.

“ 11. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.”

The sixth means of being seduced, arises from false prophets, mercenary pastors, and teachers of error. All those who advance such doctrines of religion or morality, as are contrary to the gospel, are of this number: and this number is great in all ages. Had Jesus Christ foretold the fall but of two or three persons, ought we not to have feared lest we should be of the number? He has foretold the fall of many, and we tremble not. Let us keep ourselves closely united to God by faith, and believe that this gift proceeds from his pure goodness alone.

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

The last occasion of being seduced is, the observing how charity grows cold; which still decays in proportion to the increase of concupiscence. It is a grace which is very uncommon, for a man to hold out against the iniquity of the age, and to secure his virtue from being at all weakened thereby. One of the most subtle and dangerous seducements of all, is the example of some person of great reputation for piety, who, through fear of men, grows faint and cool in the cause of truth. Such a one often draws many after him, either by the weight of his authority, or perhaps because he is the more earnest to make his weakness pass for a virtue, to maintain and justify it, and to procure as many imitators of it as he can.

“13. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

God alone gives perseverance, no man merits it. Can any one who knows his own weakness, and considers all the seducements and temptations of life,

trust at all to himself? We are so much the less secure of receiving this gift, the more confident we are of it; and we have so much the more reason to hope for it, the more unworthy we think ourselves thereof. It belongs to him who has begun the work of salvation, to finish and complete it in us. But in order to this, it belongs to us to fear, to pray, to humble ourselves, and to labour.

“ 14. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

The destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple was deferred, till the gospel had been preached every where; to the end, that the Jews might see the completion of the prophecies in the vocation of all the Gentiles; that all the Jews dispersed abroad might be called, before the execution of the divine vengeance; and that the church, even from its infancy, might have a kind of universality, and be visible to all the earth, before the shadow of the synagogue disappeared. But how many Jews were there then, how many Christians are there in all ages, to whom the knowledge of the gospel served, and still serves, only to their condemnation!

SECT. III.—*The Abomination in the Holy place.*
Flight. Great Tribulation.

“ 15. When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand,)”

We are not at all troubled at the dreadful signs of the desolation of Jerusalem, because all that is

past. We are little concerned at the desolation of the church by Antichrist, because this seems at a great distance. But how come we not to fear the desolation of the soul by sin, of which we have so many present examples, the principle of which we carry within us, and the abomination of which all the prophets, and all the Scriptures so plainly represent unto us! The profanation of holy things is a terrible mark of God's displeasure. We are affected only with such as are external and extraordinary; but the frequent abuse of the sacraments, especially unworthy communions, the sacred ministry in the hands of wicked men, the contempt of the divine word, and the sins of ecclesiastical persons, ought much more to make us sigh, and dread the last effects of the wrath of God, and even the extinction of religion itself in a country.

“ 16. Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains:”

To quit all in order to save our souls, is a counsel proper for all times, but which on some occasions may become a necessary duty. The world is judged, and is about to be given up to the divine Justice, and yet we still cleave to it! There is not one person to be found, but who, for fear of God's judgments, ought to flee into the mountains, either by retirement, or by a life of prayer, or by separating himself from the company of sinners, or by renouncing the conversation, maxims, and impertinences of the world, or even by forsaking his best friends, if they have forsaken God. When retreat is necessary to a man's salvation, he must not barely retire, but fly.

“ 17. Let him which is on the house-top not come down to take any thing out of his house: 18. Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.”

Unhappy is that man who loads himself with earthly cares and riches, when he should think of nothing but how to escape the divine wrath by forsaking all! He who desires to save all, hazards all. Let us leave that to perish, which must do so; let us save that which is eternal. Death surprises almost all mankind in some particular engagement—the carnal after one manner, the spiritual after another. The body is an earthly house: when a life of faith or mortification has once raised us above it, our salvation is secured by our not descending or coming down. The body is a garment: he who has once laid aside his affection towards it, in order to work out his salvation, must by no means take it again.

“ 19. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days!”

Happy is that man, whom the consequences of marriage, and the encumbrances of a family, hinder not from saving his soul by flying from the world! Men are generally big with desires and designs as to the world, and filled with the love of it, when they are forced to leave it. How advantageous is it, to disengage and free ourselves from them betimes! A soft and effeminate soul is fond of the body, and entirely employed about it, as a nurse about her child, to gratify its desires, to please it in every thing, and breed it up in an animal and carnal way of life. How terrible to these effeminate spirits is the bare name of death! yet it is not the less unavoidable.

“20. But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath-day:”

We must fly from sin and the wrath of God while we can. It is a fatal imprudence to wait till some great occasion present itself, ere we think of making any provision of virtue; and to delay the work of our salvation, till we are unable to perform any thing; and our flight from the obstacles of it, till the winter of a languishing, inactive, and infirm old age. It is chiefly by means of prayer, that the Christian furnishes himself with provisions, that he proposes himself to depart, and that he converts the barrenness and coldness of his heart into an abundance of charity, and his inability to work into the strength and vigour of grace.

“21. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”

Every thing is disposed and ordered in favour of the elect. The destruction of Jerusalem was hastened, to prevent those among the Jews from falling under such temptations as were above their strength; and the reign of Antichrist will be shortened, for the sake of those who shall live in the last times. How suitable to the goodness of God is this care of his elect! How happy is it to be his! Let us adore and love him; and let us, by our prayers and fidelity, draw down upon ourselves this love, vigilance, and care of God, so conspicuous in proportioning the temptation to the strength of the elect, or in taking them away even from the temptation itself.

SECT. IV.—*False Christs. The Elect almost deceived. The Eagles gathered together.*

“23. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.”

There is but one Christ or Saviour, to whom alone we must steadfastly adhere. The way of faith, as well as that of virtue, is a single and narrow way: let us take great care not to leave it, to seek new paths. When we have once been ascertained of the mission of our blessed Saviour, by the completion of prophecies, and the seal of miracles, all that which comes afterwards is but temptation and illusion.

“24. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

No miracle, how astonishing soever it may appear, should induce us to change our faith: there is but one Mediator, one gospel, one church, and one faith. The devil himself knows, that an extraordinary mission without miracles, deserves not to be regarded or examined, since he endeavours to support seducers by the shadow of this sort of evidence. Prophecy and miracles are two proofs which strengthen and confirm each other: prophecies foretell miracles, and miracles show the accomplishment of prophecies. False proofs compared with those of Christ, make the truth of the latter more evident and illustrious. Since the elect belong to God, and are peculiarly his who has undertaken to save them, there is not the least occasion to fear that even one of them shall be lost. No man is certain that he is of this num-

ber; but every one ought with confidence to think so, and to confirm that confidence by a good life and conversation.

“25. Behold, I have told you before. 26. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.”

Every secret and strange doctrine, unknown to the apostles and holy fathers, is false and pernicious. Let us have no manner of curiosity for these new discoveries. It is not the good grain, but the chaff, which is carried about with every wind of doctrine. There are but too many Christians, who seek here and there for such remedies in their miseries as God has not promised them; and neglect to have recourse to Jesus Christ, the sole Deliverer from all our miseries, whom all the Scriptures point out to us. Blind and miserable is every one who hopes to mend his condition by forsaking Christ! It is to him we must apply ourselves; it is he whom God has given us: whatever turns us aside from him is fatal to us.

“27. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

The faith received every where in so short a time, not only without any human assistance, but also notwithstanding the greatest opposition from all the powers of the earth, was, as it were, a lightning which shone from east to west, and a miracle from heaven, to confound the incredulity of the sages of the world. The last coming of Christ will be yet more surprising.

“28. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

True Christians are spiritual eagles, raised by faith above all things here below, and soaring still with ardour towards Jesus Christ. Wherever his mystical body the church, or (the representation of) his natural body in the eucharist, is found, there the elect are gathered together, as so many eagles to their prey. As soon as Christ shall appear at his second coming, with the scars of his wounds, and the standard of his cross, which will renew the memory of his death; then all men become, as it were, eagles by the resurrection; shall rise in the air to meet him; and gather about this carcass, or dead body, as the Greek expresses it, which, being the victim of God, was sacrificed on the cross; there to receive the sentence of their eternal portion. Let us earnestly endeavour to be of the number of those blessed eagles, who shall present themselves with confidence before Jesus Christ, and be united to his immortal body to all eternity.

SECT. V.—*The Sun darkened. The Coming of Christ.*

“ 29. ¶ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken :”

The Jewish church ends in the persecution which fell on the Jews; the Christian church is established by the persecutions of the Gentiles. In times of trial, when the sun of faith seems to be darkened, and the church not to give her light, when many of her doctors fall, and her pillars are shaken; then even her greatest lights and strongest supports

have sufficient reason to be afraid. Christian prudence consists in humbling ourselves, and being prepared for all events.

“30. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

The sign of the true Jonas is the glory of his resurrection; and the faith of this resurrection, received by Jews as well as Gentiles, is the triumph of his cross, the establishment of his heavenly kingdom, and the fulness of the body of Christ. Happy they who, in these last times, shall, with a true contrition of heart, mourn and bewail the misery of their sins! Unhappy they who, by a grief arising from sensual desire, shall lament only their temporal evils and misfortunes. O cross of Christ, exposed then again to be the subject of contradiction! Saviour of life, saviour of death; salvation to some, perdition to others; the comfort of the elect, the confusion of the reprobate!

“31. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

O lovely and desirable assembly of the elect, august senate, college truly sacred, why art not thou the sole object of human ambition! No man shall have any place therein who has not been a member of the true church, which alone is spread over the four parts of the world. To this church the visible angels call us with the trumpet of God's word: who-

ever obeys not this call, shall never be called by the invisible angels to the church of the elect. How sweet and comfortable is it to a Christian, separated from his brethren, banished to the remotest parts of the earth, and treated as excommunicate for the cause of Christ, to think of this re-union, so much to be desired, and which shall never have an end.

“ 32. ¶ Now learn a parable of the fig-tree : When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh : 33. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”

The belief of the coming of Jesus Christ is the consolation of the righteous. Let us not wait for the last trumpet, ere we prepare ourselves for judgment. The sound of it in the gospel, is even now heard by all those who have the ears of the heart. Whoever has not these stopped by the amusements of this life, and is not stunned by the noise of his passions, thinks that he is continually called upon by it. Let our faith incessantly say to us, The Son of man is near, even at the doors. Let the voice of thy grace, O Lord, repeat this to me both frequently and effectually.

“ 34. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. 35. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

The hope of the righteous is founded upon the stability of the divine word ; which is therefore their chief delight. Whatever difficulties our understanding may find in that which God has either foretold or promised, there is not the least reason to doubt con-

cerning it : to engage our belief, it is sufficient that he has said it. One person readily believes another on his bare word, who yet will not believe the word of God; so great is the corruption of the mind of man.

SECT. VI.—*The Last Day unforeseen.*

“ 36. ¶ But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

Our ignorance of the last day ought to make us vigilant every moment of our life. God has not discovered to us the time wherein he intends to judge us, to the end that we may always keep ourselves in a readiness to be judged. A foolish desire of knowing that which is to come, renders abundance of persons incredulous as to this oracle of the Son of God; and credulous, even to superstition, in respect of the vain predictions of men concerning the end of their lives, or of the world. They neglect a beneficial and useful kind of uncertainty, to rely on a false and deceitful appearance of certainty.

“ 37. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

There are two deluges: the first of water, the second of fire, to purge the world of iniquity, to save the elect, and to punish the wicked. Christ here instructs us how to inform ourselves of what is to come, not by a vain observation of the stars, but by a holy meditation on the Scriptures; not in order to discover in them what he designed to conceal from us, but to prepare ourselves to do his will, in pursuing the discoveries which he himself vouchsafes to

make, and in contemplating the mysteries to come, in those representations which his Spirit has given of them in what is past.

“ 38. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, 39. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

The generality of mankind, through the enchantment of the cares of this life, are surprised by death and judgment. They are not always gross and heinous sins, which throw men into a forgetfulness of God and his judgments, and into a contempt of his law: sometimes an irregular application to the common employments and affairs of life, insensibly extinguishes our faith. Every one has his own proper way to attain salvation; and every one who misses of it, does it by corrupting his way after his own manner. The surprise which is here threatened proceeds not from God's design, but from the sinner's negligence, and his abuse of the long patience and forbearance of God. A man is never in danger of being surprised when his heart is devoted to God, when his faith is pure, his hope lively, his charity fervent and sincere, and his life full of good works.

SECT. VII.—*The one taken, the other left. We must watch continually.*

“ 40. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 41. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”

Terrible but adorable choice! Men have still something to fear, even in the most innocent employments, and in the exercise of such arts as are necessary to life. In this state indeed, they are not so subject to extravagant desires; but then they are often very ignorant of their duty, and forget to direct all their labour to God's glory, to look on it as a means of salvation, and to make it an exercise of repentance. Neither the church in this life, nor any state or condition in the church, can pretend to consist altogether of elect. There is a mixture in every state; and therefore, in every one there is occasion for fear as well as hope.

“ 42. ¶ Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

The vigilance necessary to prepare us for death and judgment, is not a supine and inactive vigilance, but such as is employed in examination of our faults, in attention to our duty, in application to good works, to prayer, repentance, &c.

“ 43. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 44. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

It is much for our advantage to be obliged to be always in uncertainty, always in expectation of our Master; to the end, that we may be always on our guard against sin and sloth. The heart is then ready, when it is in order; and it is never so, but when God is master of it, when nothing but his love reigns therein, and when this love regulates that of

our neighbour, and the use of all other creatures. How great is the folly, to be more careful and vigilant on the account of a small temporal advantage, than of the eternal salvation of the soul!

SECT. VIII.—*The wise Servant. The evil Servant.*

“ 45. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?”

It is not the work, but the fidelity, which God rewards in his servants. We must all live in the same expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ, which a servant has with respect to his master: but this expectation must be more vigilant in the ministers of Christ, than in the rest of the faithful. Here is an abstract of their duties:—1. Such a person must be called and appointed, not by himself, but by the vocation and lawful mission of his Lord. 2. He must look on himself, not as the master of the family, but really as a servant. 3. He must be exactly faithful in his ministry, and in observing his Master's commands, at the expense of all. 4. His fidelity must be wise, prudent, well-informed: faithful and wise; this comprehends all. 5. He must make it his chief care to give the household their meat; not out of his own stock, but distributing what he has received. 6. He must do it in due season: and it is always a proper season to instruct and serve souls, because their needs are always present; the time of many of them may expire every hour; and for want of improving a moment, eternity is sometimes lost.

“ 46. Blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.”

This blessedness consists, not barely in working, but in working according to the law and will of God. We must then work continually in the ministry, since our Master should find us so doing; and he may come every moment. The exactness which is used in serving earthly princes in their own way is scarcely to be conceived. Does not God deserve at least as much? A servant thinks himself happy, when his services are grateful to his master. O, what happiness attends us, if we please the best and most powerful of Masters!

“ 47. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.”

He who is not satisfied with the reward which God promises him, knows not what it is to be made ruler over all his goods. His goods are himself; and nothing less is promised us, if we continue faithful to him. The ministers of the Lord have in heaven a reward proportioned to their labours and their character, and shall there partake of his authority over souls. Let us not refuse to give ourselves to God, who will freely give himself to us.

“ 48. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; 49. And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;”

Here are three characters of a bad prelate. The first is, to have little faith as to the judgments of God, or the coming of Christ. Does a man believe there is another life, when he either undertakes of his own accord to be accountable for souls, by taking on himself the pastoral office, or trembles not at the thoughts of this account? The second is, to govern

with an absolute dominion, to oppress his colleagues, and to exercise violence over his inferiors, and on the weak. The third, to lead an irregular life, and to converse chiefly with the imitators of his passions. Lord, abandon not thy flock to such wolves: but send it pastors according to thy own heart.

“ 50. The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, 51. And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Here are three punishments which answer to the three characters of the evil servant. The first is, a sudden death, and the weight of God's wrath falling upon him, without a moment's time to avert it: this answers to his infidelity and his forgetfulness of the divine judgments. The second is, a general and eternal separation from the society of the church, from the communion of saints, and from all those gifts which he has abused: and this is answerable to the abuse of his authority in the church. The third consists in tears and eternal pains: which answer to his voluptuous life; as the company of hypocritical pastors, who under an angelical office concealed a diabolical life, does to his criminal acquaintance and conversation. Every wicked Christian, every man who does not worship and serve God according to his law, is this evil servant, who shall be judged according to his sins against that faith and religion which are due to God, according to his injustice and violence against his neighbour, and according to the corruption of his heart and the irregularities of his life. My God! how dear will the sinner pay for the pleasures of a moment, and the transient satisfactions of sin!

CHAPTER XXV.

SECT. I.—*The Parable of the ten Virgins.*

“ 1. THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.”

Every Christian, by his faith and baptism, makes profession of aspiring to the marriage of the Lamb. His virginity consists in worshipping one God, and in loving none but him. His life is but one continual preparation for the marriage-supper of eternity. His heart is his lamp. By the motions and desires of his soul, he goes forth to meet the bridegroom; and hastens toward heaven by the purity of his life.

“ 2. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.”

The church, before she arrives at the place where this marriage is celebrated, which is heaven, is always divided, always mixed with good and bad. It is the greatest of all follies, to make profession by baptism of our earnest desire and ambition of attaining to eternal life, and to neglect to prepare ourselves for it during the whole course of our lives. True wisdom consists in being always ready, and in living in continual expectation of the bridegroom's coming.

“ 3. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them :”

Charity and its works are the oil of the heart. A heart without charity, is a lamp without oil. O inconceivable folly of the children of Adam ! to employ their whole lives in filling their hearts with every

thing besides, and to forget that which alone can fill, nourish, and make them shine before God, and even enjoy God himself for ever.

“ 4. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.”

The greatest wisdom consists in having charity, and in performing the works of it. Life is given us to no other end, but that we may make a sufficient provision of this oil. God alone can pour it into our hearts by his Spirit; and this Spirit is itself that oil of gladness, with which the life of our hearts must be fed to all eternity. Jesus Christ alone has the fulness of it, and of this fulness must all his members receive, according to the measure which he has designed them. Lord, as thou hast bestowed on me a lamp, leave it not empty, but replenish it out of thy abundant fulness.

“ 5. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.”

How few are there who think seriously of death and judgment, and expect the bridegroom with a persevering vigilance! The beginnings of conversion are fervent: but zeal insensibly grows cool in the generality of persons. There is need of an extraordinary grace, to enable us to continue this perfect vigilance to the end, so as not to be surprised at the hour of death. Lord, who keepest Israel—the heart, I mean, which thou hast made the Israel of God—do thou neither slumber nor sleep over me.

“ 6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.”

This is a terrible voice, which calls the creatures to appear before their Creator when they think least

of it. Happy they to whom he comes as an amiable and much-desired bridegroom, not as a severe and inexorable judge! Let us earnestly endeavour to render him such to us as we desire to find him.

“7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.”

Happy is that man who is ready to appear before God at all times whatever! But more happy still is he, who can with a true confidence desire the coming of Christ! There are some certain preparations, which no Christian omits at the approach of death; every one then thinks of trimming his heart, which is his lamp. But how late is it, to begin to think of it at that time! Grant, O Lord, that I may not be of the number of those who cannot, without regret, submit to the necessity of dying, and who neglect to prepare themselves for it until the very last hour.

“8. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.”

My God, how dismal is it, for a man not to perceive the emptiness of his heart, the want of good works, and the extinction of charity, until he comes to die! At that time there is often nothing more of the light of faith, and of the love of goodness left remaining, than only just enough to show a man what he has lost, and to raise an unprofitable regret. He then sees, that good men, whom he used to count foolish and miserable wretches, have only true wisdom and substantial wealth; to these he has recourse, and would fain partake of their piety and charity: but every thing fails when time fails.

“9. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.”

The holiness of others will not avail us at the hour of death. All the false lustre of external works, which shine only to the eyes of men, goes out and vanishes in that moment. Charity alone is never extinguished, when a man carries this oil in his lamp out of the world with him. What would we not give to buy it at the time of death, if it were to be sold? Nothing can purchase it, but worthy fruits of repentance; but then, time and the spirit of repentance are necessary to the production of these fruits.

“ 10. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.”

Sinners, on a death-bed, too often meet with those deceitful merchants, who promise them the mercy of God and eternal salvation, for a price which is of no value in his sight. How much better is it for them, with the assistance and ministry of the church, humbly to address themselves to Christ, who is the only author of salvation, who himself keeps the key of his treasury, which is charity, and distributes it freely without money, instead of losing their time in dealing with quacks, who promise every thing, and can perform nothing!—The door is shut! Dreadful and fatal words! No hope remains. Nothing but death shuts this door; but death may surprise us in our sins, and then despair is our portion.

“ 11. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.”

We stay abundantly too late, when we stay until the hour of death, ere we begin to love God, and to think seriously of our salvation. They must be ex-

tremely deficient in the knowledge of salvation, who place the foundation of it upon a will or testament charged with pious legacies, without having endeavoured to fill their hearts with the oil of mercy and charity. This is to cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," after the door is shut. Prayer is the key of heaven; but there is a proper time and manner of praying. There are prayers at the last hour, of the same nature with that of the penitent thief; but there are also those of Esau and of Antiochus.

"12. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

God, who is love, knows not those who have no charity. Let us diligently endeavour, while we have time, to make ourselves known to God as his children, by living in the spirit of children, which is love. He will own none who have not the resemblance of his Son; and this resemblance is to be attained no otherwise than by humility, purity, mortification, repentance, charity, &c. Let us thoroughly consider, in the presence of God, what it is never to be known by him, never to bear the least resemblance of his Son, which may render us acceptable in his sight, and beloved by him.

"13. Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

Can that man pretend to have any faith who does not watch, after an admonition so frequently repeated? If we would not be surprised, we must look on every hour as the last. If "to watch," be to employ ourselves chiefly about the business of our salvation, alas, how few Christians are there who watch! How many who slumber! How many

asleep! How many seized with a lethargy! How many even quite dead!

SECT. II.—*The Parable of the Talents.*

“ 14. ¶ For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.”

The children of God, and the ministers of Jesus Christ, are called, as servants, not to manage their own affairs, but those of their Master. They have nothing which is properly their own; every thing belongs to Christ, who has received it of his Father, and recovered it out of the hands of the devil, by redeeming it with his own blood. He who uses his natural or supernatural talents as if he were the author and master of them, is a usurper of the goods which belong to God.

“ 15. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.”

Duties and obligations are proportioned to the states, conditions, and talents of men. Every one, in order to be saved, must, First, Be faithful in the performance of that which God requires of him in his station. God proportions his graces, not according to natural deserts, but according to the conditions and obligations of men, and above all, according to his designs concerning souls. A person may be very inconsiderable in the eyes of men, who is designed for an exalted station in heaven. All things are measured and regulated—graces, employments, and necessities. Secondly, In order to salvation, a man must keep within his own sphere, and trade accord-

ing to his own talent, not according to that of another. It is pride and envy ambitiously to desire our neighbour's grace.

“ 16. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.”

Thirdly, A man must improve the talents he has received, by establishing and enlarging the kingdom of God, both in his own soul, and in the souls of others. There is a great difference betwixt the figure and the truth. The servant does not receive from his master the skill and industry necessary to the improvement of his money: but the Christian, and the minister of the Lord, must receive all from him—both the talent and the good-will—both the grace and the use of it!

“ 17. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.”

Fourthly, A man must not continue idle, under pretence of having only indifferent talents. No person can deny that he has two talents at least: that of the understanding, to know God and his own duty; and that of the will, to love him and adhere to him. To make a continual progress in the knowledge of salvation, and in the love of God and of Jesus Christ, is a great gain: but thereby to arrive at the sight of God face to face, and to enjoy him by a consummate love—this is a gain which is incomprehensible and eternal!

“ 18. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.”

Fifthly, A man who designs to be saved, must not leave the smallest talents unemployed. In the con-

duct of the children of Adam, there is always some excess or defect, unless they are guided by the Spirit of the second Adam; either they are desirous of making their talents very conspicuous, if they are great, or they entirely suppress them, if they are small and obscure. We must do the quite contrary: employ the greatest with humility, and the least with confidence.

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

Sixthly, A man must work, as being to give an account of all at the judgment of God. Does that person think of this, who acts directly contrary to what he commands? And if he do not think of this, where is his belief of the judgment of God? And if he believe not this, of what religion is he? God stays a long time; but this long time cannot exceed the life of man, which is very short.

“20. And so he that had received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained besides them five talents more.”

Seventhly, A man must offer to God the glory, use, and profit of his talents and labour. How scarce are those faithful servants, who take pains only for their Master, and who keep back from him no part of that glory which should arise from his graces and talents! Vanity is a thief, which robs God of that which is most precious to him, namely, his glory.

“21. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

Eighthly, A man, in order to be saved, must expect no other praise than that which God himself will give his servants. Ninthly, He must aspire at no other reward but His. Tenthly, He must not render himself unworthy of "the joy of his Lord," by entertaining any vain joy or human complacency. The reward which God bestows on his servants is a superabundant reward, because it is himself. Our faithfulness in observing his commands, is the price of it, rather than the greatness of our labour. We sow on earth—we reap in heaven. Here a little pains and sorrow—there an inconceivable and eternal joy!

"22. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents besides them."

He, who saves his neighbour's soul together with his own, is the person who doubles his talents. A faithful compliance with the designs of God and the duties of our vocation, is a great source of confidence. A man goes to him with joy when he has done his will; but he demands no reward. God is good and faithful; that is sufficient.

"23. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

O comfortable words! but which belong not to this life. How many fears, troubles, and scruples, will be for ever dissipated, when He who knows our heart better than we ourselves do, shall assure us that it is a good and faithful heart, and such as is worthy of "the joy of our Lord!" The faithful

servant enters into the bosom of the Father, there to enjoy the glory of the Son, and the rights of the divine adoption. The joy of their Lord enters here below into the heart of the elect; but in heaven, the elect shall themselves enter into the joy of their Lord, there to lose themselves, as it were, in endless felicity.

“ 24. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed :”

It is very true, though the pride of man will not comprehend it, that it is an advantage to have but one common and useful talent. The lustre of great talents dazzles, exalts, and intoxicates. Variety distracts, and often causes men to take the wrong. The having but one, and that an obscure one, unites our whole application, and secures us from vanity. The sinner, that he may lay his sin on God, spares neither calumny nor blasphemy. How far does the blindness and ingratitude of the sinner extend, to accuse God of cruelty, self-interest, and injustice, who requires nothing of us but what is for our advantage, who freely pardons our evil actions, and even rewards the good which he himself works in us !

“ 25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine.”

Laziness often covers itself with the veil of the fear of God. That man takes little care of his salvation, who, without any lawful reason, withdraws himself from labour, only out of apprehension of God's judgment, and endeavours not to advance his glory, and his neighbour's salvation, when he has a

talent for it. This is of itself a piece of theft and injustice: but for him to pretend to have discharged his duty, by doing neither good nor evil, is to add falsehood and insolence to his injustice. When a man is obliged to do good, not to do it is to do evil.

“26. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: 27. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.”

The more a man endeavours to excuse himself before God, the more he condemns himself. There is a filial fear; and one which is servile, mercenary, idle, and slothful. The unfaithful servant hides this last under a false prudence, and justifies it by a very weak argument. The true wisdom of the good and faithful servant consists in performing readily his Master's will, without arguing concerning it. It is only the wicked and slothful servant who disputes so much, and does nothing. This is the first punishment of the unprofitable servant: convicted of wickedness and slothfulness out of his own mouth, he bears the shame and confusion thereof before all.

“28. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. 29. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

The second punishment of the unprofitable servant is, the being deprived of every thing which he had received. The third is, the seeing others already rich in good works, still more enriched by that which

was his, which is no small vexation to him. The fourth is, to find himself incapable any longer of hiding his slothfulness under the appearance of piety. How advantageous is it to be employed in God's service ! a man never is at any loss, and always gains beyond his hopes. To hazard all for God, is to secure and improve all. At his tribunal there is a kind of confiscation of graces. Those of wicked and slothful servants are applied to the advantage of the good and faithful, as well as all their own labour.

“30. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

To be excluded from heaven, to be cast headlong into hell, and abandoned to rage and despair to all eternity ! O God, can any man think on it without horror ! And yet this is the inevitable punishment of every impenitent sinner. The love of rest and ease makes men slothful and unprofitable : and it is merely by this that they lose the very thing which they have loved in a wrong manner, and at a wrong time. There is but one paradise. He who is resolved to have his here below, can hope for none in heaven. There are two sorts of unprofitable servants :—1. Some, who consume the patrimony of the church, without doing her any service. 2. Others, who, through the love of ease and disgust of spiritual things, do nothing towards their salvation, and mind only the enjoyments of this present life.

SECT. III.—*The Last Judgment.*

“31. ¶ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall

he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32. And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:"

In vain does the sinner endeavour to avoid the presence of his God: he will be forced one day to appear before his tribunal. See here a spectacle very different from that of the cross, where the Son of God, naked and disfigured, forsaken by his disciples, encompassed with his enemies, and seated between two thieves on the throne of his humiliations and ignominies, did in those two exhibit an emblem of the separation here described. What an object is this to exercise our faith! What a large field of reflection and meditation is here before us—to consider Jesus Christ as a God in his majesty, as a King upon his throne, as a Judge on his tribunal, and as a Shepherd amidst his flock, wherein the goats continue mixed with the sheep even to the last day!

“33. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.”

The last function of the Prince of pastors to be performed on earth is, to make this dreadful separation of mankind for eternity. Let us strive to be of the number of the sheep, by our meekness, humility, tractableness, and innocency of life. Such as we are at our leaving this world, such shall we be for ever: either sheep, to drink at the very fountain of eternal truth; or goats, to become the prey of devils. O pure and spotless church, society of elect alone, immortal body composed of none but living members! in vain do we seek for thee on earth: it is only in the land of the living, and after this great division

and separation, that we shall find thee with and in God, living to him and by him to all eternity.

“34. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit * the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:” [** Fr. possess.*]

If there have been kings who have given away kingdoms, they were only foreign kingdoms which they could not keep: none but God gives his own out of pure bounty; and this kingdom is himself. God blesses none in Jesus Christ, but those whom he has chosen in him; and he chooses only those whom he freely loves in him. “Come, inherit:” amiable, powerful, and efficacious words! which draw the elect near to God, and put them in possession of him. He who during his life has said, “Come, Lord Jesus,” through a sincere desire of his coming; and through his fidelity and love, “Lord, possess my heart;” shall, in his turn, hear these two words, “Come, inherit,” which will actually confer on him eternal happiness.

“35. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:”

Good works done for God’s sake, through Jesus Christ, in the Spirit of the Father and the Son, are the price of the glory prepared for the elect; prepared without merits, by a bounty altogether free, but merited by Christ; bestowed on works as their reward, but on such works as are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, and are the gifts of God. Who would not be forward to give to God, so good, so liberal, so rich in mercies? If it be too little for

those who have fed and lodged the poor for the sake of God, to feed on him, to drink of his glory, and to be lodged in his bosom; let them imagine, if they can, somewhat greater. We believe this, but who can comprehend it?

“36. Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”

God rewards nothing but charity; because charity alone honours God. He rewards that only which a man does as a member of Jesus Christ, by his Spirit, and with respect to him: because God loves none but him, gives no grace but in him, and can glorify and make nothing live in his bosom but him alone. A garment of light and glory, the effusion and infusion of the divinity itself into the soul, and a perfect freedom from all evils and miseries; are not these things capable of fixing the desires of man! Such is the happy retaliation which God exercises towards those who have clothed, visited, delivered, or comforted the poor, sick, and imprisoned members of his Son.

“37. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?”

Humility easily makes the righteous forget their good works. God cannot forget them; and this is sufficient. There are many who have a clear and enlightened faith, actually intent on Jesus Christ in every thing which they do: but there are abundantly more, whose faith is simple, less instructed and intelligent, who perform good actions in general for the sake of God and Christ. It is for the comfort of

these that our blessed Lord assures us, that he has accepted their alms, though they might not perhaps actually think of him in bestowing them; and that he has less regard to the mind than to the heart.

“ 38. When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?”

Let us incessantly beg that faith which alone discovers Jesus Christ in the poor. Let us frequently exercise it with respect to his presence and residence in his members. Let us take care to awake and stir it up on those occasions wherein we may be tempted to neglect, despise, or treat the poor harshly, on the account of their personal faults. The most unworthy and most miserable have a merit and dignity invisible to the eyes of the flesh, and unimpaired by all their defects; because it is the merit of Christ himself.

“ 39. Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?”

Jesus Christ is continually humbled, and suffers in his members to the end of the world. Happy are the poor who are religious, and have eyes to perceive Christ residing and enduring poverty in themselves! But still more happy are they, if they love their poverty as the source of this advantage! The less capable the poor, the sick, and those in prison are of penetrating into these truths, the greater charity it is to instruct them therein, and to engage them to make a Christian use of their condition.

“ 40. And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch * as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” [* *Fr.* as often.]

What a comfort is it for those who assist the poor, the sick, and prisoners, to be more certain, that in so doing they serve Jesus Christ, than if they saw him with their eyes? ‘As often:’ we must not therefore be discouraged by the multitude of the poor, nor weary of serving them to the end of our lives, if we are engaged thereto by a motive of piety, or by our own state and profession; since as often as we serve them, we serve Christ himself. “Unto one of the least:” let us then take heed not to neglect any, nor to apply ourselves out of natural inclination more to one than to another, but to those whom either the providence of God sends us, or their necessity obliges us to prefer.

“41. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:”

It is an article of our faith, that those who are found without charity shall be treated as the devils, and have the same portion with them in eternity. O fatal and irrevocable exile! O eternal excommunication and separation from the body of Christ! Sad confinement in hell, and dismal society in suffering with the devils themselves! All this shows that it is more proper to tremble than to speak on this subject. Obdurate sinners are the angels, envoys, and missionaries of the devil, who establish his kingdom on earth, propagate his maxims, preach and authorize them by their example, and seduce and pervert the children of God. Let us take care not to join ourselves to them in any respect.

“42. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:”

How severely shall they be punished who take away the goods of others, when those are punished after this manner who only refuse to give what is their own! It is not out of indigence or inability that Christ suffers hunger in his members, but out of mercy, and to give us an opportunity of making some amends for our sins by our alms. In vain do we flatter ourselves, that we should have fed Jesus Christ whilst he was on earth, if we show ourselves hard-hearted towards his suffering members.

“43. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.”

Who amongst us would not run to prisons and hospitals, if an apostle assured us that Jesus Christ was there, and stood in need of us? Christ himself tells us so, and we turn a deaf ear to him. If our conscience reproach us on this account, let us humble ourselves and amend. Christ now speaks this to us in his word, and out of mercy applies himself to our hearts, that he may not have occasion to speak it hereafter publicly in his anger at the great day.

“44. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?”

It is want of faith which produces hard-heartedness towards the poor. The carnal man has only eyes of flesh and blood; he will not believe what he does not see. We find but too many who put on an affected incredulity when we give them an account of the misery and wants of the poor, who seek vain pretences to excuse themselves from assisting

them, or who even reject them with contempt or hard language. This is to feign themselves ignorant that it is Christ who asks an alms of them in the persons of the poor. It is to do that which is the ground of the condemnation of the reprobate.

“45. Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.”

Every thing is in common betwixt the head and the members: but Jesus Christ is chiefly in the poor and the humble. We at present colour and disguise our negligence or insensibility as we please; but our heart will one day appear such as it really was in respect of works of mercy. If we are ashamed to be reproached with covetousness by men; who will be able to bear a reproach of this nature from the mouth of Christ in the day of his fury? He makes the cause of the poor his own; and will resent any neglect of them, as a neglect of himself.

“46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

No appeal, no remedy, to all eternity; no end to the punishment of those whose final impenitence manifests in them, as it were, an eternal will and desire to sin. By dying in a settled opposition to God, they cast themselves into a necessity of continuing in an eternal aversion to him. The eternity of the torment of the damned, proceeds from the infinite dignity of the God who is offended; the eternity of the reward of the elect, from the infinite goodness of him who confers it on them. O eternal life, which art nothing but pure life and joy, not the joy of the world, but that substantial joy of which

God alone is the source, the object, and the end ; may I have nothing at heart but thee, may I seek nothing else during this mortal life !

CHAPTER XXVI.

SECT. I.—*The Rulers conspire against Christ.
His Head anointed.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,”

Christ having instructed the Jews by his discourses, edified them by his example, convinced them by his miracles, and loaded them with his benefits, prepares himself now to redeem them with his blood, and to sanctify them by his sacrifice. This new testimony of his love requires of us new attention, new respect, and new acknowledgment.

“ 2. Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.”

To hear Christ speak, with such sedateness and tranquillity, of so cruel and ignominious a death, to be suffered by him two days after, is a sufficient proof that this Son of man is likewise the Son of God. It is even something more than speaking of it, to foretell it as he does. Let us learn from hence, to look on the crosses which are prepared for us, with the serenity and meekness of our Head. He teaches us to spare our enemies, by not so much as naming here his own. He joins the two passovers together, the figurative and the true ; in order to teach us to imitate him, by always joining with the

eucharistic passover the love of the cross, and a disposition to suffer whatever shall please God: this is the true evangelical passover.

“ 3. ¶ Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, 4. And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.”

Who would not have thought that the priests and magistrates assembled together, only to cause Jesus Christ to be received and proclaimed as the Messiah, after all which they had seen and heard concerning him? Let us fear, lest, after their example, the abuse of the light and grace of God should draw upon us the like blindness and infidelity. The designs of men, though contrary in their intention to those of Christ, are, notwithstanding, by his sovereign wisdom, made the means of bringing these to pass. How incomprehensible and adorable is his conduct!

“ 5. But they said, Not on the feast-day, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

The wicked person regards religion no farther than it is subservient to his designs and interests. Who is there who keeps himself entirely free from this disorder? He who obeys the law, only with regard to himself, loves himself and not the law. He who observes a feast-day on motives purely human, violates it in his heart.

“ 6. ¶ Now, when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7. There came unto him a woman having an alabaster-box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.”

Charity employs every thing it has for God. Riches are not at all to be regarded, but only so far as they are serviceable to Christ or his members. The contempt which he showed for riches, and his aversion to pleasures, hinder him not from admitting this unction: every thing is mysterious in this time of mysteries; every thing ought to contribute to the honour of Christ in this season of his lowest humiliations, and to the making Judas ashamed of his avarice, to which he is just going to sacrifice the blood and life of Jesus Christ himself.

“ 8. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? 9. For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.”

One discontented or perverse spirit is enough to corrupt and disturb a whole community. How often does charity serve as a cloak for covetousness! We must not neglect what is due to Christ under pretence of what we owe his members. Men count every thing wasted which is expended in the external worship of God, when they love neither God nor his worship. Jesus Christ authorizes external worship, by accepting it at the very instant in which he was going to establish religion by a worship the most spiritual and internal.

“ 10. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.”

It is then a good work to pay an external worship to God and Christ, and that sometimes even with lustre and expense. The church, calumniated on this account by the followers of the perfidious Judas,

or by the imitators of these imperfect disciples, will still have Jesus Christ for her advocate. Nothing which is produced by charity can be evil in the sight of God. A waste of our gold and silver is of no moment in his account, when they are not wasted on our lusts ; but it is a matter of great moment to grieve our neighbour, by discouraging his charity out of temporal interest.

“ 11. For ye have the poor always with you ; but me ye have not always.”

Christ substitutes the poor in his stead, that he may be relieved in them. But that which we owe to them for his sake, cannot excuse us from paying what is due to him in his own person. He is always present with us in the eucharist, but after an invisible manner. He is visibly present here below only in the poor. It is in these that we must seek him, in order to assist and feed him, as we must seek him in the eucharist to feed on him.

“ 12. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.”

Love is quick in foreseeing things, and has sometimes instincts of which it knows not the cause. Let us admire the goodness and condescension of Christ, who anticipates the ceremony of his burial in favour of this holy woman, because he knows she will not have the comfort of embalming him after his death. True charity shall be rewarded for whatever it would have done ; and Jesus Christ sees that in its intentions which it does not perceive itself. The actions of holy persons often contain mysteries which they understand not themselves ; as that of Christ's burial is represented by this action of the woman. The soli-

citous care of Christ makes him improve all opportunities to renew the thoughts of his death, to prepare his true disciples for it, and to give some remorse to the traitor by discovering to him his own heart.

“ 13. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”

God takes delight in distinguishing those actions which the world blames through a spirit different from his. Happy is that man who is contented with the approbation of Him who sees the heart. Good works embalm the whole church with their sweet odour. The contradiction of men passes away; the fruits and edification of such actions will subsist for ever. A constant succession and perpetual tradition of them is continued by imitation. Let us esteem ourselves happy in being capable of conveying down this tradition, by a fervent application to anoint Jesus Christ in the poor and sick, either by relieving or comforting them.

SECT. II.—*The Bargain and Treachery of Judas.
The Paschal Supper.*

“ 14. ¶ Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,”

A charitable reproof completes sometimes the obduration of a reprobate; however, he who gave it has done his duty. A provoked passion, or even a small disgust, has often caused that to be done to the church which Judas does in respect of its Head; making men betray its interests, and violate its faith, unity, peace, and discipline, by sacrilegious conspira-

cies with its enemies. Thus all heresies and schisms spring from the passions of men.

“ 15. And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.”

For a man to accuse Christ of nothing, and not to complain of him while he betrays him, is to justify him and to condemn himself. He who nourishes any passion in his heart, is in great danger of delivering up Christ and the church to their enemies upon every temptation. When a man hopes for any thing from the world, he ought to fear every thing from himself. He who treats and bargains with it, leaves his conscience very often in pawn, if he do not entirely resign it up thereto. There is nothing which we have not reason to fear from avarice, since it stoops so low as to sell Jesus Christ at so vile a price.

“ 16. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.”

Men seldom leave a crime imperfect. Unhappy he who engages himself therein for want of resisting the smallest beginnings! We are but too faithful to the world, and generally keep our word with it, at the expense of all. What has God done to us, that he is the only person with whom we break it? Opportunities of finishing sin are seldom wanting when a man seeks them. The devil is too vigilant not to present them. Would to God that men were as diligent and faithful in seeking and embracing opportunities to disengage themselves from sin, to break off all familiarity with the wicked, and to renounce every dangerous conversation.

“ 17. ¶ Now the first day of the feast of unleav-

ened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?"

See here the extreme poverty of Christ, who had no house of his own on earth! He who would fain settle himself here, as in his native country, is not his disciple. The disciples and imitators of his poverty follow the spirit of their Master, depend on providence, and live in peace all their days, without knowing either where or how it will provide for their necessities. A man is easy as to every thing when he has Jesus Christ in his heart.

“ 18. And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. 19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.”

The command of Christ, the obedience of the disciples, and every thing which passes here, show plainly that he is truly the Master of all who is going to suffer. He makes himself obeyed when he pleases; but he knows also how to obey, when it is necessary for the salvation of his people, and for our example. He looks on the time of his sufferings and death as his own proper time; it is also the time of every Christian in this life.

“ 20. Now, when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.”

A man must be a disciple of Jesus Christ in order to eat the passover with him; that is, in order not to receive his body and blood in the eucharist unworthily, he must have learned in his school, which is the church,

to believe the truths which God has revealed, to hope for the good things which he has prepared, and to love the commandments which he has enjoined. The Son of God, in this last assembly, which contains an abridgment, as it were, of the whole church, shows us the mixture of the good, the weak, and the wicked, who are all united in the participation of the same sacraments.

“ 21. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, That one of you shall betray me.”

Prudence and charity require that we should use the greatest sinners tenderly to the last ; admonishing, without discovering them. God does this continually, leaving the most impious persons unknown. Lord, thou seest, in my wretched will, the principle of all sorts of infidelity and treachery ; but thou canst restrain it by thy own holy and almighty will. Do it, O Jesus, out of thy mercy and goodness.

“ 22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I ?”

It is natural to the just to fear lest some sin should lie hid in their heart without their knowing it. A man ought always to think himself more subject to fall than others ; because every one best knows his own weakness, and has reason to apprehend every thing from his own infidelity. There is a sorrow of foresight as well as of repentance. Can a man, who reflects on his own corrupt heart, and sees temptation approaching, forbear sighing, and being grieved at the danger of losing his God, to which he is continually exposed ?

“ 23. And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.”

Judas, admonished the second time, and that more plainly than before, is not at all the more affected thereby. When a heart is once hardened, it has no longer any ears to hearken to admonitions. The multiplying of benefits does but give it a new occasion of resisting more obstinately the goodness of God. It is the property of hardness of heart to make us, like Judas, deaf, obdurate, and insensible, without perceiving that we are so.

“ 24. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him : but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed ! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.”

Jesus Christ considers his death no otherwise than as a passage or journey. Long before the birth of his enemies, it was written of him, that he must die ; to make it evident that it is not through necessity, but obedience, that he dies for us. It is also by obedience that we must apply the merit of his death to ourselves. Wo to those who, like Judas, have no share therein, but by their crime and treachery ! Such is the crime of all wicked Christians, who deliver up, as it were, to the power of wickedness, Jesus Christ, who had taken possession of their hearts by baptism. But such, in a higher degree, is the crime of wicked priests, who betray Christ, while they offer his (representative) body, and receive it with a guilty conscience themselves, while they cause others who are unworthy to receive it, while they either suffer sinners to continue in their

disorders through negligence, ignorance, cowardice, interest, flattery, &c. or even encourage them to wickedness by a treachery like that of Judas.

“ 25. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.”

Judas, admonished now the third time, hears all with the insensibility and impudence of an abandoned sinner. To imagine that God sees not the bottom of our heart, is an impiety not very common. We believe that every thing is present to him, and yet we do that in his presence which we would not do before a mortal man! Nothing so common, nothing so incomprehensible. There is neither reason, nor shame, nor faith, nor religion, in a sinner entirely possessed and taken up with his sin.

SECT. III.—*The Eucharist.*

“ 26. ¶ And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.”

There is nothing more common and plain in appearance, than that which Christ does here—but yet it is a mystery of faith. God confounds the pride of carnal men, and exercises the humble faith of true Christians, in hiding his greatest mysteries under such veils as are common, and contemptible to the eyes of the flesh. Let us believe, and we shall comprehend it. Holy and adorable words! which contain the establishment of the Christian worship, the institution of the new law, the contract of the true covenant, the testament of a dying Father, a commandment of the greatest importance, the foundation

of the true religion, the substitution of reality in the room of shadows, and the end of all types and figures.

“27. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it:”

Jesus Christ makes his body and blood the price of our redemption, the victim of our sacrifice, the nourishment of our souls, the bond of our union with God, &c. Let us return sacrifice for sacrifice. The sacrifice of the outward man, by repentance, mortification, and purity; the sacrifice of the inward man, by adoration, thanksgiving, love, self-denial, and prayer, which are the soul of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and of every Christian sacrifice. The eucharistic sacrifice is an admirable contrivance of the wisdom of God, wherein every thing is rendered to God by his creatures; and every thing is given anew by God to his creatures in the communion.

“28. For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Religion is a covenant with God, confirmed by the blood of the true victim. As long as religion shall continue on the earth, and until this covenant, which is but begun, shall be finished in the course of ages, it is necessary that this blood should be also really represented. Unhappy is that man, who, by his sin, breaks a covenant cemented with the blood of God, who scandalizes a soul redeemed, or defiles a heart which has been sanctified by this blood!

“29. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

The communion of the body and blood of Christ is a pledge or earnest of the communion in heaven.

Jesus raised from the dead is a perfect new man, the Priest, the Victim, and the Sacrifice of eternity. The whole church, renewed by the participation of his glory, and re-united to him as its Head, shall offer with and in him this sacrifice, and communicate thereof, by feeding on the uncreated Truth, the bread and wine of the elect. When shall this happy hour come, O my God!

“30. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

Here is a pattern of thanksgiving after the communion. The sacrifice of our altars is itself a thanksgiving. But what acknowledgment do we not owe to God, for having afforded us so divine a means of enriching ourselves afresh, by returning him thanks for his former gifts? A communion-day is a day entirely set apart for thanksgiving, adoration, and hymns of joy, which are to be the beginning of the hymns and anthems of eternity. A man cannot pass such a day unprofitably without great infidelity, nor spend it in worldly diversions, such as dancing, play, comedies, or operas, without doing the greatest outrage to religion.

SECT. IV.—*St. Peter's Denial foretold.*

“31. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.”

Who has not reason to fear, when he sees the sufferings of Christ become an occasion of offence, even to the apostles themselves, and make them forget the duties of friendship, and the fidelity which

disciples owed to so good a Master, after more than three years of instruction and miracles? Men often follow Christ and his maxims freely enough, until they meet with times of trial and temptation. Friends are the last refuge in affliction; but even this is wanting to Christ, and he thereby expiates the abuse of worldly friendships. Let us imitate him, instead of complaining, when our friends turn their backs upon us, and dare not declare for us.

“ 32. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.”

The sheep forsake the Shepherd, but he forsakes not his sheep. He will seek, recall, and bring them back: and he fortifies and comforts them beforehand, with the hopes of his resurrection. Vulgar souls suffer themselves to be depressed by affliction, and can hardly receive any consolation: great souls always keep their station, and support others who are sinking.

“ 33. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.”

The presumptuous person imagines he can do every thing, and can do nothing; thinks he can excel all, and excels in nothing; promises every thing, and performs nothing. The humble man acts the quite contrary part. There is nothing so unknown to us as ourselves. Nothing which we see less, than our own poverty and weakness. Let us rather believe what God tells us of ourselves in Scripture, than what we perceive in ourselves. The strength of pride is but the strength of a moment. Vanity serves only to conceal from us what we are, and what we are not.

“ 34. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.”

Shall this earthen vessel have the presumption to think that it knows itself better than its Maker does? Our own experience is not sufficient to convince us of our frailty. It is not even sufficient that Christ assures us that our fall is near, and that, without his grace, it is infallible. A divine light is absolutely necessary, to pierce, illuminate, and change the heart.

“ 35. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.”

The defenders of liberty against grace, like St. Peter, give the lie to Jesus Christ. St. Peter, who draws the other disciples into his own mistake and error, shows us plainly that nothing finds a readier admission and entertainment in the minds of such as have but an ordinary degree of faith, than this presumptuous opinion of their own strength. We are not to wonder, but to lament, that it is so common.

SECT. V.—*Christ's Agony and Prayer in the Garden. The Disciples asleep.*

“ 36. ¶ Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.”

It is a true Christian foresight to prepare ourselves for sufferings and death, by retirement and prayer. The disciples had great occasion to pray; but the weak are not always to have their duty pressed upon them. It is better sometimes only to lay their wants before them, to leave them to find

their own weakness, to pray for them, and to commit them to the grace of God. All are not capable of the same communications: it is necessary to know how to discern, not only betwixt the weak and the strong, but also betwixt the different degrees of weakness.

“ 37. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.”

Jesus Christ imparts his sorrow and heaviness of heart to those whom he loves most. As the victim of sinners, he expiates their vain joys by his holy sorrows: as clothed with their persons, he undergoes that grief and contrition which they ought all to feel for their sins. This is the source from whence we must draw the spirit of contrition, and the wholesome sorrow of repentance, by adoring it in him, and praying that he would impress it on our hearts.

“ 38. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.”

Such a sorrow as this in men is never the subject of their choice: there must be a divine strength and power in Christ to draw on himself this sorrow unto death, and to open his heart thereto. He delivered his soul to this internal tormentor of his own accord, as he also delivered his body to the external tormentors when he pleased. Good God! what a shame is it to see him deprive himself of the most supreme joy, and abandon himself to the deepest sorrow, for our sakes, whilst we will not sacrifice so much as one pleasure, satisfaction, or diversion to him! Let us faithfully accept all the sorrows which may befall us

here. Let us beseech Christ to sanctify them by that state of sorrow which he chose for our sakes. Let us make it our joy to continue, persevere, and watch therein with him.

“ 39. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

What posture ought a sinner to use before God, when he sees Jesus Christ “ prostrate on his face” before his Father, to expiate the loftiness of our pride ! He here teaches us always to look upon God as our Father, even when he afflicts us ; to invoke him in this quality ; to represent our wants to him ; to beg of him deliverance, out of an humble sense of our own weakness ; and to submit to his appointments with confidence in his assistance. Christ withdraws in the height of his agony, that he may spare his disciples. It is not expedient for a good pastor to let the weak know all the struggles and combats which he undergoes : it is prudence to hide his infirmities from them. It is the wisest way on these occasions, to keep a reserved confidence with our friends, that we may not afflict or deject them too much.

“ 40. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What ! could ye not watch with me one hour ?”

How few Christians set themselves to meditate on the agony and secret sufferings of Christ ! Faithful friends in affliction are very rare. Christ would not spare himself this sort of grief, which is one of the most sensible afflictions of life, to see his friends

so little concerned at his misfortunes, whilst he is so sensibly affected with theirs, beyond all imagination! We are but too ready to lose our sleep, when it is to watch with the world, and to share in the pleasures and diversions thereof during the night: but what pain, what sluggishness seizes us, when we should watch one hour with Christ, either by way of mortification, or out of charity towards a sick person, or to praise God in the great solemnities, or to adore Jesus Christ in his sufferings, to take part in his afflictions by prayer, and to beg the spirit and grace to do it!

“41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

A good pastor, a true father, after the example of Christ, takes care of the salvation of his flock to the last. He who exhorts his flock to watchfulness and prayer, is sure to make an impression upon them, if they see him watch and pray himself. In perilous conjunctures men sometimes fall asleep, and rely on some sudden gust of courage and sensible fervour, wherewith they flatter themselves; and are often too late convinced, that they have more presumption than strength. Christian vigilance and humble prayer are the source of all our strength. The former renders the vigilance of the devil ineffectual: the latter procures the vigilance and protection of God.

“42. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.”

The example of Jesus Christ teaches us to resign ourselves to the will of God, and to redouble our

prayers, at the apprehension of death, the approach of dangers, and the presence of afflictions. How holily is a pastor's heart divided, betwixt the vigilance of his function, and his recourse to God; betwixt his attendance on his flock, and the care of his own salvation! The fear here showed by our Head under his voluntary weakness, is a great lesson of humility for his members, in the midst of so many necessities, voluntary and involuntary. Clothe me, Lord, with thy courage and thy strength, through that goodness which inclined thee to put on our fear and our weakness.

“ 43. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.”

Men sacrifice with joy their sleep and whole nights to ambition, avarice, and pleasure; but they cannot afford one to God, to charity, and to their own salvation.

“ 44. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.”

Let us not be tired with studying this pattern of perseverance, humility, and simplicity in prayer. Let us learn to speak little, and to humble ourselves much therein. This is the model of the prayer of penitents, humbled under the almighty hand of God; as that of perfect Christians, of priests, and the chief pastors of the church, is exhibited in the prayer given us in the seventeenth chapter of St. John. Let us comfort ourselves with Christ, when God makes us sensible of our barrenness and poverty in prayer. If he reduces us to one single good thought, to one comfortable word, or to one pious motion, it is reasonable that we should be contented therewith, and humbly make use of it.

“ 45. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest : behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”

Self-love renders us more vigilant when danger is present, than all the advice of our most discerning friends. If we are moved with indignation to see holiness itself in the hands of sinners, let us lay the blame on ourselves, since they were our sins which delivered up Christ to sinners. His charity is busily employed to the end. Let us adore this last use which he makes of his liberty, to admonish his disciples, and to wake them from their heaviness and slumber.

“ 46. Rise, let us be going : behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.”

Happy he, who, through zeal for God’s justice, or through charity towards his neighbour, goes forth to meet the cross, and even death itself ! but so as not to do any thing contrary either to the command of God, or to other duties which regard our neighbour, or to what prudence and humility require of us as to ourselves. Jesus Christ takes notice of all the steps of his enemies, to make it evident, that nothing is done contrary to his will, that they do only what he permits, and that they seize him because he is willing they should.

SECT. VI.—*The Kiss of Judas. Malchus’s Ear cut off. The Flight of the Disciples.*

“ 47. ¶ And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.”

Terrible change, from one of the leaders of Christ's flock, to a leader of wolves and robbers! He who trembles not at the sight of so unaccountable a fall, little knows how far the blindness and wickedness of man's heart can proceed. Let us fear, in proportion to the holiness of our state and condition. The higher the station is from whence we fall, the less hope is there of any recovery.

“48. Now, he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast. 49. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed him.”

The conduct of Judas is the picture of that of hypocrites. Let us adore the God and Restorer of peace, betrayed by a false token thereof. The world is full of this kind of civilities and insidious compliments, which tend only to deliver us up to it and to destroy us. It behoves every one who loves his own salvation to stand on his guard. A man must have a heart as full of the meekness and peace of charity, as that of Christ was, not to refuse a kiss of peace to so perfidious an enemy, and so unnatural a traitor. How will this condemn those who cannot bear the presence, or even the sincere civilities of a repenting enemy!

“50. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.”

As is the heart, such is the tongue—mild, charitable, and ready to prevent even a traitor, and that at a time when the most moderate are apt to lose all patience. The last word which Christ uses in order to make Judas recollect himself, serves only to harden

him the more. But it may often be very serviceable to us, either to remind us of the duties of our calling, or to repulse the temptations which would carry us at a distance from them. The captivity of Jesus Christ is the effect, the punishment, and the remedy of the ill use which we make of our liberty; and the consolation of those who lose their own, whether justly or unjustly.

“ 51. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear.”

Human presumption puts men upon human endeavours, and produces a blind, indiscreet, and irregular zeal. Christian humility makes them have recourse to the divine power, and inspires nothing but prudence, meekness, and charity. An engagement of word or honour may for a while keep a man to his duty; but grace alone can make him persevere in it to the end.

“ 52. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

Jesus Christ will not be served in the same manner with secular friends; nor be defended with an arm of flesh. Private persons have no right to repel any violence supported by public authority, no, not even for the sake of religion. The cause of a Christian is the cause of God; suffering belongs to one, and vengeance to the other. That spirit of bitterness, impatience, revenge, and rebellion, which appears in heretics against their sovereigns, and against all those by whom they think themselves persecuted

for religion, ought to be to them a proof of the falseness of theirs. Were there nothing to be suffered from men, there could be no martyrs in the world.

“ 53. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels ?”

The first article of our faith is to believe in “ One God the Father Almighty.” Whoever is thoroughly rooted and established in this truth, enjoys a perfect repose in the midst of the most powerful enemies. Our wants and distresses cannot be hid from the wisdom of God, nor disregarded by the goodness of such a Father, nor irremediable to him who is almighty.

“ 54. But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be ?”

Jesus Christ died not through weakness, but through obedience, zeal, and charity. Whenever God does not deliver us from our evils and afflictions, it is because they are comprehended within the unchangeable designs of his wisdom, goodness, and omnipotence, declared in the Scriptures ; and then it is our glory to be subservient to them, our perfection to submit to them, and our eternal advantage never to decline them. Christ has the Scriptures always before his eyes, as containing the plan of God’s designs, both as to himself and us. Let us imitate him herein ; for in them is the inexhaustible fountain of Christian hope and consolation.

“ 55. In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves for to take me ? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.”

How adorable are this tranquillity and meekness ;

and how worthy to be imitated by every Christian on the like occasion ! The captivity of holy persons is never idle and inactive ; their charity is always free, and always intent on the benefit of their neighbour. Nothing but a total inability can hinder a pastor from discharging his ministry. If captive, he draws from captivity itself an occasion to open the eyes of his most furious and blind persecutors, by reflections suited to their condition.

“ 56. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.”

Jesus, exactly faithful in fulfilling the Scriptures, presents the light of them to his enemies, as well as to his disciples, in order to dispel their darkness. The word of God has always infallibly its effect. All the steps of our blessed Saviour are steps of obedience. The cowardice of the disciples convinces them at last, that Christ knows better what is in man than man himself. Lord, I cannot adhere to thee but by thy assistance ; forsake me not therefore, I beseech thee, that so I may not forsake thee.

SECT. VII.—*Jesus led to Caiaphas, condemned, and abused.*

“ 57. ¶ And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.”

Let us adore Jesus Christ, humbled in his three offices or qualities of High Priest, Prophet, and King, by appearing before those who possessed these qualities among the Jews. Would to God that this sort of humiliation were not often renewed in succeeding

ages, when his truth is condemned or deserted by those who ought to teach or defend it! Let us honour the priesthood and the magistracy, even in those who abuse it; and let us conscientiously submit ourselves thereto.

“ 58. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.”

How weak are the endeavours of nature when left to itself! We cannot distrust it too much, nor adhere too close to Christ. When a man is weak, and can only follow Christ afar off, he must avoid all dangerous occasions, and the company of such persons who will but increase his weakness. He who does that out of curiosity, or some human motive, which he ought to do for the sake of God, will find therein a snare and an occasion of falling, instead of his own justification.

“ 59. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;”

Had they sought true witness in order to clear him, his whole life abounded with it. This proceeding of the council of the Jews, is too exact a representation of what the envious continually put in practice against the best of men. They first resolve to ruin them, and then seek the proper means of effecting it, how unjust soever it be. They suppose or declare them criminal; and after that, use their utmost endeavour to discover and fix some crime upon them.

“ 60. But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, 61. And said, This fel-

low said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."

It is the constant practice of the envious and unjust, to change the words of those whom they do not love, and so make them the heads of their accusation. It is easy, by means of a few small alterations, to render the most holy truths, and the most innocent persons, odious to the world. O sacred humanity of Jesus, thou art truly the temple of God, built up by the mystery of thy incarnation, destroyed on the cross, and rebuilt by thy glorious resurrection! Nay, thou art more, since thou art the victim of this adorable temple, and since it is the destruction of this temple, which makes the sacrifice of thy religion the glory of God, and the salvation of men.

"62. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?"

Jesus, as being the truth itself, deigns to be humbled by false witnesses. There is a time to defend the truth by apologies, and a time to suffer for it in an humble silence. It was necessary for mankind that there should be a victim to merit for them the grace to receive the truth; and also an example of patience, to encourage them to endure calumnies. To this end, Christ came into the world; to this end, he suffers himself to be accused without so much as opening his mouth in his own justification.

"63. But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

The silence of the eternal Word confounds the

pride of the sons of Adam, who are always eager to justify themselves. A calumny which destroys itself needs no refutation. The abusing the name of God, considered as the ever-living truth, and employing it against the truth itself, is a crime not at all scrupled by those who are most obliged to honour it, when once the spirit of calumny has taken possession of their hearts.

“ 64. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

Men ought to reverence the name and authority of God, even in his most unworthy ministers, and not to give offence to the weak, nor afford matter of new accusations, by unnecessarily disputing concerning the abuse of authority. Christ had no disposition to be silent upon a truth for which he designed to die, and which was to make so many martyrs after his example. How odious soever any truth is become through the power and envy of its enemies, we are obliged to declare for it, when an account of it is publicly demanded of us.

“ 65. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.”

Let us adore Jesus Christ, treated as a blasphemer, who is the glory of his Father. His patience under the most unjust and outrageous accusations, is a very great lesson for his disciples. See here a false zeal, a mask of religion, and a passionate and seditious way of proceeding, tending only to incense

and stir up others, all which are common to those who would oppress truth by cabal and without proof. By crying out heresy, blasphemy, and faction, though contrary to all appearance, men fail not to stir up those in power, to gain the simple, to give some shadow of authority to the ill-disposed, to cast devout but ignorant people into diffidence and scruples, and thereby to advance the mystery of iniquity, which is the mystery of all ages.

“66. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.”

The Author of life, and Life eternal itself, is then judged worthy of death; and can we complain after this of the injustice of human judgments as to ourselves? All the forms of justice are violated in order to oppress this innocent person: the judge becomes a party and accuser, and proceeds to the verdict without examining whether all the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and the miracles which he wrought without number and without example, did not justify him. Examination and proof are the ruin of calumnies, and of the authors of them; and therefore they take care to keep off from those two things.

“67. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,”

See here those affronts and indignities which the world thinks it has a right never to pardon, and which the Son of God endures with a divine meekness. Let us cast at the feet of Christ, so unworthily treated by his creatures, that false honour, that quick sense of affronts, that unreasonable niceness which cavils at every trifle, exaggerates every

thing, and pardons nothing; and, above all, that diabolical inflexibility in the resentment of injuries. The more Christ is abased on our account, the more ought we to adore him. That which he suffers in his face, condemns those who idolize their own, and that criminal care which they take to render themselves agreeable to others thereby.

“ 68. Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?”

Jesus Christ, foretold and promised to the Jews under the quality of a Prophet, is humbled by them as a prophet, and in respect of his divine knowledge. Strange corruption of the mind of man, so fond of prophecy and predictions, so ready to give ear to false prophets on their own word; and yet so very backward to believe the prophecies of the true Prophet, though confirmed by so many miracles, and so eager and zealous in persecuting him.

SECT. VIII.—*St. Peter's Denial and Repentance.*

“ 69. ¶ Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. 70. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.”

A man thinks himself able to suffer death for the sake of God, who cannot withstand even a servant's voice. Every one carries within himself that concupiscence, which tempts him to renounce Christ. It is absolutely necessary to keep it always in subjection as a servant, to hinder it from becoming a master. What darkness otherwise will it not cause in the understanding? What forgetfulness of favours, duties, and promises in the memory? What

weakness, confusion, and infidelity in the will? Support us, Lord, with thy own hand; for there is nothing on which we can depend but thy grace.

“71. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. 72. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.”

When we have once forgotten God, and are left by him to ourselves, to be tempted, and to be overcome, are almost one and the same thing. One temptation unresisted, seldoms fails of being succeeded by another: a second and greater infidelity is the punishment of the first, and very often the occasion of a third. Peter joins perjury to infidelity. Let the example of an apostle make us tremble.

“73. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. 74. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.”

How far does the weakness of man proceed? We could not have an instance of it in the Prince of pastors; but he chose to give it us in the person of one of the prime apostles, to oblige all to bear with the infirmities of the greatest sinners. Deploable progress of infidelity and blindness in an apostle in so short a time, occasioned only by his fear of some mean servants, and in reference to a Master whom he had acknowledged to be truly God. He might possibly have proceeded even as far as Judas, had God left him any longer to himself.

“75. And Peter remembered the words of Jesus,

which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”

A small matter makes us fall, when God does not support us; a small matter raises us again, when his grace makes use of it. The internal grace of conversion is generally affixed to something external. This eminent minister of Christ teaches others by his example, that, in order to a true conversion, it is necessary to forsake the occasions of sin, to weep and lament for it before God and man, and to remember and meditate upon the words of Jesus Christ. Lord, how suddenly does thy grace change the heart, when it undertakes to do it! Change mine, I beseech thee, and draw from it the tears of a sincere repentance.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SECT. I.—*Christ delivered to Pilate. The Repentance and Death of Judas.*

“ 1. WHEN the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. 2. And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.”

Let us adore Jesus Christ bound as a malefactor, and delivered up as a profane person to the secular power. He herein bears the punishment of the sinner, who deserves to be haled thus before the judgment-seat of God. This is the consolation of guilty-prisoners, the glory of the innocent, and a source of

graces and merits to sanctify our liberty, and the use we should make thereof, to bless the bonds of those who are in captivity, and to hallow their condition.

“ 3. ¶ Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,”

Behold the false repentance of a reprobate. The devil blinds the sinner before the commission of sin, in order to hurry him into it; and opens his eyes afterwards, to cast him into despair. There is no beneficial sight and sense of our faults, but what proceeds from the grace of Christ. A man may know his sin, conceive an abhorrence of it, repent of it, confess it, restore his ill-gotten goods, retire from the occasion, and yet be a false penitent like Judas. All becomes ineffectual, when a man has his eyes only upon the justice of God through a servile fear, without turning them toward his mercy by a Christian hope. That which was wanting to Judas, and is the only refuge of sinners, is humbly to have recourse to God by Jesus Christ.

“ 4. Saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.”

There is a sacrilegious confession, a diabolical humiliation, and a despairing repentance. These, without an extraordinary grace, are the natural consequences of calumny, incited by avarice and self-interest, and become irreparable by oppressing the innocent. It is a terrible judgment, not to be able to find one friend ready to offer us his hand after our fall. This is a just punishment for having left the

society of the good, and despised the charitable hand of Christ. A true pastoral charity is to be found only in the apostolic church. Those who engage us in a sinful course, seldom trouble themselves to recover us out of it. It is natural to mercenary pastors to be unconcerned at the fall of their sheep.

“5. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.”

For want of confidence, repentance is false. See here the miserable and desperate end of a covetous wretch, gnawed by the remorse of his conscience for his injustice in acquiring his wealth, and delivered up to the despair of his own mind. Every thing is wanting to a sinner, when hope is wanting; and there can be no hope in God, where there is no love of God. If nothing but fear of punishment excite a man to repentance, the more vehement this is, the more it leads to despair.

“6. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.”

Who would not admire this great care of the chief priests in not defiling the holy treasury with profane money, while at the same time they scruple not to defile their own consciences with the greatest of crimes, and deliver up the true Temple of God to profane men? Thus it is that the devil often deludes many, even among the priests, by a false and superstitious tenderness of conscience in things indifferent, while calumny, envy, oppression of the innocent, and the most heinous sins, give them no manner of trouble or disturbance.

“ 7. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.”

Blind and merciless priests, very careful in laying out Judas’ money, but not in the least concerned what would become of his soul! Would to God that abundance of Christians were not under the same blindness! Jesus Christ himself honours his death and burial, by making the price of his blood serviceable to the burying of Jewish strangers. His charity in doing good to his enemies is indefatigable; and his wisdom continually intent on turning every circumstance of their crime to some advantage. He does this good to the foreign Jews, perhaps, because they, not having been witnesses of his life and miracles, were the chief persons who cried out, “ Crucify him, crucify him.”

“ 8. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. 9. (Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, 10. And gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me.)”

The holy Scripture, having foretold every thing, renders all the Jews utterly inexcusable. In vain do the wicked endeavour to conceal themselves: God makes them instrumental in discovering their own wickedness. Judas, by returning back the money, and the priests by laying it out, raise to themselves an eternal monument—the one of his treachery, the others of their perfidiousness.

SECT. II.—*Christ before Pilate. Barabbas. The Clamour of the Jews against Christ.*

“ 11. ¶ And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.”

Jesus Christ answers out of respect to the authority of God, whose image he would honour even in a wicked judge. A man is not freed from the obligation of bearing witness to the truth, though the usefulness and advantage of it do not appear; and though on the contrary it may be the occasion of a kind of scandal, of persecution, and even of the death of him who bears it. Christ here witnesses “a good confession,” as St. Paul calls it, (1 Tim. vi. 13.) which establishes his divinity, the power of his cross, the kingdom of his truth, and the inviolable rights and almighty strength of his grace. Christ knows how to reconcile the modesty of humility, without disclaiming his sovereignty. How rare and difficult is this!

“ 12. And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. 13. Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? 14. And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.”

A man may show a contempt of accusations by a generous silence when he sees that truth is not sought, but only a pretence of crimes to justify persecution. None are more worthy of contempt, and more unworthy to hear the voice of truth, than those who

persecute it knowingly, as these chief priests and elders did. Silence under calumny is something more wonderful than miracles. These priests admire it not, because it confounds them; but a heathen is greatly affected with it, because he is not so averse to truth, has more sincerity, and is less under the dominion of his passions. When a man has once given himself up to envy and detraction, he is entirely possessed by them; his senses, his understanding, and his heart, are become their perfect slaves. Dreadful, though voluntary captivity! Preserve us, Lord, from so great a misfortune.

“ 15. ¶ Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. 16. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17. Therefore, when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?”

A comparison strangely humbling! What sinner could bear it without murmuring? We often find in a secular magistrate more inclination to support the truth, than in those who are obliged by their profession to defend it. A moral heathen would sometimes be more affected with the condition of an innocent person oppressed, than even Christians and corrupt priests.

“ 18. For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.”

Since envy is capable of putting Christ himself to death, how necessary is it to extinguish even the least sparks thereof! Truth is sometimes persecuted through policy, sometimes through engagement, com-

plaisance, surprise, or ignorance; but the most implacable of all its enemies is envy, and especially that of ecclesiastical persons. Too often men think they lend their authority to justice and truth, when a little reflection would show them that they resign it up to iniquity and envy.

“ 19. ¶ When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.”

Wives have frequently but too much credit and influence on the mind of judges, even in unjust causes; but nothing is favourable to the cause of Christ, because our sins are against him. Every thing testifies his innocence; but it is on this very account, because he is innocence itself, that he must die for sinners, and be their victim.

“ 20. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.”

We see here how dangerous in the church wicked priests are. When pastors are once corrupted, they are capable of inducing their flock to prefer Barabbas before Jesus, the world before God, pleasure before their salvation, and their passions before a life of faith and Christian mortification. A wise and pious director of the conscience, is a proper guide to seek and find Jesus Christ. An ignorant or vicious director, is good for nothing but to destroy and extinguish his life in the soul.

“ 21. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.”

This is, on the part of men, a criminal preference of a murderer before the Author of life: but, on the part of God, it is a necessary preference in order to our salvation. The Father delivers up his only Son for every one of us, and prefers our salvation to his life. It is an extreme humiliation for Christ to be judged less worthy to live than a robber and murderer. This gives us an abhorrence: and yet, what else does a sinner do but pass the same judgment, when, after having tasted of Christ and of the sweetness of his Spirit, he forsakes him to deliver himself up to sin? This momentary pleasure which we prefer to Jesus Christ, is it not a robber of our goods, and a murderer of our life; the one more excellent without comparison than the goods of fortune, and the other, than the life of the body!

“ 22. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?”

How many are there, even among Christians, who know not what use they ought to make of Christ, either because they neglect to learn, or because due care is not taken to instruct them! What shall we do with Jesus, if we make him not our Mediator, our Saviour, our Life, our Strength to go to God, our Refuge in all our evils, and the object of our adoration, acknowledgment, love, confidence, and religion; since in reality God has made him our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption?

“ — They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. 23. And the governor said, Why? what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.”

What strange fury proceeds from blindness ! To deliver up to death Him who gives life to the soul ; and to save him who takes away the goods, ease, and life of the body ! Let our indignation be kindled more against our own sins than against the Jews ; since they are those which cry out by the mouth of these, and require the death of Christ. It is absolutely necessary that God should be satisfied, and he will not be so otherwise than by the sacrifice of the cross. Let us suffer with Christ, at least in some manner, that which we make him suffer. Let our flesh, with its affections and lusts, be nailed to the cross with him.

“ 24. ¶ When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person ; see ye to it.”

In vain does a cowardly judge cast on others the injustice which he commits ; God will certainly judge him. That which a judge, a magistrate, a person in authority, owes to innocence, consists not in words, excuses, or a bare testimony in its favour, but in a real protection. He who does not oppose injustice to the utmost of his power when he ought, is no better than a prevaricator. The world is full of persons like Pilate, very favourably disposed towards what is good, who yet scarce ever do any ; very zealous for truth, justice, and innocence, provided it cost them nothing, and that they be not obliged to declare openly on their side.”

“ 25. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.”

The blood of Jesus Christ is the salvation of some, and the condemnation of others. Men expose themselves to all manner of evils in order to satisfy their passions. The sinner knows not what it is to be accountable to God for the blood of his Son. Though, when he gives himself up to sin, he does not perhaps speak so plainly as the Jews here do, yet his sin itself speaks the same thing for him. Lord, let thy blood be on me, to redeem me; on my heart and body, to purify them; on my thoughts and desires, to sanctify them; and on my life and actions, to consecrate them entirely to thee.

SECT. III.—*Christ Scourged, crowned with Thorns, and Mocked.*

“26. ¶ Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.”

When the love of justice is surmounted by interest, human respects, and the prospect of improving a man's fortune, after some weak and faint opposition, he yields at length to iniquity. A judge who has not courage enough openly to oppose injustice, will, on the first occasion, insensibly become a slave thereto. Every one of us is this Barabbas, delivered from death by that of Jesus. Who is that adopted child who will refuse to be chastised by the hand of God his Father, when he sees his only-begotten Son scourged by the hands of executioners?

“27. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. 28. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.”

Let us adore Jesus Christ, given up to the rage of the soldiers. He is the consolation of holy persons in this condition, and of the church exposed to the violence and insults of the men of the sword, and of the wicked. By being stripped in order to suffer, to be mocked, and to clothe us with his righteousness, he condemns and expiates that criminal unseemliness in dress, which has impurity and pride for its root, and for its fruit, sin, scandal, and a kind of idolatry. Can those who ruin themselves, to outshine others in the sumptuousness of their apparel, behold Jesus Christ in this condition, and not be ashamed of their vanity and injustice?

“ 29. ¶ And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews!”

Let the crown of thorns make those Christians blush who throw away so much time, pains, and money, in beautifying and adorning a sinful head. Can those who exact even a kind of adoration from men, consider Christ in this condition, without being humbled for their pride? Let the world do what it will to render thy royalty and mysteries contemptible, O Jesus! it is my glory to serve a King thus abased, my salvation to adore that which the world despises, and my religion to go to God by the merits of a God crowned with thorns.

“ 30. And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.”

Let us pay our adoration, and humble ourselves in silence, at the sight of a spectacle which faith alone renders credible, and which our senses would hardly

endure. Jesus Christ, in this condition, preaches to the kings of the earth this truth, that their sceptres are but reeds, with which they shall be smote, bruised, and crushed at his tribunal, if they do not use them here to the advancement of his kingdom in the world. This reed in the hand of Christ will be changed into a sceptre of love for some, and into a rod of iron for others. It is in our power to choose which we please.

“ 31. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.”

All the rules of justice which protect criminals from the insults of private persons, are violated in respect of Christ. Would to God he were not still made the daily laughing-stock of the wicked by their raillery, and their pretended acts of worship. To make him subservient to any passion whatever is to mock him. Let us follow Jesus Christ going toward the cross loaded with reproaches and ignominies. But how can we follow thee, O Jesus, if thou thyself dost not draw us by the virtue of this cross !

SECT. IV.—*The Cross carried by Simon. The Crucifixion. The Thieves.*

“ 32. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name : him they compelled to bear his cross.”

We see in Simon the Cyrenian a representation of the flesh, which bears not the cross but by constraint, and being mortified by the spirit. Let us bless the Lord, that he does not in this matter consult our inclinations. If God waited for us, and our choice of crosses and afflictions, Jesus Christ crucified

would have but few imitators. That he chooses them for us, and often lays them upon us by the hands of men, is a mercy which renders the cross more beneficial, and spares our weakness.

“ 33. ¶ And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, A place of a scull, 34. They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.”

The comforts of the world are always mingled with gall. It never flatters us but in order either to ruin or intoxicate us, as the Jews would refresh Christ for fear he should escape their cruelty, and to prolong his sufferings. Jesus chooses to suffer, and to adore God his Father, even to the last gasp. The children of Adam do what they can to assuage their pain, and to render themselves insensible thereof; the true children of the cross are very glad to join the sacrifice of their heart to that of their sufferings by the exercise of their faith.

“ 35. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.”

Jesus Christ, behaving himself as a criminal, does not dispose even of his clothes. In every thing he gives us a great example of submission to the laws, of humility, of poverty, of contempt of worldly things, &c. He who, at the time of death, is not perplexed with the care of dividing his earthly substance, may offer up his sacrifice with much more peace and application of his mind to God. Christ bears the shame of nakedness which sin brought upon man in his

body; and repairs that deplorable deprivation of the gifts of God wherewith the sinner was punished in his soul. Vouchsafe, O Lord, hereby to give me a salutary shame and confusion, on the account of my poverty, and of my corporal and spiritual nakedness.

“ 36. And, sitting down, they watched him there;”

We see but too many near the altar whilst the sacrifice is offering, as the soldiers were near the cross, who not only receive no profit from it themselves, but likewise hinder others from profiting as they ought by the attention and devotion of their minds. Happy that person, who, in perfect tranquillity of soul, has no other business but to place himself at the foot of the cross by meditation, that he may adore the Author of his salvation, and engrave his image on his own heart!

“ 37. And set up over his head his accusation written, **THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**”

The Holy Ghost, master both of the tongue and hands of the wicked, makes them often speak very great truths, when they design only to ridicule and expose them. This title is the sentence of the condemnation of false Jews, and the title of the purchase of true Israelites, Jews or Gentiles, made by Jesus Christ on the cross. Yes, Lord, by thy death thou hast acquired a right to subject the world to thyself, and to form thy church out of all the people of the earth. Happy I, in finding myself in the number of those over whom thou hast been pleased to preserve thy rights!

“ 38. Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left.”

Jesus Christ is compared and joined with criminals, to show that he came for the sake of sinners, and that for them he sheds his blood. The crucifixion of Christ between two thieves, is a lively representation of the mixture of good and bad in the present church, and of the separation which will be made of them at the last day. All are sinners till they are crucified with Christ, and partake of the merits of his death; but all those who partake outwardly of them in the body of the church, are not on that account justified before God. Sinners, penitent and impenitent, divide all mankind, represented here by these two thieves.

SECT. V.—*Blasphemies against Christ. Darkness.*
He cries out, and dies.

“ 39. ¶ And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, 40. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

Let us adore Jesus Christ crucified, and exposed to the contempt, the scoffs, and blasphemies of men: he will continue exposed to them to the end of the world. This is an occasion of scandal to those who view it only with carnal eyes. A High Priest who designs to destroy the temple of God; a Saviour who saves not himself; and a Son of God crucified: these are the contradictions which give offence to Jews and libertines. But a High Priest who dispels the types and shadows only that he may disclose the substance of religion, and become the minister of a heavenly sanctuary; a Saviour who dies only to be the victim

of salvation; and a Son of God who confines his power within the bounds of the cross, to establish the righteousness of faith: this is what a Christian adores, this is the foundation of all his confidence.

“ 41. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, 42. He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.”

Few are there, who, after the example of Christ, can bear the humiliation of the cross to the last, and the insults of carnal men. These insults under humiliation, are, to virtuous persons, one of the strongest and severest trials. It is a just cause to make us tremble and humble ourselves, to see the chief priests and corrupt doctors the first who deride the cross, and those who profess to love it. A man is very blind and ignorant as to the designs of God, when he refuses to adore and follow a crucified King. Make men comprehend, O my God, that it is by the cross that thou wilt reign in their hearts; and that this obstacle to the faith of the Jews, is the source, the object, and the strength of the Christian's faith, and the consolation, hope, and love of the elect.

“ 43. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have * him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” [* *Fr.* love.]

Carnal man cannot imagine, that God loves those whom he permits to suffer; that he whom he exercises by afflictions, can put his trust in him; and that a person crucified, can have God for his Father. Blessed be thou, O Lord, for having taught me by faith, that the cross is a gift of thy love, the founda-

tion of our confidence, the mark of lawful children, and the title which gives us a right to the inheritance and kingdom of the Father. Cause me to love that which I believe.

“ 44. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.”

The cross is a matter of scandal to all those who, being punished for their sins, make not a penitential use of it. The wicked suffer, blaspheming; many even of the righteous complaining; few, like Jesus Christ, silent, and humbling themselves. If crosses are not as it were anointed by the Spirit of God, they become an insupportable burthen, a subject of murmuring, and an occasion of sin.

“ 45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.”

This miraculous darkness should have made the enemies of Christ understand, that he was the light of the world; and that, because they did not follow it, it was taken from them. But darkness is always darkness to those who are abandoned to that of their own heart, whereof the other is no more than a figure.

“ 46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

In the most virtuous persons, though the spirit love the cross, yet the flesh ceases not to complain thereof. This cry should make us in some measure conceive, what it is to bear not only the judgment of God, but the whole flood of his anger and justice. It is less a complaint, than an instruction, in the mouth of Christ, whereby he would fix our minds on

the greatness of his sufferings, the mysteries of his cross, and the severity of his Father's conduct towards him in his death. How many things does this *why* comprehend? It is a question which cannot be fully answered, but by explaining the fall of Adam and of his posterity in him, the design of God's mercy as to their reparation and recovery, the nature and rigour of his justice, the necessity of a sacrifice worthy of God, and all the incomprehensible designs of his wisdom in the establishment of the Christian religion, and in the work of eternal salvation.

“ 47. Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. 48. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. 49. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.”

The cross is a scandal to heretics and to the wicked, who falsify and corrupt the word of God, and ridicule the mysteries of faith. Wo to the wicked, who continue and increase the sufferings of Christ, while the righteous fulfil them holily in themselves. That which is done here by the people who stand round about the cross, is a representation of what passes frequently at our altars, where a very small number apply themselves to offer up, in spirit and in truth, the (representative) sacrifice of Jesus Christ; but where abundance of persons, through the evil disposition of their hearts, give as it were vinegar to Christ inflamed with the thirst of their salvation.

“ 50. ¶ Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.”

This cry of Jesus teaches us, that his death does

not proceed from the decay of his strength, but from the excess of his love; that his life is not taken from him by violence, but that he gives it up by his power. It is, on the part of the Jews, a Deicide and a sacrilege; but on his own, it is a most holy and voluntary sacrifice. O cry of Jesus! penetrate to the very bottom of my heart, cure its deafness, and wake it from its drowsiness, that it may be entirely employed in adoring, loving, and praising a God dying for its salvation, and in humbling itself before his cross. This last moment of Christ's life is, to dying persons, the object of their confidence. Let my spirit, O Jesus, be received with thine, and let thy death sanctify mine.

SECT. VI.—*The Miracles after Christ's Death.*
The Centurion.

“ 51. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;”

God delays not long to manifest and exalt the glory of his Son. He takes care to honour the humiliations and sufferings of his elect, and of their Head. The veil of sin, which separated us from the sanctuary, and obstructed our sight and entrance into it, is rent by the sacrifice of Christ; and the figurative sanctuary is exposed to the view of the whole world, as having lost every thing which made it holy and venerable. Let thy death, O Jesus, work in my heart the same miracles; let it have always before its eyes that heavenly sanctuary, where all its hopes are placed; let it quake through a holy dread of thy mysteries and judgments; and let it be rent by the sorrow of a true contrition.

“ 52. And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, 53. And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.”

All nature seems to answer that expostulation of Christ, “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” by declaring the fruits of his death. The veil being rent shows, that this death is to put an end to the figurative worship, and to establish the true religion and holiness. The earthquake, that it is to make known on earth the eternal judgments of God on sinners. The rocks being rent declare, that it is to make way for the grace of repentance. The graves being opened, that it is to destroy the death of sin, and to confer the life of grace on sinners. And, in the last place, the rising of the saints shows, that it is to merit and publish the eternal happiness of body and soul for the children of promise. O adorable death, imprint thyself on my mind, and produce therein all these effects !

“ 54. Now, when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.”

Let us honour these first effects of the death of Jesus Christ wrought on the centurion and the pagan soldiers. Who, considering these, will not hope? It is good to be near the cross; its virtue diffuses itself even among those who are ignorant of its power and holiness: it is a great matter not to be averse to it, whilst all the world dishonours it. Those who knowingly and out of passion oppose the truth, are without comparison at a greater distance from salva-

tion, than those who serve the passions of its persecutors out of ignorance, and in barely discharging their office. God has often pity on these; the others are scarce ever to be converted.

SECT. VII.—*The Holy Women. Joseph of Arimathea. The Sepulchre.*

“ 55. And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: 56. Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s children.”

Difference of sex makes none as to salvation. The weakest becomes the strongest, being fortified and animated by grace. God delights to give this to the weakest persons, and to leave the strongest to themselves, because he loves to make his power conspicuous in weakness. To attend at the death of Christ, and not to be afraid of the cross, is the reward of having followed, attended upon, and ministered unto him, in the time of his life.

“ 57. ¶ When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple: 58. He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.”

A rare instance of fidelity and uncommon courage this, in a person who has much to lose, to expose himself thus to all hazards to serve Christ; and that, not while he is working miracles, but even when he is fastened to a cross. There is a time for a man to conceal himself, and a time to appear on the behalf of Christ and his truth. When all the world de-

serts it, then is the time to declare ourselves with the greater zeal on its side. Necessity is one mark of our being called to a good work, then, principally, when there is neither honour nor advantage to be expected from it on the part of men, and when there is nothing in nature but what tends to discourage us from it.

“ 59. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60. And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock : and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.”

What objections would not human prudence have made to Joseph, had he consulted it on this occasion ? It would have represented to him, that this was to expose himself, to bring himself into trouble, to render himself suspected, to put himself into an incapacity of ever doing any good, to ruin himself irrecoverably, &c. There is sometimes in our whole life but one single opportunity in which God designs to employ us, and we are for reserving ourselves for others, wherein he will have none of our service. We lose the grace of the first opportunity, and deserve to be deprived of it ever after. Happy that person who receives Jesus Christ into a new and clean heart, which has not been defiled by sin, and who takes care to secure the door thereof against the spirit of the world.

“ 61. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.”

Assiduity in meditating on the death of Christ, is the proper employment of those who ardently love him. Death cannot extinguish a friendship formed

by the Spirit of God, and newly cemented with the blood of Christ. The fidelity of faith consists in adhering firmly to Him whom we do not see; and this is the grace of these holy women. They learn, being near the sepulchre, to hide themselves from the world, and to be buried with Jesus Christ. It is always time to learn it with them.

SECT. VIII.—*A Watch set at the Sepulchre.*

“ 62. ¶ Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, 63. Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.”

Let us adore Jesus Christ injured and persecuted, even in the grave, by those who ought to be the most holy. How many precautions are here taken to stifle the truth, to bury the memory of it, and to shut up all the avenues to faith; but how vain do they all prove against the designs of the divine wisdom! These men publish beforehand the mystery of the resurrection, by endeavouring to hinder the belief of it; and, by their own words, destroy their false accusation concerning the destruction of the temple, while they themselves declare the true meaning of the prophecy. So blind is human prudence!

“ 64. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. 65. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.”

The prudence of men is utterly ineffectual in opposition to God. He makes it, in spite of them, subservient to his designs; permitting them to prevent their own calumnies, and to furnish arguments to refute themselves. Faith is the source of great repose and peace, through its docility and sincerity. An unbelieving person torments himself without end, that he may maintain himself in his incredulity.

“ 66. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.”

The Jews, contrary to their own design, confirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and take pains only to render themselves inexcusable in their infidelity. Let the great pretenders to reason tell us, if they can, what precautions have been omitted to obviate all the pretences of incredulity. The testimony of the enemies of the church is the confirmation of her faith; and their false prudence the confutation of all the cavils of unbelievers.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SECT. I.—*Christ's Resurrection. The holy Women at the Sepulchre. The Angel.*

“ 1. IN the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre.”

Death and the grave cannot extinguish a true love towards God. God inspires Mary Magdalene with this holy haste and earnestness, because he designs to reward her with his first appearance. Her love of Jesus leads her to the cross and to the sepulchre;

and his love of her brings her, by that means, to the joy of the resurrection. No person ever repents of having been faithful to God, and of having sought him betimes.

“ 2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake : for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. 3. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow :”

The angels, the ministers of light, and the first evangelists of the resurrection, show, by the brightness of their countenance, and the whiteness of their raiment, the news which they come to declare. Would to God, that after their example all pastors and ecclesiastical persons would make the purity of the mysteries which they dispense, and the holiness of the truths which they preach, evident in their external behaviour ! In order to rise to the life of grace, it is necessary to have the assistance of some visible angel of the Lord, one whose conversation is in heaven, who by a prudent condescension to the wants of sinners may be said to descend from thence, who may approach them by his charity, who may roll back the stone of their evil habits, and hinder them from shutting any more their hearts against grace.

“ 4. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.”

God can by one and the same means comfort his servants and terrify his enemies. Let us here contemplate an emblem or representation of the victory which Christ has just obtained over hell. This is a mystery of majesty and greatness, amiable to God's children, and terrible to slaves.

“ 5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.”

God gives consolation, and the spirit of the new-raised life to those who seek Jesus Christ crucified. To seek him thus, is to return to him by repentance, not to refuse the cross when he presents it to us, not to quit the way of mortification how painful soever it may be to nature, to perform our duty notwithstanding all the contradictions of men, and not to turn aside from the way of the gospel through any fear of displeasing the world. This is a state which ought to afford us confidence, because it is that wherein self-love is least to be feared.

“ 6. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay:”

Happy the sinner who is faithful to his promises, concerning whom one may say, “ He is risen as he said.” It is by his heart, which was his sepulchre, that we are to judge of this; and it is by his works that we are to judge of his heart, and to assure ourselves that this sepulchre is become the mansion of the living Jesus.

“ 7. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.”

Let us make haste to publish both Christ's resurrection and our own, by works of a new and restored life. What joy is it to a good pastor when a sinner tells him, by a life separated from the world and sin, that he is risen with Christ, and that he walks in the newness of his life! The first news of the resur-

rection, the first appearance of Jesus, and this mission to the apostles, are the recompense of the diligent attendance of Mary Magdalene and her companions at the cross and sepulchre. Let us attend there with her. Let us imitate her fidelity if we desire to share in her grace.

SECT. II.—*Christ's Appearance to the Women.
The Watch bribed.*

“ 8. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word.”

Extraordinary communications of grace ought to give fear and joy at the same time. Heavenly visits, revelations, or apparitions, yield comfort to holy persons, and give them such an assurance of their truth, as yet hinders them not from fearing their own unworthiness and the danger of vanity, nor from submitting these graces to the examination of the pastors, to whom God sends them back.

“ 9. ¶ And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.”

Christ bestows his graces and consolations by degrees; first by his angels, and then by himself. He communicates not himself to incredulous and disobedient souls; he appears not even to these women, till he has tried their faith and obedience by his ministers. This kind reception and comfortable greeting used by Jesus after his resurrection, is the due recompense of the zeal of these persons, who were neither intimidated by the rage of the Jews, nor discouraged by the death and burial of Christ. Who-

ever is so happy as to find Jesus Christ after having lost him, ought to embrace that which appears most abject in him, and to adore that which is highest.

“ 10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid : go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.”

The incredulity of the disciples hinders not Christ from seeking, comforting, and showing himself to them. The love which he has for his flock makes him apply himself immediately to strengthen and support the pastors of it. The term, “ My brethren,” is suitable to the state and condition of Christ risen from the dead. These are words of hope, which denote that he looks on them as his co-heirs in glory, that it is in that state that we shall bear his resemblance, and have God for our Father by the perfection of the Divine adoption, the absolute renunciation of Adam’s family, and a full and complete union with the body of the Son of God. O Christian hope! O celestial inheritance! O brethren and joint-heirs with Christ, about what do you amuse yourselves on earth?

“ 11. ¶ Now, when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. 12. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, 13. Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. 14. And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.”

The Jews, disappointed in their designs, grow the more hardened, and crown their wickedness with

a new crime. One sin naturally draws on another. How great is the misfortune for a man to have recourse to a lie to conceal his crime, rather than to repentance (to do what he can) to expiate it! He ought proportionably in other sins, to fear being detained by engagements, evil bashfulness, wilfulness, or obstinacy. How often do men pay dearly for the vanity of not seeming to be baffled in their undertakings!

“ 15. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”

Avarice and the love of false riches have always persecuted Jesus Christ,—the avarice of the Jewish priests during his life, that of an apostle at the time of his death, this of the soldiers after his resurrection, and that of wicked clergymen to the end of the world. The most ancient and most cruel persecutor of the church, is money in corrupt ecclesiastics and men of the sword. One single lie, one single calumny, may have dreadful consequences. A man is not less answerable for them because he did not think of them. How many Jews, on the credit of these priests and soldiers, have been lost, in not believing the resurrection of Christ!

SECT. III.—*Christ's Appearance to the eleven Disciples. His almighty Power and continual Presence.*

“ 16. ¶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.”

Men are more ready to run to Jesus when risen

from the dead, than to follow him when seized by his enemies, and to accompany him dying under ignominy. They are not very constant in attending at the foot of the cross; they never fail to seek all opportunities of joy and comfort. But these are not to be sought but only when obedience leads us to them, and when Christ himself goes before us in them, calls us to them, and vouchsafes to be present with us.

“ 17. And when they saw him, they worshipped him : but some doubted.”

Worship ought always to accompany the sight which faith gives us of Jesus Christ and his mysteries. God permits doubts to arise for the greater confirmation of the faith. We must not suffer ourselves to be surprised or staggered at the doubtfulness and uncertainty of the greatest men, since there were some who doubted even amongst the apostles themselves.

“ 18. ¶ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a state of power, to which he was predestinated from all eternity, of which he deprived himself during his mortal life, and into the possession of which he entered by his resurrection. One fruit of this mystery is the new right and power which he received both in heaven and in earth : in heaven, to send the Holy Ghost from thence down on earth, to raise his members up thither, and to crown his saints there : in earth, to bring all nations into subjection to himself, to convert sinners, to sanctify, protect, and perfect his

church, to judge mankind, and to confine the devils and the reprobate in hell. The absolute power of Christ over the hearts of men to change them as he pleases, is the recompense of his labours, the fruit of his cross, the right of his new life, the principle of the new heart, and the comfort of sinners, as being the cause of the efficacy of his grace.

“ 19. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ;”

Jesus Christ says to his apostles, “ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,” to show that he can convert them all, and that nothing can resist his almighty power, when he intends to save sinners. The mission of the apostles throughout all the world, the calling of the Gentiles, the foundation of the church, and the purchase of his elect, are the effects of his new power, and the reward of his past sufferings. In baptism, the Christian is adopted by the Father, incorporated with the Son, animated by the Holy Ghost, and consecrated to this adorable and eternal mystery, to serve him in spirit and in truth by a life conformable to the gospel.

“ 20. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

The faithfulness of a preacher consists in preaching nothing but what he has learned of Jesus Christ. His chief care must be, not to render himself unworthy of having Christ present with him in the exercise of his ministry. His confidence is, to be persuaded that he can do nothing of himself, but that Christ can do all in him ; that he is able even of

stones to raise up children unto Abraham, that it belongs to him to put his law into the heart, and to perform whatever he has promised. Be thou therefore with us always, O Lord, to be our light, our strength, and our consolation. Be with thy church, to be her steadfastness, her protection, and her holiness. Amen.

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